

POLICY PAPER

on

Fostering Active Political Participation of National Minority Youth in Europe

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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of either of the partner institutions or the organisations cooperating with them.

Context of the Policy Paper

The present Policy Paper is the result of the combined efforts of two international events:

- fYOUture of YOUth 2.0 - Fostering active political participation of national minority youth in Europe - held in Budapest, Nov. 2025
- fYOUture of YOUth - Youth Voicing Conference – to elaborate a [resolution on the future of youth in Europe](#) – held in Bucharest, March 2023

Structure of the Policy Paper

The policy paper is structured around three core components: **a research summary, the conference’s key findings, and participants’ recommendations.** Findings from the FoY 2.0 conference — including participants’ conclusions and recommendations — were fully integrated into this policy paper, ensuring that the perspectives of national minority youth and practitioners directly shape future policy directions.

Goal of the Policy Paper

The goal of this policy paper is to provide a clear, evidence-based framework that strengthens the political and civic participation of national minority youth across Europe by identifying key challenges, highlighting effective practices, and outlining actionable recommendations for policymakers, institutions, and youth stakeholders.

Audience of the Policy Paper

This policy paper is intended for a broad community of actors responsible for shaping youth participation and inclusion in Europe. These include:

- International organizations focused on human rights, democratic participation, and youth empowerment (e.g., EU bodies, Council of Europe, UN agencies).
- Government institutions and policymakers working in youth, education, culture, social affairs, and minority rights.
- Youth organizations and NGOs, especially those advocating for minority communities and inclusion.
- Local authorities, municipalities, and community leaders who implement policies and support youth participation on the ground.
- Educational institutions such as schools, universities, and training centres involved in civic education and youth development.
- Researchers and academics studying youth engagement, inclusion, and minority rights.
- National minority youth themselves, whose experiences and needs shape the recommendations and are central to implementing meaningful change.

Research Summary

Research Context

The research explores the current landscape of national minority youth participation, identifies key barriers and opportunities, and provides a foundation for this policy paper and its recommendations. It draws on three complementary research components: a detailed evidence-based analysis, a structured comparative overview, and a collection of good practices. The methodology combines extensive desk research (34 documents from European institutions and 19 good practice cases), stakeholder questionnaires (107 invitations sent to 64 organisations and 43 conference participants), and practical insights from the field.

National minority youth – young people (roughly ages 15–30) from ethnic, linguistic or cultural communities with long-standing ties in their country – are often underrepresented in political life. Ensuring their active involvement is crucial for inclusive democracy. Research indicates that while some minority youth hold roles in local youth councils or cultural organizations, their presence at regional or national decision-making levels remains rare. Few countries track minority background in political participation, which can perpetuate a cycle of disengagement: when few minority young leaders are visible, others may feel discouraged from trying to engage.

Key barriers keep minority youth on the sidelines. In particular:

- **Discrimination and prejudice.** Stereotypes, xenophobia or hostility – in society and even within youth organizations – can make civic spaces feel unwelcoming or unsafe for minority youth.
- **Lack of trust in institutions.** Many young minority individuals doubt that voting, joining a party, or engaging with political bodies will bring real change. This trust gap makes them less likely to participate.
- **Information and language gaps.** Civic information and voter education are often not available in minority languages or youth-friendly formats. Without accessible information in their mother tongue, minority youth may miss opportunities or be uncertain how to engage.
- **Legal and bureaucratic obstacles.** Some young people lack full citizenship or official documents, making them ineligible to vote or run for office. Complex registration processes and high age requirements can be discouraging – especially when instructions are not provided in minority languages.
- **Socioeconomic disadvantages.** Many minority communities face higher poverty, unemployment, and segregated schooling. Economic hardships and lower-quality education reduce the time, resources, and confidence young people can invest in political activities.

- **Lack of role models.** When minority youth seldom see peers or elders from their community in student councils, government, or media, they may feel “politics is not for people like me.” This perception undercuts confidence and perpetuates low turnout.

- **Structural exclusion.** Even when formal bodies exist for minority representation (like cultural councils or consultative boards), young people’s input is often ignored. Many minority institutions include only older leaders and no youth quota, so youth perspectives remain sidelined.

These factors create a “double disadvantage” for national minority youth: they confront the usual hurdles of youth participation (limited experience, being underestimated by older leaders) plus challenges tied to minority status (discrimination, language gaps, community marginalization). The result is generally lower voter turnout and fewer young people joining mainstream political or civic groups than their non-minority peers.

Despite these obstacles, numerous initiatives across Europe have successfully empowered national minority youth. **Key practices** include:

- **Inclusive youth councils.** Many governments and municipalities have opened local youth councils to minority participation, sometimes reserving seats for minority representatives. National Youth Councils (umbrella bodies for youth organizations) are also encouraged to diversify their leadership. Such forums help bring minority issues into mainstream youth advocacy.

- **Minority self-governance with youth involvement.** Some ethnic minority communities incorporate youth sections within their cultural or self-government councils. These practices create two-way dialogue between elected minority leaders and young activists, bridging community heritage with youth energy.

- **Youth organizations and networks.** A vibrant ecosystem of minority youth NGOs and cultural associations exists at local, national, and international levels. These groups blend cultural activities with civic engagement, giving young people platforms to celebrate their identity and advocate for their rights.

- **Capacity-building programs.** Tailored civic education and leadership trainings bolster engagement. For example, European funding (such as Erasmus+ and Council of Europe youth programs) has supported workshops in minority-language media, human rights, and leadership. These efforts build individual skills and create peer networks that fuel further projects.

- **Policy advisory bodies.** Some countries have established minority youth advisory boards or require youth consultation in minority affairs. Even if mainly advisory, these bodies institutionalize the idea that minority youth should be heard. Efforts are also growing to collect better data on minority youth participation.

- **International exchanges.** Conferences and cross-border gatherings enable minority youth from different countries to share good practices and co-create solutions. Such forums (like the one summarized here) help generate new strategies and elevate youth-driven recommendations onto policy agendas.

Building on this evidence, research advocates a **multi-pronged strategy** to enhance participation:

- **Guarantee participation rights.** Enshrine in law the right of minority youth to engage in public affairs. Involve young minority people in drafting youth and minority policies so that legislation reflects their needs.
- **Integrate perspectives in policymaking.** Include minority youth issues in mainstream youth strategies and in minority inclusion policies. When revising youth action plans, actively consult minority youth groups. Likewise, when designing minority policies, ensure youth voices are represented. This avoids leaving minority young people overlooked.
- **Create inclusive participation channels.** Strengthen the inclusiveness of youth councils, parliaments, and forums by ensuring that their structures and processes actively support minority participation. Encourage political parties to engage, recruit, and promote young members from minority backgrounds. Foster cooperation between minority youth NGOs and broader youth movements to build meaningful cross-community engagement.
- **Remove obstacles and build trust.** Provide all civic and election information in minority languages. Strengthen institutions that combat discrimination and hate speech so that national minority youth feel safe in political spaces. Simplify bureaucratic procedures (for example, voter registration) and clearly communicate processes to minority communities.
- **Invest in education and capacity-building.** Incorporate minority histories and rights into school civics curricula to foster mutual understanding. Support non-formal education (workshops, camps, mentoring) targeting minority youth. Offer internships or fellowship programs (for instance, government youth traineeships or delegate exchanges) to give hands-on political experience.
- **Provide funding and support.** Allocate dedicated grants for minority youth projects and subsidize leadership trainings or cultural exchanges. Facilitate partnerships between established NGOs and new minority-led groups to share know-how. Ensure EU youth programs (Erasmus+, Solidarity Corps) prioritize inclusion by offering extra support to initiatives led by national minority youth.
- **Protect rights and safety.** Train law enforcement and authorities to respond to hate crimes and harassment targeting young minority leaders. Establish clear channels for minority youth to report discrimination in political contexts. Guarantee that speaking up in public forums does not expose young activists to retaliation.
- **Foster dialogue and collaboration.** Promote activities that bring minority and majority youth together, such as joint volunteering, debates, or cultural projects. These intercultural dialogues break down misconceptions and build alliances. Support international and national events where minority youth recommendations are elevated to high-level decision-makers.

In summary, the research shows that engaging national minority youth is both a challenge and an opportunity for European democracies. Policymakers are urged to adopt inclusive policies, dedicate resources, and open institutional doors to young minority voices. Seeing minority youth as partners – not passive beneficiaries – enriches the political process with fresh perspectives. Empowering these young people fulfils their rights and makes democracy more representative and just, ensuring Europe’s future policies reflect the full diversity of its youth.

Conference Key Findings

In November 2025, the **fYOUture of YOUth 2.0** conference brought together youth, practitioners and officials from 16 European countries to discuss political and civic engagement of national minority youth. It largely **confirmed the research findings** and deepened them with youth perspectives. Participants highlighted two core realities: national minority youth possess strong cultural assets and motivation but **face systemic barriers and fragmented ecosystems** that limit their voice. Though diverse, participants reached broad agreement on several core themes working based on the previous conference results, on the YOUth Ecosystem.

The concept of the YOUth Ecosystem is inspired by the ecological ecosystem, which is a complete set of organisms, their environment, and their interactions. Like an environmental ecosystem, the youth ecosystem requires a diverse and healthy set of components to function that includes:

- A youth VISION (legislation, policies, strategies, work plans, programs, coordination) supported by
- Accessible and relevant youth FINANCING (public, private, crowdfunding / based on competition, direct funding or participatory budget) for
- Effective youth STRUCTURES (youth NGOs, public authorities and institutions, resource centres, youth councils, consultative and deliberative bodies, clubs, informal groups, National Youth Councils, youth movements) to carry out
- Quality YOUTH WORK (including information, counselling and other youth services and activities) carried out by
- Professionalized HUMAN RESOURCES (youth workers, volunteers and paid personnel, managers, facilitators, experts, policy makers) working in
- Adequate youth INFRASTRUCTURE (youth centres, friendly spaces to engage young people in a comfortable manner (urban/ rural, stationary/ mobile, physical/virtual).

Identity and Motivation

Participants described minority youth as culturally grounded and resourceful. Common observations included:

- **Strong cultural pride.** Young people expressed deep attachment to their traditions, language, and heritage, with tight-knit community ties.
- **Multilingualism.** Frequent bilingual or multilingual ability was highlighted as a key asset, helping minority youth connect with both their own community and the wider society.
- **Community commitment.** Many reported that youth within their minority communities actively support one another through education initiatives, representation efforts, and anti-discrimination projects.

They explained that political and civic participation matters to them because it:

- **Drives change and confidence.** Engagement enables young people to push for improvements in their communities, boosting their confidence and skills.
- **Protects identity and integration.** Participation helps preserve cultural identity while also fostering integration; it builds bridges with majority society and increases youth influence in decisions affecting them.
- **Influence on policy outcomes.** Civic participation enables national minority youth to directly shape policies and decisions that affect their rights, opportunities, and representation.

Common Barriers

Echoing the research, conference attendees identified multiple barriers limiting minority youth involvement:

- **Structural and social barriers:** Discrimination, stereotypes or xenophobia in society make political spaces feel hostile. Language barriers and unequal access to quality or multilingual education leave many young people unprepared. Institutional visibility of minorities is low, and some youth may self-exclude out of fear of tokenism, fear of repercussions or lack of awareness related to the impact produced by those barriers.
- **Institutional and governance barriers:** Young minorities often face hard-to-access funding (complicated application processes), a shortage of youth-friendly community spaces, and too few staff trained in intercultural youth work. Cooperation between institutions serving minorities is weak, leading to fragmented services. Decision-making power tends to rest with older authorities, giving young people little agency, if any at all.
- **Administrative barriers:** Bureaucratic hurdles – complex paperwork, inconsistent rules, and opaque and vague procedures – make it difficult for minority youth to navigate government services and take advantage of the opportunities provided.

These obstacles contribute to isolation, low trust in institutions, and uneven participation rates among minority youth, as shown in the attached research.

Enablers and Opportunities

Despite challenges, participants highlighted clear avenues to boost engagement:

- **Safe and inclusive spaces:** Community centres, cultural clubs, and youth-led projects where minority youth feel welcome. The presence of role models (successful minority youth leaders or mentors) and opportunities to express cultural heritage were seen as vital.
- **Supportive systems:** Fair laws and policies that protect minority rights, mentors in schools or media promoting inclusion, and greater public visibility of minority youth issues. Simplified access to essential documents and services (like education or legal aid) was also emphasized.
- **Resources and partnerships:** Accessible funding (especially micro-grants) for youth projects, non-formal learning programs (e.g. workshops, online courses), digital platforms for networking, and strong collaborations between communities, NGOs, and authorities.
- **Inclusive youth programs:** Programs at the local, regional, and European level that actively include minority youth. Community-led initiatives and accountability in public services (ensuring promises are kept) were deemed crucial. Trusted intermediaries – such as youth organizations or respected community leaders – were identified as key to guiding young people into participation.

Ecosystem Insights

Participants discussed what works – and does not – in the participation ecosystem. Failing approaches include persistent stereotypes, bureaucratic funding mechanisms, a lack of youth spaces or trained facilitators, fragmented minority services, and decision-making without youth input. In contrast, successful strategies include offering micro-grants and simplified funding, building strong institutional-community partnerships, leveraging digital outreach and non-formal education, creating inclusive youth employment and activities, maintaining open dialogue with authorities, and encouraging community-driven projects.

They concluded that a functional ecosystem requires:

- **Acknowledging youth perspectives.** Policy must recognize and incorporate the vision of young minority people at all stages.
- **Inclusive spaces with trained staff.** Well-resourced community venues and programs led by staff trained in intercultural youth work.
- **Transparent, accessible funding.** Clear, low-bureaucracy funding streams (such as micro-grants) that youth know how to access, along with guidance on navigating them.
- **Co-creation with youth.** Programs should be designed and delivered with active involvement of youth leaders, including opportunities for storytelling and alumni mentorship to sustain momentum.

Cross-Cutting Principles

Four key principles emerged from the discussions:

- **Access & Awareness:** Ensure minority youth know about available programs and opportunities, communicate in languages and formats they understand.
- **Capacity & Confidence:** Invest in training and skills-building for youth and youth workers, and highlight positive role models to build confidence.
- **Trust & Co-Creation:** Involve young people in designing and implementing initiatives so they trust institutions and ownership of outcomes.
- **Reduced Friction:** Streamline processes to minimize bureaucracy, simplify funding applications, and coordinate services to avoid duplication or confusion.

Policy Implications

Conference participants recommended that EU and national policymakers invest in: inclusive, community-based youth spaces; high-quality bilingual/multilingual and intercultural education; youth-friendly funding models (e.g. accessible micro-grants); formal channels for structured youth participation supported by political will; training for intermediaries skilled in minority-aware youth work; and public campaigns promoting positive visibility of minority youth. By implementing these measures, institutions – not just individual youth – become equipped to recognise, include, and empower national minority youth as full participants in democracy.

In essence, the conference affirmed that **systems, not just individuals, must be equipped** to include minority youth. Its findings strongly align with the research summary but offer richer detail on implementation. Both converge on one message: political participation will improve only when governments and civil society create an ecosystem of support around minority youth.

Participants' Recommendations

Building on the research and conference insights, the working groups produced concrete recommendations. These are organized below by theme. Each item reflects minority youth voices on how to make participation more equitable and empowering.

Vision and Data Gathering

- Conduct deeper research into minority youth needs via surveys, interviews, and field visits.
- Involve minority youth in creating a shared sustainable vision framework for their empowerment.
- Create a comprehensive, accessible database of research results and community data on minority youth.

- Promote inclusive and meaningful participation of minority youth in local councils and advisory bodies by improving outreach, reducing barriers, and ensuring diverse representation.
- Establish mentoring support groups where young minorities can share challenges and receive guidance from peers and elders.

Funding and Resources

- Develop diversified funding models that mix public grants, private partnerships, and community micro-funding for minority youth initiatives.
- Prioritize funding for projects that deliver high impact on minority youth (measured by outcomes or “return on investment”).
- Increase the availability of small grants and simplify application processes so that new or small minority-led organizations can access resources easily.
- Allocate and reallocate funds based on data about minority communities’ needs.
- Introduce co-financing mechanisms (for example, requiring a modest match from grantees) to encourage commitment and efficient use of resources.

Coordination Structures and Networks

- Establish umbrella organizations to support minority youth work and form a European network of national minority youth organizations with balanced boards.
- Create multi-level coordination linking local, regional, and national minority youth groups for shared learning.
- Set up formal dialogue platforms where minority youth representatives regularly meet government authorities and policymakers.
- Encourage cooperation between universities, municipalities, and youth councils to engage students and local youth in minority regions.
- Promote youth leadership by including young minority people in planning and decision-making processes at all levels.

Youth Work and Capacity Building

- Integrate minority youth work into education and national youth programs (e.g. in school curricula or youth centre activities).
- Launch national training programs to equip youth workers with specialized skills for working with minority communities.
- Strengthen partnerships between local authorities and schools/universities to co-fund and support minority youth initiatives.
- Empower young minority individuals to take initiative through leadership trainings and practical opportunities.
- Establish mentorship programs that pair experienced youth workers with newcomers, ensuring continuity and sustainability in youth services.

Staff Training and Support

- Provide intercultural competence and anti-discrimination training for all youth workers and facilitators.
- Develop targeted recruitment, professional development, and retention programs for staff working with minority youth.
- Create international mentoring or exchange opportunities for youth workers to share best practices.
- Organize regular events or conferences for youth workers to build skills and networks.
- Offer free language courses and cultural orientation for volunteers and staff engaging minority communities.
- Involve minority youth themselves in designing training for youth workers, to ensure programs address real community needs.

Infrastructure and Digital Platforms

- Invest in physical spaces (community centres, youth clubs, cultural hubs) that are welcoming to national minority youth.
- Develop online platforms and digital communities where minority youth can network, learn skills, and collaborate on projects.
- Expand the number of youth centres in minority-populated regions and regularly evaluate their effectiveness.
- Provide young people with access (such as subscriptions or premium content) to online educational and cultural resources.
- Build partnerships between local authorities and the private sector to co-fund youth spaces and activities.

Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Coordinate policies across education, culture, social services, health, and youth sectors to provide holistic support for minority youth.
- Appoint dedicated staff or advisory groups to address overlapping cultural and socioeconomic challenges faced by minority youth.
- Offer multilingual counselling services to help young people navigate education, employment, and social support systems.
- Provide digital skills training in isolated or under-resourced communities so minority youth can access online opportunities and information.
- Encourage formal cooperation between NGOs and governments across countries to share successful strategies and improve conditions for national minority youth.

Each of these recommendations is grounded in the lived experience of minority youth and community practitioners. The proposals converge on a few overarching principles: **empower youth as leaders, dismantle bureaucratic barriers, ensure funding and training are accessible, and build inclusive ecosystems that value diversity.** Together, they provide a

practical roadmap for policymakers and stakeholders. By implementing such measures, governments, educators and civil society can create an environment where minority youth are not just included but fully empowered to shape their societies.

Sources: Insights and data for all chapters are drawn exclusively from the conference documents: the Research Summary, the Conference Key Findings, and the Participants' Recommendations.