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Situation of young people in the European Union

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PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE
REGIONS**

Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy

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5. Participation

EU youth indicators

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5.1. INTRODUCTION

Young people are often described as being more disenchanted with politics and less keen on participating in political activities in comparison with older groups in the population ⁽¹⁾. This chapter shows that while this might hold true for traditional modes of participation (i.e. those related to representative democracy), increasing numbers of young Europeans are exploring new routes to political engagement and expression, in particular those made available by the internet and social media. Remarkably, young people seem to have found renewed interest in political issues and identify themselves as European citizens to a greater extent than older generations.

These trends are discussed in the first section of the chapter, illustrating young people's general level of interest in politics, their perception of citizenship and their political priorities. The following sections then examine how young citizens take advantage of different opportunities to actively participate in politics, from the more traditional means such as voting and joining political parties, to the less mediated forms of political communication and engagement offered by online applications.

5.2. YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTEREST IN POLITICS AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF EU CITIZENSHIP

Interest in the political life of society is a stepping stone to involvement in community life, and vice versa. An interest in politics prompts an individual to become informed about how the policy-making process works, what the opinions of different stakeholders are, and what means of participation are available ⁽²⁾. Ultimately, this interest can engender willingness to actively participate and address shared problems together with other members of the community, and it is therefore important to contextualise young people's political engagement ⁽³⁾.

On average, over half of young Europeans aged between 15 and 24 declared themselves to be moderately or strongly interested in politics in 2016, and what is more, this share has increased since 2010 (Figure 5-A). Contrary to the claim that young people are increasingly disaffected with politics, levels of interest in political issues in Europe seem to have experienced an upturn amongst young people in recent years.

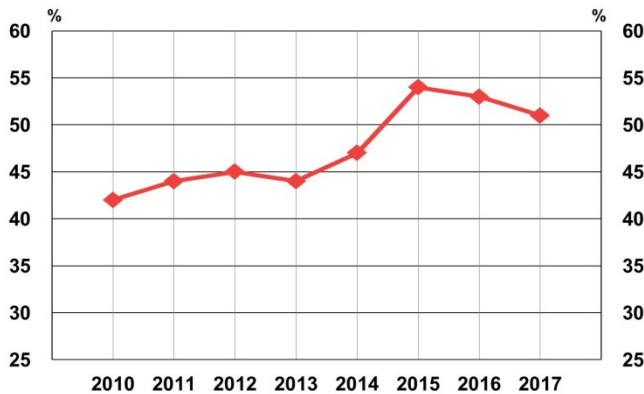
Young people have shown increasing interest in politics since 2010 and the gap vis-à-vis older age groups is reducing.

⁽¹⁾ Banaji and Buckingham, 2011.

⁽²⁾ Martin, 2003.

⁽³⁾ Ibid.

Figure 5-A: Percentage of young people (aged 15-24) claiming to be 'moderately' or 'strongly' interested in politics, EU-28 average, 2010-2017



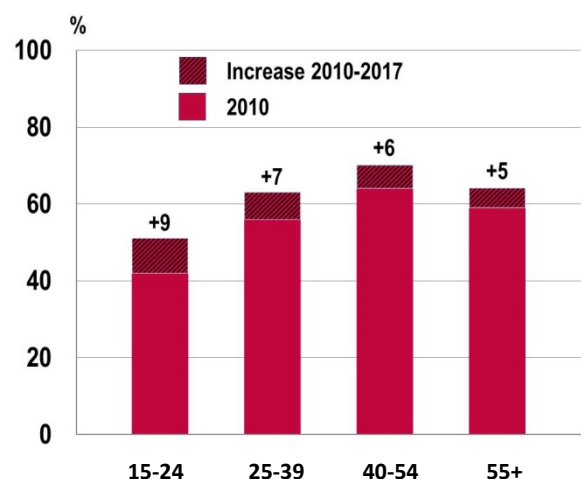
Note: The question was as follows: 'When you get together with friends or relatives, would you say that you discuss frequently, occasionally or never about...? National political matters/European political matters/local political matters'. A score was then attributed to each answer: 'Never' = 0; 'Occasionally' = 1; 'Frequently' = 2. An index was then constructed by adding together the scores for the three dimensions (local, national, European). Each group corresponds to a different index level: 'not at all interested in politics' = 0; 'slightly' = 1 to 2; 'moderately' = 3 to 4; 'strongly' = 5 to 6.

Source: Standard Eurobarometers 74 (2010), 76 (2011), 78 (2012), 79 (2013), 82 (2014), 84 (2015), 86 (2016), and 87 (2017).

The trend in the level of interest in politics amongst young people can be particularly appreciated when compared to that of older age groups over the last years (Figure 5-B).

Research has identified the main reason behind this renewed sensitivity to political issues in young people: their increasing use of new media for social and civic communication⁽⁴⁾. Social media such as podcasts, wikis, blogs and online networks are recognised as tools which can greatly facilitate participatory and peer-based politics, allowing individuals and groups to connect and discuss issues of public concern. Young people are at the forefront in adopting these new channels, and are making the most of these new opportunities for interacting within large-scale, online communities organised around media content⁽⁵⁾. The last section of the chapter will discuss these aspects in more detail.

Figure 5-B: Percentage of people with a moderate or strong level of interest in politics, by age group, EU-28 average, 2010 and 2017



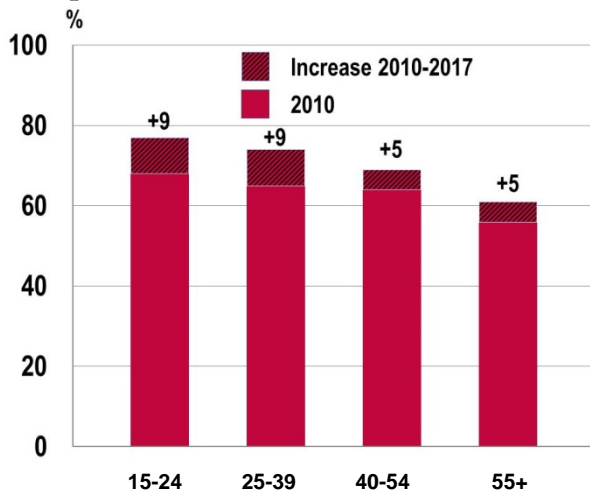
Source: Standard Eurobarometers 74 (2010), and 87 (2017).

⁽⁴⁾ Khane et al., 2014; Valenzuela et al., 2014.

⁽⁵⁾ Kushin, 2009; Banaji and Buckingham, 2011.

At first glance, the data confirm the traditional pattern according to which interest in civic and political matters increases throughout a person's life: individuals tend to become more aware of the political environment as they grow into mature adulthood, become politically socialised, and acquire a larger 'stake' in the social, political and economic life of their community ⁽⁶⁾. This phenomenon is intrinsic to each generation, therefore the fact that the youngest age group expresses a lower level of interest in politics cannot be labelled as a specific characteristic of the current generation of young people but rather as an inherent phase in the average life trajectory ⁽⁷⁾. What is worth noting is that this gap has reduced: since 2010, the increase in the share of 15-24 year-olds interested in politics has exceeded that of other age groups, probably as a result of their increased use of social media.

Figure 5-C: Percentage of people who feel they are a citizen of the EU, by age group, EU-28 average, 2010 and 2017



Notes: The question was: 'For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your own opinion – 'You feel you are a citizen of the EU'. Options included 'Yes definitely', 'Yes to some extent', 'No, not really', 'No, definitely not' and Base: all respondents. The chart does not show the share of respondents answering 'I don't know'.

Source: Standard Eurobarometers 74 (2010), and 87 (2017).

Besides a general interest in politics, identification with a political entity is essential in determining the degree of engagement in political life, since perceptions of citizenship are crucial in motivating people to participate ⁽⁸⁾.

Young people feel the most European in the general population.

Figure 5-C shows the percentage of people, by age group, who feel they are EU citizens. Interestingly, more young people feel ties of citizenship towards the European Union than older cohorts. Also noteworthy is the fact that self-identification as European citizens has grown more amongst young people than among older individuals. This might be related to the fact that young Europeans, compared to older age groups, have more opportunity to travel to other European countries for study, work or tourism; they also have a better knowledge of foreign languages and, on average, achieve higher levels of formal education – all factors

recognised as positively correlated with nurturing a sense of European citizenship ⁽⁹⁾. As citizens of the European Union, young people attach the highest importance to issues that have a tangible impact on the quality of their lives and on society: education and the acquisition of skills and the protection of the environment feature as the top priorities to be addressed at EU level, followed by employment and the integration of refugees (Figure 5-D).

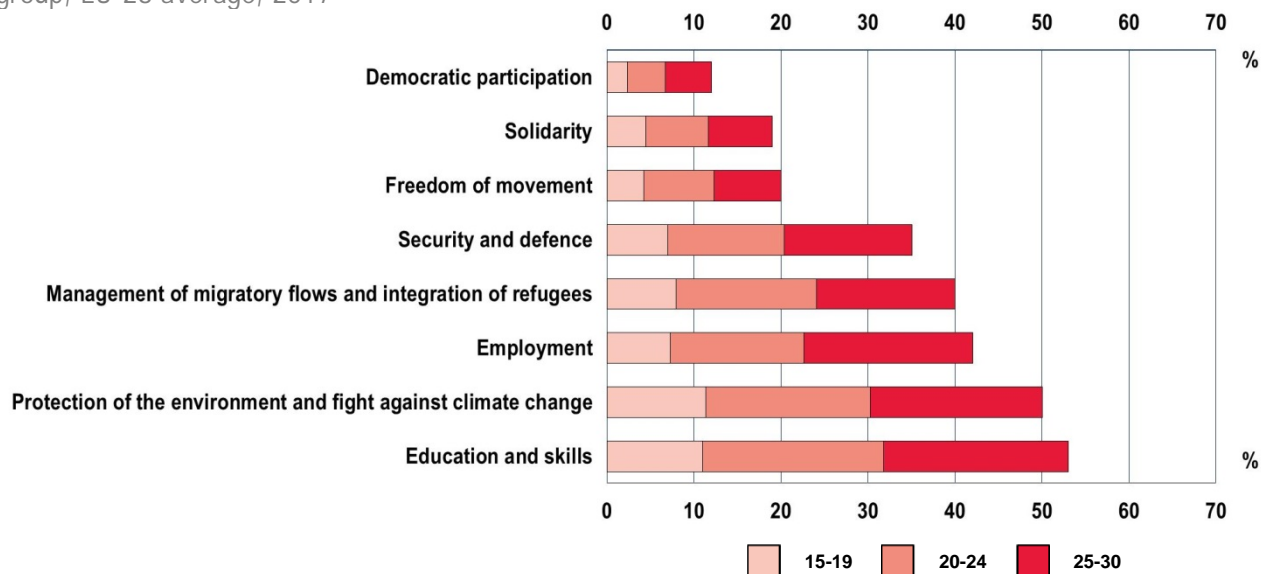
⁽⁶⁾ Jaime-Castillo, 2008; Wass, 2008.

⁽⁷⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁸⁾ Gaventa, J., 2009.

⁽⁹⁾ Fligstein et al., 2011.

Figure 5-D: Issues young people (aged 15-30) think should be top priorities for the European Union, by age group, EU-28 average, 2017



Notes: The question was: 'In your opinion, which of the following topics should be a priority for the EU? (MAX. 3 ANSWERS). Base: All respondents. The chart does not show the share of respondents answering 'I don't know'.

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 455 'European Youth' (2017).

On the other hand, democratic participation is the issue considered the least important among those highlighted in the survey. Despite the fact that more young people identify themselves as European citizens, this does not seem to translate into the opinion that fostering democratic participation should be a priority for the EU. This counterintuitive result seems to be in line with what research has indicated as a predominantly 'efficiency-driven' concept of citizenship prevailing amongst the younger generations ⁽¹⁰⁾. According to this notion, young people's attachment to the EU is born out of the desire to see concrete improvements in their lives (for example, receiving quality education, living in a healthy environment and finding a job), rather than on the less tangible principle of democracy and its practicalities in terms of citizenship and electoral representation.

All in all, the data described so far reveal young people's sound interest in politics and their strong European identity. These factors, paired with the low level of priority given to democratic participation, create the basis for understanding the actual forms of civic and political engagement favoured by young Europeans, which are discussed in the next sections.

⁽¹⁰⁾ European Commission/EACEA, 2013.

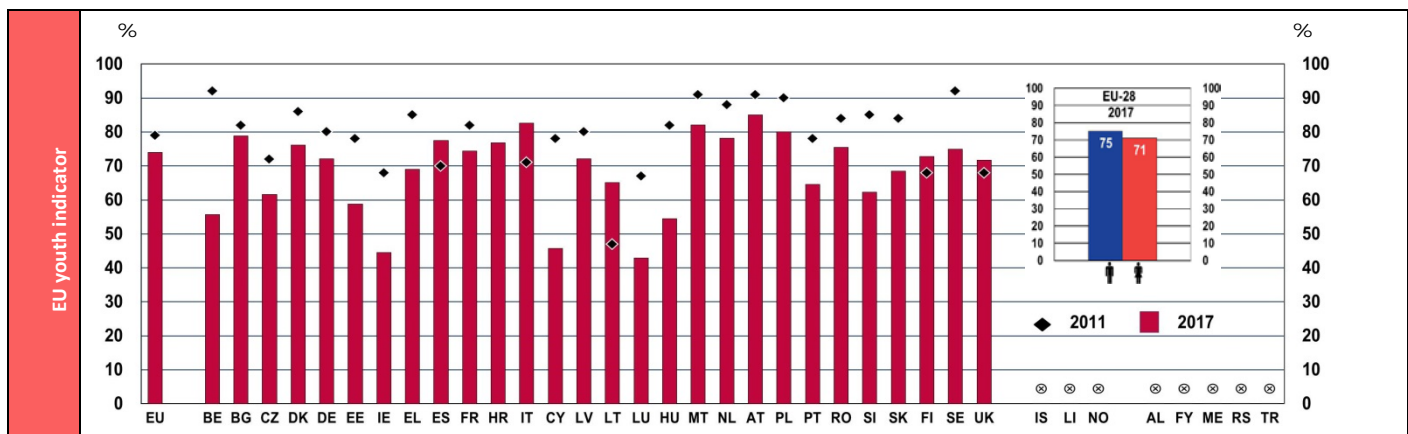
5.3. YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY: VOTING AND JOINING A POLITICAL PARTY

Genuine elections with political parties competing on alternative political programmes provide the basis for the functioning of representative democracy. Choosing between the programmes of various parties and candidates, and selecting representatives for public office are the basic actions through which citizens participate in the management of public affairs. This is why election turnout is usually referred to as a relevant measure of citizens' participation.

Electoral turnout amongst young Europeans continues to decline.

On average, 74 % of young Europeans report having participated in elections at the local, regional, national or European level during the three years preceding the survey – the results of which are illustrated in Figure 5-E. While in some countries the turnout is very high (at least 80 % in Italy, Malta, Austria, and Poland), in Ireland, Cyprus and Luxembourg, less than half of the youth population entitled to vote actually did so in recent elections. The case of Cyprus and Luxembourg is all the more noteworthy as they are amongst the countries in the European Union where voting is compulsory ⁽¹¹⁾.

Figure 5-E: Participation of young people (aged 15-30) in elections at the local, regional, national or EU level, by country, 2011 and 2017, and by sex, 2017



Notes: The question was 'During the last 3 years, did you vote in any political election at the local, regional, national or EU level? If you were, at that time, not eligible to vote, please say so'. Base: respondents who were eligible to vote at the time of the election. EU-27 (2011) and EU-28 (2017).

Source: 2011 Flash Eurobarometer 319 'Youth on the Move'; 2017 Flash Eurobarometer 455 'European Youth'.

Data also indicate a general decrease across Europe since 2011 in the electoral turnout among young people. A comparison of the EU-27 averages in 2011 and 2017 show a substantial fall from 79 % in 2011 to 68 % in 2017 (the inclusion of Croatia, which reports a high turnout in 2017, reduces the magnitude of the decline). This trend, common to the majority of EU Member States, is particularly marked in Belgium and Cyprus, where the turnout fell by over 40 %. Significant decreases of approximately 30 % were registered in Ireland, Hungary and Luxembourg. Very few countries have resisted this trend. Among these, Lithuania stands out with an increase in turnout of 36 %. Spain and Italy follow at some distance with 10% more young citizens voting in elections since 2011. On average, young men report slightly higher percentages of turnout than women (75 % and 71 % respectively), in line with similar trends in the general population ⁽¹²⁾.

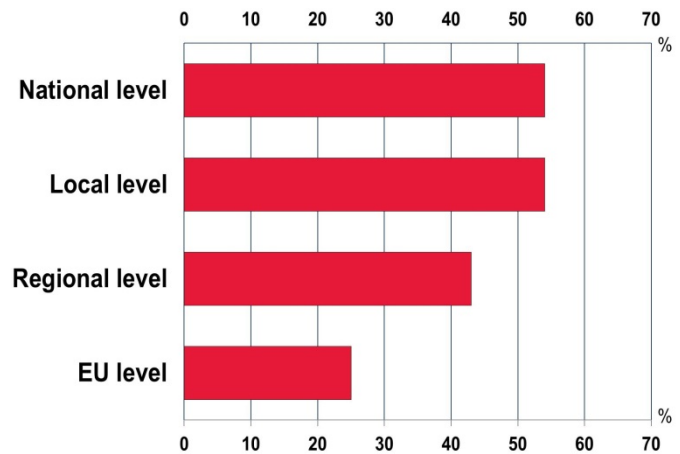
⁽¹¹⁾ An obligation for citizens to vote currently exists in Belgium, Cyprus, Greece and Luxembourg, although levels of enforcement vary (http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/residence/elections-abroad/ep-elections/index_en.htm).

⁽¹²⁾ Harrell, 2009.

Research literature has long since documented a variety of factors combining to influence voting turnout amongst younger as well as older voters (including the level of educational attainment, family income, and exposure to political conversations and exchanges)⁽¹³⁾. Current research being conducted on the issue of youth voting patterns is pointing towards an additional element: although young people do believe voting to be an important means of participation, they often choose to abstain because they do not think that politicians running at elections nor the issues debated during the campaigns sufficiently address their concerns⁽¹⁴⁾. Rather than lacking interest in politics, it may be that young people are not attracted by the choices on offer at elections. This might prove to be the case especially at EU level. Indeed, compared to other elections (local, regional and national), the general turnout amongst young voters is lowest at European level (Figure 5-F). In 2014, only about a quarter of young Europeans eligible to vote contributed to electing the European Parliament. A survey conducted by the Parliament just after the EU vote in May 2014 confirmed this ratio and indicated that older age groups voted in much higher proportions (for example, 51 % of citizens aged 55 years or older reported casting their vote)⁽¹⁵⁾.

At EU level, younger representatives are also few. The proportion of Members of the European Parliament aged 30 or under is indeed very small and has decreased since 2009 (Figure 5-G).

Figure 5-F: Participation of young people (aged 15-30) by type of election, EU-28 average, 2017



Notes: The question was: 'During the last 3 years, did you vote in any political election at the local, regional, national or EU level? If you were, at that time, not eligible to vote, please say so'. Base: respondents who were eligible to vote at the time of the election.

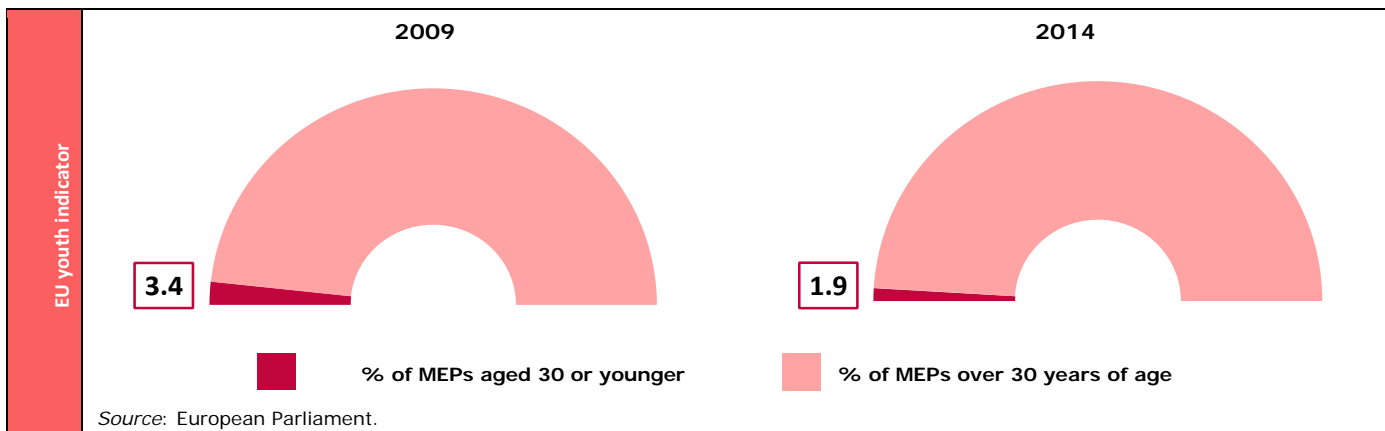
The survey was conducted in August 2017, therefore respondents' answers could in principle exclude the European elections of May 2014. However, the level of positive answers (25%) is similar to that registered by another survey conducted in the aftermath of the EU vote (28%). Data reported can therefore be considered to depict a reliable picture of youth participation.

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 455 'European Youth' (2017)

⁽¹³⁾ Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Berinsky and Lenz, 2011.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Cammaerts et al., 2016.

⁽¹⁵⁾ European Parliament, 2014.

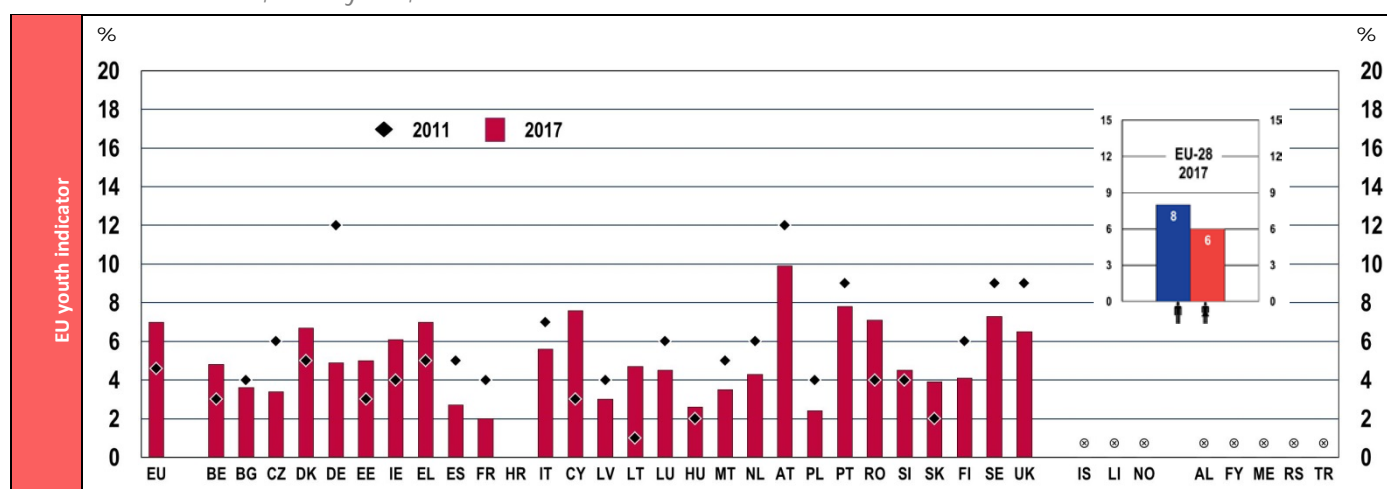
Figure 5-G: Members of the European Parliament aged 30 or under, 2009 and 2014

The results presented in the last three figures indicate only limited participation by young Europeans in elections, both as active (voters) and as passive electorate (candidates). This is especially evident at European level, despite the high numbers identifying themselves as EU citizens. Nevertheless, this situation is in line with the limited importance ascribed by young people to the issue of democratic participation, and a confirmation of the higher relevance of other political issues (Figure 5-D above).

Besides voting, membership of political parties is considered to be a form of political participation in a representative democracy. Parties play a central role in channelling political opinions between voters and candidates at elections and ultimately superintend the appointment of elected offices ⁽¹⁶⁾. Becoming a member of a political party appeals to only a small proportion of young people. In 2017, only 7 % of young Europeans reported being affiliated to a political organisation or party, although this proportion has increased somewhat in Europe between 2011 and 2017 (particularly in Czech Republic, Germany, Spain and France) (Figure 5-H). The gender balance amongst the membership of political organisations is slightly in favour of young men.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Lijphart and Aitkin, 1994.

Figure 5-H: Participation of young people (aged 15-30) in a political organisation or political party, by country, 2011 and 2017, and by sex, 2017



Notes: Question was 'In the last 12 months, have you participated in any activities of the following organisations: political organisation or political party?'. Base: All respondents. EU-27 (2011) and EU-28 (2017).

Source: 2011: Flash Eurobarometer 319 'Youth on the Move'; 2017: Flash Eurobarometer 455 'European Youth'.

Data presented in this section indicate a limited involvement of young people in the institutional practices of representative democracy. This is especially true for young women, who tend to participate less than men both in elections and in political organisations ⁽¹⁷⁾. However, though elections and political parties have a pivotal role in democratic societies, they are not the only activities to be taken into account when evaluating political participation. Other channels are open to people to have their say and to influence political decision-makers and policies, and these may be particularly attractive to younger citizens.

5.4. OTHER WAYS YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE

Political activism has, over recent decades, become more individualised, ad-hoc, and issue-specific ⁽¹⁸⁾. This trend applies to the entire population but is particularly evident amongst young people, who have come to favour more flexible and issue-based forms of participation such as contributing to the projects of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), participating in community-driven initiatives and joining social movements ⁽¹⁹⁾.

Data presented in Figure 5-I confirm young people's preference for being active in NGOs and/or local organisations which address local issues, rather than in political parties (as displayed in Figure 5-H above). On average, twice as many respondents had participated in the activities of a local organisation aimed at improving their local community than were active in a political party.

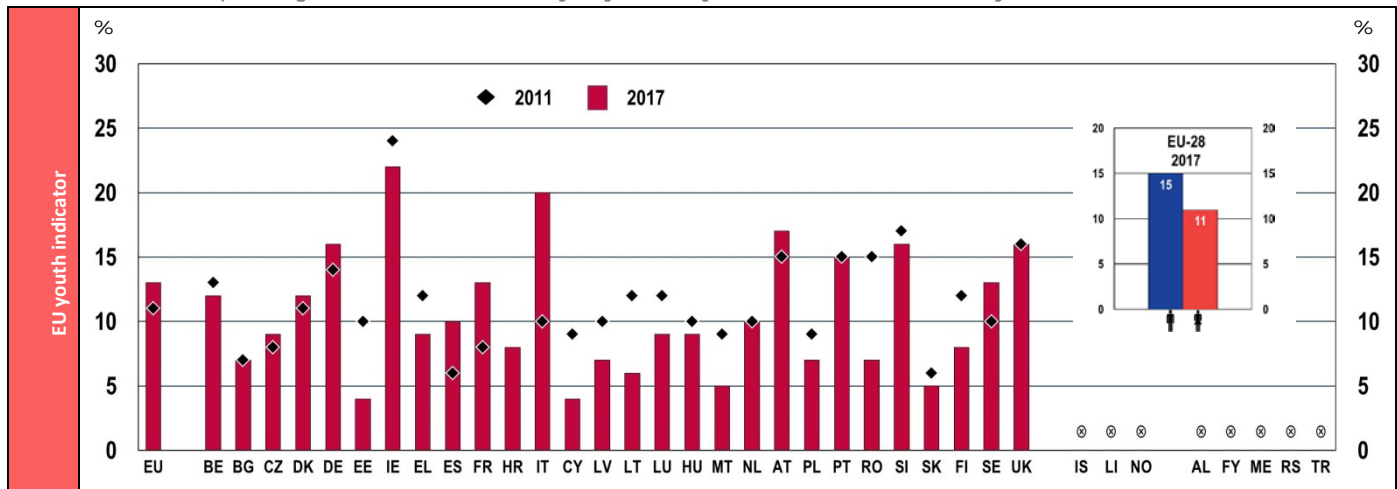
Young people are more active in non-governmental organisations and/or local organisations than in political parties.

⁽¹⁷⁾ The limited participation and representation of women in politics is an issue that is very well covered in the relevant research literature. For an overview, see Paxton and Hughes (2015).

⁽¹⁸⁾ European Commission/EACEA, 2013.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Hoikkala, 2009.

Figure 5-I: Proportion of young people (aged 15-30) who have participated in the activities of organisations aimed at improving their local community, by country, 2011 and 2017, and by sex, 2017



Notes: The question was 'In the last 12 months, have you participated in any [of the] activities of the following organisations: a local organisation aimed at improving the local community?'. Base: All respondents. EU-27 (2011) and EU-28 (2017).

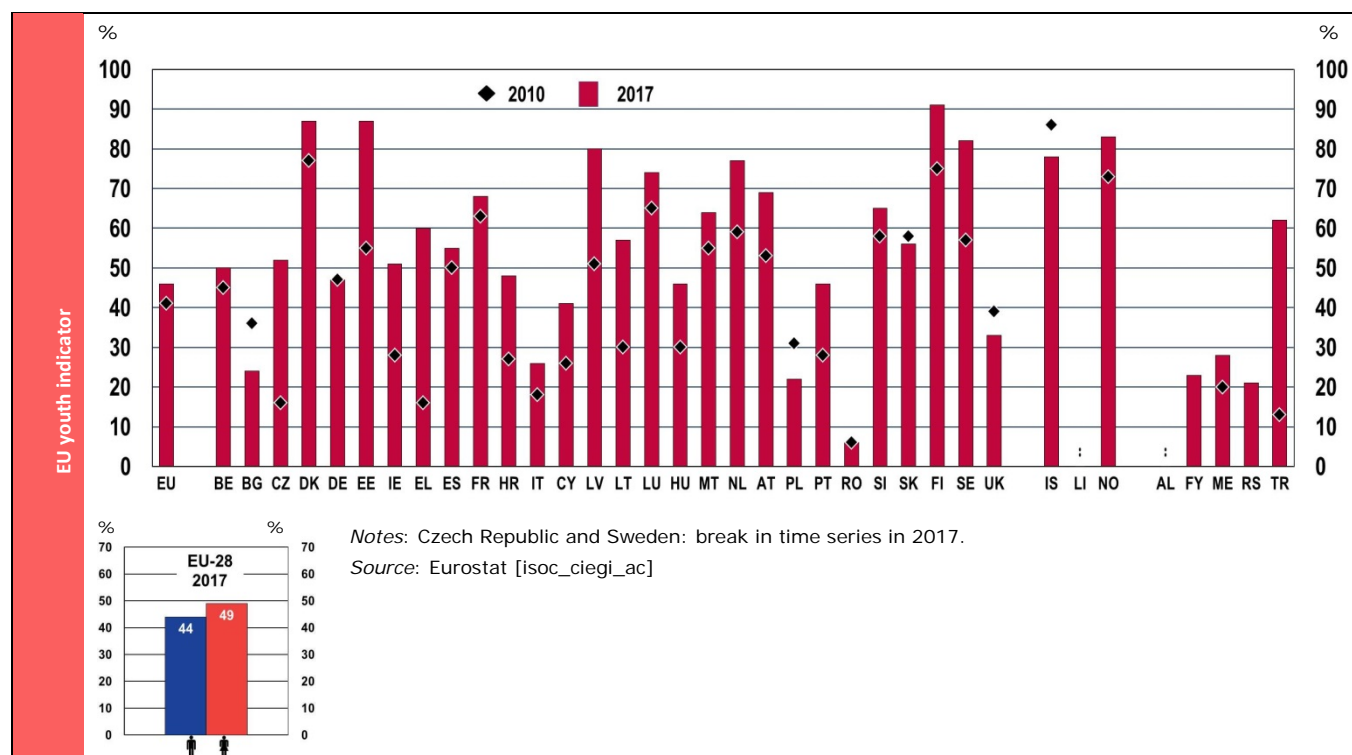
Source: 2011 Flash Eurobarometer 319a 'Youth on the Move', 2015 Flash Eurobarometer 408 'European Youth'.

Overall in the EU, the rates of participation in activities to improve the local community slightly increased between 2011 and 2017. The rise in participation has been significant in Italy where the rate doubled, and in France and Spain where it increased by over 50 %. On the other hand, participation rates halved in Cyprus, Malta and in some Eastern European countries (Estonia, Lithuania and Romania). As with the forms of participation discussed earlier, young men tend to be involved to a greater extent than women.

Frustration with traditional and institutionalised forms of political participation can also result in people choosing to show their interest in politics or express their concerns without any (or with little) mediation by organised bodies, be they political parties or non-governmental organisations. To this end, as mentioned in the first section of the chapter, a wide array of opportunities for political communication is offered by the internet and its applications, which young people have been in the forefront of using. The virtual spaces frequented by young people such as online forums, chat rooms, social networks and blogs, may serve the same basic function as the physical ones they sometimes replace: establishing collective interaction around common interests⁽²⁰⁾. In this sense, they constitute a great resource for political and social engagement, which young people have been the quickest to recognise and use. For example, as shown in Figure 5-J, the internet plays a significant role in facilitating interactions between young citizens' and public authorities.

⁽²⁰⁾ Montgomery et al., 2004; Kushin, 2009.

Figure 5-J: Proportion of young people (aged 16-24) who used the internet to interact with public authorities in the twelve months before the survey, by country, 2010 and 2017



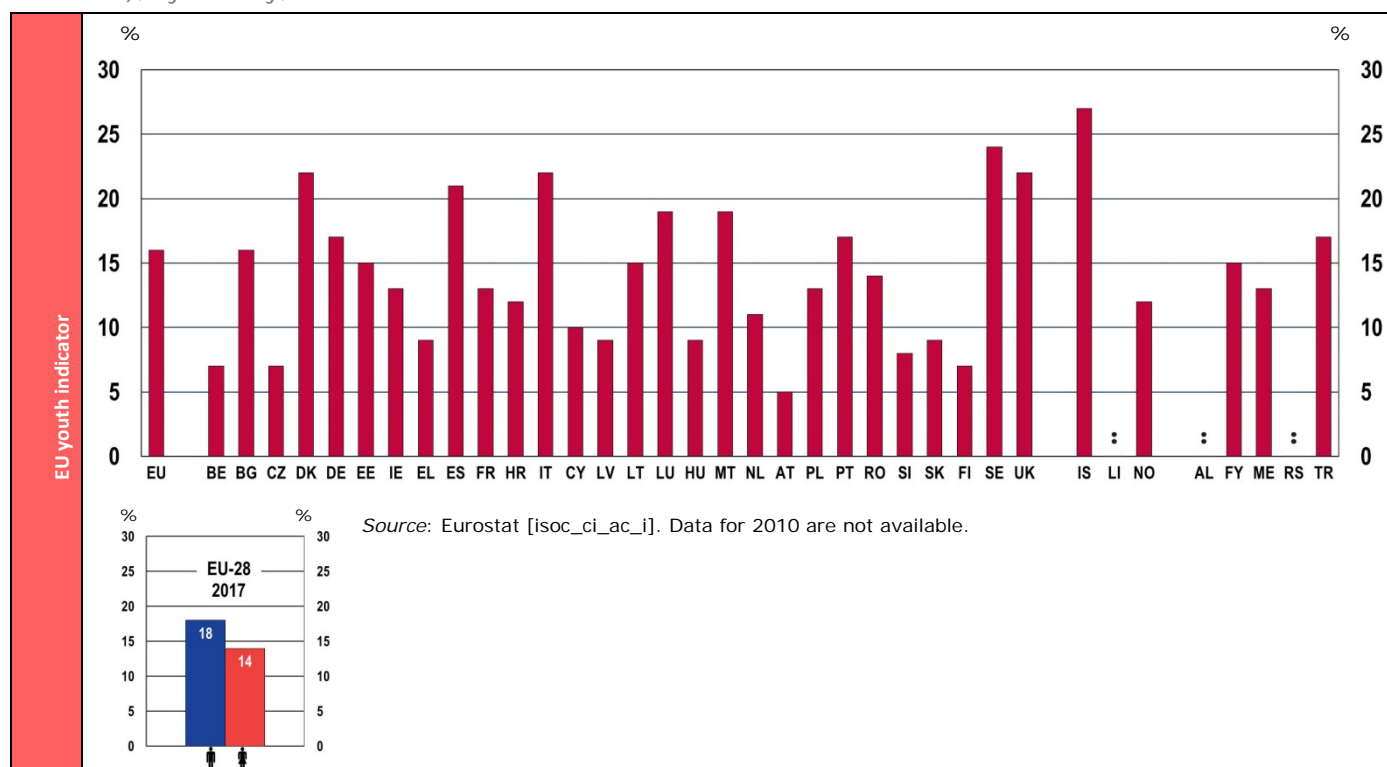
Data collected by Eurostat show that, on average, 46 % of young Europeans used the internet to contact or interact with public authorities in 2017, and this figure has increased over the last seven years, in particular in Estonia, Greece and Turkey. In the Scandinavian and Baltic countries, this percentage is extremely high, indicating a widespread use of online applications to obtain information from public authorities. On the other hand, young people in some European countries, in particular in Southern and Eastern Europe, seem less familiar with this form of interaction with public authorities. It is to be kept in mind that the propensity to use the internet to interact with public authorities is strongly influenced by the level of digitalisation reached in a country (i.e. where public administrations have established online procedures to communicate and interact with citizens, using to the internet is obviously more common amongst younger as well as older individuals). In addition, cross-country differences in the use of media to reach out to public authorities clearly reflect differences in the availability of internet connections and computers in households, and the overall frequency of internet use by individuals. Countries with low scores in these areas are also those where young people have had less contact with public authorities via online channels ⁽²¹⁾. Reversing the general trend in participation levels by gender as discussed so far, the use of internet for reaching out to public authorities is more common amongst young women than men.

On average, one in two young Europeans uses the internet and its social media to interact with public authorities.

The new media also serve as a vehicle for individuals to express their opinions on civic and political issues. On average, 16 % of young Europeans posted their views and ideas on online websites in 2017 (Figure 5-K).

⁽²¹⁾ An illustration and analysis of data per country on the share of households with internet access are available at the Eurostat online database at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Internet_access_and_use_statistics_-_households_and_individuals [accessed on 7 August 2017].

Figure 5-K: Proportion of young people (aged 16-24) who have used the internet in the three months before the survey and who have posted opinions on civic or political issues via websites (e.g. blogs, social networks, etc.), by country, 2017



Higher percentages (over 20 %) are recorded in Denmark, Spain, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Iceland, while levels well below the EU average are found in Belgium, Czech Republic, Austria and Finland. Comparing these data with those on interactions with public authorities (Figure 5-J), no relationship can be established between the two types of activity, despite both being based on the use of the internet: the willingness of young people to interact with public authorities online does not therefore appear to be linked to their willingness to express opinions in virtual spaces.

It might be expected that the level of education, particularly in the area of digital competences, would influence the opportunities young people have to take full advantage of the new technologies for engaging in political interaction. Research has, indeed, documented a 'digital divide', i.e. a level of inequality in the skills acquired and type of activities performed even amongst individuals who have equal access to the internet⁽²²⁾. Despite this, the new media are considered to lower the threshold for young people's participation and this fact therefore needs to be taken into account in order to fully appreciate the civic and political involvement of today's youth⁽²³⁾.

⁽²²⁾ DiMaggio and Hargittai, 2001.

⁽²³⁾ Khane et al., 2014.

CONCLUSION

Young people have shown increasing interest in politics since 2010, and are those who feel the most European in the general population. Yet, electoral turnout continues to decrease amongst young Europeans, especially on occasion of EU elections. Feeling unrepresented by the options available at elections appears as the most frequent reason reported for not taking part, rather than a lack of interest in democratic participation.

However, new modes of political engagement and communication have attracted young Europeans' interest. Frustration with traditional and institutionalised forms of political participation has motivated young people to use the internet and its applications (such as social media, podcasts, wikis, blogs and online networks) as a vehicle for expressing their opinions, establishing communities of likeminded citizens and initiate organised actions.

6. Voluntary Activities

EU youth indicators

Participation of young people in organised voluntary activities

Figure 6-A

Voluntary activities aimed at changing young people's local communities

Figure 6-D

Young people volunteering abroad

Figure 6-F

Young people receiving a certificate or diploma for voluntary activities

Figure 6-G

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Volunteering represents an important contribution to the promotion of social and economic cohesion. By engaging in projects to tackle current social problems, young volunteers become key agents of social reform and develop a sense of belonging in and ownership of their community.

In addition, participating in voluntary activities greatly contributes to a young person's human capital and personal development. The personal benefits that volunteering brings are numerous. Research has shown how it helps to discourage young people from leaving school prematurely and improves their self-confidence, sense of social responsibility, and level of psychological wellbeing ⁽²⁴⁾. More specifically, peer-mentoring (voluntary mentoring by a young person who has lived through similar experiences) has been shown to be effective in helping young people at risk of exclusion ⁽²⁵⁾. In terms of the development of human capital, volunteering provides young individuals with effective opportunities for non-formal learning which enhance their personal and professional skills and can greatly contribute to their employability. Improvements in knowledge and understanding, interpersonal and communication skills, organisational and managerial skills, fundraising, and technical and office skills are examples of the practical gains reported by young volunteers ⁽²⁶⁾.

This chapter provides an overview of young people's participation in voluntary activities. The first section examines recent trends in terms of participation rates, areas of activity and the tendency for young people to undertake voluntary work abroad. The second part of the chapter discusses the importance of the formal recognition of the competences acquired through volunteering.

6.2. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES

Around 30 % of young people between 15 and 30 years of age participate in voluntary activities in Europe (Figure 6-A). Cross-country variations are noticeable, with a few countries presenting rates close to 40 % (Germany, Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands) and others registering levels of participation below 20 % (Hungary, Finland and Sweden). The differing levels of youth involvement in volunteering in countries tends to reflect the more general trends in the levels of engagement in non-profit-making activities in the wider population: strong traditions of participation in voluntary networks and associations tend to be associated with higher rates of youth contribution ⁽²⁷⁾. Since 2011, the participation of young people in voluntary activities has increased by over 25 %, on average. The most remarkable increases have occurred in Greece and in Poland (71 % and 83 % respectively) and in Italy, where the share of young volunteers has more than doubled.

About 30 % of young people between 15 and 30 years of age participate in voluntary activities. This figure has increased by over 25 % since 2011.

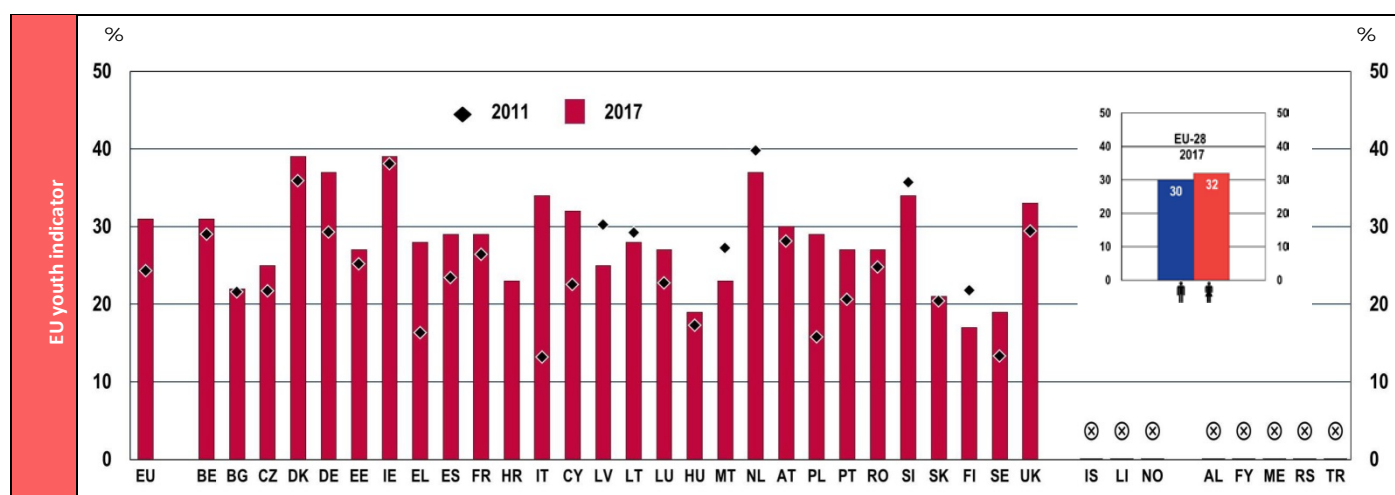
⁽²⁴⁾ Hall, 2008; Piliavin, 2003; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008.

⁽²⁵⁾ Haski-Leventhal et al., 2008.

⁽²⁶⁾ Hall, 2008.

⁽²⁷⁾ Salamon and Wojciech, 2001. For information on the national policies and traditions of youth volunteering, please refer to the relevant pages of the Youth Wiki, an online database of national youth policies in Europe available at: <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/youthwiki>

Figure 6-A: Participation of young people (aged 15-30) in organised voluntary activities, by country, 2011 and 2017, and by sex, EU-28 average, 2017



Note: The question was: 'In the last 12 months, have you been involved in any organised voluntary activities?'.

Base: All respondents. EU-27 (2011) and EU-28 (2017).

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 319, 'Youth on the Move', 2011 and Flash Eurobarometer 455, 'European Youth', 2017.

The general increase in participation rates in Europe can be at least partly explained by the progressive increase in the number of young people in education (as illustrated in the first section of Chapter 2).

Research has long since detected a positive relationship between the levels of participation in education (in particular in full-time formal education) and the propensity towards volunteering ⁽²⁸⁾. The rise in the numbers of young people enrolled in upper secondary and tertiary education over the past decade is therefore likely to have contributed to the positive trend in involvement in voluntary activities. In addition – and possibly more relevant for some of the countries where participation rates have spiked – a deterioration in labour market opportunities at times of economic crisis are recognised as powerful factors in prompting more young people to get involved in volunteering in order to acquire skills, experience and job contacts ⁽²⁹⁾.

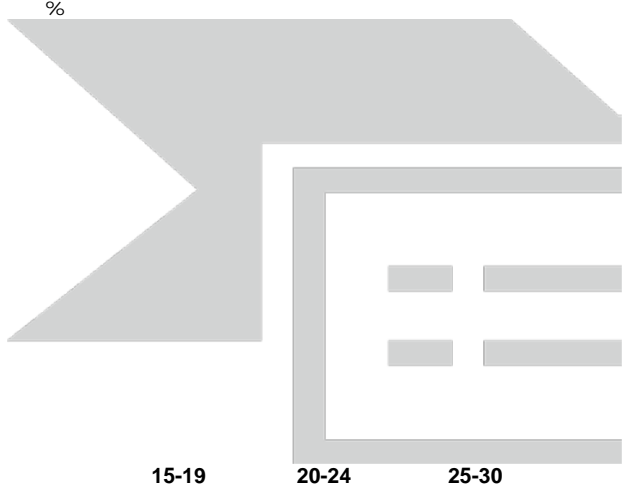
While gender does not appear to influence the propensity to volunteer, age has an impact. Indeed, 15-19 year-olds tend to be more active in voluntary activities (Figure 6-B). Moreover, the younger the cohort, the higher has been the increase in the rates of participation since 2011. This finding is probably linked to the stronger tendency demonstrated by students in full-time education to engage in volunteering mentioned above. Once young people start to combine studying with working, and even more so when they are in full-time employment, the time they have available to join non-profit initiatives tend to diminish ⁽³⁰⁾.

⁽²⁸⁾ Jones, 2000.

⁽²⁹⁾ Dean, 2014.

⁽³⁰⁾ Jones, 2000.

Figure 6-B: Participation of young people (aged 15-30) in organised voluntary activities, EU-28 average, by age group, 2017



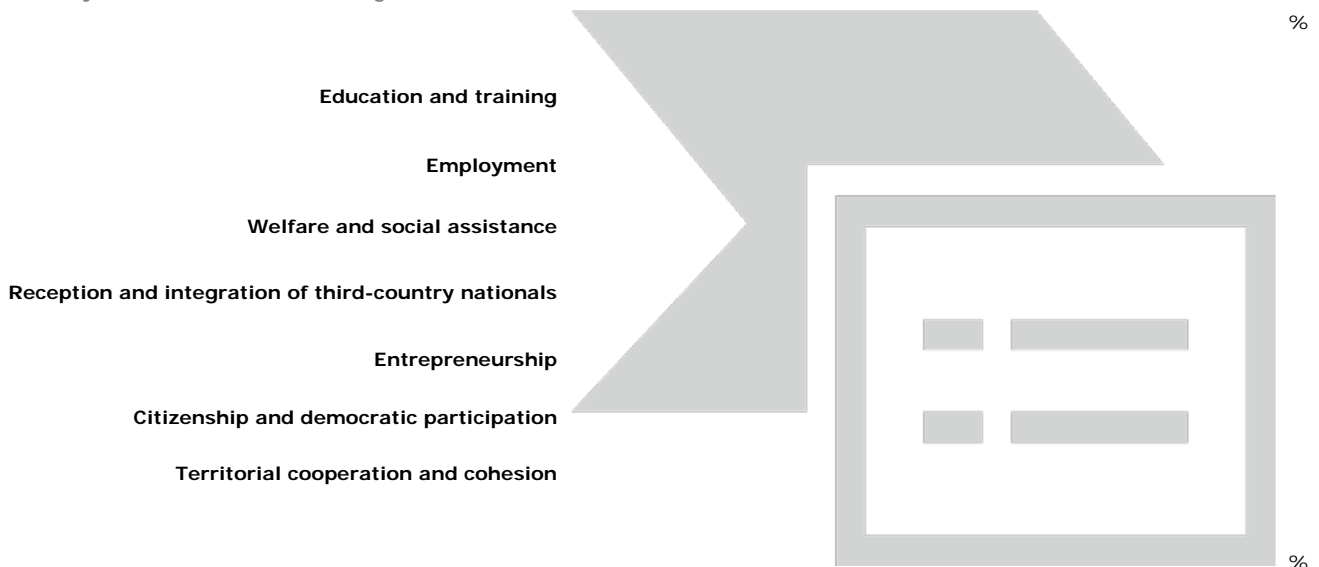
Note: The question was: 'In the last 12 months, have you been involved in any organised voluntary activities?'.

Base: All respondents.

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 455, 'European Youth', 2017

The potential for youth participation in volunteering can be furthered by identifying young people's priority areas of voluntary activity. To this end, the 2017 Flash Eurobarometer asked young Europeans to identify the areas in which they would like the EU to take stronger action to promote voluntary initiatives (Figure 6-C). Education and employment came top of the list with social assistance and the integration of immigrants and refugees also appearing as high priorities. It is worth noting that these preferences are in line with those expressed in the same survey concerning the policy priorities for the European Union, discussed in Chapter 5 (Figure 5-D). For these topics, political relevance seems to go hand in hand with young people's eagerness to directly contribute through volunteering.

Figure 6-C: Areas in which the EU should take action to encourage young people to express solidarity through voluntary activities, EU-28 average, 2017



Note: The question was: 'The European Solidarity Corps is a new initiative from the European Commission which creates opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects in their own country or abroad that benefit communities and people around Europe. In which of the following areas do you think that the EU should take action to encourage young people to express solidarity? (MAX. 3 ANSWERS)'.

Base: All respondents.

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 455, 'European Youth', 2017.

When it comes to the scope of personal engagement, the majority of young volunteers choose projects and services aimed at bringing benefits to their local community (Figure 6-D). This is particularly true for Bulgaria,

Spain and Croatia, where almost 80 % of young volunteers are active locally. On the other hand, less than half of volunteers stay in their local community in Luxembourg and in the Netherlands. The proportion of young Europeans who have undertaken these types of activity have registered an increase since 2011, especially in France, Denmark, Finland, Spain and Poland.

Figure 6-D: Share of young people (aged 15-30) who undertook voluntary activities aimed at changing their local communities, by country, 2011 and 2017, and by sex, EU-28 average, 2017



Note: The question was: 'Were these voluntary activities aimed at changing something in your local community?'.

Base: All respondents. EU-27 (2011) and EU-28 (2017).

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 319, 'Youth on the Move', 2011 and Flash Eurobarometer 455, 'European Youth', 2017.

Correspondingly, few young volunteers participate in activities with an international focus. As Figure 6-E illustrates, only about 10 % of participants report having contributed to projects aimed at changing something in other European countries or in other parts of the world.

Figure 6-E: Aim of voluntary activities carried out by young people (aged 15-30), EU-28 average, 2017



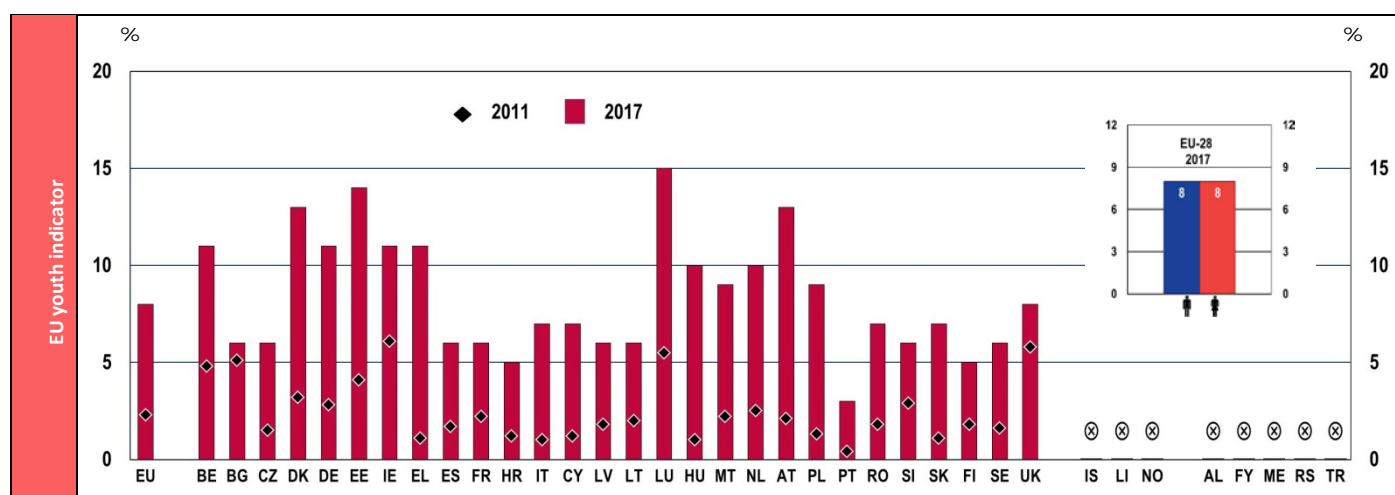
Note: The question was: 'Were these voluntary activities aimed at changing something in? (Multiple answers possible)'.

Base: All respondents.

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 455, 'European Youth', 2017.

In accordance with these results, few young Europeans leave their own country to carry out voluntary work: only around 8 % of young individuals in the European Union report having volunteered abroad (Figure 6-F).

Figure 6-F: Share of young people (aged 15-30) going abroad to do voluntary work, by country, 2011 and 2017 and by sex, EU-28 average, 2017



Note: The question was: 'Have you ever had the opportunity to stay abroad for the purpose of volunteering?'.
Base: All respondents. EU-27 (2011) and EU-28 (2017).

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 319, 'Youth on the Move', 2011 and Flash Eurobarometer 455, 'European Youth', 2017.

Even in those countries with the highest percentages of young volunteers going abroad (Denmark, Estonia, Luxembourg and Austria), the figure does not exceed 15 %. The age at which most young volunteers engage in activities makes travelling abroad more difficult, as does the financial burden involved, which represents a significant limitation to cross-border volunteering⁽³¹⁾. Because voluntary work is by definition non-remunerated, and few programmes provide reimbursement for incurred expenses, meeting the costs of living and travelling expenses while abroad is possible only for a small minority of young Europeans⁽³²⁾. Indeed, as indicated by a survey conducted in 2014, half of the young volunteers in the European Union report having incurred expenses to cover living and travel costs while doing voluntary work⁽³³⁾. Yet, almost one third has not received any reimbursement of the costs linked to their participation in voluntary projects⁽³⁴⁾.

Nonetheless, the trend registered since 2011 is extremely positive: at EU level, the percentage of young Europeans volunteering abroad has tripled. As young people's international mobility has increased over recent years bringing many young Europeans to live, study and work in other European countries (as discussed in the first and second chapters of this report), serving in cross-border voluntary organisations seems to have also become a reason for young people to leave their country of origin. The most significant increases have occurred in Greece, Italy, Hungary, Portugal and Poland. Interestingly, Greece, Italy and Poland also feature amongst the countries where the rate of participation in volunteering has increased the most over the last eight years (Figure 6-A).

Overall, data show that participation in voluntary activities has grown in recent years, both at home and abroad. While these figures are encouraging, there is still greater potential for extending the opportunities for the non-

⁽³¹⁾ Sherraden et al., 2008.

⁽³²⁾ Gaskin, 2004.

⁽³³⁾ European Commission, 2015b.

⁽³⁴⁾ Ibid.

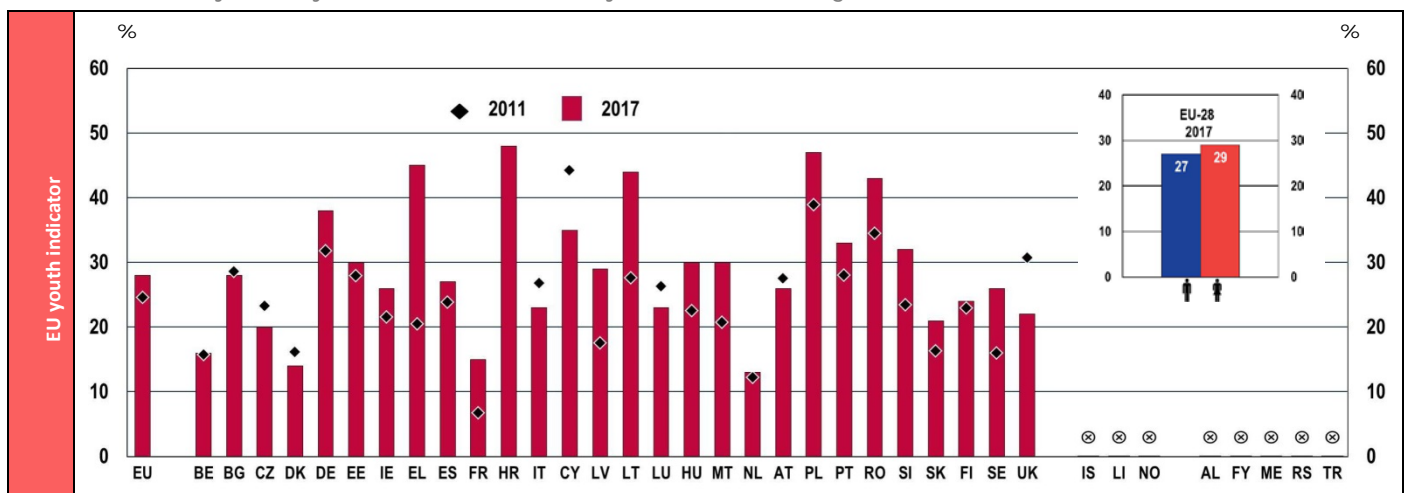
formal learning and personal growth associated with voluntary work. To this end, it is interesting to shed some light on an important factor motivating young people to volunteer, namely the possibility of receiving formal recognition of their experiences.

6.3. RECOGNITION OF VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES

By participating in voluntary activities, volunteers are able to acquire skills and enhance their personal and professional capabilities through non-formal learning. Such skills can later be useful either when returning to education or when entering the labour market; this is especially true when the skills have been formally recognised through a certificate or diploma that can enhance the volunteer's curriculum vitae⁽³⁵⁾. The opportunity of gaining formal recognition of the personal and professional experience acquired is considered fundamental in encouraging young people to participate in voluntary activities⁽³⁶⁾. This is particularly true for those who join voluntary projects not only because they want to make a contribution to society but also because they see it as a way to improve their employability – a consideration which is increasingly important in countries where unemployment is high – as mentioned in the first section. Consequently, obtaining a certificate attesting to the competences acquired is an increasingly important motivating factor⁽³⁷⁾. However, on average, less than a third of young people who have participated in voluntary activities report that they have received a certificate or diploma recognising their experience and the skills they have demonstrated (Figure 6-G).

Less than a third of young people who have participated in voluntary activities have received a certificate or diploma formally recognising their experience and the skills they have demonstrated.

Figure 6-G: Share of young people (aged 15-30) who received a certificate or diploma for their voluntary activities, by country, 2011 and 2017, and by sex, EU-28 average, 2017



Note: The question was: 'Did you receive a certificate, diploma or other formal recognition for your participation in these voluntary activities?'.

Base: All respondents. EU-27 (2011) and EU-28 (2017).

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 319, 'Youth on the Move', 2011 and Flash Eurobarometer 455, 'European Youth', 2017.

⁽³⁵⁾ Williamson, Hoskins and Boetzelen, 2005; Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth, 2011.

⁽³⁶⁾ Fisher and Ackerman, 1998.

⁽³⁷⁾ Moskwiak, 2005.

The countries reporting the highest percentages of young volunteers receiving certificates or diplomas are: Greece, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania, with percentages above 40 %. In contrast, in Belgium, Denmark, France and the Netherlands, less than 20 % of young people receive any form of certification for their volunteering. Improvements have occurred in many European countries since 2011. The most remarkable are those registered in Greece and France, where the share of young people receiving recognition for their activities has more than doubled (albeit from a low base in France). For other countries the trend has been reversed, particularly in Cyprus and the United Kingdom, which have experienced a significant decline in the percentages of volunteers receiving official recognition.

Recognition of the skills acquired through volunteering can be particularly complicated when the voluntary activity has been carried out in a country different from the one where the individual plans to either continue his/her education or seek employment. Differences in the types of competences certified, in the guidelines for assessment and, in the case of formal recognition, in national validation systems, add multiple obstacles to the transferability of skills acquired ⁽³⁸⁾. The combination of these challenges, therefore, can make volunteering abroad all the more problematic.

CONCLUSION

A significant increase in the level of participation of young individuals in voluntary activities has occurred since 2011. This is due in part to the progressive increase in the number of young people in education and in part to worsened labour market opportunities at times of economic crisis which prompted more young Europeans to get involved in volunteering in order to acquire skills, experience and job contacts.

However, a minority of young volunteers see their participation recognised: less than a third have received a certificate or diploma formally recognising their experience and the skills they have demonstrated.

Possibly also because of the additional difficulties in receiving recognition for activities conducted in another country, mobility of young volunteers in Europe is still very limited: despite a substantial increase since 2011, only around 8 % of young individuals in the European Union report having volunteered abroad. Europe.

⁽³⁸⁾ Williamson, Hoskins and Boetzelen, 2005; Kiilakoski, 2015.