

Module 4

VibeConnect ACTIVITY

# VIBES

Visionary Initiatives for a Balanced and  
Eco-conscious Society for Youth

Youth Participation in International Cooperation

● Project Number: 2024-1-EL02-KA151-YOU-000230819

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# The Importance of Youth Participation in Global Spaces

Youth participation in international cooperation is essential because it ensures that the perspectives, needs, and energies of young people shape the policies and projects that affect their lives. When young people are included as active contributors, not passive recipients, international initiatives become more relevant, more sustainable, and more impactful. This is particularly important in today's interconnected world, where global challenges such as climate change, digital transformation, and social inequality require collaborative youth voices.

Key reasons youth participation matters:

- It promotes democratic inclusion.
- It increases youth ownership of decisions.
- It strengthens innovation through new ideas.





# Creating Meaningful Youth Engagement Beyond Symbolism

Meaningful participation goes beyond inviting youth to “attend” a meeting or “listen” to decisions. It requires giving them real influence in shaping agendas, proposing solutions, and evaluating outcomes. Tokenism, where youth are present but not empowered, weakens trust and discourages involvement. Youth workers must therefore design spaces where young people feel their contributions matter.

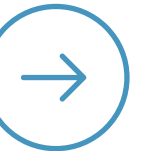
Meaningful participation includes:

- Shared decision-making
- Transparent communication
- Opportunities to initiate activities





# Engaging Young People in Project Creation from the Start



Involving youth in the earliest stages of project development ensures that initiatives resonate with their lived realities. When young people help identify needs, frame goals, and co-design activities, their insights lead to more accurate and innovative solutions. Youth workers should create structured opportunities, brainstorming labs, needs assessment sessions, digital idea walls, where youth co-create ideas.

Effective strategies:

- Youth-led research
- Co-design workshops
- Idea hackathons



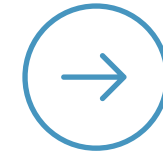


# Understanding Youth Needs Through Collaborative Mapping



Before international projects are developed, youth workers and young people should jointly map challenges that affect their communities. These needs often differ across regions, and international cooperation helps young people understand and compare social issues globally. This shared mapping creates a sense of solidarity and helps build more inclusive, responsive projects.

Collaboratively mapping youth needs involves dialogue, shared reflection, and cross-border exchange. Young people from different regions may face similar issues, such as unemployment or limited participation, or very different challenges shaped by cultural, social, or economic contexts. Bringing these perspectives together inspires empathy and deeper understanding among participants. Collaborative mapping provides a strong foundation for international projects by ensuring that they respond to real, not assumed, needs.



# Co-Creation as a Central Method in International Cooperation

Co-creation transforms young people from passive participants into creative partners who help build project content, tools, and activities. This method values collective intelligence and acknowledges that young people are experts in their own lives. In intercultural contexts, co-creation helps youth exchange strategies and learn from different realities.

Co-creation involves:

- Shared brainstorming
- Participatory design
- Feedback loops

# Encouraging Youth Ownership Through Practical Tasks

Ownership grows when young people have real tasks and responsibilities, not symbolic roles. Youth workers can assign roles such as project coordinator assistants, communication leaders, group facilitators, or evaluation helpers. These opportunities help young people develop responsibility and leadership skills in a supportive environment.

Young people are more likely to invest in a project when they feel ownership over it. Ownership is best cultivated through meaningful tasks that give youth real agency—such as leading workshops, coordinating communication, or managing components of an activity. These roles develop a sense of responsibility and leadership while allowing youth to demonstrate their competencies. Participation evolves from passive involvement to active contribution.





# Empowering Youth as Equal Partners

Treating youth as equal partners requires shifting from the traditional adult-led model to a shared-power approach. Youth workers must respect young people's perspectives, negotiate decisions with them, and trust them to take initiative. Young people thrive when they feel respected, valued, and taken seriously.

Empowering youth as equal partners requires shifting the traditional power balance between adults and young people. Youth workers must respect young people's insights and experiences, acknowledging that they possess unique knowledge about their realities. When treated as equal partners, young people become confident contributors who challenge assumptions, propose innovative ideas, and enrich international cooperation. This mindset strengthens intergenerational trust and leads to more balanced project outcomes.





# Creating Structures That Support Equality in Mixed-Age Teams

In international cooperation, teams often include both youth workers and young participants. Clear structures are needed to ensure equality: rotating facilitation roles, open discussion formats, and joint planning committees. These structures prevent adult dominance and encourage fair distribution of voice, time, and responsibility.

Useful structures:

- Mixed-age leadership teams
- Rotating speaking turns
- Youth–adult co-facilitation pairs



# Supporting Youth Leadership Through Mentoring Models

Youth leadership grows stronger when supported by mentorship. Experienced youth workers can accompany young leaders, helping them navigate responsibilities, develop confidence, and avoid burnout. Mentoring ensures that young people do not feel overwhelmed while still retaining their autonomy.

Mentoring strategies:

- Regular check-ins
- Shadowing opportunities
- Leadership coaching sessions



# Building Confidence in International Environments



International cooperation can be intimidating for young participants, new languages, cultural differences, unfamiliar settings. Youth workers must create learning environments that build confidence through encouragement, positive reinforcement, and structured participation opportunities. Confidence leads to participation, and participation leads to empowerment.

Participating in an international project can be both exciting and intimidating for young people. Language differences, cultural diversity, and new environments can lead to insecurity or hesitation. Youth workers must therefore create supportive atmospheres where participants feel safe to experiment, share, and speak.

# Strengthening Intercultural Competence in Youth Leaders

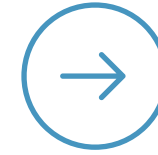


Youth participation becomes richer when young people understand cultural differences and communicate respectfully across cultures. International cooperation provides a perfect environment to build intercultural intelligence, skills such as active listening, empathy, cultural curiosity, and flexibility. These skills enable young leaders to collaborate effectively within diverse groups.

Skills to develop:

- Cultural sensitivity
- Adaptability
- Open-mindedness



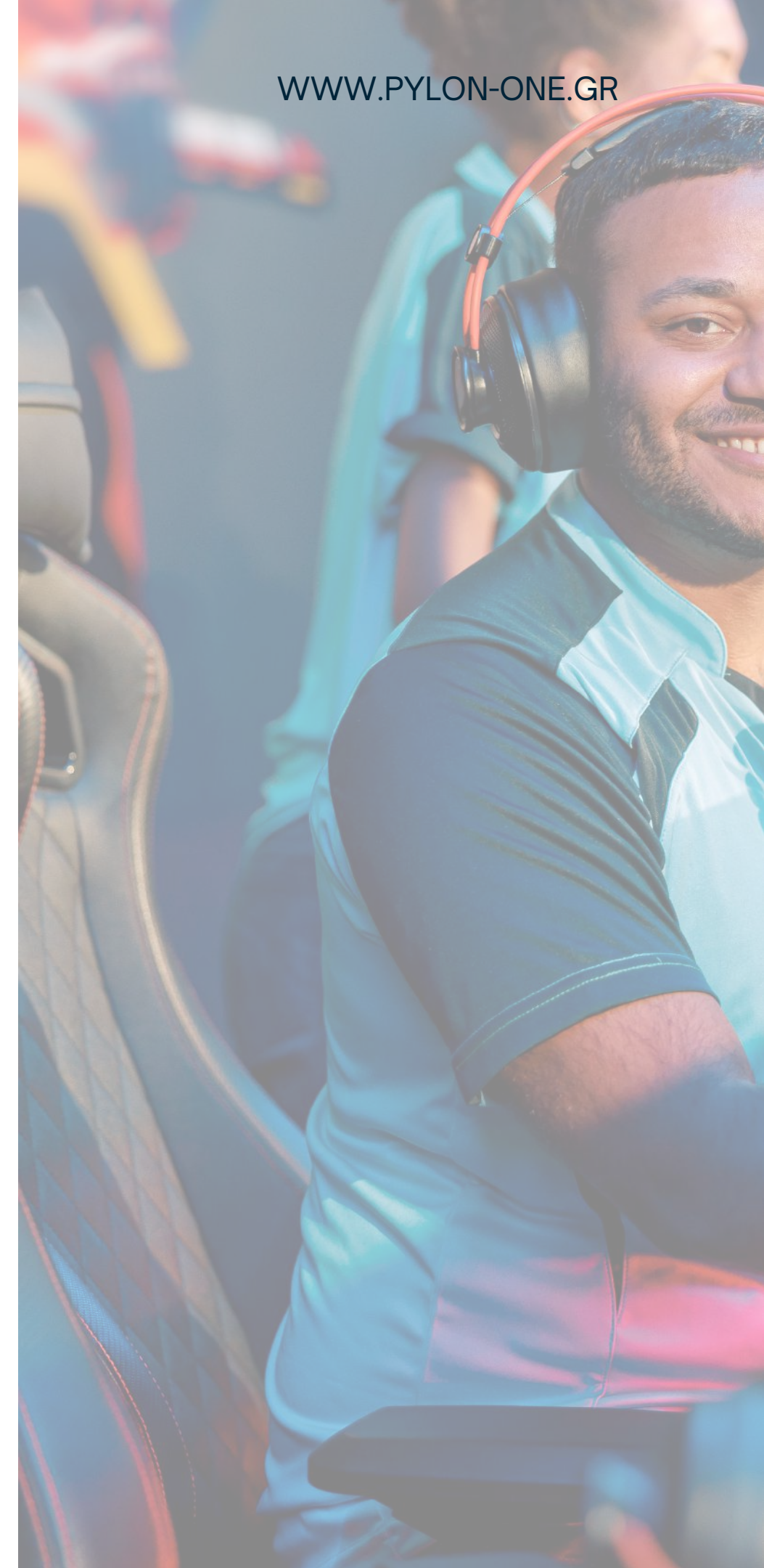


# Increasing Youth Involvement Through Interactive Tools

Digital tools can significantly enhance youth participation in international settings. Platforms like Miro, Mentimeter, Zoom, and Jamboard allow young people to express ideas visually, anonymously, or asynchronously, making participation easier for those who are shy or speak less fluent English.

Recommended tools:

- Mentimeter (anonymous polls)
- Miro (visual co-creation)
- Zoom breakout rooms



# Creating Equal Participation Despite Language Barriers



Language differences often discourage youth from participating fully. Youth workers must create strategies to make multilingual spaces inclusive, simplified language, visual support, slower pace, and peer translation. When language is managed sensitively, more young people feel comfortable contributing.

Support approaches:

- Bilingual slides
- Visual explanations
- Buddy translation system

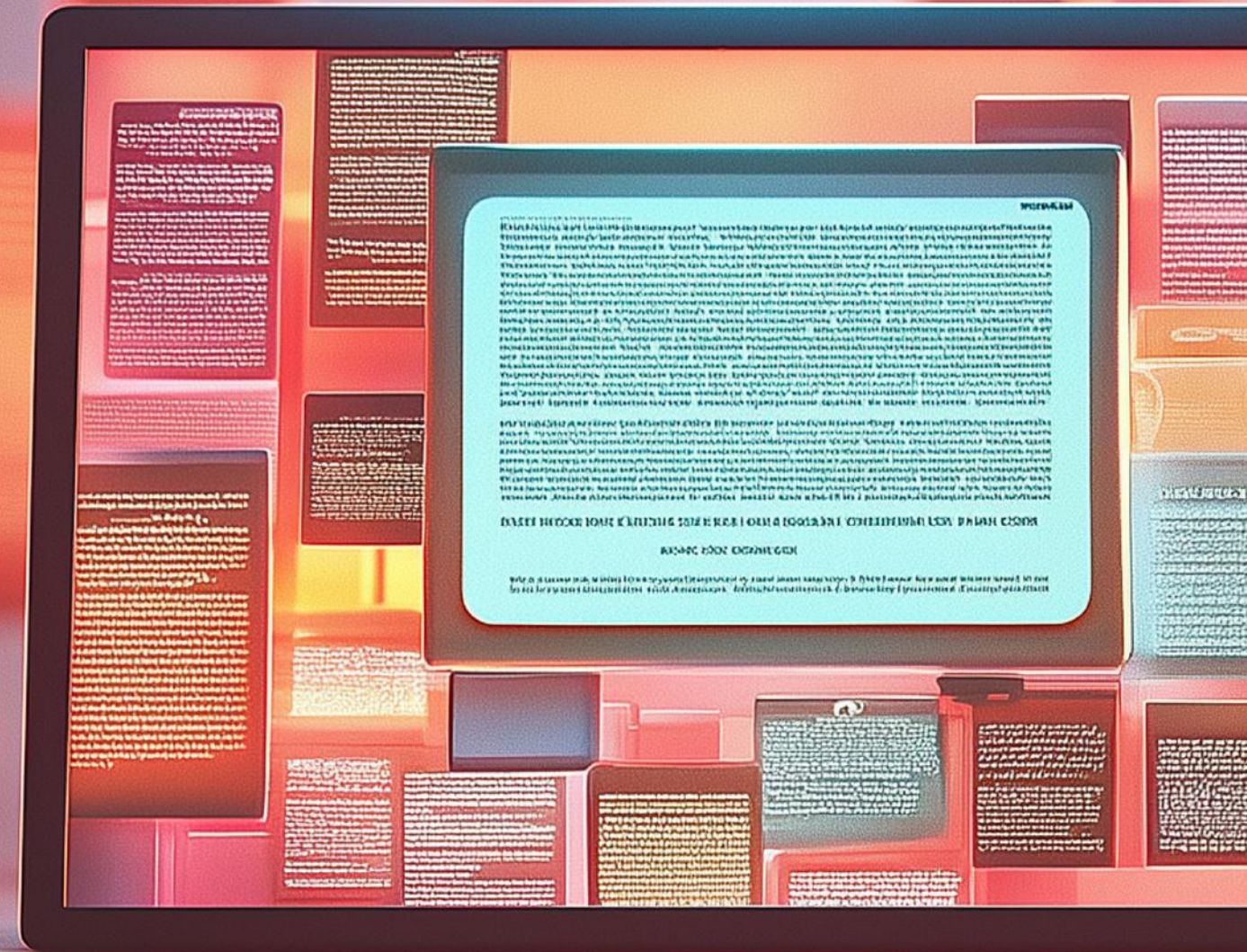


# Balancing Adult Guidance and Youth Autonomy

Effective participation requires balance: adults must guide without controlling, and youth must lead without being left unsupported. This balance is dynamic and shifts depending on the project, group maturity, and cultural expectations. A healthy partnership allows youth to take initiative while knowing that adults are available for support when needed.

Balanced leadership means:

- Adults offer structure
- Youth drive ideas
- Decisions are shared





# Encouraging Collective Decision-Making

Collective decision-making empowers youth by giving them a direct voice in shaping project directions. Methods such as consensus-building, voting, and deliberation ensure that everyone's opinion is heard. Young people learn democratic participation in practice, not just theory.

Decision-making tools:

- Dot voting
- Consensus rounds
- Fishbowl discussions





# Supporting Youth in Leading International Sessions

One of the most empowering experiences is allowing youth to lead workshops, energizers, or discussions during international activities. This gives them visibility, recognition, and practical experience. Youth workers should provide preparation support, templates, and feedback to help youth succeed.

Youth-led moments can include:

- Leading an energizer
- Presenting a project idea
- Facilitating a team task



# Using Storytelling to Amplify Youth Voices

Storytelling helps young people express personal experiences, cultural perspectives, and social concerns in powerful ways. In international contexts, storytelling promotes empathy and deepens understanding among diverse participants. It also empowers youth to speak publicly and share their narratives with confidence.

Storytelling helps young people articulate their experiences, values, and cultural backgrounds. In international projects, storytelling fosters empathy, breaks down stereotypes, and strengthens mutual understanding. When youth share personal stories, they form emotional connections with peers from different countries. Storytelling supports youth leadership by improving public speaking skills and confidence while ensuring their perspectives are heard and valued.



# Creating a Culture of Mutual Support and Respect

Partnerships thrive when partners feel appreciated and respected. Youth workers must cultivate a culture where contributions are acknowledged and successes are celebrated. Mutual support encourages partners to remain committed even during difficult moments. Respectful collaboration leads to long-term relationships rather than one-time cooperation.

Encouraging young people to lead activities during international cooperation enhances their skills and sense of agency. Youth-led energizers, workshops, presentations, or group tasks provide young people with opportunities to practise leadership in a real setting. When youth take the lead, they learn planning, communication, adaptability, and teamwork, all essential skills for future international collaboration.

# Building Long-Term Cooperation Networks

Long-term cooperation networks develop when organisations continue working together beyond a single project. These networks create opportunities for joint applications, shared training, youth exchanges, and continuous professional development. Long-term partnerships build stability, trust, and a sense of community among organisations. They also increase the impact of youth work by creating international ecosystems of collaboration.

Youth participation should not end when a project concludes. Youth workers must create pathways for ongoing engagement, such as involving youth in new projects, inviting them to join youth boards, or offering opportunities for volunteer roles. Long-term engagement strengthens their leadership identity and ensures continuity within international cooperation networks. When youth remain involved, they become multipliers who inspire new generations.



# Sustaining Partnerships Through Follow-Up and Engagement

Strong partnerships do not end when a project finishes. Youth workers should maintain communication, share outcomes, exchange opportunities, and explore new ideas for collaboration. Regular follow-ups whether through emails, meetings, or informal check-ins show partners that the relationship is valued. Long-term engagement transforms partners into allies who support each other's missions and work together to create meaningful impact for young people.

Sustainability in youth participation requires institutional commitment. Organisations must embed participation into their policies, leadership structures, and communication strategies. This includes establishing youth advisory groups, regular consultation mechanisms, and youth-led spaces. Sustainable structures empower young people to participate not just in one project but in ongoing decision-making. This long-term approach builds resilient international cooperation networks that continue growing long after individual activities end.

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