



SPGs

SUSTAINABLE PARTICIPATION GOALS

SPGs TOOLKIT

A journey of active participation
towards EU elections

www.spgs-project.eu/spgs-toolkit



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INTRODUCTION: THE SPGS PROJECT AND THE TOOLKIT

The Sustainable Participation Goals (SPGs) project is a European initiative focused on empowering youth to engage actively with the political and social life at both local and European Union level. With the 2024 European Parliament elections and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core, the project aims to address the gap between young people's awareness of global challenges and their understanding of how the EU can drive change. The project specifically targets youth aged 17 to 25, many of whom may feel disconnected from European institutions or disillusioned with the political process but share a concern for sustainability and social justice.

Over a span of 24 months, SPGs has involved 250+ young participants from four different European countries: Italy, France, Portugal and Romania. These youths, many facing social or economic exclusion, were provided with opportunities to explore the EU's structures, policies, and values through interactive sessions, discussions with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), community-based activities, theatre performances and transnational youth mobilities. Through this engagement, young people were encouraged to reflect on the SDGs, discuss the impact of political decisions on these goals, and advocate for actionable solutions within their local communities. The project is built on the principles of the EU Youth Strategy, which emphasizes the importance of social inclusion, participation, and personal development.

One of the project's primary outcomes is the creation of tangible resources that extend beyond the life of the initiative: the [Guide to EU Elections](#) for new voters, a resource developed by youth for their peers, with the aim to empower young voters by providing them with the information they need to form opinions and participate confidently in the democratic process; the [Recommendation papers](#), addressed to local and European policymakers, a key advocacy tool summarizing the most pressing concerns and recommendations raised by young people on SDGs 5, 8 and 13.

The third resource with which SPGs intend to contribute to the European system is this Toolkit, which is designed for youth workers, educators, and organisations who wish to replicate the SPGs experience. The Toolkit is more than just a collection of lessons learned; it is a practical and actionable guide that outlines how to foster meaningful participation and engagement among young people in a way that is scalable and adaptable to different contexts. Structured to offer clear, step-by-step guidance on how to organise and implement activities that engage young people with fewer opportunities, it covers a wide range of topics we consider essential for building an impactful program.

This Toolkit is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but rather a flexible framework that allows organisations to adapt the methodology to their specific local contexts. It provides a roadmap on how to replicate the SPGs experience, offering insights on how to motivate and empower young people to participate actively in the political process and contribute to a more sustainable and democratic future.

FINDING PARTICIPANTS

When organising youth-oriented projects, particularly those funded by the EU, grassroots organisations must take a deliberate approach to participant recruitment. Ensuring you engage the right group of young people is crucial to the success of the project.

Here are some key considerations and best practices for effectively finding and engaging participants:

Where to look for participants

Identifying the right places to find participants is crucial. Grassroots organisations often rely on a mix of local partnerships and digital outreach to recruit young people. Schools, universities, and vocational training centres are primary locations where youth are already gathered. Establishing relationships with school counsellors, youth coordinators, and educators can help create a direct link to students interested in social initiatives, mobility programs, and civic engagement. In addition to formal educational settings, consider partnering with youth centres, NGOs, and local community organisations. These partners often have direct contact with marginalised groups such as youth from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, migrants, or rural populations, who may be less represented in formal education systems. Youth clubs and sports groups can also offer a more informal avenue for recruitment, tapping into communities of interest that align with your project's topics. Leveraging social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook is also essential for targeted outreach. Consider running ad campaigns specifically aimed at young people or using hashtags and influencer collaborations to extend your project's visibility. Platforms like Eventbrite and Meetup can also be used to advertise introductory events or webinars where youth can learn more about your project.

Group Size

Determining the optimal group size depends on the specific goals of the project. Small groups allow for more personalised attention, stronger interpersonal relationships, and in-depth discussions. However, larger groups may be beneficial for fostering a broader diversity of ideas and experiences, which can enrich the overall project experience.

Ensuring diversity and inclusion

Diversity and inclusion should be at the forefront of your recruitment strategy. Take proactive steps to ensure that the participant pool reflects a wide range of social, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Outreach efforts should specifically target underrepresented groups, such as migrants, LGBTQ+ youth, rural youth, or youth with special needs. This ensures that the project benefits from a variety of perspectives and that those who may otherwise face barriers to participation are included.

How to engage them

Once potential participants have been identified, the challenge becomes effectively engaging them. Young people are more likely to participate if they understand the personal and social benefits. It is important to tailor communication in a way that resonates with their interests and aspirations. Create clear, youth-friendly messaging that explains the benefits of participation - whether it is gaining new skills, contributing to community change, or networking with peers across Europe. Consider organising teaser events such as online webinars, introductory workshops, or Q&A sessions where potential participants can get a sense of the project before committing fully. These events should be interactive, fun, and informal, allowing youth to ask questions and express concerns. Highlight key incentives such as European mobility opportunities, certifications, or the potential for skills development in areas like leadership, team collaboration, or language skills. Another effective way to engage participants is through Youth Ambassadors - young people who have already been involved in previous projects. Their peer-to-peer communication can be far more effective than traditional outreach, as they can authentically share their experiences, excitement, and the personal value they gained from participating. Having youth actively involved in promoting the project makes the engagement more relatable and builds trust with the target audience.

Respecting social and economic situations

Grassroots organisations often work with young people from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Recognising and accommodating these differences is key to ensuring inclusivity. For example, some participants may come from families that cannot afford transportation to project activities. In these cases, consider providing financial support for travel costs, arranging transportation directly or changing location getting closer to disadvantaged areas. Make sure that the venue and schedule of your activities are accessible. If working with rural youth or those who have caregiving responsibilities, ensure that activities are either located close to where participants live or are easily accessible via public transport. Flexible scheduling is also important, especially for participants who may be juggling school, work, or family obligations. Additionally, be sensitive to cultural and religious practices. Ensure that your activities do not conflict with important holidays or religious observances, and accommodate dietary restrictions or prayer needs during in-person events. Taking these factors into account demonstrates respect for participants' diverse realities and creates a welcoming, inclusive environment.

Considering availability and providing information while planning the activities

Planning around participants' availability is crucial to maintaining engagement. Avoid organising key activities during exam periods, holidays, or peak school events, which could limit participation. Offering virtual participation options for certain aspects of the project can also increase accessibility, allowing participants who cannot travel or who have conflicting schedules to still be involved. Ensure that participants are given detailed information well in advance. This includes the timeline of the project, a clear outline of expectations, what they will gain from participation, and logistical details like location, transportation, and accommodation for events. Transparency is key to building trust and ensuring that participants feel fully prepared and committed to the project.

Legal requirements

It is crucial to ensure that all legal and administrative requirements are met when involving young people in EU-funded projects. For participants who are minors, parental consent is mandatory, and organisations must comply with child protection laws. Ensure that consent forms are clearly worded and easy to understand, explaining the nature of the project, the activities involved, and the rights of participants. Furthermore, you must comply with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements regarding the collection and handling of personal data. Be transparent about how participants' data will be used, whether for monitoring, evaluation, or reporting to EU funders. Make sure that privacy policies are shared with participants (or their guardians) and that they have the option to withdraw their consent at any point. Additionally, consider health and safety protocols when organising physical events or travel. Ensure that participants have the appropriate health insurance coverage, particularly for international mobility, and that you adhere to any relevant health guidelines depending on the location.

TRAINING WITHIN EU INSTITUTIONS

Organising a training within the EU Institutions in Brussels, such as the European Parliament and European Commission, provides a valuable opportunity for youth to engage with European politics and policymaking. Planning such an event requires careful consideration of several factors, from communication and logistics to participant preparation and follow-up.

Getting in touch with the right people

Establishing the correct contacts within the European Parliament and European Commission is essential. Begin by identifying the appropriate departments or units that align with your project's topics. You can find these contacts through the institutions' official websites or by leveraging existing networks such as national or EU-based NGOs that have worked with these institutions before. Additionally, consider reaching out to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from your home country or those with a known interest in your project's topics. MEPs often welcome the opportunity to meet with youth organisations and discuss relevant issues, but you will need to start the conversation well in advance. Personalised email introductions, including a clear explanation of your project's objectives, can be an effective way to initiate these relationships.

Official and unofficial communication channels

While official communication channels like emails and formal requests are necessary, informal networks can be just as important. Youth ambassadors, alumni of past EU projects, and contacts within advocacy groups may already have connections to staff members within EU institutions. These informal channels can help expedite communications or provide insider tips on who to contact. Ensure that your communications are professional and precise. When requesting meetings or proposing a training session, provide all relevant details in your first message—such as dates, the purpose of the training, how it aligns with the EU's current policy agenda, and participant group composition and profile.

Know which topics you want to focus on

It is important to be clear about the specific topics your training will cover. Aligning the content of your training with current EU policy debates will make the session more relevant and appealing to EU officials and participants. Research ongoing legislative initiatives or recent discussions in the European Parliament to ensure that your training ties into timely and impactful issues. Having a well-defined agenda ensures that both your team and the participants are focused and that EU representatives can tailor their presentations or involvement to the specific areas of interest.

Logistics arrangements

Logistical planning is key to ensuring the smooth running of the training. First, identify the meeting location within the EU institutions. Some areas, like the European Parliament, may offer meeting rooms for groups, but you will need to apply in advance through official channels. Alternatively, you can consider venues nearby, such as EU-focused think tanks, embassies, or NGO offices that might offer event space. Accommodation should be affordable and accessible. Brussels offers a range of options, from youth hostels to budget hotels. If your budget allows, try to book centrally located accommodation to minimize transport issues. Provide clear instructions to participants on how to get from their accommodation to the training venue, considering local public transport options such as the metro or buses. Ensure that meals are arranged during the training, and that dietary restrictions are taken into account.

Pre-departure preparation

Ensure that the target selection process promotes diversity and inclusion, reaching participants from various socioeconomic backgrounds, geographic regions, and educational levels. It is also important to balance the size of the group – smaller groups allow for more meaningful discussions and direct interaction with officials, while larger groups can provide broader outreach. Once participants have been selected, it is crucial to provide thorough pre-departure preparation to ensure they are ready to make the most of the experience. Offer a pre-training briefing that covers the goals of the session, an overview of the EU institutions they will be visiting, and the agenda for the training. Participants should also be briefed on the role of the European Parliament and European Commission, especially if they are new to EU governance structures. Provide clear information about travel arrangements, accommodation details, local transport options, and any cultural or legal considerations they should be aware of while in Brussels. Offering a pre-departure Q&A session can help participants feel more confident and prepared for the training.

Follow-up

After the training, it is important to maintain engagement with participants and EU contacts. Organise a follow-up meeting or survey to collect feedback from participants on what they learned and how they plan to apply their knowledge. This not only helps with project evaluation but also fosters continued engagement and future collaboration. Additionally, send thank-you notes to EU officials and institutions that participated, highlighting the impact of their contribution. This gesture reinforces relationships and can lead to further opportunities for collaboration on future projects.

KEEPING YOUTH ENGAGED AND SCALE UP

Maintaining the interest and voluntary participation of the same group of youth over an extended period is a common challenge for any organisation. However, in addition to strategic collaboration with schools, our experience shows that fostering trusting and enriching relationships is essential to keeping young people engaged. By implementing the following strategies, we not only keep youth engaged throughout the project but also ensure a lasting impact that can extend to new audiences, strengthen community ties, and pave the way for replicability in other contexts. The following practical strategies help to build a community of dedicated and committed youth.

Active listening

Prioritise listening over talking. Young people are accustomed to lectures, but rarely have spaces to express their ideas, share opinions, reflect openly, and ask genuine questions. By dedicating time in your activities for them to speak and be heard, you show that their needs matter and that we value their perspectives. This creates a safe environment where they feel comfortable being themselves and addressing issues that are most relevant to them.

Taking youth opinions seriously

Respect and take into account their preferences and viewpoints, whether related to event logistics or more personal beliefs. While you might have a structured agenda, also remain flexible and adjust your plans based on their feedback, needs, and priorities. This adaptability ensures the activities stay relevant and engaging, and it shows that you value their input in shaping the direction of the project.

Encouraging ownership

By creating a space where youth feel heard, you allow them to take ownership of the project. They select the topics that interest them the most and suggest the types of activities they prefer (interactive games, lectures, guest speakers, field trips etc.). You work with them to set personal and group goals. This empowerment makes them feel like they are integral to the project's success and motivates them to move it forward in ways that have a tangible impact.

Youth as multipliers

Youth participants become your best ambassadors. Their peers and other students notice the opportunities and activities you offer, and when they hear first-hand accounts of the experiences, many more are inspired to join. Younger students often look up to older ones and eagerly await the chance to participate. You can amplify this effect by allowing participants to share their experiences during school assemblies or announcements. As trust builds within the community, parents see the positive changes in their children and spread the word to other families. Schools also become more eager to collaborate, hearing about the project's positive impact and opportunities from other institutions. This creates a cycle of sustained engagement, allowing us to reach broader and more diverse groups of youth.

THE FORUM-THEATRE METHOD

The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) as a notion describes theatrical forms that the Brazilian director Augusto Boal first elaborated in the 1970s, initially in Brazil and later in Europe. Boal was influenced by the work of the educator and theorist Paulo Freire and his techniques use theatre as means of promoting social and political change. One of its most spectacular forms remains the Forum-Theatre in which the audience becomes active, such that as "spect-actors" they explore, show, analyse and transform the reality in which they are living. The Centre du Théâtre de l'Opprimé Paris has since continued to explore the method and to propose this type of performance in France and all over the world.

The SPGs project has successfully implemented the Forum-Theatre method for its youth engagement activities.

What is a Forum-Theatre?

A Forum-Theatre is a peculiar form of theatre since all the rules are exposed from the beginning but tend to be moved by the impact of the propositions of the audience (the "spect-actors").

The actors present two or three short scenes that all have in common to end bad. The conflict generated by the characters has to be clear enough to provoke the members of the audience to then jump on stage to help solving the situation by replacing an actor or creating a new character. The whole process of the performance is managed by a "joker" who presents, organises and corrects.

In order to create a Forum-Theatre, the actors go through a process of creating images, called "photos" or "statues". The idea is to fix a conflict based on a theme without putting it into words, as it is easier to analyse an image in an objective way: An image is not the reflection of reality, it is reality. Since the Centre du Théâtre de l'Opprimé Paris tends to preserve a democratic process, all the participants work: the one proposing the image as well as the one watching the process, with the latter being invited to give their feelings about the creation – all are looking for the best image according to each sensibility.

The participants will "move" the images through a dynamisation process: What happened before? What will happen after? At this point, the crucial improvisation part begins, which leads the participants to use words and work deeper on each character involved in the scene.

The scene is ready when the conflict between the characters is clear. A scene should not go on for more than three to four minutes.

What happens during a Forum-Theatre?

When creating a Forum-Theatre, each participant has to investigate the theme of the specific scene for themselves in order to be able to "play" with it once on stage. This requires some intellectual and emotional as well as physical work. The actors never know what the audience will propose.

Participating in a Forum-Theatre scene can be a personal outlet, as specific conflicts can become part of the process of creation and of the presented scene, without exposing the individual person's own opinions.

An example from the SPGs project:

Working with young people from Cluj in Romania brought the theme of discrimination (social, gender) on the table. The Forum-Theatre method offers resources to open oneself without exposing the most intimate part, as the portrayed character is used as a protection (it is the character speaking and moving, not "me"). In this way, the participating teenagers had the possibility to express and enact their doubts, fears, and angers through Theatre, which means without the fear of judgment from the adults or their peers.

Benefits of the Forum-Theatre method

The Forum-Theatre method acts as a revealer of the difficulties that exist in society: in most circumstances, it is not possible for a person to solve a societal conflict instantly. But at least, the theatre performance gives the chance to try, fail, change strategy, and try again, as it is "only" a theatrical enaction. This also provides an opportunity to each one involved in the performance (actors and "spec-actors") to create a dialog in which everyone can think about issues that concern us all. The Forum-Theatre performance remains a real democratic process as each participant can propose their ideas and each proposition will be treated seriously. The resulting scene is then a real process of emancipation that only theatre can provide in times of crisis.

ICE-BREAKING AND TEAM BUILDING EXERCISES

Forum-Theatre founding member Augusto Boal created his own “arsenal” of theatre games and exercises on which the crew of the Centre du Théâtre de l’Opprimé Paris still builds today. They continuously use, refresh, and develop new exercises to create and consolidate groups of work during short sessions of training.

All “ice-breaking” exercises have to look very simple at first in order to convince everybody to participate. It is then the responsibility of the person in charge to play with the rhythm and speed of execution and to propose variations. These exercises tend to put a group’s participants at ease with themselves in the eyes of the others. This protocol remains the best way for each one to be able then to express their voice, desire, and point of view inside a group without fearing judgment. It is essential that an exercise remains a democratic process: each participant can contribute according to their own capacity.

What is a group and how does it work?

A group is not only the addition of each participant – each one with their own sensibility and physical and psychological capacity, but an active body on his own. To ensure that this body will remain alive during the process of the activities proposed, special care has to be taken of all and of each part. The encounter with the other members of the group is a key moment.

No matter the age of the participants, the animator has first to investigate the capacities of the group members: in the case of teenagers in particular, some tend to be shy, some would have issues with the way they are viewed, others might have physical or psychological disabilities (some are obvious, others will reveal themselves through the exercises).

Example group exercise

In order to make the process of the encounter “democratic”, the best option is to let the participants form a circle: everybody will face everybody.

1. A good way to start is with some [breathing exercises with closed eyes](#): to feel good with others, it is preferable to feel good with oneself.

2. Participant presentation. Standing in the circle, one after the other, each participant takes a step forward and says their name, then a quality they believe to have, beginning with the first letter of their name (for example: Benoît – Beautiful), then adds a gesture. It is important to always also propose movement in order to put any type of participant at ease.

3. Exploring individuality. The next step is the exploration of the individuality that exists inside the group and the study of the life of the group through each individuality. The Centre du Théâtre de l’Opprimé insists on the empowerment of each individuality, as this is the best way to make a group powerful. To do so, a good option are walks inside the working space: Each participant has to change speed and direction according to their own capacity at least every three seconds, while checking if the space is balanced. These walks keep the bodies and the minds active, as everyone is working for the same objective. Each participant respects the same rules, but each one explores them in their own way.

4. Optional deeper immersion. In order to extend and go deeper into the experience of the meeting, this walking exercise can be further pursued, but with a change: After a clap, two people will be brought together – shaking hands, looking into each other’s eyes without exchanging words. This type of exercise is more complex, as no one is equal in their ability to accept the gaze of others. It will provoke laughter or crying, but never generates no reaction. This kind of “ice-breaking” exercise plays with the concepts of object and subject through the eyes of “the other”.

5. Feedback. In order to start a dialogue inside the group, the ice-breaking exercise requires a brief round of feedback: How do I feel? Was the exercise complex to execute? More questions can be added according to the developing conversation.

NETWORKING WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND STAKEHOLDERS

To further strengthen the impact of the SPGs project in Romania, the project partner Polylogos has strategically embraced the intersector of collaboration and networking. One key pillar of success has been building strong partnerships with public school authorities, particularly high schools that cater to diverse youth demographics. This has enabled sustained engagement from students, teachers, and public authorities alike. By building trust with school authorities, collaborating closely with teachers, and engaging students as active participants, the complexities of working within the educational system can be navigated successfully. This collaborative approach not only enhances the reach and impact of a project, but also fosters long-term relationships that ensure ongoing engagement and mutual benefit for all involved.

From the implementation of the networking process within the SPGs project, the following key steps can be recommended:

Initial outreach

Begin by contacting regional school authorities before the initiative or project you want to implement even starts. Send an official letter to relevant offices, outlining the project's objectives, activities, tasks, and timeline. Starting a formal communication early helps secure commitment from schools, and it is something that can reference back to in later conversations.

Establishing and forming direct relationships

Arrange face-to-face meetings with teachers – if you have already collaborated with them in the past, even better. In these meetings, you can explain your project in detail and encourage teachers to share the information with their students. Invite interested students to participate in an introductory meeting with your team.

Formalising collaboration

Schools that become enthusiastic about the project can be asked to formalise their partnership with your organisation by signing a collaboration protocol. This agreement provides you with structured access to organise meetings and activities with students, while clearly outlining a framework for coordination between both parties. The protocol ensures alignment on the project's objectives, responsibilities, and logistics, creating a foundation for smooth and effective collaboration. Additionally, participating students should be required to sign letters of engagement, which clearly outline their rights, responsibilities, and include a data protection agreement. For minors, written consent from parents or legal guardians have to be mandatory, ensuring your project adheres to all legal and ethical requirements.

Teacher involvement

Teachers play a pivotal role in the success of this collaboration: Once they commit to your initiative or project, they should take charge of spreading information among students and organising the logistics of future meetings. This way, by the time you arrive for a working session, the involved teachers have already arranged the classroom and gathered the students. Try to get teachers' proactive involvement, which can result in them also managing the students' schedules, allowing them to participate in extracurricular activities, including full-day events or youth exchange programs, without disrupting their academic commitments.

Practical strategies for sustained engagement

To maintain strong relationships with schools and stakeholders, there are several practical strategies that can be adopted:

- **Respect for school authorities:** Adhere to school policies and instructions, ensuring all activities align with the agreed terms. While activities are organised freely, they must comply with the school's framework, ensuring mutual respect and trust.
- **Teacher collaboration:** Building trust with teachers is essential, therefore, treat teachers as equal partners, maintaining ongoing communication through calls, emails, and meetings and show understanding for their challenges and context. Teachers, as key drivers of youth engagement, are indispensable to the project's success.
- **Flexible scheduling:** Maintain a flexible approach in order to recognising and respect the complexities of the school calendar. Your activities should be adjusted around exams, breaks, and varying weekly schedules. Avoid pressuring schools when participation is not feasible – this maximises opportunities when they arise.
- **Youth engagement and respect:** Just as teachers are treated as partners, so too are the youth. By fostering a respectful and open environment, you will encourage honest dialogue about complex issues. In return, the youth show active participation and often help bring in their peers, driving further engagement organically.

YOUTH MOBILITIES

Organising a youth mobility or exchange within an EU-funded project involves careful planning and coordination to ensure a successful experience for all participants. This type of initiative not only broadens horizons, but also fosters intercultural understanding and collaboration among young people from different backgrounds. Such exchanges provide a platform for young individuals to share their unique perspectives, learn from one another, and develop a sense of European identity that transcends national borders.

The following steps are essential when organising youth mobilities and transnational exchanges:

Make sure every partner is onboard

To begin organising a youth mobility, it is essential to establish clear objectives that align with the goals of the EU project. This involves securing the involvement of all partner organisations, which is crucial for smooth logistics. Each partner must understand their specific role in the exchange process, including responsibilities related to participant selection, travel arrangements, and local support. Defining roles and expectations early on lays a strong foundation for a successful exchange. Regular check-ins and updates via meetings or group chats can help maintain momentum and engagement among partners. This collective effort not only enhances the planning process, but also builds trust among the organisations involved, creating a collaborative atmosphere that will benefit the participants. Make sure to organise at least one online pre-departure meeting with accompanying youth workers, in which to introduce themselves, discuss activities and the division of tasks once on site.

Logistics pre-departure

When it comes to logistics, providing clear information about travel schedules, required documents (e.g. passports or identification cards), and emergency contacts is essential to keep everyone informed and secure during their journey. Before departure, create a comprehensive travel itinerary detailing every aspect of the trip, including flight times, check-in procedures, and emergency protocols. This preparation helps mitigate anxiety (the participants' and their parents' anxiety alike) and allows participants to feel more confident about the upcoming experience.

Accommodation and meeting spaces

Finding suitable accommodation is also critical to the overall experience. Collaborate with the host organisation to identify safe, accessible, and comfortable lodging that meets participants' needs. If you organise an exchange with participants from various countries, try to find an option that can accommodate groups from all countries at the same time in to facilitate team building and group cohesion. This shared living experience can foster deeper relationships among participants, making the mobility more enriching. Additionally, selecting venues for activities that allow for both formal learning and informal interactions can enhance relationship-building among participants. Look for spaces that offer flexibility, such as community centres

or educational facilities that can host workshops, discussions, and social activities. This will create an environment conducive to learning and camaraderie, reinforcing the sense of community among participants.

The role of the hosting organisation

The importance of the hosting organisation cannot be overstated. A well-prepared host can significantly enhance the quality of the experience by providing engaging programmes that align with participants' interests. Before the exchange, establish strong communication with the host to outline programme objectives, timelines, and logistics. They should be able to share local insights and support, enhancing the overall experience and helping participants navigate cultural norms. Moreover, the host organisation should have a deep understanding of the local context, allowing them to create a programme that is not only educational, but also culturally enriching, offering participants a comprehensive understanding of the host country. By fostering a welcoming atmosphere and being responsive to the needs of participants, the hosting organisation plays a critical role in making the mobility experience memorable and impactful.

Activities

Planning engaging activities that incorporate project topics and local culture is essential for maximising the impact of the mobility experience. Organise workshops, site visits, and cultural exchanges that facilitate hands-on learning and dialogue among participants. This immersive approach enables youth to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts, enhancing their understanding of the subjects discussed. Inviting guest speakers who are local experts can provide unique perspectives and enrich discussions on relevant topics. These experts can share insights about current issues, local initiatives, or innovative practices that resonate with the participants' interests. Furthermore, activities should encourage active participation and collaboration, allowing youth to explore their interests, develop skills, and cultivate a sense of agency. Ensuring that participants are involved in planning aspects of the programme can enhance their investment in the experience and lead to more meaningful engagement.

Addressing language challenges

Language barriers can pose challenges during youth exchanges, but with proper planning, they can be navigated effectively. Prior to the mobility, assess participants' language abilities and consider providing peer-to-peer or educator-led language support where necessary. This can include language workshops, conversation clubs, or buddy systems where participants pair up to practice speaking. Encouraging participants to learn basic phrases in the host country's language fosters a sense of connection and respect, making interactions smoother and more enjoyable. Providing materials in multiple languages can also help bridge gaps, ensuring that all participants can fully engage in discussions and activities regardless of their language proficiency.

The role of youth workers

Engaging accompanying youth workers is crucial for the success of the exchange, as they serve as facilitators and guides, ensuring that participants feel supported throughout the mobility. They should be well-informed about the project goals and equipped to handle any challenges that may arise. Training for youth workers should include intercultural competence, effective communication strategies, and crisis management skills, enabling them to address issues sensitively and effectively. Additionally, youth workers play a vital role in fostering a positive atmosphere, encouraging participation, and addressing any conflicts that may arise among participants. Their presence is essential for building a safe and supportive environment where young people feel valued and empowered to express their ideas and concerns.

MEETINGS WITH MEPS

The European Parliament is made up of 720 Members elected in the 27 Member States of the European Union. Meeting these Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) can be a great way to learn about European politics, voice your concerns, and potentially influence policy decisions. For youth participants, such an experience will provide lasting memories and will very likely spark their curiosity about the European Union. It is an excellent opportunity to increase young people's interest in political topics and to foster civic participation. As MEPs have an important role as European decision makers and their decisions directly affect local governments, communities, and organisations, meeting with them can be a way for young people to get their voice heard in political decision making and to share their personal insights from a youth perspective.

What should you know about MEPs?

It is essential to start by doing targeted research in order to understand the MEPs' roles and how their work impacts everyone's life. Researching certain MEPs' positions on issues that are important to you and knowing where they stand on them, will help you to identify those MEPs who are most interesting and useful for you to meet, so that you can engage more effectively with them on matters that concern you. As all MEPs are part of specific committees that focus on different areas of policy, it is a good idea to identify these committees, as understanding them can help you to focus your engagement on the right areas.

Good to know:

You can find all MEP names and curricula in this official webpage: www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en

Their assistants, who can facilitate the process of contacting and meeting an MEP, are listed here: www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/assistants

How can you connect with the European Parliament?

There are a couple of ways of how connect with the European Parliament, as this official video illustrates: https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/video/x_N01_AFPS_231128_HIW9

Additionally, each EU country member state, has a European Parliament Liaison Office (EPLOs). These EPLOs are responsible for the local implementation of institutional communication activities, with the goal of enhancing people's awareness of the impact of the European Parliament on their daily lives and of promoting their engagement in the European democratic process. These offices can be a precious help if you want to contact an MEP with or for your youth group, as they are open to the public and engage with citizens and stakeholders, manage contacts with national, regional and local media, and provide support to MEPs in the exercise of their official mandates in the Member States. EPLOs engage with the local population and increase awareness about what the European Parliament is, what it does and what it stands for, as well as on the impact its deliberations have on citizens' daily life.

Local EPLOs can be contacted through the official websites: <https://liaison-offices.europarl.europa.eu/en/offices>

Tips for a successful meeting with an MEP

There are several aspects that you should consider when preparing and planning a meeting with an MEP in order to make the meeting as productive and impactful as possible.

Prepare thoughtful questions

- Be specific and avoid vague or general questions.
- Be concise and stick to the point.
- Show your knowledge by demonstrating that you have done research and know who you are taking to.

Be respectful and professional:

- Dress appropriately, choose attire that reflects a professional and respectful image.
- Be punctual, arrive on time for your appointment.
- Use proper etiquette and maintain eye contact, speak clearly, and use polite language.

Be clear about your goals:

- Know what you want and determine the specific outcome you hope to achieve from the meeting.
- Be prepared to follow up and have a plan for how you will continue to engage with the MEP after the meeting.

Utilise your network:

- If you know someone who has connections to MEPs, ask for their help.
- Join relevant organisations and become a member of youth groups or NGOs that advocate for issues you care about.

Be persistent:

- Do not give up if you do not get a response immediately – be persistent and follow up.
- Be patient and remember that MEPs have busy schedules.

Follow up:

- Send a thank you note after the meeting to the MEP you met to express your gratitude and try to mention your key points again.
- Stay informed and continue to follow the MEP's work and, if possible, engage in relevant discussions.

Some useful information about the European Parliament for youth:
<https://youth.europarl.europa.eu/youth.html>

Activity suggestions before, during, and after a meeting with an MEP

In order to get the most out of a meeting with an MEP, such an event has to be planned thoughtfully. The goal of the following activity suggestions is to create a dynamic and engaging environment that fosters meaningful dialogue and collaboration between youth participants and MEPs. Ideally, all activities are tailored specifically to the individual interests and goals of your group.

Before the meeting

- Role-playing: Simulate a meeting with MEPs, assigning roles and discussing potential issues.
- Debate: Organise debates on current European topics to familiarise participants with different perspectives.
- Group discussions: Facilitate discussions on topics related to the meeting, encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving.
- Mock interviews: Practise interviewing MEPs to prepare participants for the real encounter.

During the meeting

- World Café: Set up stations with different topics related to the meeting. Participants rotate between stations, discussing and sharing ideas.
- Fishbowl discussions: Create an inner circle for discussion and an outer circle for observation. Participants can switch roles.
- Question and answer sessions: Allow participants to ask MEPs questions in an open and interactive format.
- Group projects: Assign groups to work on specific projects or proposals related to the meeting's theme.

After the meeting

- Reflection sessions: Discuss the meeting's outcomes and insights gained.
- Creative expression: Encourage participants to express their thoughts and feelings through art, writing, or music.
- Action planning: Develop plans for follow-up actions based on the meeting's discussions.
- Sharing sessions: Organise events to share the experience with a wider audience.

ENGAGING YOUTH IN MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES

“Children have the right to be heard on matters that affect them.” Article 121 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) lays out this basic human right of every child.

Understanding Youth Engagement

Youth involvement can benefit organisations and their programmes as well as the youth themselves. Programmes that are developed in partnership with youth are more likely to be effective at engaging the population and to have a greater impact. Involving youth as partners in making decisions that affect them, especially those that are in vulnerable situations, increases the likelihood that the decisions will be accepted, adopted, and become part of their everyday lives. Empowering youth to identify and respond to community needs, helps them become empathetic and reflective individuals, setting them on a course to potentially continue on this path in their future.

Meaningful youth engagement views youth as equal partners in the decision-making process.

Programmes and activities are developed *with* youth, rather than *for* youth. In this kind of equal partnership, both adults and young people need to be fully engaged, open to change in how things are done, and share a unified vision for the partnership.

Considerations for organisations that want to involve youth in a meaningful way

This section lists some suggested steps to consider when trying to engage young people and ensure the experience is meaningful for the youth and for the organisation.

Assess

Consider where your programme currently is in the sector of youth engagement and where you would like to be. Not every programme or activity can or should always involve youth at the top level. One tool is “Hart’s Ladder of Youth Participation”, which states that *“Young people’s participation cannot be discussed without considering power relations and the struggle for equal rights. It is important that all young people have the opportunity to learn to participate in programmes which directly affect their lives. This is especially so for disadvantaged children for through participation with others, such children learn that to struggle against discrimination and repression, and to fight for their equal rights in solidarity with others, is itself a fundamental democratic right”* Roger A. Hart, Children’s Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship

The level of youth involvement may vary based on the capacity of programme staff to spend time and resources on involving youth, the purpose of involving youth, and support within the organisation for involving youth. Organisational infrastructure and support for involving youth are key concerns for sustainability of youth involvement.

Plan

Look at your organisation's programmes and determine where it would be most beneficial and feasible to involve youth. Define the purpose of involving youth in the selected activity. Based on the purpose, determine how to engage youth and identify the most appropriate level of involvement. Talk with other organisations and agencies that are already partnering with youth to learn how they went about doing this and consider any recommendations they have. Collaborating with other organisations that are engaging youth may help you avoid implementation challenges that others have already faced before.

Implement

Identify how you will recruit youth and how you will keep them engaged in the process. Issues to consider are how to recruit youth who are representative of the population you serve, what skills and capabilities the youth need, and what training should be provided. Also provide training opportunities for organisation staff who will be working with youth target groups to ensure they understand the rationale and purpose of partnering with youth, how it will benefit both the programme and the youth, and the skills necessary to effectively and participatorily work with youth.

Evaluate

Develop a plan to review and monitor the youth involvement process, based itself in a participatory activity. Engage the youth and adults to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of involving youth in the organisation and programme as well as its impact on the youth themselves.

Examples of youth involvement

There are many ways in which youth can be involved in organisational decision-making structures and programme development. Involving youth from the beginning of a project is ideal. Some suggestions about how and where youth can be involved:

Promoting programme/activities to other youth and adults

Youth should have a lead role in promoting and presenting information about the offered programme and activities. Recruiting youth and getting them to participate in programmes and activities can be strengthened when their peers describe what is available and how these opportunities were developed based on youth interests. Youth can also identify locations (e.g. libraries, schools, and recreational centres) that are frequented by potential participants.

School health councils/youth advisory boards

In rural and urban areas alike, there are certain governing bodies such as library councils, parks and recreations boards, school boards, and even city councils which offer youth participation and many of them have leadership groups that give youth full voting privileges. Although this may not be allowed by some organisations, youth can still be given a chance to be heard as representatives of the communities in which they live.

Providing technical assistance on youth culture

Youth can train adults who are interested in learning about youth culture. Youth can share the interests of youth in general, conduct group dynamics on the relevance and use of innovative technologies such as web-based social networking, or serve on a panel to talk about what it takes to engage today's youth.

Participating in action research

Young people make excellent data collectors. As they contribute to tasks such as conducting interviews, taking photos, and reviewing feedback from surveys, they are also developing analytical skills that can serve them well in other roles.

Developing evaluation instrument

Youth can brainstorm to create survey questions with adults. Once a draft of the survey is completed, youth can fill out the instrument and then provide feedback on what items were clear and unclear.

Developing criteria for success

Soliciting honest feedback from youth will help build methods into the evaluation process that can strengthen a programme or project. Youth can provide insights on what outcomes they would like to see as a result of programmes or projects.

Collecting evaluation data

Youth can take photographs of the final results of project work, administer surveys, conduct structured interviews, and participate in focus groups.

Assisting in analysing results

Youth can learn how to enter data into software programs, read through data to sort out common themes, and help with interpreting comments, reactions, and behaviours generated by participants. A guide describing what to look for during the analysis may be helpful.

Presenting results

Once youth have had a role in all levels of a programme, most youth are willing to share the results of their work. Giving them the opportunity to share what a difference the experience has made in their lives will also resonate with the audience. This is very important if youth are presenting information to local, national and European leaders who can serve as potential partners and also help make a difference in the community.

Why does youth engagement matter?

- **Empowerment:** Engagement of youth fosters a sense of agency and control over their lives.
- **Skill Development:** critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills.
- **Community Building:** Youth participation strengthens social bonds and community cohesion.
- **Positive Outcomes:** Engaged youth are less likely to engage in risky behaviours and more likely to succeed in school and careers.

Key Strategies for Engaging and Motivating Youth

Involve youth in decision-making

- **Youth councils:** Establish youth councils or advisory boards into youth organisations, to provide input on community issues.
- **Participatory budgeting:** Allow youth to allocate funds for projects they care about.
- **Tailored activities:** Offer activities that align with young people's interests and passions.

Create Meaningful Opportunities

- Community projects: Organise service projects that address local needs and concerns.
- Collaborative projects: Involve youth in planning and decision-making processes.
- Youth-led initiatives: Support youth-driven projects and initiatives.
- Mentorship programs: Pair youth with mentors who can offer guidance and support.
- Encourage critical thinking and argumentation

Provide Training and Support:

- Leadership development: Offer workshops and training on leadership skills.
- Communication skills: Teach effective communication techniques.
- Conflict resolution: Provide training on conflict resolution strategies.

Foster a Safe and Inclusive Environment:

- Respectful dialogue: Promote open and respectful communication.
- Safe spaces: Create inclusive and welcoming environments where young people feel comfortable expressing themselves.
- Inclusion: Ensure that all youth feel valued and included.
- Mental health support: Offer resources and support for mental health issues among their peers.

Foster a Sense of Belonging and Community

- Inclusive groups: Create diverse and inclusive groups that represent a variety of backgrounds and perspectives.
- Community building activities: Organise events and activities that foster a sense of belonging and connection.
- Peer-to-peer support: Encourage peer-to-peer support and collaboration among young people.

Recognize and Reward Achievements

- Public acknowledgement: Celebrate youth achievements and contributions through awards, certificates, or social media recognition.
- Opportunities for growth: Offer opportunities for advancement, such as leadership roles or participation in higher-level programs.

Leverage Technology and Social Media

- Online platforms: Create online platforms for youth to connect and collaborate.
- Social media: Use social media to reach out to youth and promote engagement opportunities;
- Virtual events: Offer virtual events and workshops to reach a wider audience, facilitate dialogue and exchange of ideas.
- Digital storytelling: Encourage young people to share their stories and experiences through digital media.
- Youth-produced media: Encourage young people to create content that reflects their experiences and perspectives.

Reinforcing trust in meaningful youth participation

Building trust between youth and youth workers or other decision-makers is crucial for fostering meaningful youth participation. This can be achieved, for example, through open dialogue, regular updates, and inclusive language, youth-centred decision-making, capacity building and training. By implementing these strategies, you can help to build trust, foster meaningful youth participation, and create a more inclusive and equitable decision-making environment contributing for Social Cohesion.

ACTIVITIES WITH YOUTH

When designing activities with youth, especially youth in vulnerable situations, it is important to consider their specific needs, interests, and cultural backgrounds. Flexibility, adaptability, and a focus on building trust and relationships are key to successful engagement. By implementing interesting and motivating activities with young people, you can inspire them to become active and engaged citizens who contribute positively to their communities. Such activities should be based on the non-formal education pedagogic strategies.

What is non-formal education?

According to the European Commission and the Council of Europe, the education system consists of three interrelated components: formal, non-formal, and informal learning.

- Formal education refers to a structured education system that encompasses all schools from primary to university, including specialised vocational and professional training programmes.
- Non-formal education refers to all planned personal and social education programmes for young people that are designed to develop a range of skills and competences outside the formal education curriculum. Non-formal education is intentional and voluntary.
- Informal learning refers to a lifelong process in which each person acquires certain attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from a variety of educational sources in their environment and from everyday experience (home, neighbourhood, library, media, work, play, etc.).

(Quoted from the publication KOMPAS: A Manual for Educating Youth on Human Rights by a collective of authors led by Partitia Brander, 2006)

The difference between formal and non-formal education is often determined by the settings and structures in which they take place. The outcome is measurable and can be predicted more easily than in informal learning, where learning occurs randomly, usually without a clear objective in advance.

Basic features of non-formal learning:

- Voluntariness – it is up to the participant to decide whether to take part in the activity or programme.
- A set aim and goals, based on the needs or concerns of the participants, the organisation or the environment or society, in the individual activity and in the whole programme.
- Conscious and holistic learning, where participants are aware of what and how they are learning, evaluate their own learning and develop the different components of competence (knowledge, skills, values and attitudes). In non-formal education, we emphasise the whole person – engaging their thoughts, feelings and emotions as well

as their bodies. At the same time, we make use of their previous experience and knowledge, complementing it and linking it to other practices.

- A partnership relationship between participants and facilitators. The activity leader is a guide in the learning process who adapts the programme or activity based on the needs or concerns of the participants.
- Valuing mistakes. Mistakes are seen as opportunities for further development.
- Role of the group. Individual group members, including activity leaders, serve as additional sources of experience, knowledge, skills and attitudes. Group work also opens up additional opportunities for learning.
- Accountability for learning outcomes. The participant determines what they need to learn and thus takes partial responsibility for the outcome.

Practical Activities using the participatory non-formal method

The following activities can be great tools for youth engagement and are specifically useful when working with youth in vulnerable situations and promote their participation.

Community mapping

Participants create visual representations of their community, highlighting important places, resources, and challenges. This encourages community understanding, identifies needs, and fosters collective action.

Storytelling

Participants share personal stories, experiences, and perspectives related to a specific theme, which promotes cultural preservation, builds trust, and empowers individuals to express themselves.

Theatre

Participants create and perform plays or skits based on community issues or experiences, such as the Theatre of the Oppressed method. This encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills.

Photovoice

Participants take photographs to document their community and share their interpretations and thus provides a visual representation of community perspectives, empowers individuals, and facilitates dialogue.

Community forums

Open discussions and debates on community issues, allowing participants to share their views and ideas, which fosters democratic participation, builds consensus, and informs decision-making.

World Café

Small groups discuss a specific topic, and then share their findings with the larger group. This encourages diverse perspectives, promotes collaboration, and generates innovative ideas.

Appreciative inquiry

This activity focuses on identifying and building upon the strengths and positive aspects of a community and creates a positive and hopeful atmosphere, fosters community resilience, and inspires action.

Visual Thinking

Participants use visual tools, such as mind maps or drawings, to explore and represent ideas, which enhances creativity, improves problem-solving, and facilitates communication.

LEARNING THROUGH EVALUATION

While monitoring and evaluation are often treated as separate tasks within a project, evaluation should ideally be an ongoing, participatory process integrated into every activity. By capturing both positive and negative outcomes – intended and unintended – as they unfold, you can effectively mitigate risks, make timely adjustments, and seize opportunities to create a lasting positive impact on your target groups. Embedding evaluation into the core of your work ensures that each iteration of a project, activity, or event builds on previous experiences and lessons learned, ultimately enhancing both impact and sustainability.

In the SPGs project, we embraced a participatory evaluation model that allows for continuous learning and improvement throughout the project's implementation. Various methods exist to gather feedback from participants, and the most effective method is the one that best serves your specific needs and context.

Based on the needs in the SPGs project, the following approaches were successfully implemented and form a set of highly recommendable and useful tools:

Regular Recaps

At the start of each meeting with participants (e.g. in a weekly or bi-monthly rhythm), conduct a recap of the previous session. This not only helps gauge how much participants remember (providing insights into knowledge retention and awareness), but also serves as a barometer for the effectiveness of the used methods. It allows to identify which topics resonate most with the youth, and which areas may need to be revisited for deeper understanding.

Immediate Debrief Sessions

After major events or trips, or at key points throughout the project cycle, hold debrief sessions as part of your meeting, before participants depart. In these group discussions, ask participants to reflect on their experiences, sharing what stood out to them, what they enjoyed, and what could be improved. The project team should always take notes on this feedback, using it to refine future events, activities, or trips. This immediate reflection ensures that fresh insights are captured and participants get the opportunity to shape upcoming activities.

Google Forms and Surveys

Use Google Forms and surveys to collect input before and after events. These tools are particularly effective when time constraints prevent group discussions or when anonymous or quantitative feedback is required. These surveys help gather valuable insights quickly between meetings and ensure that feedback is representative. To maximise response rates, design surveys to be short, concise and purposeful. If you have fruitful collaborations with schools or other entities, teachers or trainers help to ensure that students complete the surveys. Always emphasise to participants the importance of their feedback – not just for themselves, but for the success of the project overall.

Evaluation for impact

Ongoing participatory evaluation enhances the current project and also establishes a strong foundation for future initiatives. The data and feedback you gather provide valuable insights into the project's replicability and scalability, enabling you to refine strategies for different contexts and larger audiences. This continuous learning approach ensures that your future projects are grounded in proven methods while remaining flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of participants and communities.

By integrating these evaluation strategies, you will gain continuous, actionable insights that allow you to design more impactful programmes and activities. Regular evaluation not only enhances the quality of your work, but also empowers youth participants by giving them a voice throughout the process. This is particularly important in order to detect and quickly address negative experiences, grievances and disappointments, and course-correct as needed. It also allows you to identify and capture unexpected positive outcomes, which can be used as an important learning for future activities.

This participatory evaluation approach strengthens the participants' sense of ownership and commitment, as they see their input directly influencing the project's direction. Moreover, by addressing feedback promptly, you ensure that you continuously improve the experience for participants, fostering a culture of learning, adaptation, and responsiveness. This approach not only refines the current project, but also sets the stage for more effective, scalable initiatives in the future.

PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Promoting an EU project – as well as any local, regional, or national initiative – as effectively as possible is a very important factor for success, as it raises awareness and interest about the project and the produced results, implemented activities, and developed products. It is also a great way to attract new and more participants for planned activities during the project runtime and, in the long run, it will create the potential for a sustainable future use of the project outcomes. Generally speaking, promotion increases visibility of a project and ensures that target groups, partners, beneficiaries, and stakeholders know about the project or initiative.

A great way to achieve all this are promotional materials.

Promotional materials can take many forms and shapes, but what they have in common is that they help communicate the project's goals, results, and impacts to a broader audience to make the project known. Effective and clever promotional materials also strengthen project branding, contribute to a project's dissemination and exploitation efforts by making it seen publicly, and make the project's results more accessible and impactful.

The items you choose will depend on various factors: budget, alignment with project goals, size and design, availability, sustainability aspects and much more – but as there are many different options available, there will always be something that fits to your project, budget, and target group. Promotional materials are not limited to a specific topic, theme, field, or background of a project – the underlying ideas are highly transferable and can be used for any type of project and initiative.

Important points to consider

- Use project branding on all your items. The project logo and name, as well as required logos of the funding entities have to be present on all items. Additionally, you can add key messages, OR codes, contact information, partner logos and more. Whenever possible, apply the project's colour scheme to link your items even more to the project.
- Remember to actually use the items you produce – do not “save them for later”.

In a nutshell: What are the benefits and added value of promotional materials?

Increased visibility

Materials that are branded with the project design, such as brochures, posters, digital content, and gadgets help spread information quickly and widely. Paper-based or online materials such as brochures and flyers provide a lot of information about the project; practical everyday items with the project branding that people can use in their routines (e.g. water bottles, clothing, pens), your project will become more visible and better known. Make sure to follow required branding guidelines.

Engagement

Creative promotional materials attract attention and make the project more memorable. They can be a great incentive for target group members to participate in activities, read materials, interact with the project's social media or online challenges, or just spread the word about the project. Make sure you choose items that are interesting for your target group!

Involvement of external partners

Promotional tools and materials encourage more interaction with external stakeholders such as businesses, NGOs, schools, and public bodies who are not directly involved in the project, but are important partners for project promotion.

Project Recognition

Distributing well-developed promotional materials increases a project's brand recognition and ensures that a project or initiative stands out from others. It is important to use all required labels, logos and disclaimers in order for the materials to align with mandatory standards for visibility and dissemination.

Where can you get promotional materials?

Professional printing companies

There are many local and online printing companies that specialise in project branding and material production. If you know a company in your city, you can ask them directly for a catalogue to get inspired by their available products. If you prefer online shopping, you can browse the websites of online printing companies such as the ones from our recommendations list:

www.stickermule.com

www.flyeralarm.com

www.expresta.eu

www.danke.pt

Digital design platforms

Many promotional materials can be created using online design tools (e.g., Canva, Adobe Spark) and shared digitally. Some of these platforms offer direct links to printing companies. These design platforms can be used to create any kind of material from brochures and posters to specialised designs for specific gadgets.

Have your eye out for eco-friendly providers who use recycled or biodegradable materials such as recycled paper, bamboo pens, or reusable cotton bags and who apply sustainable production methods and practices such as energy-efficient production, water-based inks, or minimal packaging.

Budget considerations

In the process of planning the development of your promotional activities, do not forget to set a budget for your materials that is aligned with your overall communication strategy. Review costs for promotional materials in comparison with other necessary expenses and always try to find a good balance. Spend your money on materials that you know will reach the most people and achieve the best impact. To save money, compare different printing companies to find cheaper prices and also think about options like bulk printing, but always be careful not to waste materials and do not order more than you need.

Ideas for promotional project gadgets

In addition to more traditional options such as flyers, business cards, brochures, and posters, which are certainly essentials to have as promotional materials for a project, there are countless options available for creative gadgets. Once you browse the catalogues of printing companies, you will find many different interesting choices and a lot of inspiration.

Whatever you choose, make sure that the gadgets are useful, practical, and in line with your project goals. This will increase the engagement and interest you can expect from your target group and it will make your investment for these items worth the price. Your gadgets can be sustainable, fun, interactive, educational and much more. It's time to be creative!

Some examples

- Customised USB drives: Shaped in fun designs and displaying the project logo, they can contain project resources, videos, and educational materials that were developed in the project.
- Eco-friendly phone accessories: Reusable phone grips or compostable phone cases that are branded to the project and are made from materials like bamboo fibres or plant-based plastics.
- Clothing: T-shirts, sweatshirts, wristbands, or caps with project branding can be given to participants and can be worn during project activities.
- Seed products such as notebooks or bookmarks: They are made from paper which is embedded with seeds, can be branded with the project logo and contain other project-based information. After their intended use, they can be planted and will grow flowers or herbs. Similarly, branded pencils can include a deposit of seeds that can be planted once the pencil becomes too short to use.
- Stickers: They can take any form and shape – for example your project logo – and there are various different materials to choose from. With the help of stickers, you can easily apply your project branding to any item (e.g. paper cups, notepads, laptops etc.)
- Reusable water bottles: Customised with the project's logo, QR code, information or artwork, they encourage hydration and recycling.
- Recycled Fabric Shopping Bags: They can be made from recycled materials such as plastic bottles or organic cotton and can be personalised with project designs or other information.
- Solar-powered chargers, keychains or mini flashlights: Small portable, fun and practical solar-powered devices that feature the project logo are practical and promote green energy.
- Eco-friendly wristbands: Silicone-free, biodegradable wristbands that show the project logo and can also be customised with messages.

Examples of project material from the SPGs project

www.spqs-project.eu/materials

LESSONS LEARNED

These lessons emphasise the importance of collaboration, inclusivity, flexibility, and setting realistic expectations. By learning from these experiences, future projects can enhance engagement, inclusivity, and overall impact, ensuring that youth and communities benefit fully from their participation.

POSITIVE

1. Consortium cohesion is the key: collaboration among project partners is vital for success and achieving the desired impact. Unexpected challenges will inevitably arise during implementation. The ability to face these challenges effectively hinges on a united front among partners, who can share the workload and responsibilities based on their strengths. This collective effort simplifies problem-solving and enhances project resilience.
2. Simplicity fosters transnational connection: young people require very little to connect with one another; sometimes, a simple ball is enough to transcend language and cultural barriers. While on transnational youth exchange, instead of overloading the schedule with complex activities, allow for unscheduled moments where participants can interact freely. These spontaneous exchanges can lead to friendships that might profoundly influence their lives.
3. Embracing local contexts diversity: it is essential to respect the unique qualities of each participating local context, representing organisation and avoiding a homogenised approach that dilutes the activities. While goals should be clearly shared, the local implementation strategies must reflect the specific context of each organisation. This respect for diversity helps maintain the activities' authenticity and maximises their impact.
4. Youth engagement and active participation can lead to very enriching and positive experiences. Most of the youth involved in this project were enthusiastic about the cause and the activities.
5. Respect cultural, social, and personal differences in others. This will lead to a better understanding of each other and more fruitful experiences.
6. Local activities are important for international participants to get to really experience a different culture. Emersion into a different environment with different rules and standards can be an eye-opening experience that broadens young people's horizons.
7. Mixing participants from different countries during international activities will enrich the experience for everyone. Language barriers may seem like an issue in the beginning, but young people are very clever in overcoming these barriers.
8. Establishing strong relationships with schools and teachers is a critical step for project success. Teachers not only facilitated access to students, but also provided essential logistical support. Their involvement as key partners ensured that activities ran smoothly within the school setting, greatly contributing to sustained engagement.
9. While operating within the framework of the project, empowering youth by involving them in decision-making - whether about topics, methods, or activities - proved to be highly effective. When young participants had a voice in shaping the project, their sense of ownership and commitment grew significantly. This approach made the project more relevant to their interests, fostering deeper engagement and motivation to actively

- participate and contribute. It also fostered a multiplier effect, ensuring that more young people heard about and were eager to join the project's activities and events.
10. Ensuring equal access to participation: while relying on teachers to share project information and invite students was helpful, it risked unintentionally excluding some participants due to personal biases. Teachers, like anyone, may have preferences that lead to the selection of certain students over others. To address this, it was crucial to ensure that the initiative was communicated school-wide, emphasising that participation was open to all interested students. This approach helped prevent discrimination and promoted inclusivity, allowing a diverse group of students to engage. For instance, we received feedback that, in one of the schools, it was the first time a Roma youth had been given the opportunity to participate in an Erasmus+ project.
 11. Being flexible and open-minded: flexibility and adaptability were vital throughout the project. Challenges such as scheduling conflicts or shifts in student interest were inevitable, but maintaining an open mind allowed the team to adjust plans as necessary. This adaptability enabled us to respond effectively to logistical hurdles and participant feedback, ultimately improving the project's success and relevance.
 12. Proposing activities that are located in different places around town require for the groups some extra organisational effort, but it also opens up the curiosity. When a group has to walk 20 minutes from its Hostel to the place where the activity will take place, those 20 minutes are not lost. It is a time made to simply open the eyes and benefit from the diversity of the culture proposed. All the cities visited had functional and (most of them) cheap public transport. It is also a way to immerse in the local culture.
 13. Each nationality has its own connection with food and the ritual going with it. It is very enjoyable to discover this reality all together. Sharing food is a special democratic moment where the young adults can express things with the others that they would not express with an adult watching over them. It is a ritual when everybody is at the same level and it seems important to make sure everybody involved will share lunch and dinner all together.
 14. Meetings among the youth workers involved in the project, coming from different countries are crucial in order to share experiences and collect feedback. Taking time for this also allows the youth workers to get to know each other. It gives them the possibility to talk about the characteristics of their own group: "I have one young adult who goes through this or that...". Sharing insights like this gives the opportunity to all the youth workers to know a little more about each participant in order to better connect with them.
 15. Overall, the mobilities, such as the ones that SPGs project promoted, offers a unique opportunity for youth personal growth, mainly those that have experienced vulnerable situations. These mobilities put the participants into dynamic experiences offering a transformative learning adventure that develops valuable life skills such as communication, better decision making and conflict resolution. The mobilities journey agendas, as in the SPGs project, take a central position in the achievements experienced by youth in vulnerable situations. it will help them grow in confidence, comprehension, and capability, and will learn more about yourself. By stepping outside of one's comfort zone, young people can gain valuable skills, broaden their horizons, and create lasting memories.

16. Another positive point is related to cultural exposure. The SPGs mobilities are a good example based on an interaction between a youth group that hosts other groups coming from other cultures. Expecting the unexpected: an opportunity like this is your opportunity to place your heart in another community and gain global understanding and perspective by deepening your appreciation for other cultures and customs. By living and interacting with people from different cultures, the youth in vulnerable situations can broaden their understanding of the world and challenge their own perspectives.
17. Communication among youth people is one of the biggest challenges that they faced during the SPGs mobilities. Immersion into a foreign language environment can accelerate language acquisition skills and improve communication abilities – but it can also hinder communication. Educators are crucial players in preventing any negative situations, proposing mediation and translation for participants that are facing difficulties.

NEGATIVE

1. Be mindful of warning signs from unengaged partners: keep an eye out for signs that partners may not be fully committed to collaboration. If some partners seem disinterested from the project's very beginning, it is likely they will remain disengaged. Clear internal communication and adherence to deadlines are crucial for successfully completing the project on time and in accordance with the funder's requirements. Remember that this responsibility does not fall solely on the lead partner, it is a shared effort across the entire consortium.
2. Be ready for rising travel and accommodation costs: travel expenses (trains, flights) and accommodation costs (hotels, hostels) are increasing rapidly worldwide. The budget you prepared some months or even years ago when you submitted the project proposal will likely be insufficient to cover today's travel costs. While you will probably exceed your budget, try to minimise the impact by making reservations well in advance.
3. Expect youth participation levels to fluctuate: not all participants who respond to the initial call to action will attend the final event. Maintaining the consistent engagement of large groups of young people over a two-year project can be challenging, if not impossible. Do your best to keep interest high, but also be ready for a continual call to action. This approach often results in a larger final turnout and enhances the overall impact of the project.
4. All project partners have to be equally interested and involved in the project collaboration. If there is a partner that works less, employs non-transparent strategies, and does not keep the other partners up to date about their issues or activities, this can cause very negative effects for the whole partnership. A lot of time will be spent on resolving unnecessary issues.
5. Event/training/activity participants should be chosen carefully in order to ensure that they are all happy and willing to participate. If some participants do not show interest, the group dynamics can easily turn negative.
6. Time-keeping and sticking to schedules is very important – in “background” project work as well as during activities that are implemented face-to-face. This will allow you to get everything done and to complete all parts of a specific task or visit etc. If

- schedules are not followed, plans have to change and elements of a day will have to be cancelled, which leads to mutual disappointment.
7. Ignoring the school schedule: planning events without taking the school calendar into account led to frustrations and limited participation. Overlooking important academic events like exams, holidays, and other commitments could result in missed deadlines or low engagement. It is crucial to work in harmony with the school's timetable to ensure that students can fully participate without compromising their academic responsibilities.
 8. Overestimating youth availability between meetings: expecting students to complete tasks or assignments between sessions proved unrealistic. Youth often have competing academic, social, and personal obligations, making it difficult for them to focus on additional responsibilities outside of scheduled project time. To avoid disappointment and overburdening them, it is more effective to focus on activities that can be completed during regular sessions, ensuring full participation without unnecessary pressure.
 9. Under-communication: insufficient communication at various stages of the project could negatively impact participant engagement and satisfaction. For example, there were instances when we assumed that documents sent to teachers had reached all the students, only to later discover that they had not. Establishing direct communication channels with the youth became essential in these cases. Furthermore, relying on a single presentation at the outset of the project is inadequate. It is important to regularly revisit and discuss the project plan, activities, and expectations to ensure that all participants remain aligned, especially as the group grows and new members join. Clear communication about roles, responsibilities, and opportunities is key to maintaining high levels of engagement and fostering a positive experience for everyone involved.
 10. Teenagers and young adults (as well as adults as well) can have difficulties with concentration. As far as the activities are concerned, even if the theme could generate a deep interest in the majority of the participants, it seems important to involve the whole body. Remaining seated on a chair for one hour listening to someone speaking demands is an effort not everybody is willing to make. To make the activity attractive, it has to have a playful side. It is not about winning or losing (even though we all have a certain sense of competition), but about creating energy by involving the body: for example, writing, drawing things that will be presented to the others. There are many ways to create dialog – being seated on a chair listening to someone speaking is not one.
 11. Shyness could be the result of not mastering a foreign language. Even if it remains fundamental for the activities to mix groups and make them international, it also appears important to make sure that a person who feels less confident with a foreign language can be with someone who speaks both the same and the foreign language. Each participant should feel empowered by the experience of meeting other young adults from other countries, which means youth workers should take special care when time comes to create small groups for activities. This might seem like it can be improvised at the last minute, but it is not. “Losing” one young participant during an activity because of that issue is basically losing the whole group before the activity even ends.
 12. It is obvious that not every city experiences the same amount of tourism during certain times of the year. Some locations see their prices jump to a point where it is difficult to

- find cheap accommodation. It seems then very important to check in advance the ideal time of the year to visit one place – not only according to the weather (with climate change, no one can no longer predict), but also to the cost of life and accommodations.
13. It is important to note that potential negative sides of youth mobilities can be mitigated through careful planning, preparation, and support. Factors such as an individual's personality, cultural adaptability, and the quality of the program can significantly influence the overall experience. Throughout the SPGs project activities, the tensions between staying and going – participating in mobilities or remaining in the neighbourhood – between speaking in broken language or staying silent, and between experiencing local food choices or opting for familiar fast food, became significant challenges. These issues highlighted the importance of planning, preparation, and support – not only among the project partner organisations, but also among educators and youth participants.
 14. Even when we are prepared, cultural shocks can occur and can be unexpected. Adapting to a new culture can be challenging, often leading to feelings of homesickness or isolation. If we do not carefully prepare a set of immersive soft activities, and, above all, remain attentive to the initial signals from the youth, we may encounter issues that could interfere with and negatively impact the mobility programme.
 15. Dealing with language barriers is another aspect that can negatively influence youth mobilities. Limited language proficiency can hinder communication and integration into the host community. It is important to be tolerant and incorporate other forms of communication, such as non-verbal cues and body language, even if we strive to communicate in a common language like English. In SPGs, whenever we tried to speak only in the host language, other groups often disconnected and raised questions about this behaviour. Ultimately, having good skills in one language is less important than having strong overall communication skills.