



Toolkit on democracy and youth civic participation

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Executive Summary

Democracy thrives when citizens are informed, engaged, and empowered to participate in decision-making. This *Toolkit on Democracy and Youth Civic Participation* is designed to support teachers, educators, and youth workers in equipping young people (ages 16-24) with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to become active and responsible citizens. Developed through a collaborative, bottom-up process, the toolkit brings together best practices, interactive learning activities, and real-world examples to make civic education more engaging, relevant, and impactful.

Objectives of the Toolkit

- ❖ Strengthen civic knowledge → Provide a clear and accessible foundation in democratic values, institutions, and processes.
- ❖ Develop key civic competencies → Equip young people with critical thinking, dialogue, negotiation, and decision-making skills.
- ❖ Promote youth engagement → Encourage active participation in democratic life, from voting to advocacy and grassroots activism.
- ❖ Support educators with practical tools → Offer structured lesson plans, activities, and facilitation techniques to enhance civic education.

Toolkit Structure & Key Components

 **Part 1: Foundations of Democracy:** A glossary of key democratic values and principles, defining concepts such as rule of law, human rights, and participation, and an overview of political systems in Romania, Italy, and Bosnia & Herzegovina, with a comparative analysis.

 **Part 2: Best Practices in Civic Education:** Methods for teaching democracy interactively, fostering critical thinking, and creating inclusive, participatory learning environments.

 **Part 3: Youth-Led Change & Real-World Examples:** Inspiring examples from Italy, Romania, and BiH to showcase the impact of youth-led action.

 **Part 4: Workshop Activities & Interactive Learning:** Step-by-step civic education activities, designed to take participants through problem identification, engagement strategies, and action planning.

 **Part 5: Additional Resources:** A curated list of resources to support further learning and program development.

By providing interactive, reality-based civic education, this toolkit ensures that young people: understand how democratic institutions function and how to influence them; develop the confidence and skills to engage in civic life, and see themselves as agents of change, capable of shaping their communities and society.

Democracy is not a spectator sport—it requires active participation. This toolkit empowers educators to inspire and equip young people to take part in civic life, ensuring a more inclusive, resilient, and participatory democracy for future generations.

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Foreword

Understanding The Problem Under the Problem

Author: Jack Fallow

Every major social issue is made up of layers of interconnected causes. Often, what appears to be the problem is actually just the surface symptom of deeper, more systemic challenges. To create meaningful and lasting change, we need to look beyond immediate concerns and identify the root causes—this is the essence of understanding the problem under the problem.

A simple analogy helps illustrate this concept: a car that won't start. At first glance, the issue seems straightforward—the car isn't running. But what is preventing it from working? Is the fuel tank empty? Is the battery dead? Before assuming a major mechanical failure, we need to examine the underlying factors that could be contributing to the issue.

In the context of social change, problems are often part of complex systems. Addressing only the visible symptoms—without considering the deeper structural causes—leads to temporary or ineffective solutions. To make a real impact, we must break big problems into smaller, actionable components and ask:

- ❖ What are the contributing factors to this issue?
- ❖ What deeper challenges sustain or reinforce it?
- ❖ Where can we intervene to create meaningful change?

For example, if a community faces high unemployment, simply offering job listings might not be enough. A deeper look may reveal barriers to employment, such as a lack of education, training programs, access to transportation, or available childcare. Addressing one of these underlying challenges—such as expanding vocational training opportunities—could have a far greater impact than tackling the surface-level issue alone.

This approach highlights the power of systems thinking—instead of reacting to problems as they appear, we must analyze their causes, map their interconnections, and find the most effective entry points for change.

Big problems are built from smaller problems. True solutions require digging deeper, asking why an issue exists, and focusing on the root causes that sustain it. By understanding the system, we can create strategic, sustainable solutions that lead to real, long-term impact.

1. Introduction

This toolkit has been developed through a collaborative process, bringing together diverse expertise, experiences, and insights from educators, youth workers, and civic education practitioners across multiple countries. Designed to support both formal and informal educational settings, the toolkit combines theory with interactive learning, offering thought-provoking questions, engaging activities, and practical exercises to strengthen young people's democratic competencies.

1.1. About the Project: ASPYRE EUROPE

This toolkit was developed as part of **ASPYRE EUROPE**, a 24-month project funded by the CERV-2023-CITIZENS-CIV programme. The project aims to increase the participation of young citizens (ages 16-24) in democratic and civic life through a set of iterative steps:

- ✓ **Developing civic education tools** in collaboration with teachers, educators, and youth workers to strengthen civic competencies and youth engagement.
- ✓ **Hosting major civic events (Active Youth Forum - AYF)** in Cluj-Napoca (RO), Genova (IT), Sarajevo (BiH), and Brussels, fostering transnational exchange and strategic networking.
- ✓ **Facilitating Civic Cafés**, where young people engage in meaningful dialogue with decision-makers on topics they identify as relevant.
- ✓ **Forming Youth Advocacy Groups (YAGs)** at local, national, and European levels to mobilize support for key issues and present concrete policy recommendations.

By providing young people with tools, platforms, and opportunities to engage, ASPYRE EUROPE empowers a new generation of informed and active citizens to shape their communities and the future of Europe.

 **Project Timeline:** August 2023 – July 2026

 **Countries Involved:** Romania (Polylogos), Italy (Agora), Bosnia and Herzegovina (NIT and Youth for Peace)

1.2. Purpose and Objectives of the Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to support teachers, educators, and youth workers in providing meaningful and effective civic education to young people aged 16-24. This stage of life is crucial as young citizens gain voting rights and begin participating in democratic processes. The toolkit provides educational tools and interactive activities to equip young people with the skills and knowledge needed for active citizenship.

More specifically, the toolkit aims to:

- ✓ Define and explain key concepts related to democracy and civic engagement.
- ✓ Provide guiding questions to facilitate meaningful discussions.
- ✓ Introduce interactive and engaging activities to develop civic skills and competencies, including dialogue, collaboration, critical thinking, negotiation, decision-making, and communication skills.

 **Note:** This toolkit is not intended to be fully exhaustive. Creating a complete guide would have required hundreds of pages, which would make it impractical as a tool. Instead, we've included a list of **additional resources (Chapter 7)** that are worth looking into if you wish to elaborate more on certain topics.

1.3. Target Group

This toolkit is primarily designed for **teachers, educators, youth workers, and trainers** who work in formal and non-formal education settings.

 **End Beneficiaries:** Teenagers and young adults (ages 16-24), who will develop civic skills and increase their understanding of and capacity to engage in democratic processes.

The development of this toolkit followed a bottom-up and participatory approach, integrating feedback from educators and young people through a series of co-creation workshops from November 2024 through January 2025, engaging up to 200 teachers, educators and young people in Romania, Italy, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This collaborative process ensured that the toolkit is practical, adaptable, and responsive to the needs of those who will use it.

1.4. How to Use This Toolkit

For maximum impact, we recommend following the full sequence of activities in the toolkit, from **Problem Identification** ([Activities 1](#) and [2](#)) to **Change Facilitation** ([Activity 7](#)). However, it can also be used flexibly, allowing educators to select specific activities based on their teaching goals.

 **Key Features of the Toolkit:**

- ✓ **Structured but adaptable:** Suitable for classrooms, youth centers, outdoor settings, and community spaces.
- ✓ **Clear instructions for each activity:** Facilitators are provided with detailed guidance on how to tailor activities to different contexts.
- ✓ **Easy-to-navigate format:** Use the table of contents to find relevant topics and exercises.

1.5. Context in which it was developed

This toolkit was collaboratively developed across three European countries—**Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Romania**—each bringing unique perspectives, democratic experiences, and civic engagement practices.

- ✓ **Romania:** A semi-presidential republic where civic education efforts focus on youth engagement, democratic resilience, and institutional transparency.
- ✓ **Italy:** A parliamentary republic with a strong tradition of civil society activism and youth-led initiatives.
- ✓ **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** A highly complex political system, where youth participation plays a critical role in fostering reconciliation and democratic development.

 **Why This Matters:** By integrating insights from different democratic contexts, the toolkit offers a richer, more adaptable approach to civic education.

1.6. Toolkit Overview

This toolkit consists of five sections, each of which can be used independently or in sequence, depending on the facilitator's goals, expertise, and needs.

Part 1: Introduction to Key Concepts and Decision-Making Processes

- ✓ **Chapter 2: Key Concepts, Values, and Principles**
- ✓ **Chapter 3: Understanding Power – Decision-Making in Romania, Italy, and BiH**

This section introduces core democratic principles and provides an overview of political decision-making processes in the three participating countries. Teachers and facilitators can use this as a reference guide when leading discussions or workshop activities.

Part 2: Educational Approaches to Civic Engagement

- ✓ **Chapter 4: Methods and Approaches for Teaching Civic Education**

Beyond definitions and activities, this chapter explores educational approaches that promote transformative learning and participatory democracy. These methods are based on evidence-based practices and expert insights from the ASPYRE EUROPE consortium, in particular Polylogos' experience delivering civic education in Romanian high schools.

Part 3: Youth-Led Change – Inspiring Examples

- ✓ **Chapter 5: Youth-Led Initiatives in Italy, Romania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina**

This section showcases successful youth-led initiatives that have influenced policies, mobilized communities, and driven social change. These real-world examples serve as inspiration and provide practical insights into how young people can shape democracy through action.

Part 4: Educational Activities & Facilitation Guidelines

- ✓ **Chapter 6: Interactive Civic Education Activities**

This section contains detailed instructions and facilitation guidelines for a variety of engaging educational activities, designed for both formal and non-formal settings. Activities focus on dialogue, decision-making, advocacy, and civic leadership. Activities are designed to be adaptable, making them accessible for classroom use, youth centers, or community workshops.

Part 5: Conclusion & Additional Resources

- ✓ **Summary and reflections on civic engagement**
- ✓ **Bibliography and further resources for deeper learning**

1.7. Final Thoughts

Democracy is not just a political system—it is a way of thinking, engaging, and acting. This toolkit is designed to empower educators and young people to participate actively, think critically, and contribute to strengthening democratic culture.

 **Key Takeaway:** Whether you are a teacher, youth worker, or facilitator, this toolkit provides practical tools and knowledge to support young people in becoming engaged and informed citizens—ready to shape their communities and the future of democracy.

2. Key Concepts, Values and Principles

This chapter provides an overview of the fundamental concepts, norms, values, and principles that underpin democratic systems. It is designed as a user-friendly glossary for high school teachers, civic educators and youth workers to introduce students and young people to the essential building blocks of democracy, human rights, rule of law, citizenship, and active participation.

2.1. Democracy: Power of the People

 “No one is born a good citizen, no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth” - **Kofi Annan**, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations

Democracy means “rule by the people” (from the Greek *δημοκρατία* - *demokratia* - *demos*, “people” + *kratos*, “power”). It is a system where citizens participate in decision-making, either directly or through elected representatives. True democracy is based on individual autonomy (freedom to live by rules you help create) and equality (everyone has an equal voice). However, it is not just majority rule—it must also protect minority rights¹.

Building Blocks of Democracy:

- ✓ **Separation of Powers** → Checks and balances between government branches.
- ✓ **Rule of Law** → Everyone, including leaders, must follow the law.
- ✓ **Freedom of Speech & Media** → A free press holds leaders accountable.
- ✓ **Active Civil Society** → Citizens can organize and express views freely.
- ✓ **Informed & Engaged Citizens** → Transparency and access to information.

 **Key Idea:** Human rights (freedom of expression, assembly, and information) are essential pillars of democracy.

¹ Council of Europe, *COMPASS: Manual for Human Rights Education for Young People*, “Democracy”, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/democracy>

2.2. Human Rights: The Foundation of Democracy

Human rights are fundamental freedoms that belong to everyone. These rights are essential for democracy to work because they ensure everyone can participate equally, protecting individuals from discrimination and oppression.

Key Human Rights in Democracy:

- ✓ **Freedom of Thought & Belief** → You can think and believe freely.
- ✓ **Freedom of Expression** → You can speak and share opinions.
- ✓ **Freedom of Assembly** → You can join groups, protests, or initiatives.
- ✓ **Right to Nationality** → Citizenship provides access to rights like voting.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 15²:

"Everyone has the right to a nationality."

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 21:

"Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives."

2.3. Rule of Law: Equality and Accountability

The rule of law means that no one is above the law—not even government leaders. It ensures fairness and prevents power abuse³.

Key Principles of Rule of Law⁴:

- ✓ **Equality Before the Law** → The same rules apply to all.
- ✓ **Legality** → Laws are created through a democratic process.
- ✓ **Legal Certainty** → Laws must be clear, stable, and predictable.
- ✓ **Independent Judiciary** → Courts must be free from political influence.
- ✓ **Separation of Powers** → Executive, legislative, and judicial branches check each other's power.

 **European Union Connection:** To join the EU, countries must uphold the rule of law, ensuring democracy, justice, and human rights⁵.

² United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights#:~:text=Article%2015,right%20to%20change%20his%20nationality>.

³ Britannica (Oct 21, 2024), *Rule of Law*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/rule-of-law>

⁴ European Commission, *What is the Rule of Law?*,

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/upholding-rule-law/rule-law/what-rule-law_en

⁵ European Commission, *ibid*.

2.4. Challenges to Democracy

Even established democracies face challenges⁶:

✓ **Voter Apathy** → Low turnout can weaken legitimacy, but activism, protests, and civic engagement can strengthen democracy. These alternative forms of engagement are just as important as voting.

✓ **Majority Rule vs. Minority Rights** → Protecting minorities from the "tyranny of the majority." True democracy protects everyone's rights.

✓ **Nationalism & Populism** → Can threaten democratic values if used to promote hatred and violence against minorities, or to justify exclusion or discrimination.

💬 "A minority may be right, and a majority is always wrong". — **Henrik Ibsen**, Norwegian playwright and theatre director.

 **Key Takeaway:** Democracy is a process, not a static system. Citizens must actively engage and defend democratic values.

2.5. Active Citizenship: Making Democracy Work

Democracy requires citizen participation beyond voting⁷. Active citizenship means engaging in decision-making at all levels.

♦ Ways to Engage:

✓ **Stay Informed** → Follow political decisions and debates.

✓ **Express Your Views** → Write to representatives, use media platforms.

✓ **Join Groups & Movements** → Collective action is powerful.

✓ **Organize Demonstrations & Petitions** → Mobilize support for causes.

✓ **Engage in Political Parties or Advocacy Groups** → Long-term impact.

✓ **Vote** → Hold leaders accountable.

 **Key Idea:** There is power in numbers—working together creates real change!

⁶ Council of Europe, COMPASS: *Manual for Human Rights Education for Young People*, "Democracy", <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/democracy>

⁷ CoE, *ibid.*

◆ 5 Key Instruments to Influence Decision-Making:

1. Knock on the right door → Contact directly the person in power who works on the topics that you are concerned with, at local, national or EU levels.
2. Form a group → There is power in numbers. Bring together people who share your interests, and work together to achieve your objectives.
3. Get media attention → Reach out to journalists and convince them to do a story about your engagement.
4. Organize demonstrations, protests or petitions → Gain attention and mobilise support for your case.
5. Become a member of a political party or advocacy organization → If you want to influence policies in the long term, consider joining a political party, civil society organization, or advocacy network.

 **Final Thought:** Every action counts. Whether through voting, advocacy, or grassroots activism, your voice has the power to influence decisions and create meaningful change in your community and beyond.

2.6. Citizenship: Rights and Responsibilities

Citizenship defines the **relationship between individuals and the state**, including both **rights and duties**⁸.

Four Dimensions of Citizenship⁹:

- ✓ **Political** → Voting, democratic participation.
- ✓ **Social** → Community involvement, social responsibility.
- ✓ **Cultural** → Shared identity, heritage, and values.
- ✓ **Economic** → Work, financial stability, and economic rights.

These dimensions are shaped by family, education, civic organizations, and interactions with others. Just like the four legs of a chair, these dimensions need to be balanced for full citizenship.

 **Key Idea:** Active citizenship strengthens democracy by ensuring diverse voices are heard.

⁸ Council of Europe, COMPASS: *Manual for Human Rights Education for Young People*, “Citizenship and Participation”, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/citizenship-and-participation>

⁹ Council of Europe, COMPASS: *Manual for Human Rights Education for Young People*, “Citizenship and Participation”, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/citizenship-and-participation>

2.7. Youth Participation: Shaping the Future

Young people play a critical role in democracy, bringing fresh perspectives, energy, and new ways of engaging in political life. However, youth participation is not always valued or recognized within traditional political structures. Roger Hart's "Ladder of Participation"¹⁰ helps identify the different levels of meaningful youth involvement:

- ✓ **Youth-Led & Initiated** → Young people lead projects with optional adult support.
- ✓ **Shared Decision-Making** → Youth and adults collaborate equally.
- ✓ **Tokenism** → Youth are involved but have no real influence (*to be avoided*).

For more information about Hart's model, see **European Youth Forum's** [Advocacy Handbook](#), p. 48.

♦ A Question of Legitimacy in Youth Participation

A major challenge in fostering youth political engagement is the relationship between informal, grassroots action and formal institutional structures. This relationship is often shaped by **legitimacy**—who is recognized as having the right to speak, take action, or influence decisions?

Key Questions:

- ✓ Who has the legitimacy to speak in political contexts?
- ✓ Which actions are considered legitimate?
- ✓ Who decides what is legitimate?

These questions arise at different levels of participation:

- In informal and grassroots movements, formal political procedures may seem out of touch, bureaucratic, or even illegitimate.
- Conversely, youth-led actions often struggle to gain institutional recognition, leading to difficulties in accessing resources, securing public spaces, or even facing resistance from local governments.

 **Example:** A group of young activists organizing a climate protest may struggle to get city permits or public support, even if their cause aligns with widely accepted environmental goals. Meanwhile, institutional youth councils may lack credibility among young people because they are seen as too controlled by political authorities.

These challenges stem from the coexistence of different languages, communication styles, and behavioral norms between youth movements and formal institutions. Mediation is necessary in order to bridge the gap between youth-led activism and political decision-making structures. In practical work with young people, this translates into a crucial question: how can we gain recognition for new and diverse forms of participation and action?

¹⁰ CoE, *ibid*.

2.8. Democratic Decision-Making: Transparency and Accountability

Democratic decision-making is a system where people have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Decisions are made either directly by the people, as seen in referendums, or through elected representatives who act on behalf of their communities. Democratic decision-making ensures fairness and representation.

Main Principles:

- ✓ **Transparency** → Open, accessible decision-making.
- ✓ **Respect for Diversity** → All perspectives are considered.
- ✓ **Accountability** → Leaders must answer for their actions.

 **Key Idea:** A strong democracy requires ongoing civic engagement.

2.9. Advocacy, Lobbying and Campaigning: Influencing Change

Civic engagement extends far beyond voting—it involves individuals and organizations actively shaping policies, decisions, and public discourse. Three key concepts often used to describe civic action beyond elections are Advocacy, Lobbying, and Campaigning. While they share common goals of influencing decision-making, each has distinct methods and contexts that are important to understand for effective civic participation¹¹.

Advocacy: Broad Influence on Decision-Makers

Advocacy refers to actions taken to influence individuals or institutions with decision-making power. It is a broad concept that applies to social, political, economic, and institutional change.

Examples of Advocacy:

- ✓ Advocating for increased funding for youth programs.
- ✓ Pushing for policy changes on environmental issues.
- ✓ Mobilizing communities to support or oppose a law.

 **Who engages in advocacy?** Everyday citizens, community organizations, and businesses all participate in advocacy to influence public policy, institutional practices, or public awareness.

¹¹ European Youth Forum's *Advocacy Handbook*, p. 54. <https://www.youthforum.org/topics/advocacy-handbook>

Lobbying: Direct Influence on Policymakers

Lobbying is a specific form of advocacy that involves direct engagement with policymakers to influence decisions—often on behalf of businesses, industries, or interest groups.

Characteristics of Lobbying:

- ✓ Typically conducted by business groups, industry associations, or professionals.
- ✓ Involves private meetings with government officials, providing data, research, or policy recommendations.
- ✓ May focus on securing financial benefits, regulatory changes, or favorable policies for a particular industry.

 **Key Distinction:** While advocacy is often linked to the public good or social change, lobbying is sometimes viewed more negatively because it advances specific private or business interests. However, lobbying is a legal and regulated process in many democratic systems.

Campaigning: Mobilizing Public Support for Change

Campaigning is a form of advocacy focused on engaging and mobilizing the public to support a cause or policy change. It is about raising awareness, building momentum, and inspiring action.

Key Elements of Campaigning:

- ✓ Organizing public demonstrations, protests, or petitions.
- ✓ Using social media and traditional media to spread messages.
- ✓ Encouraging mass participation to pressure decision-makers.

 **Key Idea:** Campaigns often combine advocacy and lobbying to create broad societal support for an issue while also influencing policymakers directly.

Summary: Key Differences Between Advocacy, Lobbying, and Campaigning

Concept	Definition	Main Goal	Key Actors
 Advocacy	Taking action to influence decision-makers on broad public issues.	Policy change, public awareness.	Citizens, NGOs, businesses, civil society.
 Lobbying	Direct engagement with policymakers to influence legislation or regulations.	Advancing specific industry or interest group goals.	Businesses, trade associations, professional lobbyists.
 Campaigning	Mobilizing the public to support an issue and put pressure on decision-makers.	Raising awareness, inspiring public action.	Activists, grassroots movements, social organizations.

Key Takeaway:

- ✓ Advocacy is a broad term for influencing decision-makers.
- ✓ Lobbying is a targeted effort focused on direct engagement with policymakers.
- ✓ Campaigning mobilizes the public to build pressure for change.

Each plays a critical role in democratic engagement—and when combined, they create powerful movements for change. 

2.10. Core Democratic Values and Principles

Democracy is more than a system of government—it is a **culture built on shared values** that shape how people interact, make decisions, and resolve conflicts. These values influence **democratic norms** that cannot always be formalized into law but are essential for fostering trust, cooperation, and respect in a democratic society. A healthy democracy thrives when citizens actively uphold and promote these values in daily life.

☀ Essential Democratic Values (non-exhaustive list):

- ✓ **Transparency** → Open governance and access to information.
- ✓ **Participation** → Active citizen engagement in decision-making.
- ✓ **Equality** → Equal rights and opportunities for all.
- ✓ **Accountability** → Leaders and institutions answer to the people.
- ✓ **Justice** → Fairness, legal protections, and the rule of law.
- ✓ **Freedom** → Protection of civil liberties and personal rights.
- ✓ **Responsibility** → Ethical civic behavior and duty to society.
- ✓ **Respect** → Tolerance for diverse perspectives and opinions.
- ✓ **Inclusion** → Ensuring that every voice is heard and valued.
- ✓ **Integrity** → Honest, ethical, and principled governance.
- ✓ **Representation** → Elected officials and institutions reflect the diversity and interests of society.

Democracy provides an environment where human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected, and where the freely expressed will of the people determines governance. True democracy ensures that:

- People have a voice in decisions that affect their lives.
- Decision-makers are held accountable for their actions.
- Women and men have equal rights and opportunities.
- All individuals are free from discrimination, regardless of background.

These values are embodied in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

 **Key Idea:** Democracy is only as strong as the people who defend and uphold its values. Active participation, civic responsibility, and respect for human rights are essential for maintaining a just, fair, and inclusive society.

3. Let's talk about politics - who does what?

Democratic governance relies on well-defined institutions, legal frameworks, and mechanisms that ensure accountability, representation, and the rule of law. However, the structure of political decision-making varies significantly across different democratic systems, shaped by historical, cultural, and constitutional factors. This chapter provides a comparative overview of the political systems and institutions of Romania, Italy, and Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH), highlighting their governance models, power dynamics, and checks and balances.

Each country presents a distinct approach to democracy and decision-making:

- **Romania** operates as a semi-presidential republic, where executive power is shared between the President and the Government, with strong parliamentary oversight.
- **Italy** follows a parliamentary republic model, where governance is dependent on parliamentary confidence, and decision-making is highly influenced by coalition politics.
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina** has one of the most complex political systems in the world, structured around ethnic power-sharing mechanisms established by the Dayton Peace Agreement, leading to a highly decentralized and consensus-driven governance model.

By analyzing the institutional frameworks, legislative structures, executive powers, judicial independence, and external influences in these three countries, this chapter explores how different democratic systems balance power, maintain stability, and navigate political challenges.

An overview of the three systems is depicted in the table below:

	Romania	Italy	Bosnia & Herzegovina
System	Semi-Presidential Republic	Parliamentary Republic	Parliamentary Republic (Highly decentralized)
Head of State	President, Elected, 5 years	Presidential (Elected by Parliament, 7 years)	Tripartite Presidency (Rotating, 4 years)
Head of Government	Prime Minister (Appointed by President, Approved by Parliament)	Prime Minister (Appointed by President, Approved by Parliament)	Chair of the Council of Ministers (Appointed by Presidency, Approved by Parliament)
Legislature	Bicameral (Senate & Chamber of Deputies)	Bicameral (Senate & Chamber of Deputies - Equal Power)	Bicameral (House of Representatives & House of Peoples)
Judiciary	Constitutional Court & Judiciary (Independent)	Constitutional Court & Judiciary (Independent)	Constitutional Court & State Court (Includes Foreign Judges)
Regional government	Unitary State (Local Governments, No Autonomous Regions)	Decentralized (20 Regions, Some Autonomous)	Highly Decentralized (Federation of BiH, Republika Srpska, Brčko District)
Key Checks and Balances	Parliament can override Presidential veto; Judiciary reviews laws; No-confidence vote against Government	Parliamentary oversight; Judiciary reviews laws; No-confidence vote against Government	Ethnic Veto (Vital National Interest); OHR can impose laws; Judiciary reviews laws
Ethnic or Political Veto	No Ethnic Veto	No Ethnic Veto	Yes (Vital National Interest Veto)
International Influence	European Union compliance & NATO membership	European Union compliance & NATO membership	European Union compliance; NATO debated; Office of the High Representative (OHR) oversees governance

3.1. Overview of the decision-making system in Romania

Romania is a **semi-presidential republic**, meaning power is shared between the President, Government, and Parliament, with a system of checks and balances to prevent any one branch from dominating. Decision-making involves executive, legislative, and judicial institutions, with additional influence from local government and European Union regulations.

3.1.1. Key Institutions

✓ President (Head of State)

- Elected by popular vote for a 5-year term (max. two terms).
- Represents the state internationally and ensures adherence to the Constitution.
- Appoints the Prime Minister (subject to parliamentary approval).
- Can veto laws (but Parliament can override).
- Leads the Supreme Council of National Defense (influencing security and foreign policy).

✓ Government (Executive Power: Prime Minister & Ministers)

- The Prime Minister is nominated by the President and approved by Parliament.
- Implements policies and proposes laws to Parliament.
- Can issue emergency ordinances, which take immediate effect but must later be approved by Parliament.

✓ Parliament (Legislative Power: Senate & Chamber of Deputies)

- Bicameral: Senate (136 seats) & Chamber of Deputies (330 seats).
- Passes laws, approves the budget, and oversees the government.
- Can remove the government via a motion of no confidence.
- Can override a presidential veto with a re-vote.

✓ Judiciary (Constitutional Court & Courts of Justice)

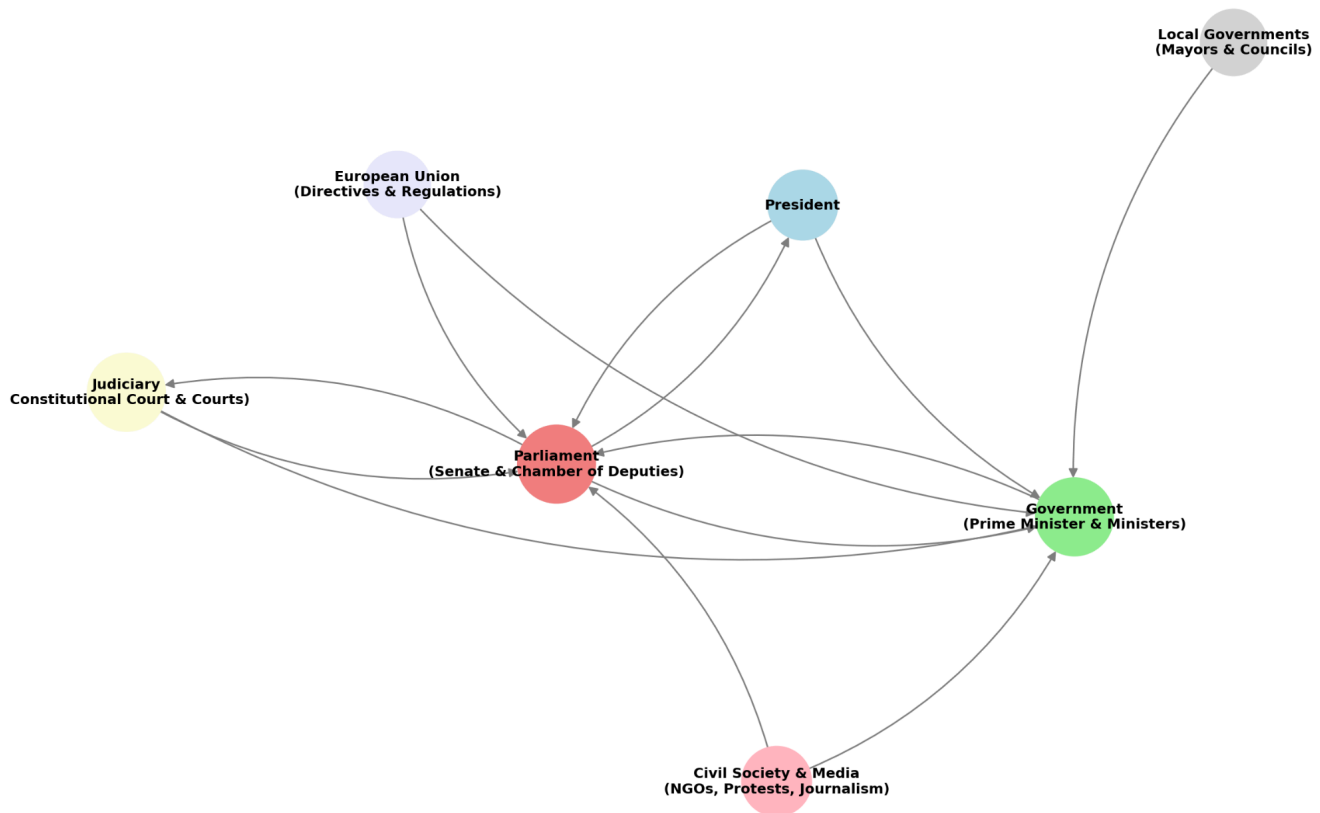
- Constitutional Court (CCR): Interprets the Constitution, reviews laws, and resolves institutional conflicts.
- High Court of Cassation and Justice: Ensures uniform interpretation of laws.
- Judiciary is independent, with the Superior Council of Magistracy overseeing judges and prosecutors.

✓ **Local Governments:** Cities and counties have elected mayors and councils, handling regional administration.

✓ **European Union:** As an EU member, Romania must align national laws with EU directives.

✓ **Civil Society & Media:** NGOs, protests, and investigative journalism hold decision-makers accountable.

Romania's Political Decision-Making System



3.1.2. Checks and Balances

The President can send laws back to Parliament, but the Parliament can override the President. Parliament can dismiss the Government through a vote of no confidence. The Government can issue emergency ordinances, but the Parliament and the Constitutional Court can overturn them. Judiciary checks Parliament and Government by reviewing laws for constitutionality.

Why two chambers? The Senate vs the Chamber of Deputies

Romania has a bicameral Parliament, meaning it consists of two chambers:

1. Senate (Senatul)
2. Chamber of Deputies (Camera Deputaților)

Both chambers are involved in passing laws, overseeing the government, and representing the people, but they have some differences in structure, responsibilities, and legislative procedures.

An overview of the two chambers of Parliament in Romania, and their respective roles and procedures, is depicted in the table below:

Feature	Senate (Upper House)	Chamber of Deputies (Lower House)
Seats	136 Senators	330 Deputies
Who they represent	Regional/national interests	Local and individual citizen concerns
Roles in lawmaking	Reviews and modifies bills	Initiates, debates and has the final say on most laws
Final authority	Sends law to the Chamber for a final decision	Has the final say on most legislation
Powers	Focus on foreign policy, constitutional law, and national security	Stronger control over domestic policies, budget, and economic laws
Election Method	Proportional representation	Proportional representation

 **Takeaway:** The Senate focuses on broader national issues, while the Chamber of Deputies is more citizen-focused. The Chamber of Deputies has the final word on most laws, but the Senate plays a crucial role in reviewing and shaping legislation.

Romania's system balances executive, legislative, and judicial power, with institutions checking each other to prevent abuses and ensure democratic governance. However, challenges such as corruption, political instability, and executive influence on the judiciary remain key concerns for civic engagement and oversight.

3.2. Overview of the decision-making system in Italy

Italy is a **parliamentary republic**, meaning the government is dependent on parliamentary confidence rather than direct presidential authority. Power is divided among executive, legislative, and judicial branches, with checks and balances to ensure democratic governance. Italy also has a strong regional governance system, giving significant autonomy to local governments.

3.2.1. Key Institutions

✓ President of the Republic (Head of State)

- Elected by Parliament and regional representatives for a 7-year term.
- Acts as a neutral figure ensuring adherence to the Constitution.
- Appoints the Prime Minister and can dissolve Parliament.
- Can reject laws (but Parliament can pass them again).
- Commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

✓ Government (Executive Power: Prime Minister & Ministers)

- The Prime Minister (President of the Council of Ministers) is nominated by the President and approved by Parliament.
- The Council of Ministers (Cabinet) is responsible for executing laws and managing policies.
- Can issue legislative decrees, but they must be ratified by Parliament.
- Relies on parliamentary support—if a vote of no confidence passes, the government falls.

✓ Parliament (Legislative Power: Senate & Chamber of Deputies)

- Bicameral system: **Senate of the Republic** (*Senato della Repubblica*) – 200 seats; **Chamber of Deputies** (*Camera dei Deputati*) – 400 seats.
- Both chambers have equal legislative power (perfect bicameralism).
- Pass laws, approve budgets, and oversee the government.
- Can force the government to resign via a vote of no confidence.

✓ Judiciary (Independent Courts & Constitutional Court)

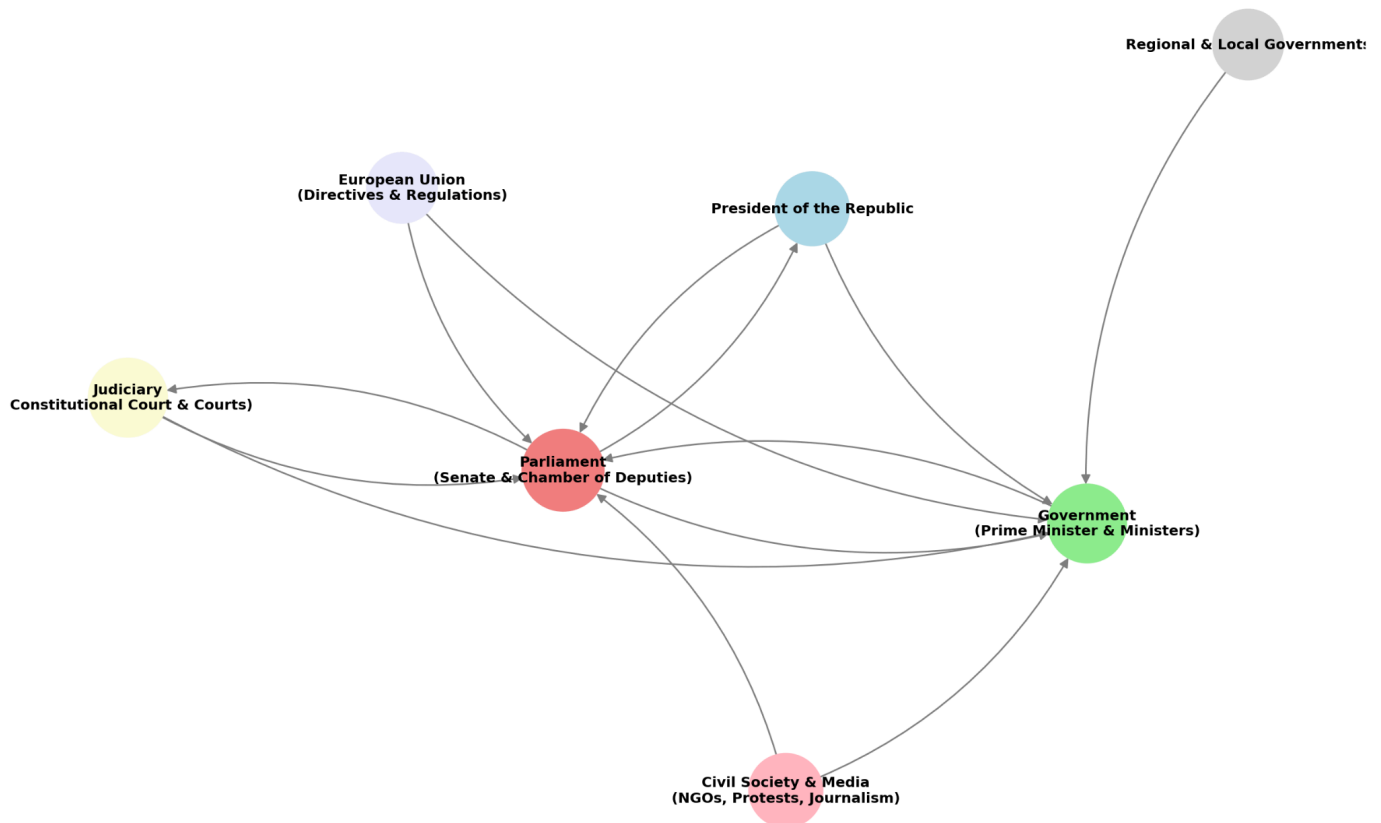
- The Constitutional Court ensures laws comply with the Constitution.
- Ordinary courts handle civil, criminal, and administrative cases.
- Judiciary is independent, with judges selected through a merit-based system.

✓ **Regional & Local Governments:** Italy is highly decentralized, with 20 regions that have their own governments. Some regions (e.g., Sicily, Trentino-Alto Adige) have special autonomy.

✓ **European Union:** As an EU member, Italy must follow EU laws and regulations, especially in trade, economy, and human rights.

✓ **Civil Society & Media:** Strong NGOs, unions, and protests influence policy. Investigative journalism holds decision-makers accountable.

Italy's Political Decision-Making System



3.2.2. Checks and Balances

The President can reject laws, but Parliament can pass them again. The Parliament can dissolve the government with a vote of no confidence. The Prime Minister needs parliamentary approval for policies and laws. The Judiciary checks Parliament and Government by reviewing laws for constitutionality. Local governments manage key areas like healthcare, education, and transport, reducing central government power.

Italy's parliamentary system relies on strong checks and balances, with the executive power depending on parliamentary support. The regional government system and European Union influence add complexity to decision-making. However, political instability is a recurring challenge, with frequent government changes due to coalition politics.

3.3. Overview of the decision-making system in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has a complex and highly decentralized political system, established by the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995). The system is designed to balance power among Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs, but it also creates challenges in decision-making, governance, and reform implementation.

BiH is a parliamentary democracy with multiple layers of government and strong ethnic power-sharing mechanisms, which significantly influence checks and balances.

3.3.1. Key Institutions

✓ Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Collective Head of State)

- Tri-partite presidency: One representative from each major ethnic group (Bosniak, Croat, Serb).
- Elected for 4 years: Bosniak and Croat members are elected from Federation of BiH (FBiH), and the Serb member from Republika Srpska (RS).
- The chair of the presidency rotates every 8 months among the three members.
- **Roles:**
 - Represents BiH internationally.
 - Appoints key officials (e.g., Prime Minister, ambassadors).
 - Decisions require consensus or a two-thirds majority.

 **Power Dynamics:** The rotational leadership weakens centralized authority, often leading to gridlock in foreign and domestic policy decisions.

✓ Council of Ministers (Executive Power – Prime Minister & Ministers)

- Headed by the Chairperson of the Council of Ministers (equivalent to a Prime Minister).
- Appointed by the Presidency but must be approved by Parliament.
- Composed of Ministers from all ethnic groups.
- Implements state laws and coordinates with lower-level governments.

 **Power Dynamics:** The ethnic quota system can make decision-making slow and inefficient, as each group has veto power over key policies.

✓ Parliamentary Assembly (Legislative Power: House of Representatives & House of Peoples)

- Bicameral system:
 - House of Representatives (42 members) – Directly elected.
 - House of Peoples (15 members) – Indirectly elected, 5 per ethnic group (Bosniak, Croat, Serb).
- Passes laws, approves budgets, and oversees the government.
- Can dismiss the Council of Ministers via a no-confidence vote.

 **Power Dynamics:** Ethnic-based voting rules often lead to political stalemates. Any ethnic group can block decisions using the “vital national interest” veto, slowing reforms.

 Judiciary (Constitutional Court & State Court)

- The Constitutional Court of BiH ensures laws comply with the Constitution.
- The State Court of BiH handles high-profile cases, including war crimes and corruption.
- The Judiciary is independent, but ethnic and political pressures affect judicial efficiency.

 **Power Dynamics:** The Constitutional Court includes 3 foreign judges to prevent political influence. The Office of the High Representative (OHR) can remove officials and enforce judicial decisions.

 **Office of the High Representative (OHR):** An International supervisory body established by the Dayton Peace Agreement, with authority to remove officials and impose laws if BiH institutions fail to act. OHR is currently being phased out, but still holds significant influence.

 **European Union & NATO Influence:** The EU monitors political reforms and conditions membership on democratic progress. NATO cooperation is complicated due to Republika Srpska (RS) opposition to joining the alliance.

 **Civil Society & Media:** Plays a role in pushing for anti-corruption reforms. Investigative journalism holds politicians accountable, but political control over the media remains strong.

3.3.2. Decentralized Governance Structure

 Two Entities + Brčko District:

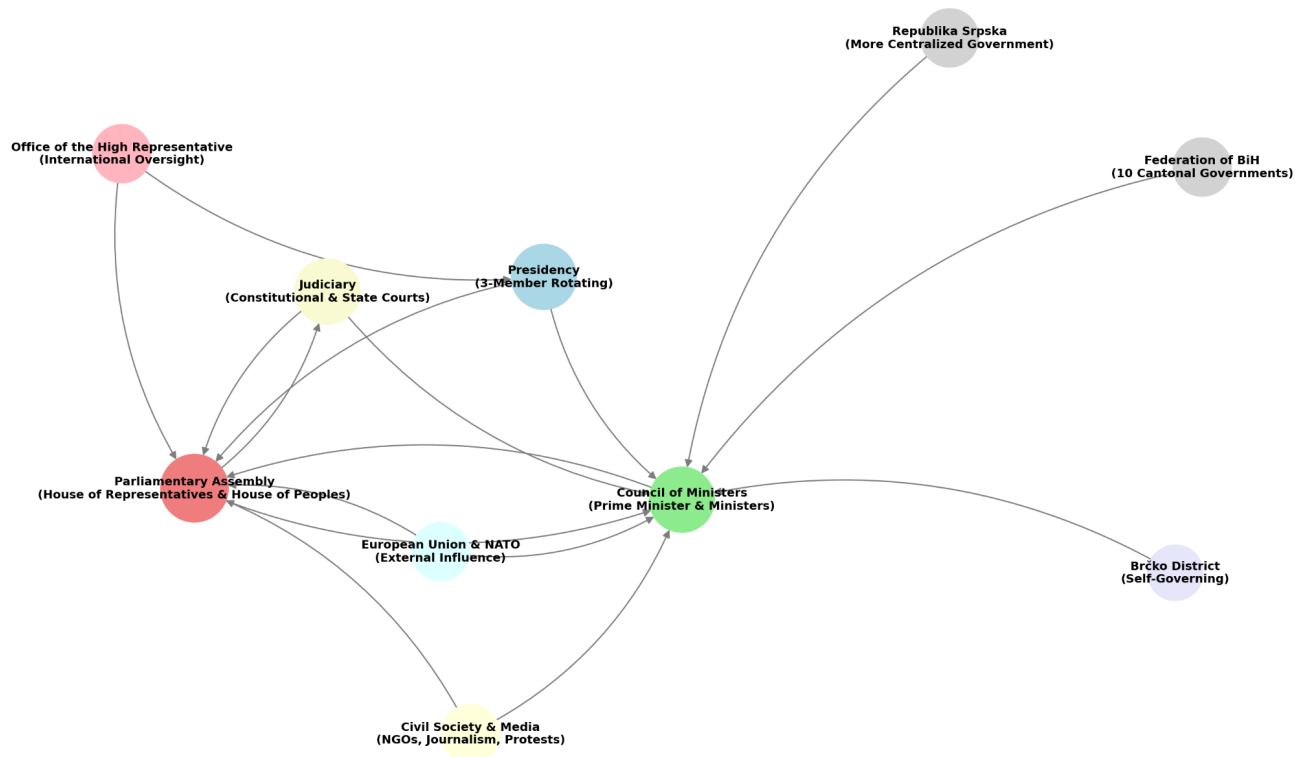
- Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) – 51% of the territory, majority Bosniak & Croat, with 10 autonomous cantons.
- Republika Srpska (RS) – 49% of the territory, majority Serb, more centralized.
- Brčko District – Self-governing, under joint jurisdiction of FBiH and RS.

 Each Entity Has:

- Its own President, Parliament, and Government.
- Separate police forces, education systems, and health services.
- Independent taxation and budget policies.

 **Power Dynamics:** Entities have more power than the central state, making country-wide decision-making difficult. FBiH is further divided into 10 cantons, each with its own government, adding another layer of bureaucracy. Republika Srpska operates more like a unitary system, while FBiH is highly fragmented.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Political Decision-Making System



3.3.3. Checks and Balances

The political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is one of the most complex in the world. It has multiple layers of checks and balances, primarily designed to prevent domination by any one ethnic group. However, these mechanisms also contribute to political deadlock and slow decision-making. Below are the key checks and balances at play in BiH's governance system.

1 Presidency vs. Parliament vs. Council of Ministers

- ✓ The Presidency (Head of State) can propose policies and appoint the Chair of the Council of Ministers, but Parliament must approve the appointment.
- ✓ The Council of Ministers (Executive) needs parliamentary approval for major decisions, including the budget and laws.
- ✓ Parliament (Legislative) can dismiss the government via a vote of no confidence, forcing new government formation.

Check & Balance: The executive branch is accountable to Parliament, preventing unilateral action by the Presidency or Prime Minister.

2) Ethnic Veto ("Vital National Interest" Mechanism)

- ✓ Any of the three constituent peoples (Bosniak, Croat, Serb) can block a law or decision by invoking a "vital national interest" veto.
- ✓ The House of Peoples (Upper House) can decide whether a veto is justified.
- ✓ If there's a dispute, the Constitutional Court of BiH makes the final ruling.

 **Check & Balance:** Prevents ethnic domination, but often leads to legislative gridlock.

3) Constitutional Court as the Final Arbiter

- ✓ Reviews laws passed by Parliament and can strike down unconstitutional decisions.
- ✓ Can intervene in disputes between state institutions, entities, and local governments.
- ✓ Includes three foreign judges (appointed by the European Court of Human Rights) to reduce political bias.

 **Check & Balance:** Provides independent judicial oversight, but political parties often challenge its decisions.

4) Office of the High Representative (OHR) – International Oversight

- ✓ Has the authority to impose laws and remove officials who obstruct peace or reforms.
- ✓ Acts as an external check on domestic politics, ensuring compliance with the Dayton Agreement.
- ✓ Currently being phased out, but still holds intervention power.

 **Check & Balance:** Ensures stability, but critics argue it limits BiH's sovereignty.

5) Federation of BiH vs. Republika Srpska vs. Brčko District

- ✓ Entities (FBiH & RS) have significant autonomy, limiting the central government's power.
- ✓ The Brčko District operates under joint oversight, ensuring neither entity dominates it.
- ✓ Each entity can pass its own laws in areas like education, policing, and health.

 **Check & Balance:** Prevents excessive centralization but creates governance fragmentation.

6) European Union & NATO Oversight

- ✓ BiH must align its policies with EU accession requirements.
- ✓ NATO cooperation is debated—Republika Srpska opposes joining, while FBiH supports it.

 **Check & Balance:** International pressure promotes reforms, but political divisions slow progress.

In summary: BiH's system prevents authoritarian rule but often results in political deadlock. Ethnic-based vetoes and entity autonomy slow down national policy-making. The Constitutional Court, international oversight, and EU pressure provide external checks.

4. Educational Approaches to Civic Engagement

Effective civic education extends beyond teaching political institutions—it must equip young people with practical civic skills such as communication, organization, critical thinking, and collective decision-making¹². Research shows that active, experience-based learning fosters greater youth engagement, particularly when students discuss real-world issues, participate in service-learning, and interact with civic role models¹³. Youth-Adult Partnerships (Y-AP)—where young people are actively involved in decision-making and supported by meaningful adult relationships—further enhance empowerment, agency, and community connections¹⁴.

Studies also indicate that civic education is most effective when it emphasizes youth-led initiatives, hands-on civic action, and critical engagement with social dilemmas, rather than focusing solely on formal institutions and theoretical knowledge.¹⁵ To achieve this, educators must integrate participatory and student-centered approaches that empower young people to see themselves as agents of change in their communities.

♦ Key principles for teaching civic engagement:

- ❖ **Consensus-Seeking & Democratic Decision-Making** → Encouraging collaborative problem-solving and respect for diverse opinions.
- ❖ **Bottom-Up Processes** → Allowing participants to shape discussions, identify key issues, and co-develop solutions.
- ❖ **Safe Spaces for Dialogue** → Creating an environment where students feel free to express ideas, question assumptions, and engage in meaningful debate.
- ❖ **Responsive & Real-World Learning** → Addressing current events in real-time and adapting discussions to students' lived experiences.
- ❖ **Objective Discussions** → Exploring political issues without promoting partisan views, fostering critical thinking rather than ideological alignment.

This toolkit provides a structured, evidence-based framework for transformative civic learning. The approaches presented here draw on proven methodologies and the expertise of the ASPYRE EUROPE consortium. By embracing these engaging, student-driven approaches, educators can equip young people with the skills, confidence, and motivation to actively participate in democratic life and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

¹² Kirlin, M. (2005) 'Understanding the Relationship between Civic Skills and Civic Participation: Educating Future Public Managers'. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, Vol.11 (4), pp. 305-314.

¹³ Kahne, J. E. & Sports, S. E. (2008). "Developing Citizens: The Impact of Civic Learning Opportunities on Students' Commitment to Civic Participation". *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 45 (3), pp. 738-766.

¹⁴ Krauss, Collura, Zeldin, Ortega, Abdullah, and Sulaiman (2013). 'Youth-adult partnership: Exploring contributions to empowerment, agency and community connections in Malaysian youth programs'. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Vol. 43 (9), pp. 1550–1562.

¹⁵ Pospeiszna, P. & Galus, A. (2018) 'Promoting active youth: evidence from Polish NGO's civic education programme in Eastern Europe'. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 23 (1), pp. 210-236.

4.1. Setting the Stage: Building Trust and Creating a Safe Space

Trust—among individuals and between citizens and institutions—is the cornerstone of democracy. For civic education to succeed, trust within the learning group is essential. When participants feel respected, valued, and safe to express their ideas, they are more likely to engage in meaningful discussions, think critically, and participate actively.

Facilitators play a key role in setting the tone for a culture of mutual respect, inclusivity, and open dialogue. They model trust-building behaviors by being transparent, approachable, and adaptable, creating an environment where participants feel empowered to share their perspectives.

♦ Guiding principles for educators:

- ✓ **Be open and transparent** → Share your background, motivations, and the purpose of the learning experience. Authenticity builds trust.
- ✓ **Acknowledge power dynamics** → As an educator, recognize your inherent authority and strive to balance it by using inclusive language and fostering open discussions.
- ✓ **Set clear boundaries** → Co-create rules of engagement with participants to ensure inclusivity and respect (*see example activity below*).
- ✓ **Embrace flexibility** → Adapt your agenda to respond to current events and participants' needs, making discussions relevant and engaging.
- ✓ **Foster reflection** → Use group activities as opportunities for debriefing and shared learning experiences.

 **Tip:** Icebreaker activities help establish an initial level of trust in newly formed groups. See **Chapter 6** for a selection of icebreaker activities.

♦ Example Activity: GROUP AGREEMENT

 **Objective:** Engage participants in bottom-up decision-making, empowering them to co-create rules for their shared learning space.

Instructions:

1. On a flipchart or blackboard, write the heading: "**We agree to...**"
2. Ask participants to **suggest group norms and rules** they believe will create a respectful and productive learning environment.

If needed, offer examples such as:

- ✓ Respect others' right to express themselves—even when we disagree.
- ✓ Listen actively and with curiosity.
- ✓ Acknowledge and empathize with different perspectives.
- ✓ Ask questions when something is unclear.
- ✓ Be honest and express viewpoints respectfully.

3. Once the group finalizes the list, **have each participant sign the agreement** as a symbolic commitment.
4. Take a **photo of the agreement** and revisit it in future sessions as needed.

 **Why This Matters:** By actively participating in defining the rules, participants take ownership of their learning environment, leading to greater trust, accountability, and group cohesion.

♦ Creating a Safe & Inclusive Space

A safe space is the foundation for meaningful dialogue, learning, and personal growth. It is an environment where participants feel respected, valued, and free to share their thoughts without fear of judgment, ridicule, or discrimination. To cultivate open communication and mutual respect, educators must intentionally build and reinforce this environment.

Key Elements of a Safe Space:

- ✓ **Mutual Respect** → Foster a culture where every voice is valued, and participants are encouraged to listen actively and with curiosity—even when they disagree.
- ✓ **Inclusivity** → Ensure diverse perspectives are welcomed and represented. Be mindful of barriers such as language, accessibility, cultural norms, or personality differences that may affect participation.
- ✓ **Confidentiality** → Set clear guidelines to protect participants' privacy, ensuring discussions remain within the group unless agreed otherwise.
- ✓ **Supportive Environment** → Address discriminatory or harmful language and behavior constructively, reinforcing the group's commitment to inclusivity and respect.

 **Key Takeaway:** By prioritizing trust, safety, and inclusivity, educators create the conditions for deep engagement, critical thinking, and meaningful dialogue—all essential for empowering young people in democracy and civic life.

4.2. Democratic Decision-Making: Practicing Democracy

Democratic decision-making is not just a theoretical concept—it is a practical skill that should be woven into the structure of civic education. By integrating real-life decision-making processes into learning experiences, educators give participants firsthand exposure to collaboration, deliberation, and shared responsibility. This approach models democracy in action, reinforcing the principles of participation, fairness, and accountability.

♦ Why Democratic Decision-Making Matters

In a civic education setting, democratic decision-making does more than teach about democracy—it embodies it. Integrating inclusive and participatory decision-making helps young people experience democracy rather than just study it.

- ✓ **Empowerment** → Participants see that their voices matter and that they can influence outcomes.
- ✓ **Critical Thinking** → Decisions must be reasoned, debated, and collaboratively refined.
- ✓ **Accountability** → The group takes ownership of decisions and their consequences, fostering responsibility and trust.

 **Key Idea:** The best way to learn democracy is to practice it—through active engagement in decision-making processes.

♦ Applying Democratic Decision-Making in Practice

One simple but powerful example of democratic decision-making in action is the Group Agreement Activity (*outlined above, Chapter 4.1*). By co-creating rules and expectations, participants experience collective decision-making firsthand, leading to greater buy-in and commitment. This process reinforces the role of the educator as a facilitator, guiding rather than imposing decisions.

However, democratic decision-making is not one-size-fits-all—different situations may require different approaches. Facilitators can introduce various decision-making methods based on the needs of the group:

Choosing the Right Method:

✓ **Consensus-Seeking** → Best for complex discussions that require depth, such as defining shared values or long-term strategies.

✓ **Majority Rule** → Useful for practical, operational decisions, such as choosing a meeting time or dividing responsibilities.

✓ **Deliberation & Debate** → Effective for weighing multiple perspectives, encouraging critical thinking and compromise.

✓ **Rotating Leadership** → Allows different participants to lead discussions and guide decisions, fostering collective ownership.

The table below highlights the differences, advantages and challenges with the two main methods of democratic decision-making: Consensus-Seeking vs. Majority Rule.

Method	Description	Advantages	Challenges
Consensus-Seeking	Consensus-seeking involves collaboration to find solutions acceptable to all participants. It reflects the ideals of equality and inclusivity but requires time, effort, and negotiation.	Fosters deeper understanding and group cohesion. Ensures all voices are considered, minimizing the risk of marginalization.	Can be time-consuming and logistically difficult. Risks stalling progress if no agreement is reached.
Majority Rule	Majority-based decision-making is quicker and simpler but risks alienating minority voices. It is most effective when used in tandem with open discussions that allow dissenting views to be heard and respected.	Efficient and practical in larger groups. Clear, actionable outcomes.	Minority voices may feel excluded. Overuse of this method can discourage collaboration and consensus-building.

Ultimately, the goal is not just to make decisions but to build a democratic culture where:

- ✓ Diverse voices are heard.
- ✓ Decisions are made transparently and fairly.
- ✓ Participants feel empowered to contribute and take responsibility.

 **Key Takeaway:** Democracy is not just about voting—it is about listening, debating, compromising, and taking responsibility for collective outcomes. By practicing inclusive decision-making, educators equip young people with the skills and mindset needed to actively engage in democratic life.

4.3. Bottom-Up Ideation and Development

For civic engagement to be meaningful and impactful, participants must have the freedom to identify, discuss, and prioritize issues that matter most to them. While educators play a key role in guiding the learning process, the topics and issues explored should emerge from the group itself. This bottom-up approach fosters relevance, ownership, and long-term motivation, ensuring that civic education is rooted in lived experiences and real concerns.

♦ How This Toolkit Supports Bottom-Up Engagement

The activities in this toolkit are designed to **empower young people** to define and shape their civic engagement journey:

✓ **Identifying Key Issues** → Helping participants reflect on their experiences and the challenges they observe in their communities (see [Activity 1: Youth Can Bring Change](#) and [Activity 2: Problem Identification](#)).

✓ **Developing Problem Statements** → Transforming broad concerns into clear, actionable problem statements (see [Activity 2: Problem Identification](#)).

✓ **Forming Collaborative Groups and Strategic Alliances** → Encouraging participants to connect with others who share their interests or concerns, strengthening their collective impact (see **Chapter 6: Activity 3 - Finding Your Allies**, [Activity 4 - Understanding and Leveraging Power](#), and [Activity 5 - Getting to Win-Win](#)).

 **Key Idea:** When participants shape the topics they engage with, their motivation and commitment increase, leading to sustained civic participation.

♦ The Power of Collaboration in Civic Action

Effective civic action is rarely achieved alone—it requires strategic, collective efforts by groups that represent shared concerns, ideas, and solutions.

Why Collaboration Matters:

✓ **Amplifies impact** → Groups working together can mobilize more people, resources, and influence.

✓ **Builds alliances across sectors** → Bringing together diverse voices strengthens legitimacy and reach.

✓ **Transforms individual concerns into systemic change** → What starts as a local issue can scale up when groups organize effectively.

 **Key Idea:** The ability to collaborate and form alliances is what transforms individual advocacy into real, sustainable change—whether at a school level, local community, or national policy level.

◆ Grounding Engagement in Lived Realities

For young people to stay engaged in civic action, their involvement must feel personal, relevant, and purposeful. If they can connect their advocacy to their lived experiences, they are far more likely to remain committed over time.

🧠 Addressing the “Why?” Behind Civic Action

- ✓ **Why does this issue matter to me?** → Linking civic participation to personal experiences and challenges.
- ✓ **Why should I invest my time and energy?** → Understanding how action leads to tangible change.
- ✓ **Why should we work together?** → Recognizing the power of collective efforts.

🗣️ **Key Idea:** Civic engagement must feel both urgent and achievable. When young people see a clear purpose in their efforts, they are more likely to sustain their participation and create meaningful change.

◆ Bottom-Up Engagement as a Path to Democratic Change

This bottom-up approach to civic engagement does more than equip young people with knowledge and skills—it empowers them to take ownership of democratic change. By ensuring that youth:

- ✓ **Define** the issues they care about
- ✓ **Collaborate** with like-minded peers
- ✓ **Connect** their activism to their real-world experiences

They become active participants in democracy, prepared to challenge injustices, advocate for change, and shape the future.

4.4. Addressing current events in real-time

Civic education is most impactful when it is relevant to the realities participants are experiencing. Addressing current events allows educators to connect democratic principles to lived experiences, providing practical examples of how democracy functions (or fails) in society. To achieve this, educators must remain flexible, responsive, and attuned to the needs and interests of their group.

♦ Why Addressing Current Events Matters

- ✓ **Relevance** → Connecting discussions to real-world events helps participants see how democratic principles apply to their daily lives.
- ✓ **Engagement** → Current events are often topics participants are already curious or passionate about, making them natural entry points for dialogue.
- ✓ **Critical Thinking** → Analyzing ongoing events helps participants explore multiple perspectives, question assumptions, and evaluate sources of information.
- ✓ **Empowerment** → Understanding current events encourages civic action, helping participants see themselves as agents of change in their communities.

 **Key Idea:** Civic education is most effective when it is alive, evolving, and responsive to the issues shaping participants' worldviews.

♦ Strategies for Addressing Current Events

 **Stay Informed** → Educators should be aware of local, national, and global developments that may resonate with the group. The focus should be on facilitating discussions and helping the participants reflect, not acting as an expert analyst, giving all the answers.

 **Adapt Flexibly** → Be prepared to adjust lesson plans to address emerging issues that participants find important.

 **Use Open-Ended Questions** → Encourage critical thinking by prompting participants with questions like:

- What do you think caused this event?
- Who is involved, and who is affected?
- How does this issue impact your community?
- What democratic principles are at play (or being violated)?
- What solutions or responses might be possible?

 **Focus on Process Over Content** → Instead of centering discussions on who is "right" or "wrong," emphasize the democratic processes involved—how decisions are made, who holds power, and how citizens can participate.

 **Connect to Core Democratic Principles** → Frame discussions around values like human rights, equality, sustainability, and justice, helping participants understand how these principles are reinforced or threatened in real-life situations. (For reference, see **Chapter 2.10: Core Democratic Values**.)

◆ **Adapting to the concerns and interests of the group**

✓ **Be Attentive** → Listen to participants' discussions and concerns; their curiosity should shape the focus of the discussion.

✓ **Create space for emotional responses** → Recognize that current events can evoke strong emotions. Acknowledge these reactions while maintaining constructive and respectful dialogue.

✓ **Encourage civic action** → When appropriate, guide participants toward meaningful responses, such as community projects, advocacy efforts, or raising awareness.

 **Key Idea:** Civic education should not only explain democracy—it should inspire participants to engage with it in real-time.

◆ **Example in Practice: Responsive Civic Education**

Scenario: A major election, social movement, or crisis occurs before or during a session.

How to Respond:

-  Pause your planned program to discuss the event.
-  Encourage participants to share their perspectives and analyze different viewpoints.
-  Use Chapter 2's list of core democratic values to guide discussion:
 - How does this event reinforce or challenge democratic values?
 - What roles do institutions, the media, and citizens play in shaping the outcome?
 - What civic actions can individuals or groups take in response?

This **flexible, real-time approach** ensures that civic education remains relevant, engaging, and empowering, helping participants connect democratic principles to the realities of their world.

 **In summary:** By addressing current events in real-time, educators make civic education dynamic and deeply meaningful, equipping young people to think critically and take responsible action in an ever-changing society.

4.5. Discussing Politics Without Promoting a Political Agenda

While complete neutrality is impossible, the role of the educator is not to promote personal political opinions or ideology. Instead, the focus should be on empowering participants to develop their own informed perspectives. Civic education should equip young people with the tools to ask thoughtful questions, engage in critical thinking, and form independent conclusions—rather than guiding them toward a specific viewpoint.

♦ Maintaining Awareness of Power Dynamics

As an educator, you hold an inherent position of authority that can subtly influence participants' perspectives. It is crucial to approach this role with self-awareness and sensitivity.

What You Should Do:

- ✓ **Express commitment to universal democratic principles**—such as human rights, equality, and the rule of law—while avoiding partisan perspectives.
- ✓ **Encourage analysis and discussion** rather than steering conversations toward a specific opinion.
- ✓ **Facilitate reflection rather than instructing conclusions**—your role is to guide, not dictate.

 **Key Idea:** Civic education should focus on exploring participants' ideas, encouraging debate, and developing critical thinking skills—not reinforcing the educator's personal views.

♦ Turning Questions Back to the Group

Participants may ask for your opinions on current events, political figures, or controversial issues. While it might be tempting to answer directly, doing so can inadvertently alienate certain participants or reinforce personal biases. Instead, use these moments as opportunities to enhance critical thinking and dialogue.

Redirect questions with prompts like:

- ✓ “What do you think about this issue?”
- ✓ “Why do you ask this question?”
- ✓ “Where did you read, watch, or hear about it?”
- ✓ “Do you think the source is reliable? Why or why not?”

These **open-ended questions** encourage participants to analyze information, reflect on their own perspectives, and engage with different viewpoints. By shifting the focus from your opinion to participants' reflections, you create space for meaningful dialogue without imposing personal biases.

♦ Working with External Speakers

When inviting guest speakers, such as policymakers, experts, or educators, it is important to consider their political views and potential biases.

Best Practices:

- ✓ **Ensure balanced representation** by inviting speakers from diverse backgrounds.
- ✓ **If only one speaker is present**, ask them to focus on their experiences, values, and expertise—rather than promoting a specific political agenda.
- ✓ **Encourage participants to ask critical questions**, reinforcing their role as engaged citizens.

 **Key Idea:** The presence of external voices should enhance democratic learning rather than push a single perspective.

♦ Fostering Information Literacy & Critical Thinking

Civic education should not just present facts—it should train participants to evaluate information critically. Encourage participants to assess the credibility of news, social media, and other sources.

Guiding Questions for Critical Media & Information Literacy:

- ☐ **Where did you find this information?** Is it from a reputable news outlet, a social media post, or an unknown website?
- ☐ **Does the information seem reasonable and fact-based?** Does it align with known facts, or does it contain exaggerations, speculation, or possible misinformation?
- ☐ **Is the content designed to provoke a strong emotional reaction?** If it feels shocking, disturbing, or outrage-inducing, it's crucial to fact-check before believing or sharing.
- ☐ **Can we trust the source?** Why or why not? Who owns or funds the platform, and does it have a history of reliable reporting?
- ☐ **Who created this content, and what might their agenda be?** Is there potential bias? Is the author affiliated with a particular political, corporate, or ideological group?
- ☐ **How can we verify this information?** Can the same claims be found in multiple independent sources? Are there reliable fact-checking tools available?
- ☐ **What other perspectives or sources could we explore?** Does the information reflect a single viewpoint, or have multiple perspectives been considered? Are there alternative sources providing different angles?

Rule of thumb: Always question, cross-check, and verify before accepting or sharing information. Critical thinking is the best defense against misinformation and manipulation.

 **Key Idea:** By integrating media literacy and source evaluation into civic education, participants learn to navigate information responsibly in a digital world.

♦ Avoiding Common Pitfalls

As an educator, sharing your personal opinions—even unintentionally—can:

- ✗ **Alienate participants** → Certain views may make individuals feel excluded or undervalued.
- ✗ **Erode trust** → Perceived bias can undermine your credibility as a facilitator.
- ✗ **Limit participants' critical thinking** → They may rely on your views rather than developing their own.

 **Key Idea:** A civic educator's role is to guide, question, and empower—not to prescribe opinions.

4.6. Conclusions and Key Take-Aways

This chapter has outlined core principles and best practices for civic education, emphasizing the importance of creating safe spaces for open dialogue and the free exchange of ideas, making civic education relevant by addressing current events and adapting to participants' interests, and practicing democratic decision-making to ensure a bottom-up learning approach.

♦ Key Takeaways for Educators

- ✓ **Model Democratic Values** → Act as a facilitator, not an instructor, encouraging critical thinking and open debate.
- ✓ **Encourage Ownership** → Let participants define the issues that matter most to them.
- ✓ **Promote Collaboration** → Emphasize the importance of collective action to achieve meaningful change.
- ✓ **Strengthen Information Literacy** → Equip participants to analyze news, sources, and political narratives critically.
- ✓ **Maintain Neutrality** → Avoid promoting personal political views, ensuring trust and inclusivity.

Activities like co-creating group agreements reinforces shared responsibility and democratic engagement. Reflecting on the practical implications of democratic values through real-world events strengthens democratic understanding and engagement.

Democracy is not static—it is shaped by active, engaged citizens. The goal of civic education is not just to inform, but to inspire—equipping and empowering young people to:

- ✓ Think critically about democratic systems and processes.
- ✓ Engage constructively with different perspectives.
- ✓ Take meaningful action to improve their communities.

 **Key Takeaway:** By fostering a culture of trust and mutual respect, encouraging reflection and critical thinking, and prioritizing relevance, educators create transformative learning experiences that equip participants to actively contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic society.

5. Inspiring youth initiatives in Romania, Italy and Bosnia and Herzegovina

This chapter showcases inspiring stories of successful youth-led initiatives, demonstrating how young people can drive meaningful, systemic, and lasting change within their communities. These examples highlight the potential of youth as powerful changemakers, using available democratic channels to influence policies, advocate for social issues, and mobilize others around shared goals. By exploring these stories, readers can gain insights into practical strategies for community engagement, understand the impact young people can achieve, and feel empowered to take similar steps in their own contexts.

5.1. A Skatepark in Câmpia Turzii – Our Story

A few years ago, back in 2019, skateboarding was *the* thing among kids in our town. It had become this international trend — cool, energetic, and exciting — and naturally, everyone wanted to try it. We were no different. The streets of **Câmpia Turzii**, our small rural town, were filled with young people learning tricks, sharing skateboards, and imagining ourselves in competitions we saw online.

But we had a big problem: **there was no place for us to skate.**

We would practice on sidewalks, in parks, or on the streets — wherever we could find space. But the newly formed local police, wanting to prove themselves, didn't like that. They would come, scold us, even fine some of the kids for skating in public areas. It started to feel like we weren't welcome in our own town just for doing something we loved. So one day, we decided to **do something about it.**

Together with a big group of children and youth — some of us still in primary school, others teenagers — we **organized ourselves.** We talked about what we wanted: not just to be left alone, but to have a proper **skatepark**, a place built for us and for others in town who might want to try the sport. We knew we had to make our voices heard, so we planned to go directly to the **city hall.**

When the day came, we gathered in front of the building, holding signs and standing in a long line facing the entrance. Some of us were nervous. Others were determined. We had practiced what we wanted to say. We made sure we weren't shouting or protesting — instead, we wanted to **start a conversation.**

Eventually, the mayor came out to see what was going on. At first, he seemed surprised. Maybe even a little unsure of what to make of all these kids outside his office. But we had prepared. One of the older teens stepped forward — someone who was confident speaking in public — and explained our idea. He told the mayor how important skateboarding had become for us, how it kept us active and focused, how it gave us a sense of identity. Another girl spoke up and mentioned how often we were punished for wanting to do something that shouldn't be a crime — just for playing and moving our bodies.

We were polite, but firm. We told him we didn't want to break rules — we wanted **a solution**. Something real. We even offered to help come up with a design for the park and said we'd be willing to fundraise or help clean the space if needed. To our surprise, the Mayor listened to us, and even asked a few questions. And then, to our amazement, he said something like: **"Let's see what we can do."** We left that day feeling **empowered**.

About a year later, a **beautiful skatepark** was built in our town. Right next to it, a **basketball court** was added too, both open to everyone in the community. Now, every day, you can see people of all ages there — skating, playing, relaxing, trying new tricks, and spending time together.

So if there's one thing we learned, it's this: **don't hesitate to dream**, and don't be afraid to speak up — especially when your idea could help others too. Every opinion matters. And no matter your age, your ethnicity, or where you come from, your voice counts. When you find the courage to use it, you'll often discover that others feel the same. And together — we can make things happen.



Image from a news article from Transilvania Business: "Câmpia Turzii va avea un complex sportiv cu skate park", by Nora Dumitrescu¹⁶.

¹⁶ <https://www.transilvaniabusiness.ro/2020/09/16/campia-turzii-va-avea-un-complex-sportiv-cu-skate-park/>

5.2. Spazio 126: From a Collective of Friends to a Youth-Led Association in Genoa

After the first wave of COVID-19 and the easing of restrictions, we began discussing the need to combat social isolation and create vibrant youth communities that could offer social initiatives. As a group of friends, we met more frequently, brainstorming ways to create something meaningful for young people in suburban neighbourhoods—a space where we could engage with and experience our local area. The solution was clear: we would establish our own association, a place for people to meet, a hub for change, and a source of social renewal in the community.

What began as informal discussions soon transformed into Space 126, our association, and we started presenting initiatives to the public. Each activity we've organized over the years has played a crucial role in establishing our presence in the area. Through this time, we've built new partnerships and connections with like-minded organizations, expanding and enriching the network of relationships in the neighbourhood and the city.

This journey has also led to the revitalization of abandoned spaces at the Lagaccio Multipurpose Center, where we've now firmly established ourselves. This redevelopment project not only brought these spaces back into public use but also created a welcoming, horizontally managed social hub for the community.

Of course, bureaucracy remains the biggest challenge for grassroots organizations like ours. The administrative demands required to maintain an association and run initiatives pose significant obstacles, both in terms of difficulty and the financial burden they entail. Our political stance is independent of any party or majority interests, prioritizing solidarity and collective participation.

However, without Space 126, our area would lack a self-managed, youth-driven initiative that creates social impact. If this effort were to be interrupted, many young people would be left without spaces for connection, further exacerbating the social isolation that modern society often fosters.

NASSA: Ideas, festivals and politics in our city.

In 2021, we began discussing the idea of creating an association. We often gathered as friends to talk about what was lacking in our city and what wasn't working. After a while, we decided it was time to stop complaining and start making a change. Since then, there have been three key moments when we felt we had truly contributed to the community.

The first was the Work Café, which was a significant event. Many people participated, and it gave us the initial momentum to keep believing in the project we were bringing to life.

The second moment was the "Sextival." This festival focused on gender, sexuality, and important topics that often go undiscussed, such as sex education. In 2024, we organized a discussion day with the candidates in our city. It was the first time such an event had taken place in our city. Many people spoke, and many voters attended, making it a meaningful and impactful moment (we spent three days crying tears of joy after the event)

Continuing our work is not easy. One of our biggest challenges is ensuring a generational turnover and involving more young people. We want to help them understand that becoming active means taking responsibility. Many young people don't know what a nonprofit is—they don't realize it's not a job, nor is it simply volunteering. It's about coming together for a greater purpose: contributing to the community's well-being.

Without our efforts, our area would feel less tailored to our needs. Nassa, for example, is a simple place where we can meet on Fridays, share meals, play games, have fun, and exchange ideas in a safe environment. It's a space created for us, young people, offering an alternative to just meeting at bars or hanging out on the street.

5.3. Jajce Teens Halt School Segregation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In July 2016, a courageous group of high school students from Jajce, Bosnia and Herzegovina, stood up against an attempt to further segregate schools in their town under the divisive “Two Schools Under One Roof” system. Despite facing skepticism, fear, and indifference from their community, these youth activists successfully overturned the government’s decision and inspired a nationwide conversation about ethnic divisions in education.



Image from the film “Two Schools” by Srđan Šarenac depicting an ethnically segregated high school in the Bosnian town of Travnik¹⁷.

The “Two Schools Under One Roof” system was introduced in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) as a post-war measure to protect the cultural and linguistic rights of returnees. However, over two decades later, this system continues to perpetuate ethnic segregation and discrimination, fostering division rather than unity. In Jajce, the cantonal authorities proposed creating a new segregated school, which would separate students based on ethnicity and curriculum. Recognizing this as a harmful step backward, the students organized protests, holding banners with powerful messages such as “Are we really doing this in the 21st century?” and “It can be done together after all.”

¹⁷ Kadic, Neira (Feb 28, 2019), Balkan Diskurs:

<https://balkandiskurs.com/en/2019/02/28/youth-heroes-jajce-teens-halt-further-segregation-in-schools/>

Fear and apathy initially characterized the community's response to their protests. While some encouraged their efforts, tangible support was scarce. "We did have some support," explained Ivica, one of the lead activists, "but when it came to strategic help, everyone remained silent." Undeterred, the students persisted. They sought guidance from organizations like the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which helped them plan public debates and develop their advocacy skills.

The activists proposed a compromise: students of different ethnic backgrounds would attend classes together, except for "national" subjects like language, religion, and history. Although not an ideal solution, this approach avoided full segregation while preserving cultural and linguistic differences. The students also highlighted the authorities' misplaced priorities, pointing out that resources spent on segregation could instead address urgent needs like improving school infrastructure.

In a significant victory, the cantonal government reversed its decision to create a new segregated school. As of the 2018-2019 school year, Jajce's students continued to study together for most subjects, while national subjects were taught separately. This compromise represented a step toward unity in a deeply divided educational system. "These schools are ours," said Ivica, "and we have the full right to reject segregation."

The Jajce youth's activism has earned national and international recognition, inspiring other communities across Bosnia and Herzegovina to question divisive practices in education. Their story demonstrates the power of youth-led civic activism in addressing systemic issues and advancing reconciliation in post-conflict societies. Today, these young leaders remind the region that change is possible when voices are raised, persistence is shown, and unity is prioritized over division.

6. Workshop Activities – A Hands-On Approach

This section provides detailed instructions and facilitation guidelines for a set of engaging, adaptable educational activities designed for both formal and non-formal learning environments. These activities draw on the expertise and experiences of the consortium partners, as well as freely available civic education resources.

Rather than serving as an exhaustive curriculum, this toolkit offers a structured yet flexible sequence of activities—each building upon the previous one—to help participants develop key civic competencies, such as critical thinking, dialogue, decision-making, negotiation, and advocacy. By actively engaging in these workshops, participants **move beyond theory and experience democracy in action**—equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to become informed, engaged, and active citizens in their communities and beyond.

Overview of activities:

#	Activity name	Duration	Page numbers
1	Youth as Changemakers (link)	40-50 min	52-53
2	Problem identification (link) Part 1: Preliminary Problem Identification Part 2: the Problem under the Problem <i>Alternative: Problem Identification World Cafe</i>	90-120 min 40-55 min 45 min 90 min	54-56
3	Finding your allies (link) Part 1: Values Part 2: Spectrum of Allies	90 min 25-30 min 40 min	57-59
4	Understanding and leveraging power (link) Part 1: Systems Game Part 2: Pillars of Power	90 min 30 min 55 min	60-62
5	Getting to Win-Win (link) Part 1: Red vs Blue Part 2: Steps to Win-Win	90 min 40 min 40 min	63-64
6	Communication Strategy (link) Part 1: Telephone Pictionary Part 2: Elevator Pitch	90-120 min 30-40 min 60-80 min	65-67
7	Change Facilitation (link) Part 1: 8 Steps Change Part 2: Action Mapping	90-180 min 40 min 40 min	68-70

6.1. Youth as Changemakers

Aim: (1) to create an environment where young people feel ready to share their perspectives on youth engagement and the possibility of change; (2) to develop a deeper understanding among participants about the potential impact of youth-led initiatives.

 **Duration:** 40-50 minutes

 **Workshop Materials:**

- ☐ Projector / Laptop
- ☐ Case story of [successful youth-led change in Jajce](#) (or other relevant story, see Chapter 5).

Pre-Workshop:

- Prepare the room, ensuring an appropriate number of chairs for the inner and outer circles in the [fishbowl format](#)
- Choose a case story (Chapter 3) tailored to the workshop's focus, highlighting the actions young people took and how they achieved change.

(10 min) **Energizer:** [“Stand Up If...”](#)

Fishbowl Activity - Youth Power to Create Change

 **Duration:** 30-40 minutes

♦ **Step 1: Setting the Stage** (Preparation & Setup – 5 min)

- **Introduction:** Display an image of a [Fishbowl discussion setup](#). Briefly explain the concept: In a Fishbowl discussion, some participants speak while others actively listen. This format encourages deeper dialogue and thoughtful participation.
- **Distribute the Case Story:** Hand out the case story and give participants 10 minutes to read it. Explain that this story serves as a springboard for discussing how young people can create change.
- **Arrange the Room:** With the group's help, set up the **Fishbowl format**:
 - Inner Circle (Speakers): Those actively discussing.
 - Outer Circle (Listeners): Observing, listening, and reflecting.
 - One Open Chair: Allows participants to join the discussion when ready.

♦ **Step 2: Explaining the Rules & Participation Guidelines** (5 min)

- **Explain the fishbowl rules:** Participants in the outer circle will listen, while only those in the inner circle will speak. Leave one seat open in the inner circle to allow participants from the outer circle to join the discussion if they wish. The discussion flows naturally, with no interruptions or raised hands.
- **How to Participate:**
 - If you are in the outer circle and want to contribute:
 - Sit in the open chair to join the inner discussion.
 - Stand behind a participant to signal that you'd like to take their place.
 - After speaking, be mindful of rotating out so others can participate.
 - If you are asked to step out, do so graciously and continue engaging as an active listener.
-  **Facilitator's Tip:** Encourage participants to step outside their comfort zones, but respect personal choice—some may prefer to listen. Reinforce respectful dialogue: Listen actively, build on others' points, and engage in constructive discussion.

♦ **Step 3: Leading the Discussion** (20-30 min)

- Open with a general reflection on the case story: *"What stood out to you in the story? Did it remind you of any real-life situations?"*
- Gradually shift focus to participants' own experiences, ideas, and perspectives on how youth can make an impact. Use open-ended prompts to deepen the conversation:
 - "Can you share an example of youth-led change in your community?"
 - "What challenges do young people face when trying to create change?"
 - "What are small, realistic actions youth can take today?"
 - "If you had unlimited resources, what issue would you tackle first?"
- Observe group dynamics and gently prompt quieter participants to join the conversation. Keep the discussion focused but flexible, allowing for organic exploration of ideas.

♦ **Step 4: Conclusion & Reflection** (10 min)

Thank participants for their contributions and ideas. Invite them to reflect on how they felt during the fishbowl and any insights they'll carry forward. Summarize key highlights from the discussion and, if possible, revisit the case story along with additional examples. Emphasize that change can start small and grow with time, effort, and courage.

6.2. Problem identification

Aim: To help participants identify what they care about and clear actionable changes that they can work towards.

 **Duration:** 90-120 min

Workshop Materials:

- ☐ Google Sheets presentation and projector AND/OR Fishbone Diagrams for Root Cause Analysis
- ☐ Group work materials - markers and pens
- ☐ **(Option 1)** Sticky notes, flip chart or butcher paper, and tape (to attach sheets of paper to walls)
- ☐ **(Option 2)** World Cafe materials
- ☐ [Fishbone Diagram handout](#)

Workshop Flow:

- 1 Energizer – Group Juggling (Optional, 10 min)
- 2 Part 1: Preliminary Problem Identification (40-55 min)
- 3 Part 2: the Problem under the Problem (45 min)
- 4 *Alternative Activity: Problem Identification World Café (90 min)*

(10 minutes) **Energizer:** [Group Juggling](#)

♦ Part 1: Preliminary Problem Identification

 **Duration:** 40-55 minutes

Group Work: [Affinity Mapping Workshop](#) - Using sticky notes participants collaboratively identify and categorize challenges they are passionate about addressing, laying the foundation for root cause analysis and the development of campaign strategy.

♦ Part 2: the Problem under the Problem

 **Duration:** 45 minutes

♦ Step 1: Introduction and Framing (10 minutes) - [Facilitator notes](#)

- (Optional) Show a short “reveal” movie clip or use a real-life example to illustrate how surface-level problems often mask deeper issues.
- **Why Root Cause Analysis matters:**
 - Clarifies the challenge – Making abstract concerns concrete & specific.
 - Identifies effective interventions – Finding real, actionable changes instead of temporary fixes.
 - Prevents recurring problems – Solving surface-level issues doesn’t lead to sustainable change.
- **Methodologies:** “Problem under the Problem,” Fishbone Diagram, 80/20 Rule

♦ Step 2: Group Application (30 min)

- Reassemble participants into small groups from previous activities. Ask each group to choose one problem from earlier discussions to analyze.
- Use the [Fishbone Diagram](#) to discuss a preliminary problem identified during the group work and work to identify root causes upon which groups can plan interventions for actionable change.
 - **Step 1:** Hand out [Fishbone Diagram](#) templates and have groups define the problem clearly (write it at the “head” of the diagram); identify major categories of causes (e.g., People, Systems, Policies, Resources, Environment); and brainstorm specific contributing factors within each category.
 - **Step 2: Apply the 5 Whys Technique:** Groups select one key cause from their Fishbone Diagram; ask “Why?” at least five times to dig deeper; and write down responses until a fundamental issue emerges.
 - **Step 3: Prioritize Using the 80/20 Rule:** Identify the “vital few” causes that drive the majority of the problem’s effects. Discuss: *“If we could only solve one or two key root causes, which would have the biggest impact?”*

 **Facilitator’s Role:** Encourage critical thinking & discussion—don’t let groups settle for surface-level answers. Remind the participants that problems often have multiple root causes. The goal is not just identifying problems, but finding solutions.

♦ Step 3: Conclusion & Next Steps (5 min, optional)

Forming Youth Advocacy Groups (YAGs): Participants reflect & discuss which YAG they would like to join. Encourage groups to: Exchange contact information, set up communication channels (WhatsApp, email, group chat), and identify next steps for action (follow-up meetings, research, outreach).

Alternative Activity: Problem Identification World Cafe

 **Duration:** 90 minutes

Instructions: [Problem Identification World Cafe](#)

Objective: To explore community challenges, identify root causes, and develop actionable insights through rotating small-group discussions in an engaging, café-style setting.

Problem Identification World Café is a dynamic, interactive discussion format where participants explore key challenges in their communities through rotating small-group conversations. Seated at themed tables (e.g., Health, Education, Environment), participants discuss issues, identify root causes, and capture insights. Through multiple rounds of dialogue, they exchange ideas, uncover patterns, and prioritize actionable problems, fostering a collaborative and engaging problem-solving experience.

6.3. Finding your allies

Aim: To empower participants to identify and engage potential allies in their cause by reflecting on core values and strategizing how to move individuals and groups one step closer to active support.

 **Duration:** 90 min

Workshop Materials:

- ☐ PowerPoint presentation & projector (for visuals)
- ☐ Markers & whiteboard/flipchart
- ☐ Paper & pens (for [Values](#) exercises) OR Value Cards (for [Bargaining Values](#) activity)
- ☐ Spectrum of Allies handout (for group work)
- ☐ Workshop handout (for summary and reflection)

Workshop Flow:

- 1 Energizer – 5 Squares (Optional, 25 min)
- 2 Part 1: Values (25 min)
- 3 Part 2: Spectrum of Allies (40 min)

(25 minutes) **Energizer:** [5 Squares](#) (optional)

♦ Part 1: Values (25-30 min)

Step 1: Introduction to Values (5 min)

Define values and share about their characteristics (see [Values Intro](#)). For this workshop, values are helpful because they guide people's decisions and serve as a framework for what is important, which is helpful to identify potential allies.

 **Facilitator Explains:** Values are personal principles that guide our choices. When engaging allies, aligning with shared values can help bridge differences. Rather than focusing on labels (e.g., political identity), focus on values that drive people's actions.

 **Facilitator Tip:** Give 2-3 concrete examples of how values influence actions (e.g., "If someone values fairness, they may support anti-corruption efforts").

☀️ Step 2: Experience & Reflection (20 min)

✅ Option 1: [Six Values Exercise](#)

- Participants write down 6 values that matter most to them.
- One by one, they must eliminate a value until only one remains.

✅ Option 2: [Bargaining Values](#)

- Participants receive a set of value cards and must trade with others to obtain their top 3 values.
- Forces participants to negotiate and prioritize what they truly care about.

💬 Discussion Questions:

- What value matters most to you? (There is no wrong answer!)
- What was it like to be forced to prioritize your values?
- Did you struggle to choose between values? Why?
- What is an example when you have seen values conflict with one another?
- How might shared values help build connections with allies?

🗣️ **Facilitator Tip:** Emphasize that values are the foundation for messaging and mobilization.

♦ Part 2: Spectrum of Allies (40 min)

☀️ Step 1: Understanding the Spectrum of Allies (10 min)

📌 **Key Message:** Allyship is not binary—people exist on a spectrum of support, from active allies to active opposition. The goal is to move individuals/groups one step closer to active support.

💡 **Facilitator Explains:** We often think in terms of ‘us vs. them,’ but most people are somewhere in between. Instead of convincing direct opposition, focus on activating those who are neutral or passive supporters.

- Build allies around core values rather than oppositional language (politics, ethnicity)
- Analyze your “Spectrum of Allies”—see [Spectrum of Allies handout](#)
- Determine potential allies and opposition related to your project/goals

🗣️ **Facilitator Tip:** Use a real-world example (e.g., climate action: passive allies recycle, active allies organize cleanups, neutral parties need awareness, passive opposition dislikes inconvenience, active opposition spreads disinformation).

☀️ Step 2: Mapping Allies & Opposition (20 min)

1. Divide participants into small groups (5-8 people), each group selecting a specific challenge they care about (see [Activity 2: Problem Identification](#)).
2. Using the [Spectrum of Allies handout](#), groups:
 - Identify individuals or groups who fit into each category.
 - Determine core values that might activate allies and pacify opposition related to the issue addressed by the small group.
 - Strategize how to move people one step closer to active support.

 **Facilitator Tip:** If groups struggle, prompt them to think about schools, organizations, influencers, or community leaders. Encourage strategic thinking (e.g., How might you engage neutral parties? What message would resonate with passive allies?).

☀️ Step 3: Closing Circle & Reflection (10 min)

Each group shares ONE key insight from their discussion. Facilitate a short reflection:

- What surprised you about the ally mapping?
- What strategies could help shift neutral or passive allies to active supporters?
- How will you use values to engage people in your cause?

 **Final Message:** Building alliances is about finding common ground. Instead of trying to 'convert' opposition, focus on activating those closest to your cause.

6.4. Understanding and leveraging power

Aim: To help participants analyze power dynamics, identify key power holders among allies and opposition, and develop strategies to leverage power effectively in their efforts for social change.

 **Duration:** 90 min

Workshop Materials:

- ☐ Google Sheets presentation & projector (for visuals)
- ☐ [Pillars of Power](#) handout (for group reflection)
- ☐ Flip chart paper & markers (for group work)

Workshop Flow:

- 1] Part 1: Systems Game (30 min)
- 2] Part 2: Pillars of Power – Generalization & Application (55 min)

♦ Part 1: Systems Game (30 min)

Pre-Workshop:

- ☒ Choose a large space (classroom, outdoor area, or open hall).
- ☒ Prepare a flipchart to capture reflections after the exercise.

Objectives:

- To illustrate how power operates within complex, adaptive systems.
- To explore cause-and-effect relationships in power structures.
- To demonstrate the unpredictability of interventions in dynamic systems.
- To highlight that no one has a complete picture of how a system works.

Instructions: [Systems Game](#)

1. Form a large circle. Each participant will represent a "stakeholder" in a system.
2. Secret Connections: Each participant silently picks two other people in the circle to "follow" (without revealing who).
3. Movement Begins: When the facilitator gives the signal, everyone tries to maintain equal distance from their two chosen individuals. As people move, the system self-adjusts unpredictably, causing chain reactions.
4. Introduce or Removing stakeholders: The facilitator removes or freezes people (simulating a stakeholder leaving or entering a system).

 Debrief Discussion (Flipchart Notes):

- What happened when you tried to maintain your position?
- What did you notice about cause and effect?
- Who seemed to influence the system the most? Why?
- What does this tell us about power dynamics in society?

 **Facilitator Tip:** Relate the activity to power in advocacy, politics, and social movements—power does not move in isolation and is often unpredictable when challenged.

 Key Learning:

1. Power operates in complex, interconnected ways.
2. Small changes can trigger large, unexpected shifts.
3. Understanding power holders, relationships, and influence is key to leveraging change effectively.

 Part 2: Pillars of Power – Generalization & Application (55 min) **Step 1: Understanding & Leveraging Power (15 min)**

 **Key Message:** Power is not just held by people in authority—it is built through different forms. To strategize effectively, we must identify where power lies and how to use it to drive change; leveraging **allied power** and minimising **opposition power**.

 Instructions:

- Facilitator notes: [Pillars of Power](#)
- Handout: [Understanding & Leveraging Power](#)

Five Pillars of Power:

1. **Resource Power** – Money, infrastructure, tools, access to technology.
2. **Legitimacy Power** – Public trust, credibility, perceived right to lead.
3. **Expertise Power** – Knowledge, technical skills, specialization.
4. **Relationship Power** – Networks, alliances, and social capital.
5. **Moral Power** – Ethical authority, moral responsibility, justice-driven influence.

☀️ Step 2: Power Mapping & Strategic Storytelling (30 min)

🎯 **Objective:** To identify key stakeholders (allies & opposition), analyze where power is held, and develop strategic messages to shift power dynamics.

✏️ **Instructions:** (see Facilitator Notes - [Pillars of Power](#))

1. Divide participants into small groups (4-8 people).
2. Each group chooses a social issue to address (See [Activity 2: Problem Identification](#))
3. Power Mapping:
 - Identify key stakeholders: allies, neutral parties, and opposition.
 - Map them on the Spectrum of Allies (see [handout](#)).
 - Determine which pillar of power they hold (see [handout](#)).
4. Strategic Storytelling: Identify values and narratives that can activate allies and neutralize opposition. Ask: "What framing would make an opponent reconsider their stance?" Develop one persuasive message based on values (not political labels).
5. Practice Presenting Stories: Each group practices sharing their narrative as if convincing a key stakeholder. Groups offer feedback on effectiveness and clarity.

☀️ Step 3: Closing Circle & Reflection (10 min)

Each group shares one key insight from their discussion. Facilitate a short reflection:

- What surprised you about power mapping?
- What was challenging about identifying allies vs. opposition?
- How will you apply power dynamics in real advocacy work?

Distribute the [Workshop Handout](#) with key takeaways & further reflection prompts.

By the end of this session, participants will:

- ✓ Recognize how power operates in systems.
- ✓ Understand different types of power & how to leverage them.
- ✓ Strategize effectively to shift power dynamics in their movements.

6.5. Getting to Win-Win

Aim: To introduce the idea of win-win solutions and to recognize that in real life the competition doesn't stop; durable win-win solutions can only be established by engaging in the hard work of long-term collaboration.

 **Duration:** 90 min

Workshop Materials:

- ☐ PowerPoint presentation & projector (for visuals)
- ☐ Markers (black, red, blue, and green)
- ☐ Whiteboard or flipchart (for group notes)
- ☐ [Red-Blue game instructions](#) (for teams), [Scoring sheets](#) (for facilitator tracking)
- ☐ 10 blank pieces of paper per group
- ☐ Facilitation notes: [Steps Towards Win-Win Solutions](#)
- ☐ [Workshop Handout](#)

Pre-Workshop Preparation:

- Print [points charts](#) (one per group) and [scoring charts](#) (one for facilitator).
- Prepare small blank pieces of paper (10 per group).

Workshop Flow:

- 1 Energizer & Session Introduction (10 min) *(Optional)*
- 2 Part 1: Red vs. Blue Game & Debrief (40 min)
- 3 Part 2: Steps to Win-Win Solutions (40 min)

(10 minutes) **Energizer:** [Connect the Dots](#) *(Optional)*

♦ Part 1: Red vs. Blue Game (40 min)

 **Objective:** To simulate competition vs. cooperation dynamics and allow participants to experience how trust can be built or broken in a negotiation setting.

Instructions - [Facilitation Notes](#)

1. Divide participants into teams. Each team will receive a [Player Instruction Sheet](#) explaining their role and objectives.
2. Teams will compete for points by choosing between "Red" or "Blue" in each round. Their decisions affect both their own team and the opposing team.
3. The facilitator tracks and announces scores ([Scoring Chart](#)), creating tension and showing how decisions impact trust and strategy.

Debrief Discussion (10 min)

1. What happened? From the beginning: When was trust broken? What decisions were made by one team or another and how did that impact the other team?
 2. If trust began to regrow, when and how did that happen?
 3. What was this game like for the negotiators? Did you trust each other? Did your group trust you?
 4. How is this game similar to or different from arguments or conflicts in your life?
-

◆ Part 2: Steps to Win-Win Solutions (40 min)

☀ Step 1: Understanding Negotiation & Trust-Building (10 min)

1. **Introduce [Going Underground](#)**—when win-win is not achieved, people may seek revenge, further eroding trust, leading to opposition and perpetual conflict.
2. **Negotiation Steps – [Steps to Win-Win Solutions](#)**
 - a. Identify needs and interests of stakeholders
 - b. Brainstorm options to meet the identified/common needs
 - c. Establish objective criteria for a solution
 - d. Broaden and refine options to develop the best solution

 **Key Takeaway:** Win-win solutions are not about quick fixes—they require deep understanding, creativity, and persistence.

☀ Step 2: Application: Framing a Real-World Win-Win Solution (20 min)

1. **Choose a Social Issue:** Ask participants to select an issue they deeply care about (e.g., climate action, school policies, youth rights). (See [Activity 2: Problem Identification](#))
2. **Apply [steps to win-win](#)** to this identified issue/problem; how do we frame the solution as a win-win for everyone?
3. **Small Group Strategy Discussions:** Participants map out a negotiation strategy for how they would engage different stakeholders to find common ground.

 **Key Takeaway:** The best win-win solutions don't just split the difference—they expand possibilities by finding new ways to meet everyone's needs.

☀ Step 3: Closing Circle (10 min)

- Each group shares one word, phrase, or question that stood out to them from the session.
- Distribute the [Workshop Handout](#) with key takeaways & further reflection prompts.

6.6. Communication Strategy

Aim: To enhance participants' communication capacity and presentation skills, equipping them to deliver persuasive advocacy messages with clarity and impact.

 **Duration: 90-120 min**

 **Workshop Materials:**

- ☐ PowerPoint presentation & projector (for visuals)
- ☐ Markers & whiteboard/flipchart (for brainstorming)
- ☐ Telephone Pictionary booklets (one per participant)
- ☐ [Elevator Pitch templates & examples](#) (for reference)

Workshop Flow:

- 1 **Part 1: Telephone Pictionary** (40 min) – Exploring communication challenges & clarity
- 2 **Part 2: Elevator Pitch** (60 min) – Developing persuasive advocacy messages

♦ **Part 1: Telephone Pictionary (40 min)**

 **Pre-Workshop Preparation**

- ☐ Prepare mini-booklets (one per participant) with blank pages. Think of these as small flipbooks. Rather than use full-size sheets of paper, you can fold them in half. Staple the books if you like. Make sure each player has their own book with enough pages.
- ☐ For large groups, divide participants into two or more smaller circles, ensuring each booklet has enough pages for everyone in that group.

 **Activity: [Telephone Pictionary](#) (20 min)**

 **Objective:** To illustrate how messages can be distorted or misunderstood, highlighting the importance of clarity in communication.

1. Distribute booklets – Each participant gets one blank flipbook.
2. Start the game – Each person writes a phrase on the first page.
3. Pass the booklet – The next person draws an image to represent that phrase, then folds back the original text before passing it along.
4. Continue the pattern – The next person writes a new phrase based on the drawing, then folds back the drawing before passing it.
5. Repeat until the booklet returns to the original owner – then, reveal how the message evolved.

 **Facilitator Tip:** Encourage laughter and engagement—this activity is fun but also insightful!

 Group Reflection (10 min)

1. What happened? – How did the message change?
2. Which was harder: translating words into images or images into words? Why?
3. How does this relate to real-life communication? – *What happens when we assume others understand what we mean?*

 **Key Takeaway:** Effective communication requires clarity, feedback, and shared understanding—misinterpretation can easily occur.

 Generalization: Communication & Persuasion (10 min)

 The Role of Strategic Presentation:

- Why does clear messaging matter in advocacy?
- What makes a speaker engaging and persuasive?

 Core Communication Skills for Advocacy:

- Strategic Dress & Etiquette – First impressions count!
- Body Language & Eye Contact – Build trust and confidence.
- Tone & Emotions – How we say something matters as much as what we say.

 Introduction to Elevator Pitches:

- What is an elevator pitch? A brief, persuasive speech to engage someone in your cause.
- Why does **framing matter** in advocacy? People support issues when they see how they are personally connected.
- **Refining your strategy**
 - Identify the Problem - from [Activity #2: Problem Identification](#)
 - Find a Solution - SMART Goals: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound objectives
- **Refine your elevator pitch** - see [Elevator Pitch template and examples](#)
 - **Hook** – Problem Statement, Values, Core Needs (reasons people care!)
 - **Who** – Who we are and why we care, why you should care too (make the audience part of the story/solution)
 - **Vision** – Paint a picture of a better future
 - **The Change / Solution** – Define the change that we're calling for
 - **Invitation** – Invite them to be part of the change/solution. Make it easy - signatures, following up meeting, other next step

 **Key Takeaway:** The way we communicate our message directly impacts how people perceive and engage with our advocacy efforts.

♦ Part 2: Elevator Pitch (60 min)

 **Step 1: Revisit the [Elevator Pitch Framework](#) (5 min)**

 **Step 2: Group Work – Crafting the Elevator Pitch (30 min)**

- Divide participants into small groups based on their advocacy topics.
- Each group develops and refines their pitch, using the [Elevator Pitch template and examples](#) as guide.

 **Facilitator Tip:** Encourage participants to frame their advocacy message around values & shared interests rather than just problems.

 **Step 3: Practice & Feedback (15 min)**

1. Pair groups together to present their elevator pitches to each other.
2. Each group gets 5 minutes – *2 minutes to present, 3 minutes for feedback.*
3. Encourage constructive feedback, focusing on:
 - a. **Clarity** – Is the message clear and persuasive?
 - b. **Emotional appeal** – Does it connect with the audience?
 - c. **Call to action** – Is it specific and actionable?

 **Facilitator Tip:** If time allows, **rotate pairs** so groups get multiple rounds of feedback.

 **Closing Circle: Reflection & Next Steps (10 min):** Each group shares a point of confidence in their pitch, and at least one area they still need to work on to improve.

6.7. Change Facilitation

Aim: To help participants analyze power dynamics, identify key power holders among allies and opposition, and develop strategies to leverage power for systemic change using structured action planning.

 **Duration:** 90-180 min

Workshop Materials:

- ☐ Google Sheets presentation & projector (for visuals)
- ☐ Energizer materials (depending on activity choice)
- ☐ Flip chart paper & markers (for [Action Mapping](#))
- ☐ [Workshop handout](#) (8-Step Change Model)

Workshop Flow:

- 1 Part 1: 8-Step Change Model & Power Dynamics (40 min)
- 2 Part 2: Action Mapping & Strategic Planning (40 min)
- 3 (Optional) Case Study Film Screening (1 hour)

♦ Part 1: 8 Steps to Change & Power Analysis (40 min)

 **Objective:** To introduce participants to structured change-making strategies while highlighting the importance of power dynamics, adaptability, and collaboration in advocacy campaigns.

Step 1: Energizer – Overcoming Challenges (25 min)

Choose an energizer:

- [Swamp](#) – Teams must cross an area using limited materials as stepping points.
- [Stepping Stones](#) – Participants navigate from one side to another using only a set number of "stones."
- [Human Knot](#) – Groups untangle themselves without breaking hand-holds.

Group reflection:

1. What strategies helped your team successfully complete the activity?
2. How did you adjust after encountering difficulties?
3. How does this relate to real-world advocacy—where things don't go as planned?

 **Key Takeaway:** Advocacy and campaigns require strategic adaptation, teamwork, and persistence to navigate unexpected obstacles.

Step 2: Interactive Game – Understanding Power Structures (10 min)

 **Objective:** To help participants understand who holds decision-making power at different levels of governance and how campaigners can strategically engage those institutions.

Positioning Game: Who Decides What? – [The EU in our daily lives](#)¹⁸

- Facilitator reads a statement (e.g., “*Who determines that you get at least a two-year guarantee when you buy a new laptop?*”).
- Participants position themselves around the room based on who they think is responsible (local, national, regional, EU levels, etc.).
- Facilitator reveals the answer and explains how decisions at different levels affect advocacy efforts.

 **Note:** *The EU in our daily lives* is from the [European Parliament’s Youth Hub](#), where you can find a series of active games and lessons about the European Union.

Step 3: Introducing the 8-Step Change Model (10 min)

Use the [Facilitator notes](#) to present the **8-Step Change Model**. Share [Handout](#) with participants.

- **Step 1:** Create Urgency About the Root Problem
- **Step 2:** Build Your Team & Identify Allies
- **Step 3:** Clarify the Vision & Strategy
- **Step 4:** Mobilize Your Network of Allies
- **Step 5:** Enable Action by Making It Easy
- **Step 6:** Generate Short-Term Wins
- **Step 7:** Sustain & Build Momentum
- **Step 8:** Anchor & Institutionalize Change

 **Key Takeaway:** Sustainable change doesn’t happen overnight—it requires a clear plan, coalition-building, and ongoing action.

¹⁸ European Parliament Youth Hub. *Europe@School: Active Lessons about the European Union*. Lesson 4: The EU in our daily lives. <https://youth.europarl.europa.eu/more-information/ambassador-school/active-lessons.html>

♦ Part 2: Action Mapping & Strategic Planning (40 min)

📌 Step 1: (Optional) Case Study – Learning from Success (1 hour)

 **Objective:** To show a real-world example of a successful movement, analyzing how they navigated power structures and sustained their momentum.

Suggested Film: [Bringing Down a Dictator](#), about the story of how Milosevic was brought down by a courageous campaign of political defiance and massive civil disobedience (for brevity, consider sharing snippets of this or another case study).

Transition: “Now, let’s apply these lessons to our campaign strategy, using **Action Mapping** to break down the 8 steps (presented in Part 1), test them out, and refine them based on feedback and experience.”

📌 Step 2: Action Mapping (30 min) - [Facilitation Notes](#)

- ✓ **Step 1: Define the Goal** – Identified in [Workshop #2 – Problem Identification](#)
- ✓ **Step 2: Map the Actions Needed** – What steps are necessary to reach this goal?
- ✓ **Step 3: Identify Obstacles & Barriers** – What challenges might arise? Who might resist?
- ✓ **Step 4: Develop Strategies** – How do we overcome barriers and engage allies?
- ✓ **Step 5: Evaluate & Adjust** – What could go wrong? How do we adapt?

8 Steps Change model - Group Work

- Pass out [Workshop Handout](#)
- Break participants into small groups, each focusing on one issue (Identified in [Workshop #2 – Problem Identification](#))
- Provide flip chart paper to map their actions, allies, and obstacles.
- Facilitators circulate and provide feedback.

 **Facilitator Tip:** Encourage realistic, specific actions (“*Meet with the local council by next month*”) rather than vague ideas (“*Raise awareness*”). Ask who holds power in this issue—and how can that power be shifted and/or leveraged?

📌 Group Presentations & Discussion:

- Each group shares their Action Map.
- Facilitator highlights common themes, creative strategies and each groups’ concrete next steps

💬 Closing Circle: Reflection & Next Steps (10 min)

- Each participant shares one insight, challenge, or action they will take forward.
- Share closing comments & questions

7. Additional Resources

Below is a curated selection of freely available resources that provide valuable insights, tools, and best practices for civic education, democratic participation, and youth engagement. These materials can support further learning, facilitation, and program development.

♦ Civic Education & Democracy

- ❖ CIVICUS' **Civic Education Toolkit**. [Link](#).
- ❖ Council of Europe's **Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture**. [Link](#).
- ❖ Council of Europe's **Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education - Guidelines for Educators**. [Link](#).
- ❖ Council of Europe's **COMPASS: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People**. [Link](#).
- ❖ Institutul Intercultural Timisoara's **Education for Democratic Citizenship**. [Link](#).

♦ Youth Participation, Advocacy and Community Engagement

- ❖ Aktiviraj se - Priručnik o aktivizmu za mlade. PERPETUUM MOBILE. [Link](#).
- ❖ British Council's **Active Citizens Facilitator's Toolkit**. [Link](#).
- ❖ Dynamo International's **Practical Guide for New Social Street Workers**. [Link](#).
- ❖ European Youth Forum's **Advocacy Handbook**. [Link](#).
- ❖ European Parliament's Youth Hub. **Learning Resources**. [Link](#).
- ❖ Harrison Owen's **Open Space Technology: A User's Guide**. [Link](#).

♦ Social Justice & Human Rights

- ❖ Edizioni Clichy's **Piccolo atlante delle disuguaglianze** (*Atlas of Inequalities*). [Link](#).
- ❖ OSCE's (Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe) **Guidelines on Human Rights Education for Secondary School Systems**. [Link](#).

♦ Monitoring & Evaluation

- ❖ Council of Europe's **RFCDC Teacher Self-Reflection Tool**. [Link](#).
- ❖ The Robertson Trust's **Monitoring and Evaluation Tools and Techniques**. [Link](#).

8. Conclusions

Civic education is most effective when it is **experiential, participatory, and grounded in real-world issues**.

Young people learn best not just by studying democracy, but by actively engaging in it—through discussions, debates, decision-making exercises, and real-life civic action. This toolkit provides educators with the resources and methodologies needed to equip young people (ages 16-24) with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to become informed, active, and responsible citizens.

Designed for use in both formal and non-formal education settings, this toolkit supports teachers, educators, and youth workers in delivering engaging civic education programs that foster critical thinking, democratic competencies, and active participation.

♦ What This Toolkit Provides:

- **Conceptual Framework & Glossary** → A clear and accessible overview of key democratic values and principles.
- **Understanding Decision-Making** → Insights into democratic systems and political decision-making in Romania, Italy, and Bosnia & Herzegovina, with a comparative analysis.
- **Best Practices in Civic Education** → Practical approaches to facilitate discussions, encourage critical thinking, and promote democratic engagement.
- **Inspiring Youth-Led Initiatives** → Real-life examples of successful civic actions by young people in Romania, Italy, and BiH, demonstrating the power of youth engagement.
- **Experiential Learning Workshop Activities** → A structured, interactive learning process that takes participants from problem identification to active engagement and change-making. Each activity includes detailed facilitation guides and handouts.
- **Additional Resources** → A curated list of freely available online materials to support further exploration and learning.

Democracy is not a passive system—it thrives when individuals are informed, engaged, and committed to upholding and defending its values. By using this toolkit, educators can inspire and empower young people to see themselves as active participants in shaping their communities and societies. The goal is not just to teach about democracy but to cultivate a culture of participation, responsibility, and meaningful civic action—ensuring that the next generation is ready to uphold and strengthen democratic values for the future.

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