



SOCIAL INCLUSION

Y VOTE CONVENTION
TARTU, ESTONIA

RESULTS BOOKLET



This event is part of the “My Europe, My Say” Project and is organized with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

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“My Europe, My Say!” is a European project, implemented by a consortium led by the World Organisation of the Scout Movement- Bureau Européen du Scoutisme (WOSM). The consortium includes AEGEE-Europe and 48 independent youth organisations and covers 30 countries. The project encompasses various aspects, all the way from capacity building tracks to large scale youth exchange events to interactive spaces of dialogue between young people and decision makers. This convention was one of the activities under the project, and received the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

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Dear reader,

Seven years ago, as a first-time voter, I realised how important elections are for society and representative democracy. A few years later, as a Political science' student, I found my passion of considering the European union as a core actor in the daily life of every European citizen.

In 2014, I already started to think about what I can do more to help motivate people to vote for the European Parliament elections and how I can help people love the EU as much as I do. What should be done to create impact and empower mainly the young people to vote and be an active part of the Future of Europe?

The answer is simple - make them vote for the issues they care and feel passionate about. As part of Y Vote project team, I have been part of the creation of our EU Youth Agenda with recommendations based on specific topics. In my opinion this is the successful approach in developing the sense of belonging and participation amongst the young people in Europe.



Elitsa Hadzhieva

Fundraising and Financial Manager
Y Vote Project

Dear reader,

At the European Elections in May 2019 we will once again decide upon the direction the EU will choose for the future. One of the most anticipated topics is and will be the questions on how we can actively involve social groups, who suffer from different forms of exclusion and how we can increase participation in public discourse. For this reason, the topic of social inclusion is of high importance to me.

During this Convention, we managed to gather a group of young, involved, and active Europeans, who were eager to voice their opinions.

I believe with the Y Vote project, we were able to not only increase participation of young people in policy discussions but also to make them realize that their voices have a great value. After all, we are the young generation, who will shape the Europe of the future and thus our involvement is of utmost significance.



Antonia von Richthofen
Content Manager
Equal Rights Working Group

The Convention

As a project, Y Vote wants to encourage young people to make informed choices at the European Parliament elections and learn more about topics that are relevant for young Europeans. One way to achieve this are the Y Vote Conventions that are structured along the topics of the [EU Youth](#) Strategy. The participants learn about the functioning of the EU and discuss how to become active citizens.

The Y Vote Convention on Social Inclusion took place from the 21st to 24th February 2019 in Tartu, Estonia, it was attended by 22 participants from all over Europe. With a focus on the second topic on the EU Youth Strategy, [Social Inclusion](#), the Convention consisted of different parts aiming at:

1. Informing the participants about the EU institutions with a strong focus on the European Parliament, voting in the European elections, Social Inclusion and its role in the European Union, youth policy in the EU with the focus on structured dialogue
2. Having discussions with and without policy makers about Social Inclusion. During this part, the participants learned about the current work of the EU and its competences in this field.
3. Drafting recommendations in the form of a Youth Agenda that will be brought to policy makers.



The recommendations are brought to our final conference in April 2019, which will happen in Turin, Italy. Together with other NGOs and participants from all over the European continent, we will gather recommendations from all the Conventions into one Youth Agenda for Europe.

In the following pages, you can find a wrap-up of our Convention!

Programme

Introduction to the EU institutions

The European Union with its history and institutions is a complex system that we all heard about somehow, but we need to understand a little in order to really discuss its influence. After all, the EU institutions are the European peoples' institutions. In these sessions, participants learned about four of the main European institutions and their competences, the competences of the EU vs. the member states, and [how laws are made in the EU](#).

After discussing the significance of different milestones of the European history and why they are important, we had a look at the [division of competences](#) in the EU in order for the participants to obtain the needed knowledge on how the responsibilities are divided within the EU and the member states, and in which spheres the EU actually can only support the EU member states.



Introduction to Social Inclusion and Participation

In order to gain an understanding of Social Inclusion and Exclusion, the participants took part in 4 interactive sessions on the topics, with input given by the two trainers Saul Furonés Ballesteros and Antonia von Richthofen. Through simulations and role plays they experienced and debated on the different dimensions of Social Inclusion and Participation.

Throughout the brainstorming process, the participants defined terms that they consider important in connection with the topic of social inclusion.

- Social Inclusion: "care for the weaker", "being part of society", "involvement".
- Social Exclusion: "having fewer possibilities", "apathy".
- Participation: "active citizen", "voting", "engaging in society".
- eParticipation: "ability to vote from everywhere", "expressing ideas", "participate very easily".

Furthermore, participants discussed on the question if eParticipation as a concept is a perspective for the EU in the future. They exchanged their opinions on advantages (e.g. accessibility, lowers barriers, involvement) and disadvantages (e.g. censorship, a decrease of traditional participation, manipulation) of this concept.

After gaining a comprehension of the depth and details of the topic the participants were able to determine which factors matter if we ask for the visibility of e-voting in the EU in order to enhance inclusion. During a roleplay the participants had to answer the following questions:

- 1. How do you experience exclusion?**
- 2. How do you experience voting?**
- 3. Are you in favor or against e-voting and why?**
- 4. What could be the measures to include you easier into society?**

Through group works they later filtered and presented data on e.g. exclusion in a rural areas, explored factors like health, education and internet access, as well as the issue of disabilities and in what ways disabled individuals can be included in society more successfully. Measures preventing exclusion like the [WCAG 2.0](#), [WIF4EU](#), [GDPR](#), [European Solidarity Corps](#), [Erasmus+](#), [Structured Dialogue](#), [Youth Guarantee](#), and [Broadband Europe](#) had been part of the sessions in order for the participants to get familiarized with existing practices done by the EU and what is the European Union doing in order to promote better Social Inclusion within the member-states. At the same time having the knowledge of what is already existing had help them during the creation of their recommendations to make them more relevant to youth issues and make them more feasible to implement.

With those sessions the training and introduction of the convention on the topic was finalised.

Panel discussion on eDemocracy

The first panel discussion was focused on the experience Estonia has been gaining in the past few years as a leading country on e-governance and especially e-voting. For this reason the panelist were Estonian speakers coming from diverse background and experience in order to give the different aspects of e-voting and whether it increased the voting turnout in the country and has given the possibility to more people to vote in and outside of the country. The speakers that joined our discussion were:

- Heiki Viisimaa, the Estonian National Youth Council
- Kadri Haller-Kikkatalo, the Estonian Health Insurance Fund (EHIF)
- Tanel Keres, CEO e-kool
- Märt Põder, activist on free movement of information
- Katrin Höövelson, Deputy Head of the European Commission Representation in Estonia

The discussion was moderated by Antonia von Richthofen, content manager of the Convention.



The discussion followed the question of how digital governance, or e-governance, is practised in Estonia and how the persons present experience e-voting in their country. Inside the speaker group, different aspects and point of views were shared on the topic as they didn't had a consensus on whether e-voting more inclusive and its ensuring higher voting turnout. Despite this, most of the participants after sharing the experience in their own country and being part of the previous activities of the convention on acting upon different situations of exclusion, they were unanimous on considering e-voting as an important resource for the inclusion of all citizen into the political processes.

Numerous valid point were discussed as the e-voting before the official election day on 3rd March already started. Part of the talk was how the voting actually works and the specific procedures around it. For example if a citizens casts their vote online but decides to anyways go to the voting ballots during the official elections day, the latest

casted vote matters. Or the fact that the organisational part and the whole execution of the election process requires a small budget each time. An interesting point on how Estonia based its international identity on being a pioneer in e-voting around the world and promotes the country.

Throughout the panel the participants were able to ask every question, thus the topic of the discussion often left the original subject, nevertheless everyone gained a complete comprehension of the situation of e-governance in Estonia and obtained another perspective on how Social Inclusion could be enhanced through the example of online media.

Panel discussion on Social Inclusion in the EU with a MEP

The second panel discussion during the event was connected with the aims of the Key Action 3 of the current Erasmus+ program about bringing together the young people and policy makers. After having the experts panel discussion on e-voting, the participants had the chance to explore another aspect of how to socially include the European citizens not only in voting, but in daily life. The opportunity of interacting with a member of the European Parliament that is involved in the lawmaking on European level, help them realise that politicians are not so far away as well as the issues within and outside the EU.

Mr. Miroslav Mitrofanovs, an MEP from Latvia, was the one that came for the decision-makers' panel discussion on Social inclusion in the EU. At first, he started with explaining his experience and his work as an MEP and asked few questions the participants in order to interconnect the bigger picture of the nowadays globalisation with the importance and need of having more social inclusive European Union. This into helped the participants to ask a lot of diverse questions that Mr. Mitrofanovs answered in the next hour.

Mr. Mitrofanovs also did a "reality check" activity about the draft recommendations of the our participants and explained his point of view of how feasible the ideas for possible change. young people at our event and he gave his point of views as a member of the Parliament.

The recommendations drafting process

To make the participants aware of the fact that their input and recommendations would feed in the consultation phase of the EU Youth Dialogue, a short introduction was delivered. The third day was fully dedicated to drafting recommendations connected to the topic of Social Inclusion.

At first, the facilitators recapped the knowledge acquired during the previous two days. Participants then entered two rounds of group work in which they drafted the recommendations, followed by a feedback round to express their opinion on the work of the other groups and thus helped improve the other recommendations. The finished recommendations were then discussed in the plenary and voted upon.

Recommendations

“United in diversity” is the motto of the EU. It embodies the importance of the different cultures and people within the Union. And social inclusion has always been a core value for the European identity.

Social inclusion is a broad issue that collocates various topics on the continent like gender equality, acceptance of the LGBTQI+ community, accessibility to disabled people. Unfortunately, a significant group of young people in Europe is part of the NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training) group. The youth in Europe needs to be better included in society regardless of their social, economic or political background. Therefore we, the participants of the Y Vote Convention on Social Inclusion, propose the following recommendations:

Inclusive education throughout volunteering:

We recommend the EU to create a program for adding voluntary work to school curricula and providing necessary tools in order to train supervisors of voluntary work for the young people at the end of the high school to encourage active citizenship and youth development.

Socially inclusive dialogue:

We encourage the EU to coordinate and fund an agency providing a dialogue between diverse social groups on a local level promoting and improving European values throughout providing a platform for all people to speak their minds and strengthen social cohesion.

Mental health support for inclusiveness of all young people

We would recommend implementing mandatory weekly meetings for school students held by trained school specialist about mental hygiene. The workshops include topics about stress, building self-confidence, time managing, being productive and focused, emotional intelligence etc.

Social recycling

We encourage the EU to establish regulations for a standardized recycling system. Investment in new recycling centers built in less developed regions will cut down local unemployment and increase the recovery process of recyclable waste.

Better EU for better Social inclusion

We would encourage the European Union to establish a common electoral system for all of the member states of the European Union, based on a proportional vote and a directly elected candidate, in order to promote democracy and representation.

Drafted by

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The participants' perspective

By Evita Ločmele, participant

“Social inclusion and participation in elections – do they even have something in common?” That might be the question that many participants asked themselves before applying. Nevertheless, curiosity and European spirit took over and from 21st February until 24th of February, Tartu in Estonia welcomed more than 20 participants from all corners of Europe.

Five minutes into the Convention and the participants are already divided into groups for the first task. The task is simple - choose the new president of Fantasyland. Appears to be easy, but is not. Each group is facing their own reality and hurdles they have to overcome to be able to vote, e.g., living far from the polling station or being blind and having to ask help to cast their vote.

This small introductory task was only the first one, where the young people had to embody the reality of socially excluded groups. Next day, portfolios of four different people were given to the groups. One of them was Gertrud, 78 – living in the countryside, where she has her own community, works on a farm, has a troubled family and is not concerned with politics. Gertrud together with a young woman in a wheelchair and a US citizen living in EU are just some of the examples, how challenging it is for some social groups to exercise their democratic rights.

Estonia, where the Convention took place, is the only country in the European Union, where e-voting is possible, therefore one of the talking points was e-participation. With the help of the panel discussion, the participants were able to explore the debate on e-voting. The questions mainly concerned social inclusion, e.g. how inclusive e-voting is regarding people in the rural areas with lower or no accessibility to internet coverage or how suitable the e-voting webpage is for blind people.



During the Convention, attention was also put toward theory and how European Union policy-making process takes place. Therefore, it was a highlight of the Convention to meet a Latvian MEP Miroslav Mitrofanov. He first introduced his view on globalization and EU's place in the world, and later was eager to answer the participant questions on his views on the future of Europe. He stated, that more powers should be given to the European and regional level and taken away from a national level, that sparked intense discussions between participants even after the MEP left.

On the third day the participants were given a chance to have their own voice heard and drafted recommendations in fields like social inclusion, education, health and sustainability, for the next EP, that will be elected in May. The drafting process allowed participants to catch a glimpse of how challenging policy making is, as the recommendations had to be achievable and relevant for the whole European Union.

During 4 days filled with workshops, panel discussions and games, most of the participants concluded, that inclusion of various groups in the society is a requirement for high participation in the election process. Accessibility of the election polls was one of the main talking points. People with disabilities or people in rural areas have to overcome many obstacles that most of the participants had not given a thought before.

Y Vote Convention united young people not only from EU member states but also from the candidate countries with diverse backgrounds that were eager to have their voices heard. After the Convention most participants agreed, that voting is a privilege and they will vote in the upcoming EP election in May.

Thanks from the participants to the amazing local organizers, who provided facilities, to YVote team, to the Equal Rights Working Group, and of course, Erasmus+.

Results in numbers

22

Participants

4

Days

10

Different nationalities

21

Years old on average

34%

is the average increase in knowledge
about the EU Institutions.

68%

Members of AEGEE

81%

Have had the chance to vote

94%

Of these people did vote

100% of participants...

...(strongly) agree that the political institutions of the EU are important for
young people.

...(strongly) agree that participation is important and can change outcomes.

...gained new knowledge about the EU and its institutions

...say that the workshops can help increase ones participation.

Y Vote

Y Vote is a Europe wide campaign designed to encourage young citizens to make informed choices in the European Parliament elections 2019. This will be reached by improving and developing the knowledge and skills of young people about the elections and European institutions. Y Vote aims at empowering and motivating young people to participate in society and become involved in democratic processes. These actions will tackle the current low understanding of and information on European institutions, mistrust and apathy and the low voter turnout, especially among young people. The project has previously been organised for the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament elections.

Y Vote is AEGEE-Europe project which is supported by various [partners](#), such as

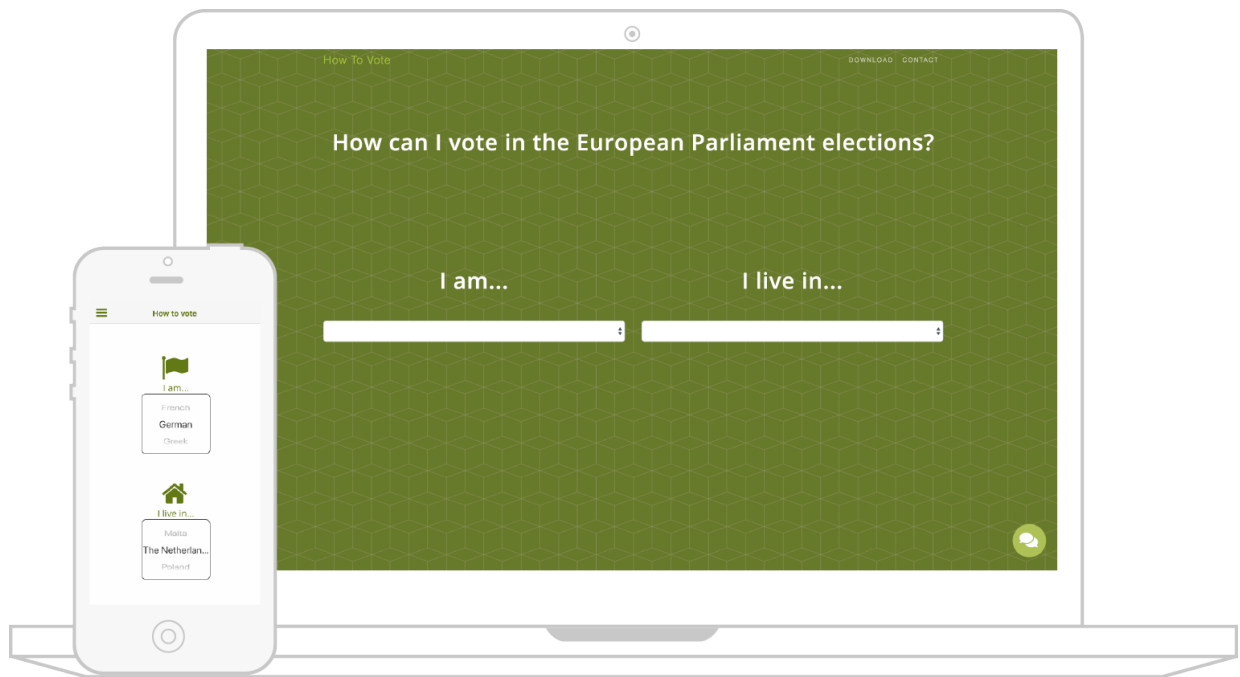
- EDUOpinions
- The European Youth Forum (YFJ)
- Young European Federalists (JEF)
- Erasmus Student Network (ESN)
- European Movement International (EMI)
- This Time I'm Voting – The official campaign of the European Parliament
- The European Parliament
- POLIS 180
- #MEGACampaign by the European Civic Forum
- Eyes on Europe
- World Organisation of the Scout Movement
- EU40

www.yvote.eu

AEGEE-Europe

Founded in 1985, the European Students' Forum, "Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe", is now one of the largest interdisciplinary student associations of the continent. AEGEE strives for a democratic, diverse and borderless Europe, which is socially, economically and politically integrated, and values the participation of young people in its construction and development. AEGEE empowers students and young people in Europe to take an active role in society. It creates a space for dialogue and learning opportunities as well as acts as their representative towards decision-makers. Moreover, AEGEE strengthens mutual understanding and brings Europe closer to young people.

www.aegee.org



I'm an Italian living in Brussels, how do I vote?

This question – or at least in a similar way – will come to the minds of many European Union citizens. The root of the problem is that every member state sets their own regulations for the elections and therefore the conditions vary immensely.

We believe that **voting should be easy.**

For this reason, we have created the “How to Vote” app. By choosing your nationality and country of residence, you will get an overview of the specific regulations you will face for the upcoming elections. Who is eligible to vote? How does the registration process work? What ways of voting from abroad do you have? If you decide to vote in your country of residence, which criteria do you need to fulfil?

Our app is now available on any device. It can either be downloaded for iOS in the App Store, for Android in the Play Store or accessed online at

www.howtovote.eu



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