

POLICY PAPER WRITING WORKSHOP



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TITLE: E1. Enhancing Youth Civic Engagement and Education in the EU: A Unified Framework

TOPIC: Education, Culture, Youth & Sport

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Enhancing Youth Civic Engagement and Education in the EU: A Unified Framework

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1. Executive Summary

This proposal aims to tackle the growing problem of youth civic engagement by promoting and enhancing civic education across the EU Member States. It is addressed to the CULT Committee of the European Parliament. First, it identifies the core problems that young people face in terms of democratic participation and engagement – from limitations in the educational curricula, to the lack of expertise in teaching. Two recommendations are proposed as potential solutions to these problems: 1) The establishment of a tiered EU civic passport, and 2) The creation of an EU Youth Advisory Council.

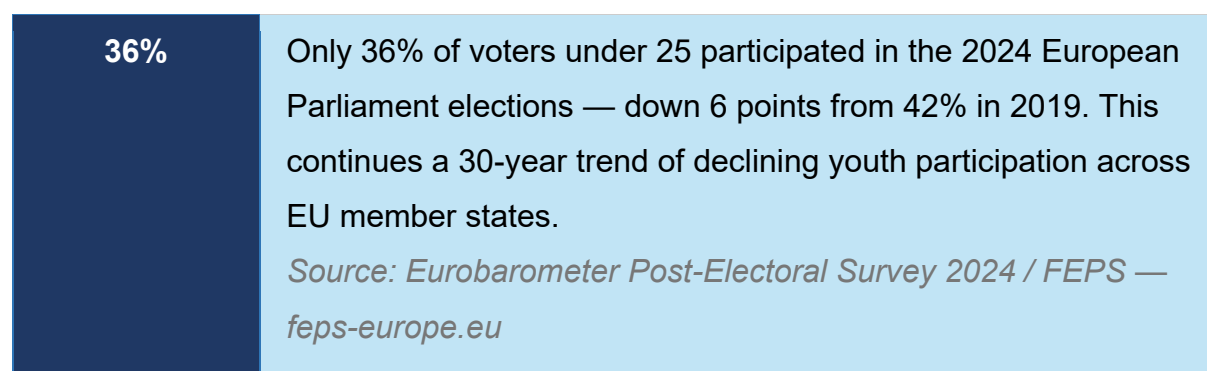
2. Introduction

Across the European Union, a generation of young people is coming of age without the foundational civic knowledge required to participate meaningfully in democracy. They are not disengaged by choice – the system has not given them enough tools. This paper argues for a solution begins in school but extends to larger institutions: a portable EU Civic Passport that certifies what young people know, and a permanent EU Youth Advisory Council that gives them a formal space to act on it. Both recommendations operate within existing EU competences, use existing infrastructure, and are designed to be adopted by Member States voluntarily, without imposing curricula or creating new institutions.

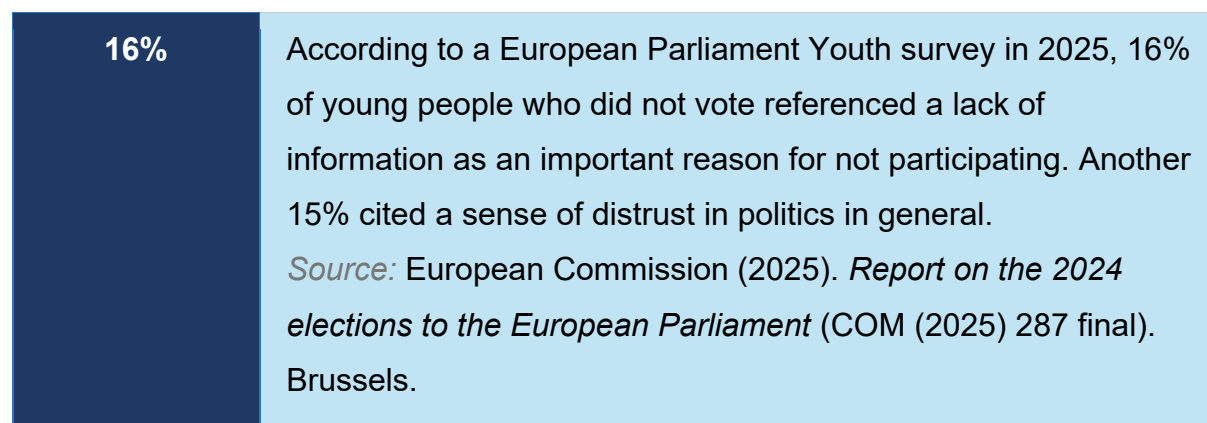
3. Problem Statement

The European Union is facing a fundamental problem: a whole generation of young people are entering civic life without the requisite foundational knowledge needed to participate in it meaningfully. Basic civic education regarding how elections work, how representative democracies work, what institutions exist, and how citizens can be actively involved, is at best inconsistent and in some cases absent in the school curricula of the EU's member states.

Direct evidence of this can be found in the historic drop in youth participation in the 2024 European Elections.



One may be tempted to attribute this to a lack of motivation or a lack of interest in politics – but the data do not support such a claim.



This directly connects to the current progress (or lack thereof) regarding civic education across EU member states.

35%

According to a European Parliament report from 2022, only 35% of students have been found to hold a holistic and critical understanding of citizenship concepts.

Source: European Parliament (2022). *Report on the implementation of citizenship education actions* (A9-0060/2022). Committee on Culture and Education.

4. POLICY BACKGROUND

Policy that effectively invests in democratic participation and civil engagement has historically shown great return on investment – with potential GDP increases of up to 20% over 25 years (Acemoglu et al., Journal of Political Economy, 2019).

4.1 Current Structural Policy Failures

Failure 1: Insufficient education

In most EU member states, civic education is absent, superficial, or embedded as a secondary element of history or social studies.

OECD, February 2025 — Civic Education as a Pathway to Inclusive Societies

Despite civic education being a stated curriculum priority, the OECD documents systematic failures in teacher training, low school priority ranking, and lack of cross-subject integration. High-quality evaluations of civic education impact remain scarce across EU member states. Source: [oecd.org](https://www.oecd.org)

Failure 2: Lack of expertise in teaching

Civic education is typically assigned to teachers trained in history or geography – disciplines for which democratic pedagogy was never a core component.

JRC INNO4DIV Project, December 2023

The European Commission Joint Research Centre found that developing democratic competences in teachers requires structural reform of teacher education programs. This finding directly informed the Council of the EU Conclusions on Democratic Citizenship, November 2023. Source: [joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu](https://research-centre.ec.europa.eu)

Failure 3: Young people have no institutional stake

Young people below 18, directly affected by decisions on education, climate, housing, have no formal democratic stake in those decisions.

OECD Youth Policy Toolkit, November 2024

When lowering the voting age is coupled with enhanced civic education, like Austria did in 2007, it generates lifelong civic engagement habits. Belgium and Germany extended voting to 16-year-olds for the 2024 European elections. Malta saw 58% youth turnout in 2024 after its 2018 reform. Source: oecd.org

4.2 What the EU Can Do

Education is a sovereign national competence (Article 165 TFEU). The EU cannot impose curricula. What the EU can do is set up voluntary frameworks, fund training, generate evidence, and create positive financial incentives for adoption. Many such initiatives exist and can be utilized.

EU instrument	Existing legal basis and operational mechanism
Voluntary reference frameworks	European Key Competences Framework; Council of Europe RFCDC adopted by 46 education ministers in 2016, now in national curricula in 20+ countries. (Council of Europe, 2023)

Erasmus+ KA1 teacher mobility	Erasmus+ Regulation 2021/817. KA1 funds 100% of teacher training abroad. Annual KA1 budget: ~EUR 743M. Source: erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu
CERV programme	Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme. Budget EUR 1.5Bn 2021-2027. Explicitly funds civic engagement and democratic participation. Source: eacea.ec.europa.eu
Positive conditionality	Countries adopting EU framework elements receive preferential Erasmus+ National Agency budget allocation. Already used in European Education Area.

5. Recommendations / Call to Action

Recommendation 1: The EU Civic Passport

PROPOSAL: Every student completing secondary education in the EU can earn an EU Civic Passport, a verifiable digital credential delivered via the existing Europass European Digital Credentials infrastructure, certifying democratic competences across 5 domains.

Certification Criteria: The Passport is structured around five competence domains drawn from the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC, adopted unanimously by 46 European education ministers in 2016).

Domain 1: Democratic institutions: knowledge of national governance, EU institutions, electoral systems, and citizens' rights under the EU Charter.

Domain 2: Digital civic literacy: identifying disinformation, understanding algorithmic curation, and evaluating political content online.

Domain 3: Participatory practice: documented evidence of real civic participation.

Domain 4: Intercultural dialogue: constructive engagement with different political and cultural positions.

Domain 5: EU citizenship: how EU policy is made and how citizens engage with EU institutions.

Value to Young People

The Passport opens three doors: (1) a selection bonus in Erasmus+ KA1 individual mobility; (2) formal recognition by the European University Association (850 universities) as a positive optional admissions criterion; (3) priority access to the European Solidarity Corps. With these incentives in place, the credential becomes more desirable to young people.

How the results will be measured

- I. Tracking the percentage of schools that are providers of Civic Passport Certification (Target: 25% by 2030).
- II. Tracking the percentage of universities that recognize the EU civic passport (Target: 50% by 2030).
- III. Tracking the number of young people (15-25) who hold an EU civic passport (Target: 25% by 2030)

Recommendation 2: A Permanent EU Youth Advisory Council

Proposal: A permanent EU Youth Advisory Council of 150 randomly selected young Europeans aged 15-25, modelled by the Ostbelgien Permanent Citizens' Dialogue (Belgium, 2019). Two deliberative cycles per year. Hybrid format (1 in person session + online deliberation phases) to minimize cost and maximize accessibility. The Council issues formal recommendations on all initiatives subject to the EU Youth Check. The

CULT Committee must respond in writing within 6 months. The Parliament retains full sovereignty.

The Civic Passport as entry requirement.

From 2030 onward, holding an EU Civic Passport is a prerequisite for inclusion in the lottery pool for the Advisory Council. This creates a direct institutional link between Recommendation 1 and Recommendation 2: the Passport certifies the foundational knowledge needed to deliberate effectively on EU policy, and the Council is the institutional space where that knowledge is put into practice.

How the results will be measured

- I. Formal recommendations issued by the Council per cycle.
- II. Voting participation from Council members compared to randomized control group.
- III. Socioeconomic diversity of Council members: minimum 30% from NUTS 2 less-developed regions (Eurostat classification), tracked each cycle — ensuring the Council is not captured by already-engaged youth.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, this policy paper demonstrated the current difficulties and structural problems of young people's civic education in the EU – and how those issues lead to less participation and engagement. To combat these problems, we proposed the establishment of an EU Civic Passport and an EU Youth Advisory Council. These recommendations aim to increase youth democratic participation and encourage the Member States of the EU to bolster their civic education systems. Our propositions are feasible, as they follow the precedent of other actions taken by the EU, and their results can be easily tracked to measure their impact.

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