

**Walk** THE  
COME FORWARD FOR  
WHAT MATTERS  **Talk**

# I'm voting: How to use

**2024 European Elections**

On the initiative of the Belgian and European networks:



european **youth information**  
and counselling agency



Financé par  
l'Union européenne

The Belgian network Infor Jeunes and ERYICA have produced this brochure.

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ISBN: 978-2-919810-77-2

Publication: February 2024

# Introduction

The European elections mark an important date for democracy. Every five years, **more than 400 million voters** are called upon to vote in one of the biggest democratic processes in the world.

The 2024 elections present major challenges for participation. While older people remain more likely to vote, the increase in the number of **voters** between 2014 and 2019 was more significant among young people under 25 and between 25 and 39 than among people aged 55 years old or older. Furthermore, there are **people who are voting for the first time** in any election, as well as certain under-represented groups, and reaching these two groups requires extra effort.

Research in social sciences has identified some important trends in the democratic participation of young people. Young people are very politically motivated, but they have less trust in formal politics, public institutions and traditional forms of participation. Many young people are more inclined **to get involved in alternative forms of participation**, such as activism for a given cause. They often prefer to get involved around a single issue or topic, rather than joining and/or supporting a formal structure or organisation.

All this contributes to the fact that in the last European elections in 2019, the turnout rate was 43.09%. Paradoxically, those who abstained have become more engaged and more politically aware. Additionally, 47% of voters and abstainers in 2019 said the EU might not be moving in the right direction.

It is therefore necessary not only to increase the participation of young people in future elections, but also to make their worries, concerns and points of view known to decision-making bodies and policy makers. It is crucial **to better communicate what the European Union (EU) is doing**, and could do, for its young citizens.



As part of our Walk The Talk project, the youth information sector is aiming to contribute to democracy within the European Union, by providing young people, and the people around them, with the tools necessary to participate in voting, while ensuring that they have access to **objective, comprehensive, accessible and reliable information on issues** that matter to them. This includes issues such as climate change, human rights, mental health, affordable housing, fair economy, accessible education, full employment, security and safety, and better local opportunities. After all, there is no participation without information. Today, more than ever, youth information is necessary to meet the demands of a globalised and increasingly digital world, where understanding and navigating the information and media landscape is essential.

*I'm voting: A Guide to the 2024 European Elections* is the result of a collaboration between the Fédération Infor Jeunes Wallonie Bruxelles and the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA). This guide is above all a practical tool **intended for young people and all people in contact with young people**, such as youth workers, youth information workers, educators, teachers or young activists. It aims to cover basic concepts and information about the EU, the impact of the EU in daily life and provide information about voting. We reckon that this knowledge can contribute **to more informed participation in the upcoming 2024 elections**. The aim is to support activities that encourage dialogue with

young people or between young people, to discuss and work on this theme using accessible information and non-formal education and youth information methods.

Although financed by other organisations, and especially the It's up to Youth project in Belgium, this guide also aims to complement the actions carried out within the framework of the **EU inFORM - Young Voters Project**, financed by the European Parliament and coordinated by ERYICA, involving the Fédération Infor Jeunes and other ERYICA member organisations. EU inFORM aims to promote the informed participation of first-time voters in the European Parliament 2024 elections.

The multilingual initiative 'Walk The Talk', developed as part of the EU inFORM project, aims to highlight the impact of voting and European matters on aspects identified as important by the young people involved in the project. Walk The Talk also addresses the impact of disinformation and propaganda on decision-making and political participation. The multilingual platform - [www.walkthetalk.eu.com](http://www.walkthetalk.eu.com) - facilitates young people's access to understandable information about the EU, the European electoral process in each country, and helps to compare political programmes by policy area and parliamentary group. This guide frequently refers to the **Walk The Talk platform so that you can get more detailed or additional information or explore certain questions in more depth.**

### **Brochure "I'm voting"**



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**Walk the Talk**



**Je vote - Mode d'emploi - Infor Jeunes**



**Élections - Europa**



**Ensemble pour la démocratie**





**1. When  
can I vote?**

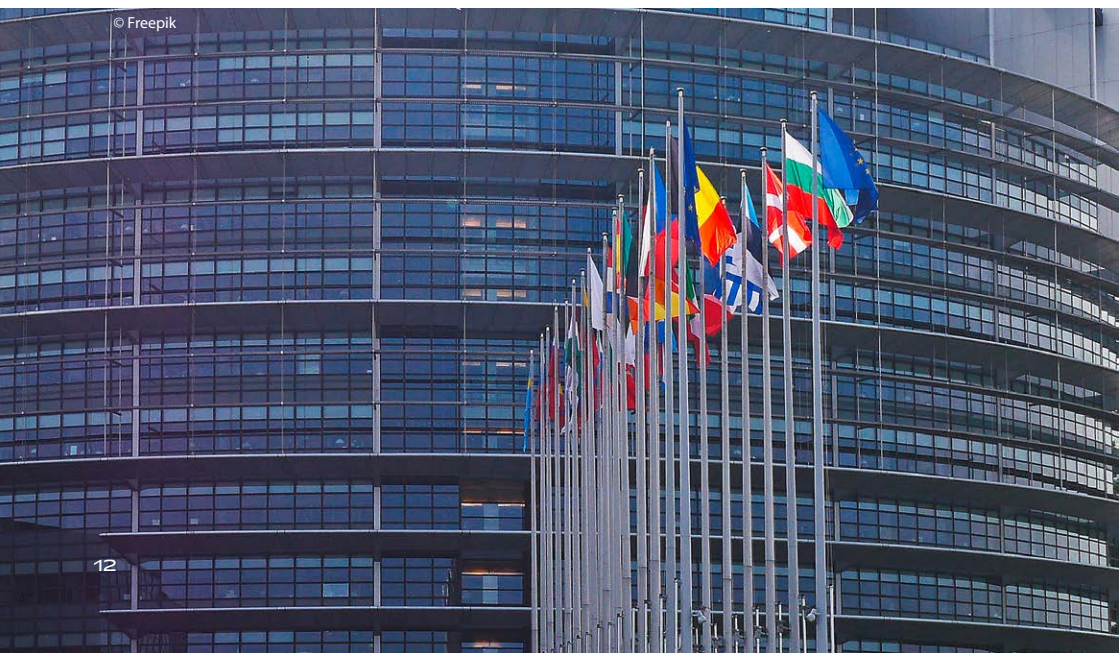
The amount of time that a political representative can serve in office is limited, which allows voters to renew their trust in their preferred candidate or, if they are not satisfied with the decisions made throughout the last few years, to choose someone new. In Europe, citizens of the European Union elect the deputies who sit in the European Parliament **every 5 years**.

Each Member State decides the day and time that the European elections will take place in their country, in accordance with their own electoral calendar. This has to be within a four-day period between Thursday and Sunday (the day preferred by the majority of Member States). Vote counting occurs at the same time across all Member States and the results are communicated at the same time.

Some countries – such as Belgium and Ireland – benefit from organising their national, regional and / or local elections all on the same day.

## **From 6 - 9 June 2024**

Information about election dates in each country can be found in the **“How to Vote”** section of the **Walk The Talk** multilingual website.



## 1.1. Election calendar by country

The European Elections will start in the Netherlands on 6 June 2024. In the Netherlands, voting traditionally happens on a Wednesday, but this year it will take place on a Thursday for practical reasons.

However, **the first results will not be revealed until the evening of 9 June**, once all of the polling stations have closed across all Member States, including those who voted on Thursday.

**Watch out!** Voting is mandatory in **Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Luxembourg**.

### Thursday 6 June

The Netherlands

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### Friday 7 June

Czech Republic

Ireland

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### Saturday 8 June

Czech Republic

Latvia

Malta

Slovakia

### Sunday 9 June

Austria

Belgium

Bulgaria

Croatia

Cyprus

Denmark

Estonia

Finland

France

Germany

Greece

Hungary

Italy

Lithuania

Luxembourg

Poland

Portugal

Romania

Slovenia

Spain

Sweden

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**2. Why should I vote?**



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In a democracy, employing your right to vote is a way to exercise your citizenship; it allows you to elect your representative. This is why it's important to be informed about the candidates, the parties and their ideas. In doing so, you will be able to decide which ideas fit most closely with your own.

Voting is therefore about following political trends and choosing which ideas you believe in, whilst they are up for debate during political decision-making.

The European Union (EU) plays an important role in the daily lives of citizens on issues such as the **economy, the environment, social protection and individual rights**. Voting in the European elections is therefore essential for defending citizen participation and democratic values within the EU.

The European Parliament, whose members are elected by European citizens, plays a key role in making decisions that shape European political direction. As an institution **directly elected by EU citizens**, the European Parliament exercises a major legislative function and plays an essential role in decision-making and democratic representation. It exercises democratic control over other EU institutions, in particular the European Commission. **MEPs have the power to monitor the activities of the Commission** and can vote



on a motion of no confidence if necessary, thereby strengthening accountability and transparency within the European Union.

The European Parliament also holds **key power in budgetary matters**. It examines, approves and controls the EU budget, in order to ensure responsible management of the European Union's financial resources. This function strengthens accountability and aims to ensure that EU funds are used effectively and in line with defined priorities.

Finally, the European Parliament represents the interests of EU citizens, providing a platform where MEPs debate major issues and defend the concerns of European citizens. By approving international agreements concluded by the EU, the European Parliament also contributes to the international relations of the European Union.

## 2.1. **An acquired right**

In the last century, the right to vote has advanced significantly across the different EU Member States. In the past, far from being considered a universal right, voting was generally reserved to a governing elite – in other words, the wealthiest men. During this time, there were a number of other criteria that excluded a person from voting, such as their age, gender, nationality or religion...

This system has gradually evolved and today we have **universal suffrage**, which allows everyone to make their voice heard, regardless of their income. The first European Parliament elections based on direct universal suffrage took place in 1979.

Voting is the right granted to citizens to choose representatives who will sit in various assemblies at European, national, regional or local level. Citizens can exercise their right to vote during elections. However, the right to vote is just one way of exercising citizenship. Citizens also have the right to express their opinions freely in the press or on social networks, to send petitions to public authorities, to debate on specific issues and to develop proposals, to associate and assemble peacefully and without arms, to contest decisions made against them, particularly before the courts, etc.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the **European Ombudsman**, which is the European Union institution responsible for handling complaints from citizens regarding administration within EU institutions, and **petitions**. Petitions are official complaints or requests submitted by European citizens or entities of the EU to the European Parliament to report issues related to the application of EU law.

## 2.2. **A duty**

Everyone has a duty to participate in political life, whether it is that of Europe, one's own country, region or town. In some countries – such as Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Luxembourg – it is even **mandatory** to vote and penalties may be imposed on those who fail to do so.

In any case, by exercising their right to vote in the European elections, citizens can influence the future decision making that will affect their everyday life: the budget that goes towards youth mobility programmes, consumer protection, energy, professional integration...

## 2.3. **A personal decision**

Voting is **anonymous**.

This is to ensure that citizens vote freely, without influence, especially through intimidation or being offered advantages in exchange for a vote.

Knowing yourself well, questioning the choices of others, identifying your own priorities among the themes addressed by various political parties, reflecting on your own desires, and asking yourself what it is that you want or do not want in the society you live in are essential elements for making a personal electoral choice.

## 2.4. **An informed choice**

As well as taking into account your own choices and priorities, you should also take the time to research the different parties and candidates who are running in the June 2024 elections.

You can also find on the **Walk The Talk** website the different political groups' proposals for priority issues for young people. These are of equal crucial importance for the entire population.

For example, what is the position of each parliamentary group on the following issues: climate change, human rights, mental health, affordable housing, a fair economy, accessible education, full employment, security and safety, local opportunities?

Before casting a vote, it's important to ask questions. For example, is the candidate FOR or AGAINST:

- Creating a European army?
- Focussing on the fight against climate change?
- Promoting free trade agreements with other countries?
- Establishing minimum social protection for all European citizens?
- Reducing the powers of the European Union?
- Regulating the secondment of workers more?
- Reinforcing the fight against terrorism?
- Developing methods for consulting citizens (e.g. referendums)?
- Making the fight against youth unemployment a priority?

It's important to recognise disinformation and propaganda campaigns that may influence our opinions, such as fake news, targeted ads and questionable photo and video manipulation.



### **3. Who can vote?**

## 3.1. **Voting terms and conditions**

To be able to vote in the European Parliament, you must:

1. Be a **citizen** of the **European Union**
2. Be **aged 18 or over** on polling day

**Watch out!** The voting age is now 16 in Austria, Belgium, Germany and Malta; 17 in Greece; and 18 in the rest of the Member States.

3. Be a **resident** of a country of the European Union

**Watch out!** The meaning of residence varies from country to country: it can mean the place where you live or your place of residence (Germany, Estonia, France), the place where you spend the majority of your time living (Denmark, Greece, Ireland) or where you are part of the electoral register (Belgium and Czech Republic). Some countries stipulate that citizens of other Member States have to spend a minimum period in the country to have access to voting rights.

4. Meet the **same criteria** as other people living in the country



This brochure is only about the European Parliament elections, if other elections (regional, local...) take place in your country, the voting conditions could be different.

For more information on 'who can vote and how?', visit the Walk The Talk '**How to Vote**'

## 3.2. **The right to vote in your country of origin**

Citizens of a country that is a part of the European Union have **the right to vote** in the European elections. If you are voting in your country of origin, you should respect existing electoral rules and only vote for candidates that come from your own country.

To find out more, get in touch with the relevant authorities in your country of origin.

## 3.3. The right to vote from abroad

**Watch out!** This chapter only covers the hypothesis that your country of residence is an EU Member State. If it's a non-EU country, it's important to find out about the electoral rules for that country, as they are country specific.

As a citizen of a country that is a part of the European Union, you also have the right to vote in the European elections, **even if you live abroad**. In this case, you have a choice:

- Either you decide to vote for candidates from your country of origin.
- Or you decide to vote for candidates from your country of residence.

**Watch out!** You can only vote once.









































### 3.3.1. Voting for candidates from your country of origin

You must comply with the electoral rules and vote for the representatives of your country of origin. Currently, **almost all Member States** (except Ireland, Malta, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) **allow citizens to vote from abroad**, but some countries require you to also be pre-registered with their national authorities to be able to vote abroad.






Find out what voting methods are planned and what means are available to you to be able to vote: electronic or postal voting, voting via an embassy or by proxy?

In any case, Member States are required to adopt sufficient measures to guarantee the reliability of the result, the confidentiality of the vote and the protection of personal data.

### Voting methods for citizens abroad

Austria (AT)		Ireland (IE)	Not possible
Belgium (BE)	  	Italy (IT)	 
Bulgaria (BG)	 	Lithuania (LT)	 
Cyprus (CY)		Luxembourg (LU)	
Czechia (CZ)	Not possible	Latvia (LV)	 
Germany (DE)		Malta (MT)	Not possible
Denmark (DK)	 	Netherlands (NL)	 
Estonia (EE)	  	Poland (PL)	
Greece (EL)	 	Portugal (PT)	
Spain (ES)	 	Romania (RO)	
Finland (FI)	 	Sweden (SE)	 
France (FR)	 	Slovenia (SI)	 
Croatia (HR)		Slovakia (SK)	Not possible
Hungary (HU)	 		

	By post		Voting from abroad only possible within another EU country
	Embassy/consulate		
	Proxy		
	E-voting		

### 3.3.2. Voting for candidates from your country of residence

You will be subject to the **same electoral rules as nationals** and you will have to vote for the candidates of this country. If you live in a country where voting is compulsory and you choose to vote there, you will have to do so, or you risk a financial penalty. The voting procedures may differ from your country of origin, for example, allowing postal voting.

To make sure you know how it works, contact the competent authorities well in advance.



## **4. How should I vote?**

## 4.1. The voting system

All MEPs in the European Parliament will be elected under **proportional representation**, regardless of the voting method that exists in each individual country. This system works on the premise that each party gains seats in direct proportion to the number of votes that they receive. The objective is to reflect the will of the people as much as possible, in order to reinforce the legitimacy of the parliament.

Each country is free to determine other aspects of the voting procedure, such as how it establishes its electoral constituencies, setting a minimum threshold and the method of allocating seats.

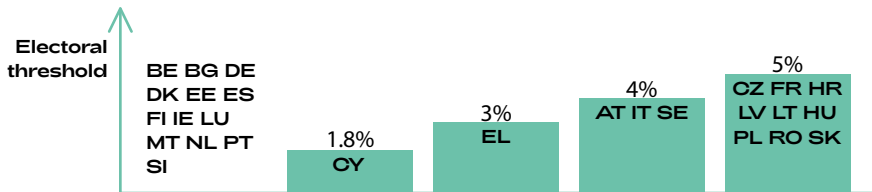


## 4.2. Setting up the constituencies

The majority of Member States consider their national territory as a **single electoral constituency** when it comes to the European elections. This means that all citizens of the country can vote for **the same electoral lists, and therefore, the same candidates**. Conversely, there are countries (Belgium, Ireland, Italy and Poland) that have decided to divide into **multiple constituencies**. This means that their citizens have a **different list of candidates**, depending on their constituency.

## 4.3. Establishing a minimum threshold

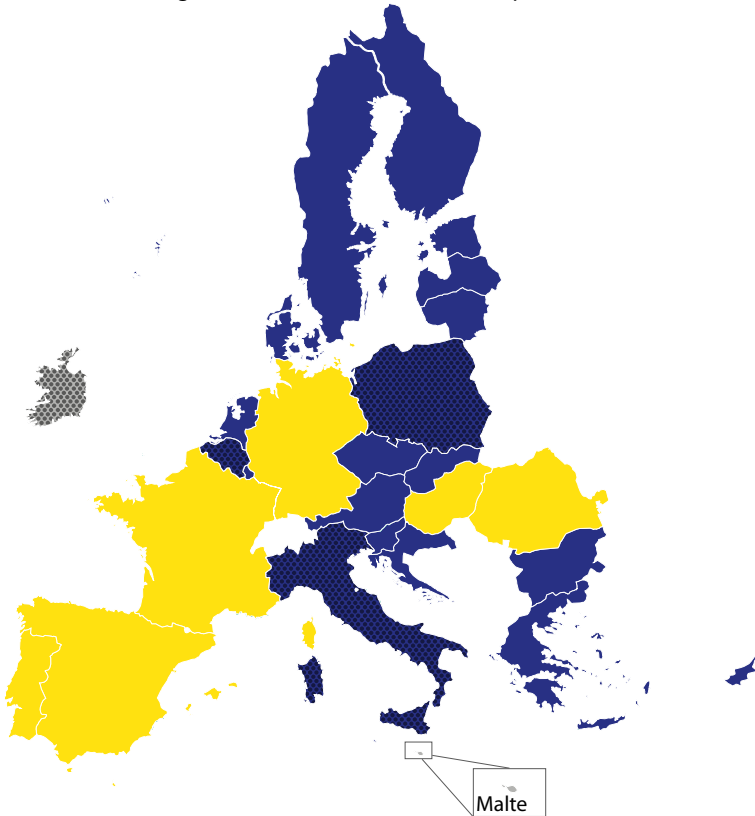
Member States have the **option of determining** whether there is a mandatory minimum threshold to be reached before seats can be allocated to a list. At the national level, this threshold **cannot exceed 5% of the votes**.



## 4.4. How seats are allocated

Although Member States<sup>1</sup> are all required to respect the principle of proportional representation, they alone can decide what form this representation should take. They usually base this on the electoral system in place in their country. For the European elections, there are **three methods** of allocating seats.

- Closed list
- Preferential Voting
- Single transferable vote (STV)
- Multiple constituencies



<sup>1</sup> It's important not to forget the outermost regions that are also a part of France, Spain and Portugal; this includes the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, Mayotte, Reunion, Guyana, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Saint Martin.

#### 4.4.1. **Closed list**

Electors **vote for a political party** rather than a particular candidate. They are only able to vote for one list, and do not have the power to change the order of the candidates; hence the name 'closed list'.

The seats are then allocated to the different parties, in proportion to the number of votes that they have obtained. The elected candidates are taken from the winning lists in order of preference.

This is the preferred system for France, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

#### 4.4.2. **Preferential Voting**

Electors **vote for a political party and also for the candidate(s)** of their choice. They can indicate their preference for a candidate and this changes the position of the candidate on the list.

The seats are then allocated to the candidates on the list based on the order of preference established by the votes.

This system exists in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden.

In principle, you can only vote for one candidate from one list. There is one exception; in Luxembourg, electors are free to vote for candidates from different lists.

#### 4.4.3. **Single transferable vote (STV)**

Electors vote for a political party but also for the candidate(s) of their choice. They not only choose their representatives but also **rank all candidates in an order of preference**.

During the counting process, the total votes obtained by each candidate as first choice are counted first. Candidates who reach the electoral quotient (required threshold) are elected, and the surplus votes are transferred to the second choice and so on until the required number of seats are filled.

This system exists in Malta and Ireland.

For more information on **'How to Vote'** visit [Walk The Talk](#).



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**5. Who should  
I vote for?**

## 5.1. **Conditions for being a candidate**

To be eligible as a candidate, you should:

1. Be a **citizen** of the **European Union**.
2. **Be old enough**, which varies from country to country:

**18**

BE DK DE ES FR HR  
LU HU MT NL AT PT  
SI FI SE

**21**

BG CZ CY EE IE LV LT  
PL SK

**23**

RO

**25**

EL IT

- 
3. Be a **resident** of a country of the European Union.

**Watch out!** The meaning of residence varies from country to country: it can mean the place where you live or your place of residence (Germany, Estonia, France), the place where you spend the majority of your time living (Denmark, Greece, Ireland) or where you are part of the electoral register (Belgium and Czech Republic). Some countries stipulate that citizens of other Member States have to spend a minimum period in the country to have access to voting rights.

4. Not have been deprived of your **eligibility rights**.
5. Not operate a **mandate that is incompatible** with the role of a Member of the European Parliament.

**For example**, the mandate of a Member of the European Parliament is not compatible with the position of a member of government of a Member State, a member of the European Commission, or an advocate general or clerk of the Court of Justice.

6. Meet the same criteria as other nationals of the country.

**For example**, in some Member States (Germany, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands, Czech Republic and Sweden), only political parties can participate in the European elections, whereas in other countries, individual candidates can participate, provided that they have received the required number of signatures.



## 5.2. **The right to stand**

As a citizen of a European Union country, you have **the right to stand in the European elections** of your country, as long as you respect the existing electoral rules there. All information on the rules in force in the different EU countries can be found in the “**How to vote**” section of Walk The Talk.

**Even if you do not live in your country of origin**, you still have the right to run for the European elections. In this case, you have a choice:

- Either you decide to **stand for election in your country of origin**.
- Or you decide to **stand for election in your country of residence**.

**Watch out!** You can stand for election in one country only.

It is then necessary to respect the electoral rules of this country. Do not hesitate to contact the competent authorities to find out more.

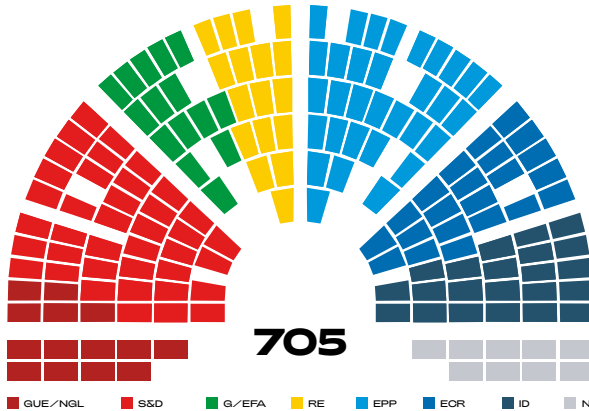
## 5.3. **The European political groups**

A political group exists when a group of people with likeminded opinions and ideas come together within the European Parliament. Once the election results are announced and the seats are allocated, the deputies come together by political group. As a result, representatives aren't arranged by country but by their political ideology.

To form a group, you need to have a **minimum of 25 deputies**, from at least 7 different countries. This can include a deputy who does not wish to subscribe to a particular group; part of the non-inscrits.

The European Parliament has a peculiarity; whilst it operates as a representative system, it must not form a clear majority. Therefore, for a motion to pass, it needs to obtain a simple majority, so **50% of the votes +1**.

### The current composition of the Parliament resulting from the 2019 elections:



Although **MEPs assemble** by political group to discuss ongoing projects, they are not required to vote according to their group. **They can vote freely in Parliament** and are not required to follow the opinion of the majority.

For more information on the political groups in the European Parliament, see **“Who’s running”** on the Walk The Talk platform.

## 5.4. The parliamentary groups and their ideas

**European People’s Party (EPP):** Centre-right, pro-European, bringing together national Christian Democratic, conservative and centre-right liberal parties. It is currently the group with the most seats and the oldest in the European Parliament. The group supports free market economic policies, while emphasising social responsibility.

**Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D):** Centre-left group that brings together national social democratic parties that share left-leaning and centre-left principles. It is the second largest party in the European Parliament, and the leading progressive



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force in Europe. The S&D advocates for a European society based on values such as freedom, equality, solidarity, diversity and fairness.

**Renew Europe (RE):** Centrist, liberal and pro-European group representing national liberal and democratic parties. It brings together parties that share a commitment to liberal values, individual freedoms, and a market-oriented economy.

**The Greens/ European Free Alliance (EFA):** It prioritises issues such as climate action, environmental protection, social equality, and the rights of minorities and regions seeking greater autonomy.

**European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR):** The ECR is associated with conservative and Eurosceptic ideologies. They focus on decentralisation, connecting people and businesses, promoting fair and free trade, and promoting a safe and secure Europe.

**Identity and Democracy (ID):** Right-wing group composed of nationalist, populist and Eurosceptic parties. Their aim is to create jobs and growth, strengthen security, fight illegal immigration and make the EU less bureaucratic.

**The Left (GUE-NGL):** Left-wing group that includes members from national democratic, socialist, communist and Eurosceptic parties. They advocate for workers' rights, the environment, feminism, peace and human rights with the goal of creating a socially equitable and sustainable Europe based on international solidarity.

**Non-inscrits (NI or NA):** Non-inscrit (NI) or non-attached members (NA) refer to MEPs who are not affiliated with any of the recognised political groups within the European Parliament. Although these non-attached members do not belong to any specific group, they still carry out their parliamentary functions independently.

For more information on the political groups in the European Parliament, see **“Who’s running”** on the Walk The Talk platform.



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## **6. The European Union**

The European Union (EU) and the decisions made there may seem far removed from your daily concerns. However, this is far from being the case. The EU has regulated many things that may now appear normal to you, but which were the subject of numerous negotiations, and took a long time to put in place.

Here are some examples: thanks to the principle of free movement of people and the elimination of customs, you can now study, work or travel without a visa or passport. If you fall ill or have an accident abroad, you are entitled to receive medical care at the same price as nationals of the country. You can also call or use your mobile data from abroad, without having to pay extra. The European Union provides financial support to students who decide to study abroad via Erasmus, as well as to farmers, culture, and the most disadvantaged regions of Europe...

In short, the EU is a democracy that we can all be part of and which has the following goals:

- Bring peace, stability and prosperity to its members;
- Be a united front in addressing global challenges, including climate change, economic struggles and geopolitical crises such as the war in Ukraine, and influence the economic and political landscape beyond its borders;
- Protect the rights of all its citizens while defending democratic principles, human rights, individual freedoms and the rule of law;
- The free movement of goods, services, money and people, which allows EU citizens to benefit from a greater number of opportunities and which guarantees the unity of the group;
- Share a common currency - the euro -, reduce exchange risks and exchange costs, and stimulate economic integration;
- Advocate for political transparency and work as closely as possible with its citizens. Indeed, the legislative process is public and anyone has the right to request access to Council of the European Union documents, which means that the European Union offers one of the most transparent decision-making processes in the world.

Now that you understand European matters, it's time to understand how the European Union and its institutions work!

## 6.1. **Origins and composition**

The European Union (EU), not to be confused with Europe as a continent (50 countries), is an **organisation that brings together 27 countries and 24 official languages**, which work together to resolve political, economic and social issues.

The EU has its roots in the 1950s, and was started in the aftermath of the Second World War, to sustain peace, prosperity, stability and democracy; to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to create solidarity among European people.

Members of each EU Member State come together regularly to make key political, judiciary, economic, monetary, social and environmental decisions, that have an influence on our everyday lives.

**For example**, thanks to the EU, we can travel from country to country without a passport or having to exchange money (if we're traveling through one of the 20 countries within the Eurozone). We can also study or work abroad through various programmes, frameworks, scholarships and other financial and administrative supports. The EU also recommends or prohibits certain beauty or cleaning products in order to protect the environment, etc.

The EU comprises **27 Member States (with a population of approximately 448 million people)**, including (by order of when they joined): Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands (the six founding countries), Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Cyprus, Malta, Slovenia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia.

There are still a number of **official candidate countries**: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. When a country is ready, it becomes an official candidate for membership, but this does not necessarily mean that formal negotiations have been opened. Other countries are also likely to become candidates for integration in the future. Kosovo has been identified as a potential candidate, without however fulfilling, at this stage, the necessary conditions to formally become a candidate.



Joining the EU is a long process and requires negotiations and significant reforms that can take years, even decades. Every EU Member State must give up some elements of their independence in order to abide by the rules, demands and common decisions of the union. A country applying for membership often has to make changes, sometimes even fundamental ones, in how it functions in order to be a part of the EU. To be admitted, the country needs to meet different political and economic criteria, such as the fundamental rights and freedoms of its people, the stability of its democratic institutions, and there is a maximum percentage that its public debt should not exceed, etc.

For more information on how the European Union works, see [The European Union: How does it work?](#) by the Information Centre on European Institutions - Europe Direct Strasbourg.



## 6.2. **The Schengen Area and the Eurozone**

You may have heard of the Schengen Area and the Eurozone; they are often confused with the EU. Even though both were created within the framework of European cooperation, they are different political structures of the EU. Moreover, not all EU countries are part of the Schengen Area and the Eurozone.

We must therefore differentiate between the EU, which is a political and economic union with democratic institutions, and these two entities.

### 6.2.1. **The Schengen Area**

Initially established in 1985, the Schengen Area was an agreement between five countries of the European Economic Community (EEC – later integrated into the European Union we know today): Germany, Belgium, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The objective of this agreement was to remove internal borders, allowing free movement of people between these countries.

Gradually, many EU member countries as well as associated states (i.e. non-EU members, but partners) joined the Schengen Area. In 1997, the Schengen Agreement was integrated into community law, that is to say European law.

Today, the Schengen Area includes **27 countries** (23 EU members and 4 associated countries):

EU member countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.

**Associated countries: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Sweden and Switzerland.**

**Bulgaria and Romania will join the Schengen area by air and sea, but not by land, from March 2024.**

## 6.2.2. The Eurozone

The Eurozone is the monetary union of EU member countries which have adopted the euro (€) as their single currency, thus choosing to replace their national currency. The Euro was first introduced in 1999, to date not all EU member countries are members of the Eurozone, either because they do not meet the necessary conditions or because they chose not to participate.

Today, the Eurozone includes **20 of the 27 EU member countries**: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. EU member countries that do not belong to the Eurozone are: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Sweden.

**Watch out!** Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and the Vatican City have adopted the Euro as their national currency through specific monetary agreements with the EU. But, since they are not EU Member States, they are not part of the Eurozone.

**Watch out!** Kosovo and Montenegro unilaterally decided to adopt the euro in 2002. This means that the euro is not legal tender, but the population uses it as their official currency.

## 6.3. Brexit

You've almost definitely heard people talking about **Brexit**; an event that has shaped the entire European Union! A short reminder – Brexit is an abbreviation of 'British Exit', which refers to the UK's departure from the European Union.

This historic decision was taken following a referendum organised by the United Kingdom on 23 June 2016, when the majority of votes (**52%**) were **against the United Kingdom remaining in the EU**. After a transition period of more than three years, on 1 January 2021, with the signing of the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU, the United Kingdom officially ceased to be a part of the Union. Since Brexit, relations between the UK and the EU have been based on **three agreements**: the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the Security of Information Agreement and the Agreement for Cooperation on Nuclear Energy. These agreements govern their relations with the EU in a wide range of areas, including trade, fisheries management, common security threats and nuclear energy, among others.

With the departure of the UK, the different EU institutions will see a reduced number of British representatives, including 73 members of the European Parliament.

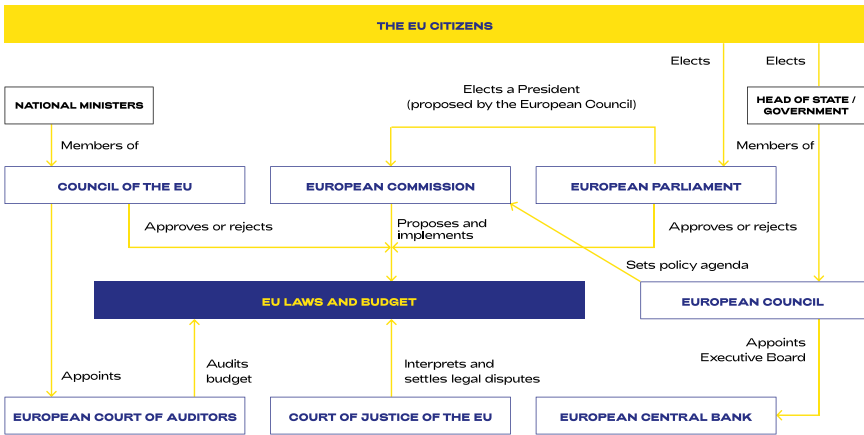
Despite the agreements, EU Member States, and the United Kingdom, have suffered from the economic impact of Brexit. Daily difficulties, for example in the field of education and research, are particularly present in the United Kingdom. Today, the United Kingdom is no longer part of the EU, the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC), the Schengen Area or the Eurozone (which it never joined).



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# 6.4. The European Political Institutions

The EU is comprised of **two economic institutions** (the Central Bank and the European Court of Auditors), a **legal institution** (the European Court of Justice) and last but not least, **four political institutions**: The European Council, the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, and the European Parliament.



## 6.4.1. The European Council

The European Council has regular meetings, or summits, which bring together the **Heads of State or Government** of all the countries within the EU, the President of the Commission and the President of the European Council, (who chairs the meeting). During these meetings, participants **define general guidelines and political priorities for the EU**, and address more complex issues relating to intergovernmental cooperation.

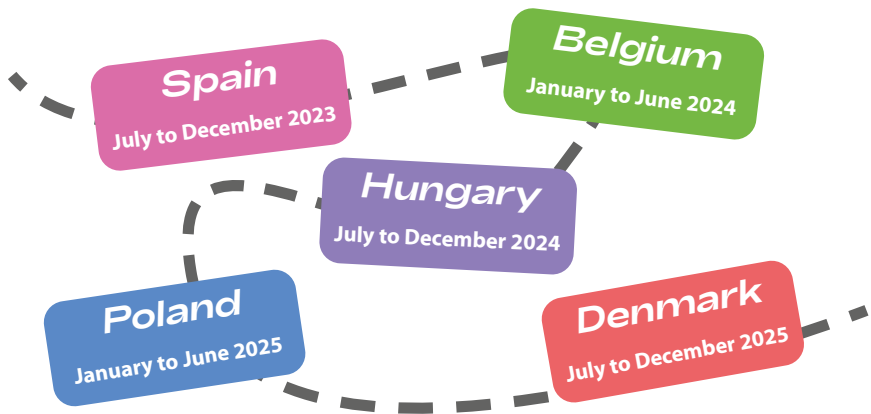
The European Council does not have the power to pass European legislation (create laws) but it does define the directions and priorities of policies defined within the EU.

It meets in Brussels **two times every six months** (four times a year), and, if necessary, additional special meetings are held as and when called by the President.

## 6.4.2. The Council of the European Union

The Council of the European Union **assembles the relevant ministers** for each government of the **27 Member States**. According to the agenda of the day, each country will put forward its representative for the issue under discussion (foreign affairs, finance, social affairs, transport, agriculture etc.).

The presidency of the Council of the European Union is entrusted to a different country for a period of 6 months. From January to June 2024, it will be Belgium's turn. Here is the calendar for the presidency for the next 2 years:



Situated in **Brussels**, the Minister in charge of the issue at hand will chair the meeting.

**For example**, meetings concerning the justice system will be chaired by the Belgian Minister of Justice, when it's the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The Council of the European Union is responsible for:

- Coordinating the general direction of economic policy of its Member States.
- Adopting the legislation of the EU: on the basis of the European Commission's proposals for laws, it adopts and votes on the directives and regulations that Member States will include in their respective legislation, by carrying out the necessary reforms.
- Signing agreements between the EU and other countries or international organisations.
- Approving, with the help of Parliament, the annual budget of the Union.
- Defining the EU's common foreign and defence policy.

**Watch out!** These two institutions (the Council of the European Union and the European Council) should not be confused with the **Council of Europe**, which is not a body of the EU, but an intergovernmental organisation, comprised of 46 Member States, of which 27 are also a part of the EU. Headquartered in Strasbourg, the Council of Europe aims to promote democracy and protect human rights across Europe.

### 6.4.3. **The European Commission**

The main aim of the European Commission is to draw up **legislative and budget proposals**, and to submit them to the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament. If they choose to adopt this legislation, **the European Commission is then responsible for applying it**.

Located in **Brussels**, the Commission is comprised of **27 commissioners** (including the President), elected by each Member State for a period of **5 years** (1 commissioner per country).

The European Parliament must approve the Commission, before its members can take office. The Parliament can pass a vote of no confidence against the Commission, or some of its members, forcing them to resign.

The European Council proposes the President to the Parliament, which must approve the candidate by absolute majority (50% of the votes +1). Since the choice of European elections must be taken into account in this nomination, the Presidency often belongs to the party that received the most votes. The President of the European Commission for the period 2019 to 2024 is **Ursula von der Leyer**.

The Commission consists **of 33 policy departments known as Directorates-General (DGs)** and about **10 specialised departments**. Each DG is headed by a Director-General, who reports on its actions to a Commissioner, who holds political responsibility.

#### **6.4.4. The European Parliament**

Since the Treaty of Lisbon (2007), the European Parliament has gradually increased its power, particularly regarding looking after the interests of the citizens of its Member States. Moreover, it is the only EU body whose members are directly elected by its citizens. The MEPs are therefore elected by direct universal suffrage. **These are the deputies that you will be voting for in June 2024!**

After the elections, the European Council adopts a decision unanimously determining the composition of the European Parliament, upon the initiative of the European Parliament and with its approval. The voters from the 27 Member States elect the Members of the European Parliament **every 5 years**.

The principle of **digressive proportionality** ensures that citizens are fairly represented, with a minimum threshold of 6 representatives (members) and a maximum of 96 members per Member State.

Following Brexit, the European Parliament had to reduce the number of MEPs. There are now 705 MEPs, but this number has temporarily increased for the 2024 elections: the Parliament will be made up of **720 MEPs** and distributed among the **27 Member States**, depending on the number of citizens at the next elections.

## Number of MEPs and voting system

The Parliament meets monthly in **Strasbourg**, and can also come together in exceptional circumstances at the request of MEPs, the Council of the European Union or the European Commission, in **Brussels**.



The European Parliament has **three key roles**:

1. It examines and adopts **European legislation**, with the Council of the European Union. Ever since the Lisbon Treaty, the areas in which these two institutions cooperate has grown, and now includes issues such as the environment, consumer protection, immigration, the legal system, public health etc. Additionally, Parliament needs to give its approval for certain decisions, such as for new countries becoming EU Member States;





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2. It carries out a **supervisory role over the activities of other European institutions** to ensure their democratic functioning. For example:
  - It must approve the appointment of new members to the Commission;
  - It can issue a no confidence vote to the Commission, forcing its members to resign.
3. It examines and controls the **budget**, with the help of the Council of the European Union.

The European Parliament includes **20 permanent parliamentary committees**. The committees prepare, amend and adopt legislative proposals and reports. Members of the European Parliament examine the proposals of the Commission and the Council and, if necessary, draft reports to be presented to the plenary assembly.

The European Parliament can also create **temporary subcommittees**, dealing with specific problems (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic), or set up inquiry committees in the event of a breach of community law or its improper application (e.g., protection of animals during transport). Each committee is responsible for a different area of expertise:

























- Foreign Affairs (AFET), which has two subcommittees – Human Rights (DROI) and Security and Defence (SEDE)
- Development (DEVE)
- International Trade (INTA)
- Budgets (BUDG)
- Budgetary Control (CONT)
- Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) which includes the subcommittee Tax Matters (FISC)
- Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL)
- Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) which includes the subcommittee Public Health (SANT)
- Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE)
- Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO)
- Transport and Tourism (TRAN)
- Regional Development (REGI)
- Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI)
- Fisheries (PECH)
- Culture and Education (CULT)
- Legal Affairs (JURI)
- Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE)
- Constitutional Affairs (AFCO)
- Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM)
- Petitions (PETI)



## **7. Lexicon**

**Here, you will find the meaning for the different country codes.**

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- |   |  |
|---|--|
|  AT Austria        |  IE Ireland     |
|  BE Belgium        |  IT Italy       |
|  BG Bulgaria       |  LV Latvia      |
|  CY Cyprus         |  LT Lithuania   |
|  CZ Czech Republic |  LU Luxembourg  |
|  DK Denmark        |  MT Malta       |
|  DE Germany        |  NL Netherlands |
|  EE Estonia        |  PL Poland      |
|  EL Greece         |  PT Portugal    |
|  ES Spain          |  RO Romania     |
|  FI Finland        |  SI Slovenia    |
|  FR France         |  SK Slovakia    |
|  HR Croatia        |  SE Sweden      |
|  HU Hungary       |  |

## **8. To go further**

**If you would like to learn more,  
here are some useful links:**

1. How the EU budget is spent:  
[https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/budget/spending\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/budget/spending_en)
2. European Central Bank:  
<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/html/index.en.html>
3. Brexit:  
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/topics/brexit/>
4. European Commission:  
[https://commission.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/index_en)
5. How the elections work:  
<https://elections.europa.eu/en/how-elections-work/>
6. Council of Europe:  
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/>
7. Council of the European Union:  
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/>
8. European Council:  
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/>
9. Court of Justice of the European Union:  
[https://www.europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/court-justice\\_en](https://www.europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies/court-justice_en)
10. European Court of Auditors:  
<https://www.eca.europa.eu/en>
11. Members of the European Parliament:  
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/home>

12. European elections 2024:  
<https://elections.europa.eu/en/>
13. Ensemble.eu:  
[www.ensemble.eu](http://www.ensemble.eu)
14. ERYICA:  
<https://www.eryica.org>, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, X
15. Erasmus+:  
<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>
16. Infor Jeunes:  
<https://www.inforjeunes.be>
17. EU institutions and bodies:  
[https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/institutions-bodies_en)
18. EU Law:  
[https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/law\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/law_en)
19. The Council of the European Union:  
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/>
20. The European Parliament:  
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/portal/en>
21. The Political groups of the European Parliament:  
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/organisation-and-rules/organisation/political-groups>





## 9. Toolkit



As a young activist, youth information worker or educator, mobilising young people to promote their democratic participation in electoral processes can be complex, enriching and exciting. When addressing topics of civic and electoral participation with young people, it is important to follow certain best practices.

When facilitating an activity on electoral participation, we recommend **staying neutral about the content** and **being well informed on the topic**, particularly the functioning of the EU and the right to vote. Successfully organising such an activity also involves actively listening, asking questions, clarifying concepts to ensure the group's overall understanding, summarising ideas, avoiding digressions, accurately recording discussion, putting participants at ease, and creating intentional silences to stimulate reflection. It is equally essential to solicit feedback from participants and to remember that you are also learning, not just teaching and facilitating.

Here are some additional guidelines:

- Ensure thorough preparation on the topic before addressing it;
- Focus on issues that matter most to young people;
- Involve young activists and local volunteers to ensure peer-to-peer mentoring;
- Be genuine, objective and avoid jargon;
- Take into account trends and discourse on social media, making young people's voices heard.<sup>2</sup>

This toolkit gathers examples of non-formal education activities designed to address electoral participation issues with young people or among young people to help them better understand the role of the EU. It is intended for young activists, youth information workers, educators and other multipliers.

We also encourage you to visit the **Walk The Talk** website and its social media channels (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube) to find information and materials, including interviews with young people and Members of the European Parliament. More activities can be found in the **Learning Corner** of the European Union.

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2 [https://www.campaignplaybook.eu/how\\_engage\\_europe\\_youth\\_ahead\\_of\\_2024\\_european\\_elections](https://www.campaignplaybook.eu/how_engage_europe_youth_ahead_of_2024_european_elections)

## 9.1. **How can access to information influence young people's lives?**

### **Objectives:**

- Learn the importance of quality information in decision-making processes.
- Understand how information can meet our needs and influence our life and decisions.
- Tailor information to different needs and aspirations.

### **Target group:**

Young people aged between 18 and 25.

### **Materials:**

- Flip chart paper, markers, scissors, post-its.
- Video – beamer, computer.
- Worksheet “A Day in the life of...”.
- **Engage. Inform. Empower. Brochure.**

### **Time:**

90 minutes.

### **Description:**

- Introduce the topic: Present an inspiring person that the young people will know, tell their life story - how information changed their life.
- Divide the group into small groups and assign them imaginary characters, for example students, workers, immigrants (European, African, Afghan...), people of different age groups (13, 19, 25), people of different genders and gender identities. The groups complete the form below referring to the assigned characters:

## Worksheet 'A day in the life of...'

Character (short description)	Interests	Needs	Access to information	Network
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Emphasis should be put on information needs regarding the elections:

- Split the group so that at least two of the teams have the same character profile in order to compare and enrich the discussion in the big group.
- Group presentations and discussion.

### Source:

ERYICA Youth Ambassadors manual, ERYICA (2022)

## 9.2. How does the EU work?

### Objectives:

- Map the European Union and understand the European Parliament election process.
- Discover the origins of the EU and its principles.
- Recognise the EU institutions and how they work.
- Describe the electoral process of the European Parliament and the political map of participating countries.

### Target group:

Young people aged between 16 and 23.

### Materials:

- Projector.
- Fake voting ballots.
- Box for voting ballots.

### Time:

90 minutes.

### Description:

- Start with an energiser.
- Explain what the EU is, why it is important, how the EU institutions work. Show the **video** of the virtual tour of the European Parliament.
- Simulate voting with the aim of understanding how the relationship between national parties and European parties is structured. While the votes are being counted, participants do a quiz on the functioning of the EU.
- Present the results of the fake elections.

### Source:

Session organised by ERYICA at the University on Youth and Development, Molina, Spain, on 19 September 2023.

## 9.3. **Politics in my daily life**

### **Objectives:**

- Be aware of the influence that political power has on our daily lives at different levels (regional, national and European).
- Understand what your position is on various current political proposals.

### **Target group:**

First-time voters, aged 16 to 26, maximum 24 young people.

### **Materials:**

- Three A3 posters.
- The 'typical day' full texts, and cut into individual sentences.
- Adhesive paper.
- Rope or coloured adhesive paper (for the moving debate).

### **Time:**

50 minutes, with an additional 50 minutes for the moving debate.

### **Description:**

- Explain the purpose of the activity to the participants.
- Form 3 or 4 groups.
- Display the three A3 posters showing the three levels of political power (regional, national and the European Union) on the board.
- Distribute the envelopes showing different 'typical days' to the groups. Each group receives a sheet describing the daily life of a young person through their 'typical day'. Each sentence in this text refers to a different thing that political powers influence, without specifying which one or at what level. Beforehand, each group also receives the story of the young person's typical day, cut into strips with one sentence of the story per strip.

- Ask the groups to stick these strips on the corresponding A3 posters, depending on whether the sentence corresponds to something the region/state/European Union has influence over.
- Correct on the A3 posters if necessary.
- If you have enough time, initiate a moving debate on a topic of your choice. The principle of a moving debate: Draw a line on the ground. One side of the line is 'for' and the other 'against'. Read out or state a controversial sentence to the group. In reaction to this sentence, members of the group stand on the 'for' or 'against' side of the line. Those who wish to can express themselves, and it is possible to change sides if they change their minds after listening to someone else's point of view.

### Source:

**I'm voting** – A Guide to the 2018-2019 Elections, Fédération Infor Jeunes Wallonie Bruxelles.



## 9.4. Values and politics

Participants discover their values by choosing their own ideal life path. They will then try to link the colours of European political groups to their ideologies, and discover some of the European groups' political programmes.

### Objectives:

- Discover your own values.
- Understand that you can express your values through a party.
- Understand the benefit of reading a political programme.

### Target group:

First-time voters.

### Materials:

- Roadmap.
- Projector and screen.
- Coloured sheets.
- Description of ideologies.
- Post-its.

### Time:

2 x 50 minutes.

### Description:

- Explain the purpose of the activity to the participants.
- Distribute a roadmap to each participant. Display multiple copies of two contrasting stories/situations on the board or on a wall. Ask the participants to choose between them, according to their vision of an ideal world.
- The participants write their response on the relevant part of the roadmap.
- The roadmap contains a list of values (solidarity, ecology, autonomy, security, success, tradition, family, etc.). Participants should circle the values that speak to them, that they like, that inspired their choice in the previous exercise and which influence their everyday life.

- Place different coloured pieces of paper in the middle of the table. Each participant writes down on one or multiple post-its (of one colour) what occurs to them when they see this colour (ideally non-political). Read out in the group the different ideas that occur to the participants for each colour.
- Next, participants write on a different coloured post-it the political ideas, parties and ideologies that they think of when they see the colours.
- Try, with the whole group, to link the words and general ideas (post-its colour 1) with the words and ideas linked to politics (post-it colour 2).
- Give a short summary of everything that has been said and then ask the following question: “Why is it important to know your own values and political ideologies when you vote?”
- On the roadmap is a summary of the programmes of the main political groups in the European Parliament. Each young person then has the opportunity to vote on their roadmap. Young people discuss the political programmes.
- Explain how elections work and the importance of reading electoral programmes. The site [www.walkthetalkeu.com](http://www.walkthetalkeu.com) offers a list of the programmes of the main European political groups.

### Source:

**I'm voting** – A Guide to the 2018-2019 Elections, Fédération Infor Jeunes Wallonie Bruxelles.

## 9.5. The role of different authorities

### Objectives:

- Discover and understand the role different authorities have (from local to European).
- Differentiate between levels of power and their fields of action.
- Reflect on the role of different authorities in order to measure their impact and better understand them.

### Target group:

First-time voters, small groups of minimum 3 participants.

### Materials:

- Cards with the roles of different levels of authority written on them.
- 3 posters to represent the different levels of authority (local/regional, national and European Union).
- Adhesive paper.

### Time:

Approximately 50 minutes.

### Description:

- Explain the purpose of the activity to the participants.
- Split them into groups.
- Hang up, on the board or on a wall, three posters entitled: "Local/regional", "National", "European Union".
- Randomly distribute cards to groups on which the things that different levels of authority have influence on are written.
- Participants should decide which level of authority has influence on the matter and stick the cards on the corresponding poster.
- When all the cards have been stuck on the posters, check and correct if necessary by putting the cards in the right place, explaining when needed.
- Each group must choose one role per authority level and make an action plan for each one.

### Source:

I'm voting – A Guide to the 2018-2019 Elections, Fédération Infor Jeunes Wallonie Bruxelles.

## 9.6. Elections tool

### Objectives:

- Encourage the active participation of young people in democratic processes.
- Strengthen leadership and communication skills.
- Promote the understanding of local issues.

### Target group:

Young people between the ages of 14 and 18.

### Materials:

- 4 types of colour paper.
- Paper.
- Pens.
- Conference room (or 8 desks in two columns of four).

### Time:

40/50 minutes.

### Description:

- Split the participants into four groups. Each group represents a party participating in the elections.
- Groups 1 and 2 are competing to win the elections of a small municipality of 10.000 people, while the rest of the participants from the other two groups are citizens of this municipality who have the right to vote.
- The two competing parties have 10 minutes to define 5 priorities if they win the election. One of the priorities should be to create the conditions allowing young people to participate in the life of the municipality. The available budget for implementing the priorities is 2 million euros per year.
- Group 1 appoints a representative who has 5 minutes to present the focus of their future governance. Group 2 does the same.
- Then, it is voting time. Everyone is allowed to vote (they don't have to).
- Count the ballots and announce the winning party.

- Next, groups 3 and 4 compete to win the elections in a larger municipality with one million inhabitants and an annual budget of 200 million euros.
- At the end, summarise the principles of representative democracy and elections - free, fair, direct, and anonymous.

### Source:

Salto (<https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/elections.1148>), Toolbox for Training and Youth Work, Elections (2009).

## 9.7. **Where do you stand?**

### Objectives:

- Practise taking a stand and defending it in a group.
- Build an argument as part of a group.
- Present an opinion with conviction.
- Understand the mechanisms of verbal and non-verbal communication.

### Target group:

All age groups, 12-20 participants.

### Materials:

- 2 posters: I agree, I disagree.
- 2 chairs.

### Time:

45/50 minutes.

### Description:

- Place the two posters – agree and disagree – at either end of the space, large enough so that participants can stand in a line.
- In the centre of the space, arrange two chairs facing each other and ask participants to position themselves around these chairs.
- Explain the rules.
- There will be a series of statements read out.
- Each time a statement is made, participants should position themselves in the space between the two signs, depending on the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement. If they totally agree or disagree, they stand next to the sign. If not, they stand somewhere in the middle, depending on how much they agree or disagree with the statement.
- Begin by reading out the statements (you can, of course, also work with other themes. The key point is that the statements are controversial for the group you are working with):
  - You are morally obliged to vote in elections.
  - You must obey all laws, even if they seem unfair.

- The only people who have power in a democracy are politicians.
- Citizens deserve the leaders they have. It is the responsibility of citizens to control the daily activity of their representatives.
- I always agree with my friends or follow the opinion of the majority.
- No freedom for enemies of freedom! We must not allow extremist parties to march in the streets.
- Go back to the statements that incited the most controversy and ask participants to go back to the positions they chose.
- Invite the two participants with the most opposing views to sit on the chairs in the centre of the space. The other participants should stay in their positions.
- Each of the two seated participants then has 1 minute to explain the reasons for their agreement or disagreement with the statement. Nobody should interrupt or assist them.
- The other members of the group are then invited to stand behind the spokesperson they felt was the most convincing, thereby forming a 'for' and 'against'.
- The two groups have 10 minutes to work together to prepare an argument in favour of their position. They can designate a spokesperson, but a different one from before.
- The two new speakers should then take the seated position. They have 3 minutes to present their arguments, surrounded by their team.
- At the end of the presentations, participants are welcome to change sides if they find the other group more convincing.
- The new groups then have 5 minutes to develop a new argument. They should each designate a third spokesperson.
- Follow the same pattern as before, with participants free to switch sides.
- The focus of the activity is to encourage participants to reflect on debate as a process and think about its objectives and value in a pluralistic society.

### Source:

**Liaisons**, ERYICA (2017).

## 9.8. Clash of freedoms

### Objectives:

- Consider how freedom of expression contributes to the functioning of a democratic society.
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of having no limits on freedom of expression.
- Practice negotiation skills.

### Target group:

All ages, groups of 10 – 20 participants.

### Materials:

- 2 rooms.
- Paper and pens.
- Activity supports 1, 2 and 3.

### Time:

120 minutes.

### Description:

- Explain that the activity will involve a simulation and divide the group into two different communities. The Ixprat community should be larger: about two thirds of participants. The remaining third of the group will represent the Pastiks. The Ixprats live on an island. The Pastiks are considering migrating there.
- Explain that the first part of the simulation will involve work in the separate communities. After 20 minutes, the groups will be brought together.
- The minority group should be shown to a different room. The spokesperson for each group should read out the information about the relevant community and may then hand out copies for people to refer to (see the activity supports on the following pages).



- Begin the discussion in each group by asking for participants' thoughts about life on the island. Ask whether they would like to live there. After some reflection, the following questions should be put to the groups:
  - Pastik group: What are your concerns about having to move to the Ixprat island?
  - Ixprat group: What are your concerns about having to receive a large number of Pastik immigrants with no knowledge of your culture or traditions?
  
- After 20 minutes, bring the two groups together and invite them to introduce themselves, encouraging them to make brief statements if they would like to do so.
- After about 10 minutes, give participants the following information: *A year has passed, and a number of problems have arisen. Tensions between the communities have become increasingly acute and many people are worried about severe social unrest. The President has invited you to form a working group to try to find solutions to these problems.*
- Divide the whole community into smaller working groups, so that each working group has (roughly) 2 Pastik members and 4 Ixprat members. Give each group one of the problems (see activity support).
- Tell the groups that they have 20 minutes to reach a decision about how to resolve the problem. Explain that any proposal must be put to the vote and needs to be approved by a majority of participants (in the working group) in order to be accepted. Remind them that if they cannot approve a new decision, the status quo will continue! The Ixprat community can veto proposals as they are the majority.
- After 20 minutes, bring everyone together to present their decisions.
- Give each working group 2-3 minutes to feedback and outline their solution, and ask for any brief responses.
- Ask participants to come out of role and remind them that they are now going to discuss the activity as a whole. They should try not to return to previous debates:
  1. How did you feel about the activity? What did you like or not like?
  2. How easy was it to play your role – and stay in it – when the islanders came together?

3. What did you think about the negotiation process, and the process of decision-making at the end? What were the most important things for you when trying to find a solution?
4. Was it fair that the Ixprat community effectively had a veto on any proposal, because they were the majority? How can we make sure that the opinions and rights of minorities are fairly represented in 'real' life?
5. Did the activity change any of your views? If so, which in particular, and why?
6. Do you think the activity was close to reality: did it remind you of any problems in society today?
7. How do you think we should deal with the problem of people saying things which are hurtful, intolerant and sometimes dangerous?

**Source:**

**Liaisons**, ERYICA (2017).

## Activity support 1: The Pastik Island

*You live on a small island whose borders are closed and which has seen no immigration and very few tourists for as long as anyone can remember. Your society is calm and peaceful: peace and the absence of conflict have a strong tradition and are regarded as a 'national priority'. There is even an article in the Constitution, which states that: "No one should say or do anything which might be painful or upsetting to others". This article is carefully monitored, and infringements are severely punished. It is very rarely broken; it is much easier to agree with other people. Disagreement has become painful for the Pastiks. Your country calls itself a democracy. Elections are held every year and nearly everyone votes. However, the same people tend to be elected, as there is little discussion about alternative policies. In general, conversations, public pronouncements and even the media don't stray beyond the opinions that are generally accepted by society, and people mostly don't mind this as they have forgotten or are unable to imagine a different way of doing things. There is little news about other places on the globe, no literature from other cultures, and very little change, because change has been found to be upsetting. People have noticed over the years that the coastline has altered: sea levels have risen and many parts of the country, which used to be habitable, are now under water. This did not matter to begin with: there was enough land for everyone and communities living near the coastline simply had to move further inland. However, in recent years the problem has become more acute. A few people began discussing it among themselves, but this was found to be upsetting, so the government introduced a ban. So life continued, mostly calm, predictable and free from conflict and disagreement, until one terrible windy day a severe hurricane hit the island. Buildings were destroyed, many people died, and most of the land was flooded. When the waves subsided, few crops had survived and those that had survived were now dying from the salt water. Nearly all the infrastructure was destroyed. Food became scarce, infection and disease began to spread and medical supplies were inadequate. The island fell into chaos. People started disagreeing about what the best thing to do was. Just when it seemed that all hope was lost, a message came from a neighbouring island, the Island of Ixprat. The message expressed sincere concern for all Pastiks and offered to accommodate anyone who wished to move to Ixprat. You are among those who have decided to move.*

## Activity support 2: The Ixprat Island

*You live on the Island of Ixprat, located in the Pacific Ocean, on one of the most ancient shipping routes. Your island has traditionally relied on trade and communication with other countries and you have had an open borders policy for hundreds of years. That has meant that travellers and immigrants from many different cultures have been a strong feature of life on the island. The result is a very diverse population, with a wide range of opinions, beliefs and cultural practices. Your national culture embraces such diversity: people have a keen interest in other ways of doing things, different beliefs and ideologies. Of course, with such diversity, not every idea or ideology can be embraced by everyone. Disagreement and conflict are a way of life on Ixprat. When two human minds meet, they throw around thoughts, beliefs and ideas. This inevitably involves or ends in disagreement. Disagreement is almost a national hobby! For that reason, there are no laws that limit what one person or one group can say to another, or that limit what one person or one group can say about another. Some people do say terrible things. Sometimes this leads to people doing terrible things. The 'doing' is punishable by law; the saying is not. Life on Ixprat is interesting, challenging, and constantly changing. You value the richness of the culture and the fact that you can say anything you like. You know that endless argument and disagreement does not always lead to happiness. In fact, you often find disagreement very tiring, and very painful: it is not always easy to hear people say things you think are wrong, let alone things you think are cruel. You have also seen how some groups in society tend to be victims of cruel and intolerant language more often than others. Even so, it is important to you that no one should ever be stopped from expressing their beliefs. One windy day, your island received news that a very strong hurricane had hit one of the other islands in the Pacific. You know very little about that island: they have always kept themselves to themselves. You have heard tales that the people living on the island are very stupid and backward, but you have never met anyone from there. You know it is almost impossible to visit. The government has announced that the Island of Pastik suffered so badly as a result of the hurricane that most of the residents who have survived will be relocating to Ixprat. They can probably be squeezed in, but it will mean that current residents will have to do a lot of re-adjusting. Jobs will have to be shared out and there may not be enough housing for everyone.*

## Activity support 3: Problems for the groups

### Group 1

*A campaign has been set up to 'Find a Pastik tongue' and it has taken the Internet by storm. The campaign includes slogans such as:*

- *Poke a Pastik dummy: see if he squeaks! No tongue, no brain!*
- *Find a Pastik tongue, win a smartphone!*

*People are invited to submit photos of Pastik tongues. There is a 'Tongue Gallery' with photos and videos of people forcing open the mouths of Pastiks, shining a torch into their mouths, posing with telescopes or pointing to the tongue. The campaign is gathering momentum and there have been a large number of incidents where Pastiks have been attacked in the streets. Pastiks have responded by saying they refuse to be drawn into an insulting conversation with people who do not respect them.*

### Group 2

*A young girl from the Pastik community was shouted at in the street by a group of Ixprat boys. They called her a "fat slob", a "filthy slag" and told her she had no tongue in her head and no mind of her own. The girl has been miserable and has not left the house or talked to anyone for a week. She has not eaten anything for days. Her parents are desperately worried.*

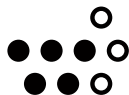
### Group 3

*A report has been released which shows that the rate of unemployment among Pastiks is far higher than in the population as a whole, there are no Pastik representatives in Parliament and few in positions of power. The report has also monitored other social factors, for example, levels of stress and mental illness, educational qualifications, and levels of crime. On all indicators, the Pastiks appear to do worse than any other sector of society. Attitudes towards Pastiks among the rest of society are also overwhelmingly negative.*





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