

YouthVote

e-Guide to Active Citizenship

Roma advocacy and research centre

2024

Active citizenship is a key element in democratic societies that emphasises the involvement of individuals in social, political and environmental processes. It is a way in which citizens not only exercise their rights, such as voting or expressing an opinion, but also actively contribute to improving life in society. It focuses on accountability, solidarity and participation, which are fundamental values in democratic politics.

In today's world, where global issues such as climate change, social inequality or political instability are becoming increasingly urgent, active citizenship is essential to ensure sustainable and equitable development. Active citizens not only elect their representatives, but also influence decision-making processes, organise campaigns, engage in volunteering, and contribute to the dissemination of information and education in different areas of life.

This approach to civic life promotes not only personal responsibility but also the ability to work collectively to solve problems that go beyond individual interests. Active citizenship is thus an integral part of the democratic process, where every citizen can and should be an active creator of social change.

Active citizenship

- means the active involvement of citizens in social, political and community life to improve society and promote the common good. It is a concept where citizens take responsibility for their environment and community, not only by obeying the law, but also by taking an active part in decision-making, interacting with local authorities, supporting volunteer initiatives or organising and participating in various activities that contribute to the development of society.

Examples of active citizenship include:

1. Volunteering - Helping community organisations, participating in charity events, working in local clubs.
2. Participation in the political process - Voting in elections, participating in public debates, getting involved in local political initiatives or petitions.
3. Organising and initiating projects - Organising events to improve public spaces, getting involved in environmental campaigns, creating community gardens, etc.
4. Educating and informing - Disseminating information on important social issues, learning about current issues, sharing knowledge with fellow citizens.

The aim of active citizenship is to promote participatory democracy, improve community relations and strengthen solidarity and mutual responsibility between citizens.

1.1 VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering is an activity in which individuals give their time, skills and energy to help others or to support various projects and organisations without financial reward. The aim of volunteering is to contribute to the betterment of society, to help those in need or to protect and improve the environment.

Volunteering can take different forms:

1. Social volunteering - a form of volunteering that focuses on helping people and communities in need of support. These are activities that aim to improve the quality of life of individuals and social groups who may be in difficult life situations or socially disadvantaged. Volunteers in social volunteering are mainly involved in personal care, emotional support and practical help.

Examples of social volunteering:

- Helping the elderly - Visiting nursing homes, helping with activities of daily living, organising leisure activities, giving talks and providing companionship.

- Supporting people with disabilities - Helping them integrate into society, assisting with activities, accompanying them to events or educating them.
- Working with children and young people - Tutoring, mentoring, organising leisure activities, running clubs or camps for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Helping people in need - Distributing food, clothing or basic necessities to the homeless, helping in shelters or charitable institutions.
- Supporting families in crisis - Providing assistance to families facing social or economic problems, help with housing situations, financial counselling or emotional support.

Social volunteering objectives:

- To improve the living conditions and increase the quality of life of people who are disadvantaged.
- To promote social inclusion and inclusion of those who are excluded or marginalised.
- To offer emotional and psychological support to those in need.
- To strengthen relationships within the community and increase solidarity among its members.

Social volunteering is an important part of the community because it not only helps people in difficult situations, but also strengthens social cohesion and the sense of belonging in society.

2. Environmental volunteering is a type of volunteering activity that focuses on the protection, restoration and sustainability of the natural environment. This type of volunteering includes various activities that aim to protect ecosystems, reduce the negative impact of human activities on nature and raise awareness of environmental issues.

Examples of environmental volunteering:

- Cleaning up natural sites - Picking up litter on beaches, in forests, parks, along rivers or roads to improve the quality of local ecosystems.
- Tree planting and nature restoration - Organising tree planting, reforestation, reforestation of degraded or neglected areas, which helps reduce carbon footprint and promotes biodiversity.
- Protecting animals and their habitats - Caring for injured or abandoned animals, protecting endangered species, working in rescue stations or reserves, monitoring local species.
- Creating and maintaining community gardens - Establishing and maintaining community gardens where people can grow

their own food organically while learning about sustainable agriculture.

- Education and environmental campaigns - Organising workshops, lectures or awareness campaigns on conservation, climate change, recycling and other environmental issues.
- Participating in conservation projects - Assisting with research, environmental monitoring, collecting data for ecological studies or engaging in ecosystem restoration projects.

Environmental Volunteering Goals:

- Conservation and Biodiversity - To minimize environmental damage and promote the restoration of disturbed ecosystems.
- Combating climate change - To carry out activities that help mitigate the impacts of climate change, such as planting trees or supporting environmental initiatives.
- Raise environmental awareness - Educate and inform the public about the importance of environmental protection and promote sustainable behaviour.
- Promote sustainability - Motivate individuals and communities to live sustainable lifestyles and to manage resources responsibly.

Environmental volunteering not only has a positive impact on nature, but also helps to build community

and deepen people's relationship with nature. It provides an opportunity to actively contribute to protecting our planet and ensuring its health for future generations.

3. Volunteering in cultural and educational areas - is a type of volunteering where individuals contribute their time and skills to support cultural and educational activities. The aim is to enrich cultural and educational life in the community, to promote education and access to culture for the general public and to contribute to the development of local cultural identity.

Examples of volunteering in cultural and educational areas:

- Helping in libraries and museums - Cataloguing books, assisting visitors, organising events, guiding visitors through exhibitions, preparing exhibitions or educational programmes.
- Organising cultural events - Participating in the preparation of concerts, theatre performances, film festivals, art workshops, fairs or literary readings.
- Running clubs and interest groups - Organising and running creative workshops, interest groups (e.g. art, drama, music) or hobby activities for children and adults.

- Tutoring and mentoring - Helping children and students to learn, tutoring school subjects, providing language courses or mentoring young people who need support in education.
- Adult education and lifelong learning - Organising courses, workshops or lectures for adults, covering a range of topics from basic skills to vocational training.
- Support for local artists and cultural projects - Assistance with artistic projects, support for local artists, spreading awareness of local culture and traditions.
- Digitisation of cultural heritage - Digitising old documents, books, photographs or artefacts to make them accessible to the public and preserve them for future generations.
- Goals of volunteering in cultural and educational areas:
 - Promoting access to culture and education - Ensuring that cultural and educational activities are accessible to all, including socially disadvantaged groups.
 - Preserve and promote cultural heritage - To preserve and promote local traditions, history and cultural heritage.
 - Developing creativity and knowledge - Encourage the personal and intellectual development of people through education and cultural activities.
 - Community building - To strengthen social ties in the community, encourage cooperation

between people and create opportunities for people to meet together.

Volunteers in these areas play a key role in ensuring cultural and educational life, contributing to better access to knowledge and cultural wealth, and helping to maintain cultural diversity and values in society.

4. Humanitarian volunteering - is a type of volunteer work that focuses on helping people in need, especially in crisis and disaster situations. The aim of humanitarian volunteering is to provide support and assistance in times of need, to alleviate suffering, save lives and help restore normalcy after disasters or in difficult social situations.

Examples of humanitarian volunteering:

- Disaster Relief - Support during floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, fires or other disasters, including first aid, distribution of food, water and basic necessities, as well as involvement in rescue and evacuation operations.
- Support to refugees and migrants - Assisting in the integration of refugees, providing language courses, distributing clothing, food and hygiene supplies, providing information and emotional support.
- Humanitarian aid distribution - Distributing food, water, clothing, medical supplies and

other basic needs in areas affected by war, famine or poverty.

- Health Volunteering - Working in health facilities, field hospitals or mobile clinics, providing health care, vaccinations and health education in areas that lack access to health services.
- Education and community reconstruction - Educating children and adults in emergency situations, helping to rebuild schools and community centres, organising leisure activities for children and young people who have survived trauma.
- Psychological and emotional support - Providing psychological support to people who have experienced trauma, loss of loved ones or who are affected by war or disaster. Also organizing support groups and workshops to strengthen mental health.

Goals of humanitarian volunteering:

- To save lives and alleviate suffering - To provide immediate assistance to people in need and minimize suffering in times of crisis.
- Promote a life of dignity - To provide the basic necessities of life, such as food, water, clothing and shelter, to those who have lost everything.
- Rebuild affected communities - To support the long-term recovery of communities and help

people get back on their feet after a disaster or crisis.

- Strengthen resilience - To educate and train communities to be better prepared to face future crises, supporting the ability of local people to solve problems on their own.

Humanitarian volunteering often takes place in partnership with international organizations such as the Red Cross, UNICEF, Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) or other non-profit organizations that specialize in crisis relief. Volunteers in the field often work in challenging conditions, but their work is crucial to saving lives and providing hope to those facing extreme situations.

Volunteers often work for non-profit organizations, local communities, schools, hospitals or churches. The main motivation for volunteering is a willingness to help, a sense of belonging and a desire to contribute to positive change in society.

Volunteering can also bring personal development, new experiences, the opportunity to meet new people and gain practical skills.

1.2 PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PROCESSES

Participation in political processes implies the active involvement of citizens in the political life and decision-making processes of society. It is a way for individuals to influence political decisions, shape public policy, express their views and values, and thereby shape the direction of their country or community. Participation in political processes is fundamental to democracy because it ensures that citizens have a say in public affairs.

Ways of participating in political processes:

- Voting in elections
- Running for public office
- Participation in referendums
- Membership of political parties and civil society organisations
- Supporting petitions and initiatives
- Participation in public debates and consultations
- Activism and demonstrations

Objectives of participation in political processes:

- Improve the quality of public decisions - Citizens can contribute to better and fairer

laws and policies that take into account the needs of different groups in society.

- Promote transparency and accountability - Citizen participation increases the pressure on politicians to act in the public interest and to be transparent in their decisions.
- Strengthen democratic principles - Active citizen participation is a fundamental pillar of a democratic society where decisions are not only made at the level of elites but also take into account the voices of ordinary people.
- Promote interests and values - Through political processes, citizens can fight for their rights, interests and values that they consider important for their communities and society.

Participation in political processes is not only a right but also a responsibility of citizens, as it ensures that policies are not implemented without their consent or knowledge. Active engagement in politics promotes civic engagement, strengthens democracy and contributes to a society that better reflects the needs and views of all its members.

1.2.1 Voting in elections

- is the process by which citizens exercise their right to vote and decide who will represent their interests in public office. It is a fundamental democratic instrument through which representatives are elected to political office, such as presidents,

deputies, mayors or other elected bodies. Voting in elections is one of the most important ways in which citizens can directly influence political decisions and the running of society.

Types of elections:

- Parliamentary elections - Voting where citizens elect representatives to a national parliament or other legislative body. The elected members then form the government and pass laws.
- Presidential election - A vote where citizens elect the head of state, the president. This type of election takes place in countries with a directly elected president, where citizens directly decide the person who will hold the office.
- Local and regional elections - Voting where citizens elect representatives to local government, such as mayors, local councillors or regional representatives. The aim is to influence decision making at the local level.
- Euro Elections - Elections to the European Parliament, where citizens of the European Union elect their representatives to this supranational body.
- Referendum - A direct form of voting where citizens decide on a specific bill, constitution or other important issues. Referendums can be local, regional or national.

How to vote in elections:

- Registering to vote - In some countries, people have to register to vote. In other countries, registration is automatic when a citizen reaches the age of majority.
- Candidates and political parties - Before an election, individuals or political parties run for public office. They create lists of candidates or campaign to persuade citizens of their agenda.
- Election Campaigning - Candidates and political parties campaign to present their views, programmes and promises to the electorate. Campaigns can include television and radio advertisements, debates, rallies, leaflets and the use of social media.
- Election Day - On a set day or days, polls open for voters to cast their vote. Each voter will receive a ballot or use electronic voting if available.
- Secret ballot - Voting is done in secret to ensure that voters can express their opinion without pressure or fear of repercussions. The secret ballot protects voter privacy and is one of the fundamental principles of democratic elections.
- Counting - After the polls close, the votes are counted and the results are officially announced. The counting process should be

transparent to ensure the fairness of the election.

Why voting in elections is important:

- Promoting democracy - Voting is a fundamental pillar of democracy and ensures that political decisions reflect the will of the majority of citizens.
- Protecting rights and interests - Voters have the opportunity to elect representatives who will defend their rights, interests and values in public office.
- Scrutiny of politicians - Voting allows citizens to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the actions of politicians, thus motivating them to act responsibly and transparently.
- Accountability for public decisions - Participation in elections means that citizens take responsibility for the direction of the country or community and decide who will make important decisions.

Who has the right to vote:

The right to vote varies from country to country, but the following principles apply in most democracies:

- Age of majority - People who have reached the age of majority (usually 18) can vote.

- Citizenship - Citizens of the country are eligible to vote. In some cases, permanent resident aliens may also have the right to vote, but only in certain types of elections.
- Voter registration - Voters must be registered on the electoral roll in order to cast their vote.

Voting in elections is one of the most important rights of citizens and provides them with the opportunity to take an active role in deciding the future of their country or community. Every vote can make a difference, which is why it is important to participate in elections and make your voice heard.

1.2.2 Standing for public office

- is the process by which individuals seek election to public office, such as MPs, mayors, presidents, or other representatives on political and public bodies. This process involves a number of key steps and conditions that a candidate must meet in order to gain the trust of the electorate and obtain elected office.

Key steps for running for public office:

- Interest in public service: A candidate decides to run for public office based on his or her beliefs, values, and desire to serve the public. This is often motivated by a desire to influence policy, improve life

in society or bring about concrete change in an area where the candidate has expertise.

- Getting support and registration: In many cases, candidates need the support of other people or organisations (such as political parties) in order to officially run for office. Sometimes it is necessary to obtain a certain number of signatures from citizens (called a petition) supporting the candidacy. In some cases, they also run as independent candidates, which may require other administrative conditions to be met.
- Compliance with legal requirements: Each public office has specific legal requirements that the candidate must comply with. These include a minimum age (for example, 18, 21 or 30, depending on the post), citizenship of the country, non-payment of certain criminal convictions or lack of legal capacity. The candidate must also usually prove his or her integrity and transparency in the case of public office.
- Campaigning and presentation: After registration and the official launch of the candidacy, the candidate launches a campaign to win the support of the electorate. The campaign may include a variety of activities such as public appearances, meetings with citizens, debates, advertisements, distribution of promotional materials, use of the media

and social media to present their views, programmes and intentions. The aim is to convince voters that the candidate is the best choice for the elected office.

- Participation in pre-election debates and public appearances: candidates take part in various discussions, interviews and debates to present their views on current issues, policies and plans to improve the lives of citizens. These debates are important to give voters a better understanding of what the candidate has to offer and how he or she plans to tackle society's problems.
- Elections and voting: Once the campaign is over, election day comes when citizens go to vote for their preferred candidate for public office. The candidate who gets the most votes or reaches the required number of votes is the winner and wins the public office.
- Presentation of victory or accountability: If a candidate wins an election, he or she is held accountable for fulfilling his or her promises, implementing the policies and programmes he or she promoted during the campaign. A candidate who does not win enough votes can analyse his or her campaign, learn from the experience and consider making further attempts to run in the future.

Why running for office is important:

- Democratic participation: Running for public office is an integral part of the democratic process, where individuals have the opportunity to gain political power and decide on public issues. This process allows citizens to express their views and influence the direction of the country.
- Representation of citizens' interests: Candidates often run for elected office to represent the interests of a region, a community or a group of citizens. This increases citizen participation in decision-making processes.
- Right and responsibility: Running for public office is a right of every citizen, but it is also a responsibility. A person seeking public office has a responsibility to serve the public and to fulfil the tasks and obligations associated with that office.

Who can run for public office?

Citizens who meet certain requirements set by the laws of the country can run for public office, usually this includes:

- Attaining a certain age (e.g. 18, 21 or 30 depending on the type of office),
- Citizenship of the country,
- Integrity, and meeting other legal requirements.

Candidates can be individuals from political parties or as independent candidates. In the case of political parties, the candidate usually goes through internal selection processes, while an independent candidate must obtain the support of the electorate or meet other requirements (e.g. petitions).

Running for public office is a fundamental way for individuals to influence policy and public decision-making. It is an important tool for civic engagement and democratic processes because it allows people to express their views and contribute to the governance of a country or community.

1.2.3 Participation in referendums

- is a process in which the citizens of a country directly decide on specific political or legal issues, usually involving significant changes to the constitution, laws or public policy. Referendums are a form of direct democracy where voters are not left solely to elected representatives to decide, but have the direct power to decide on specific issues.

How a referendum works:

- Initiating a referendum: A referendum can be initiated in a variety of ways. In many countries it can be triggered by the government, parliament or other relevant authority. In some cases, citizens themselves

can propose a referendum if they collect enough signatures (called a referendum petition).

- Defining the question: In a referendum, there is usually one specific question or several questions to which the voter answers 'yes' or 'no'. These questions concern important political, economic or legal issues such as changes to the constitution, new laws, public spending decisions, national treaties or international commitments.
- The right to vote: as in elections, citizens who are of legal age and have the right to vote can vote in a referendum. The vote is usually secret, and voters are asked to answer a question asking whether they are for or against the proposed change.
- Referendum day: On the day of the referendum, citizens go to the polling stations to cast their votes. Electronic or postal voting may also be allowed if this is permitted in the country.
- Counting and results: After the polls have closed, the votes are counted and the results are announced. In some countries, a minimum number of participants (called a quorum) is required for the declaration of results in order for the decision to be valid.

Types of referendums:

- Consultative referendum: In this type of referendum, citizens express their opinion on an issue, but the result is not legally binding on the government or parliament. It is a form of public consultation that helps politicians make a decision.
- Binding referendum: The results of this type of referendum are legally binding. If a majority of voters vote for or against a proposal, this result must be accepted and implemented. Binding referendums are often used for changes to the constitution or for major legislative changes.
- Constitutional referendum: This type of referendum is held when changes are to be made to a country's constitution. Constitutional referendums tend to be binding and often require a qualified majority (e.g. a super-majority of voters) to approve the changes.
- Local and regional referendums: These referendums are held at the local or regional government level and relate to specific issues affecting a region or community (e.g. decisions on building, local taxes, school issues).

Why participation in referendums is important:

- Direct Democracy: A referendum is a direct democracy tool that allows citizens to decide directly on political or legal issues without having to rely on their representatives. In this way, citizens have a direct say on important issues.
- Expressing the will of the citizens: Participation in a referendum is a way for citizens to express their views and attitudes on important issues. It is a form of engaging in public life and influencing political decisions.
- Increasing government accountability: When a government or parliament calls a referendum, it is a signal that they are asking citizens for their views before taking decisions that may have a long-term impact. This helps to increase accountability and transparency of public institutions.
- Strengthening civic engagement: Participation in a referendum motivates citizens to take an interest in public affairs, politics and rights, thereby strengthening civic engagement and raising awareness of important societal issues.
- Protecting democratic rights: Referendums allow citizens to exercise control over politicians and politics. When the government takes controversial

decisions, a referendum gives citizens the opportunity to voice their opposition or support.

Factors influencing participation in referendums:

- Citizen interest and awareness: the more informed citizens are about the issue being decided in the referendum, the more likely they are to vote.
- Participation and motivation of voters: Participation in a referendum can be influenced by a variety of factors such as political commitment, interest in the subject of the referendum, or trust in political institutions. A low turnout can invalidate a referendum if the minimum quorum is not met.
- Bindingness of the result: Binding referendums can attract more voters because the results are legally binding and will influence legislation or public policy.

Participation in referendums is an important tool of direct democracy, allowing citizens to directly intervene in decisions on important political and legal issues. Referendums give voters the opportunity to express their views on specific issues, improve political accountability and strengthen the democratic process. Every vote in a referendum can

have a major impact on the direction of a country or community.

1.2.4 Membership of political parties and civil society organisations

- is a form of civic engagement that enables individuals to take an active part in shaping public policies, to advocate for particular values, interests or goals, and to engage in decision-making processes in society. Membership of these organisations can take different forms and meanings, depending on the type of organisation and its purpose.

Political parties are organisations that aim to gain political power through elections. Parties often have a specific political programme that expresses the values, principles and policies they wish to promote. Membership of a political party enables individuals to take an active part in political life, influencing public policy and decision-making on issues that are important to them.

Key aspects of political party membership:

- Active participation in the political process: members of political parties take part in a variety of political activities such as election campaigns, organising events, participating in political debates and developing political agendas. They may be involved in selecting

candidates or in deciding on political issues within the party.

- Formulating political programmes: Party members are involved in the development and formulation of the political programmes that the party presents to the electorate. This process may involve debating and deciding on important issues such as economic policy, education, health, the environment or social issues.
- Electoral support: membership of a political party also means that members support the election of the party's candidates and organise and participate in election campaigns. Their activities help to achieve the party's political goals.
- Intra-party decision-making: In political parties, members participate in the election of party leaders, decide the party's political orientation and contribute to discussions about how the party will proceed in public life.
- Support for values and ideology: Members of political parties often make decisions based on the ideology of the party, which may be oriented towards, for example, conservative, liberal, socialist, ecological or other values. Party membership allows them to promote these values within the wider political debate.

Membership of civil society organisations:

Civil society organisations (sometimes referred to as NGOs, non-profit organisations or the third sector) are organisations that are involved in various areas of social life, such as human rights, environmental protection, education, health care, helping the poor, promoting culture and the arts, and more. Membership of a civil society organisation means engaging in activities that serve to improve social conditions and promote public or charitable objectives.

Key aspects of membership of civil society organisations:

- Promoting social objectives: members of CSOs engage in activities that are aimed at specific social or environmental objectives. These organisations may work to protect the environment, improve children's rights, women's rights, improve access to education or health care, reduce poverty, and so on.
- Activities and volunteering: members often participate in various activities of the organization, such as campaigns, public events, educational programs, donation collection, or direct action in support of specific causes. Many CSOs also offer volunteering opportunities where members help with various projects.
- Advocacy and lobbying: CSOs often engage in lobbying and advocacy for specific legislative

or policy changes. Members may contribute to organising petitions, arranging meetings with politicians or public officials, or influencing public policy in other ways.

- Provision of professional services: Some CSOs focus on providing professional services or advice in specialised areas such as minority rights, assistance to victims of domestic violence, psychological support or legal aid.
- Improving civil society: Membership of CSOs also means active participation in improving the functioning of civil society. Members of these organisations contribute to building democratic, just and inclusive societies.

Differences between membership of political parties and civil society organisations:

- Aim and focus: Political parties aim to gain political power and promote political agendas that have an impact on the overall policy of the country. Civil society organisations, on the other hand, aim to promote specific interests, protect rights and address societal problems, often independently of political structures.
- Methods of action: Political parties focus on electoral campaigning, organising political activities, formulating political agendas and winning voters. CSOs focus on education, advocacy, community outreach, organising

activities to promote rights and public interests.

- Legal form: Political parties have a formal political and legal status that allows them to stand for election. Civic organisations are non-profit in nature and focus on a variety of public and charitable causes.

Membership of political parties and civic organisations enables individuals to take an active part in public decision-making, to improve society and to promote the values that are important to them. Political parties provide a platform for shaping and implementing policy objectives, while civil society organisations enable active participation in addressing specific problems in society. Both forms of membership are important for a healthy and vibrant civil society.

1.2.5 Support for petitions and initiatives

- is one way for citizens to express their views and influence political or social decisions. Petitions and initiatives are tools that allow people to organise themselves, mobilise support for certain issues and pressure government or other public institutions to act on their demands.

Petitions:

A petition is a formal document submitted by citizens to express their opinion, request or demand to the government, parliament, local government or other authority. A petition can be started for a variety of purposes, such as changing laws, protecting human rights, promoting environmental issues or other social problems. To be effective, a petition must gain sufficient support from the public in the form of signatures.

Key aspects of petitions:

- **Gaining support:** A petition usually starts by organising and getting signatures from citizens who are in favour of a particular change or initiative. The more signatures that are obtained, the more weight and legitimacy the petition has, which can increase pressure on decision-makers.
- **Topics and objectives:** petitions can focus on a variety of topics - from changes in legislation, to environmental protection, to specific local community issues. Petitions can vary in form and scope - from online petitions to physical signature gathering.
- **Legal force:** Petitions themselves are not legally binding, but they can have a major political or social impact. If a petition gains sufficient public or media support, it can put

pressure on government institutions, parliament or local authorities to address the subject of the petition.

- Importance in democracy: Petitions are an instrument of direct democracy, allowing citizens to express their views and demands and thus influence political decision-making without the need to elect representatives in regular elections.

Initiatives

Initiatives are similar to petitions, but are often broader and more proactive in nature. An initiative can be defined as a formal attempt to change laws, policies or other public affairs that is proposed and initiated by a group of citizens, organisations or other entities.

Initiatives can take different forms:

- Citizens' initiatives: these initiatives are the most common in democratic countries and allow citizens to directly propose changes in laws or policies. For example, if a group of citizens collects enough signatures, the initiative can be put to a public vote, where citizens decide whether to accept or reject it.
- Legislative initiatives: Many countries allow citizens to initiate legislative changes through so-called legislative initiatives. This means

that citizens can submit a proposal to change laws directly to parliament if they can get a certain number of supporters to sign.

- Campaigns and awareness-raising initiatives: In addition to formal legislative proposals, citizens' initiatives can also include awareness-raising campaigns aimed at raising awareness of a particular topic or issue (e.g. animal protection, health, climate change).

Key aspects of initiatives:

- Generating support and public interest: Like petitions, initiatives need public support to have a chance of success. This often means organising public campaigns, collecting signatures, getting the media on side and mobilising the community.

- Participation in the legislative process: Some initiatives can directly influence the legislative process if they reach parliament or government and are supported by enough citizens. In this case, the initiative may be linked to the possibility of a public vote or other formal political processes.

- Aim: To change policy or law: Initiatives usually aim to change a specific policy or piece of legislation, or to enforce new laws. They may be aimed at addressing issues such as poverty, climate change, minority rights, health care or education.

- Civic and community engagement: Initiatives are often a way to mobilise citizens locally, nationally or even internationally for change. These processes can help build a strong civil society that participates in decision-making on important issues.

Differences between petitions and initiatives:

- Form and purpose: Petitions are usually a tool to express a public opinion or request, while initiatives are aimed at a specific change in the political or legislative process.
- Bindingness: Petitions can be formal or informal, with the primary purpose of gaining support for a particular issue. Initiatives are more often a tool to directly change laws or policies.
- Formality of the process: Initiatives may have formal legal mechanisms that allow them to be debated in parliament or a referendum, while petitions often serve as a tool to inform politicians of public support or opposition.

Why is it important to support petitions and initiatives?

- Strengthening the democratic process: Petitions and initiatives are instruments of direct democracy that allow citizens to directly intervene in public decision-making and express their views on important societal issues.

- Mobilising public support: Petitions and initiatives help to mobilise the public in support of certain issues, which can create pressure on the government or other public authorities to take up the issue.

- Influencing political decision-making: If a petition or initiative gains sufficient support, it can influence the legislative process or contribute to changing political decisions, ensuring that decisions reflect the needs and views of citizens.

- Protecting rights and interests: Petitions and initiatives provide a way for citizens to defend their rights or interests and to fight political decisions they consider unfair or inappropriate.

Supporting petitions and initiatives is a powerful tool for civic participation, enabling citizens to influence public policy, push for changes in legislation and ensure their voices are heard. Whether it is protecting the environment, improving educational conditions or defending human rights, petitions and initiatives provide a way to get involved in social processes and contribute to the improvement of society.

1.2.6 Participation in public debates and consultations

- is a process that allows citizens, organisations and various stakeholders to express their views,

comments or suggestions on certain political, legislative or other public issues. This type of participation is an important tool in democratic societies where the emphasis is on public involvement in decision-making processes.

Public debates:

Public debates are formal or informal meetings where current political, economic, social or environmental issues are discussed. These discussions are open to the general public, experts, activists, stakeholders and politicians. The aim is to gather different views, information and perspectives that can contribute to informed decision-making.

Key aspects of public debates:

- **Raising public issues:** Public debates are a tool to raise important issues before the public. Topics may include proposals for new laws, changes to existing policies, project proposals or important societal issues such as environmental protection or improving public services.
- **Accessibility and openness:** Public debates are usually open to all citizens and can take place at different levels - from local community meetings to national conferences. They can be organised through public institutions such

as governments, municipalities, non-profit organisations or academic institutions.

- **Exchanging ideas and finding consensus:** The aim of a public debate is to gather different opinions on a given topic. Participants can express their attitudes, concerns and suggestions, which can contribute to building a broader consensus and better solutions for society.
- **Inclusiveness:** Public debates often aim to ensure inclusiveness, to give a voice to different groups of the population, including those who might otherwise be excluded from decision-making processes, such as vulnerable groups or minorities.

Public consultations:

Public consultations are systematic processes that allow the public to participate in the development of policies, laws or regulations before they are formally introduced. This process is often organised by government institutions or legislative bodies to obtain feedback from citizens, experts and various stakeholders.

Key aspects of public consultation:

- **Soliciting public feedback:** Public consultations are often used to gather views and suggestions from citizens and experts on a

specific policy or draft law. This can be on issues related to economic policy, education, environmental protection or social policy. The consultation process can include public surveys, consultation documents, online platforms and meetings.

- Transparency and openness: Public consultations aim to be transparent to ensure that the public has the opportunity to be informed about the processes taking place. These consultations give citizens the opportunity to influence policy decisions before they are finally adopted.
- Formal engagement process: Consultations are often more formal than public debates and may have set rules or forms for submitting comments. This process may be linked to certain time limits for citizens to send in their views or proposed changes.
- Legislative support: Public consultation is important because it allows governments and parliaments to take citizens' views into account when making new laws and policies. This process helps governments create policies that are better tailored to citizens' needs and expectations.
- Equality and fairness: Consultation should ensure equal opportunities for all citizens to have their say, regardless of their social, economic or political status.

Benefits of participating in public debates and consultations:

- **Strengthening democracy:** Participation in public debates and consultations allows citizens to be directly involved in decision-making processes, which strengthens democratic values and ensures that decisions are made with the will of the people in mind.
- **Improving the quality of decisions:** Getting broad feedback from the public allows for more balanced and effective policies that are better adapted to society's needs and problems.
- **Increased transparency and accountability:** Public debate and consultation increase the transparency of decision-making processes and the accountability of public officials to citizens.
- **Promoting inclusiveness and equality:** These processes give a voice to those who might otherwise feel excluded from formal political and legislative processes. This helps to ensure that decisions are accessible and fair to different groups of the population.

Examples of participation in public debates and consultations:

- **Public meetings and forums:** Many cities and municipalities organise public meetings where

citizens can discuss proposed projects such as infrastructure construction or urban planning.

- Online platforms: Many governments and organisations use online platforms to organise public consultations where citizens can express their views on various draft laws or policies.
- Collecting comments on legislative proposals: Governments and parliaments can publish draft laws or policies and invite the public, experts and organisations to submit their comments and suggestions for improvement.

Participation in public debates and consultations is an important way for citizens to influence political decision-making and contribute to public policy-making. This process helps to ensure that policy decisions are informed, transparent and take into account the views of the general public. It strengthens democratic principles and enables the development of policies that are closer to citizens' needs and expectations.

1.2.7 Activism and demonstrations

- are forms of public expression and struggle for social, political or environmental change. These activities are common in democratic societies and play a key role in mobilising the public in support of various causes such as human rights, justice,

environmental protection, social equality or political reform.

Activism is a broad term that refers to actions by individuals or groups aimed at changing social, political or environmental conditions. Activism can take many forms, from public speaking and organising protests to campaigning, lobbying, legal initiatives, or organising educational or awareness-raising events.

Key characteristics of activism:

- Focus on change: Activists are committed to fighting for specific changes that they believe are necessary or right. These changes can be political (e.g. reforming the electoral system), social (improving minority rights) or environmental (protecting nature, combating climate change).

- Forms of activism:

- Political activism: fighting for political rights, changes in legislation or improvements in the political system.

- Social activism: Focusing on equality, justice and protecting the rights of different groups (e.g. equal rights for women, the LGBTQ+ community or ethnic minorities).

- Environmental activism: Focusing on protecting the environment and fighting environmental problems such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity conservation, etc.

- Human rights activism: Focusing on improving the rights and freedoms of individuals and groups, as well as fighting discrimination.

- Methods of activism- Activism can be carried out in different ways:

- Organizing protests, demonstrations and marches,

- using social media to disseminate information and mobilise the public,

- Lobbying: influencing political decision-making and legislative change through direct interactions with politicians and government institutions,

- petition writing and campaigning for specific causes,

- Legal action: activists can focus on using lawsuits to advocate for change,

- Sources of activism: Activism can be supported by a variety of organizations such as non-profits, civic initiatives, political parties, or individuals. Often activists are

motivated by personal experience, conviction, or a passionate interest in an issue.

- Pressure for change: Activism often involves using public pressure on responsible actors (governments, corporations, political parties) to change legislation, policy, or social norms.

Demonstrations are public protest actions where people gather to express opposition, support or demands on a particular issue. Demonstrations can take many forms, from peaceful assemblies to organised marches through city streets.

Key characteristics of demonstrations:

1. Purpose of demonstrations:
 - Protest against injustice: Demonstrations can be a way to express opposition to political decisions, legislative changes, or unethical practices.
 - Support for a particular cause: They can also be a show of support for a particular political agenda, person, or ideology (e.g., support for minority rights, conservation, or free elections).
 - Celebration of achievements: Demonstrations can also be celebrations of achievements, such as a march for women's rights or a celebration of historical events.
2. Peaceful vs. violent demonstrations:

- Peaceful demonstrations: most demonstrations are peaceful, where participants peacefully express their views and demands, often using banners, placards and waving signs.
 - Violent demonstrations: Some demonstrations can escalate into violent clashes when participants clash with police or counter-demonstrators. Violent protests can arise when participants are frustrated by the lack of consideration given to their demands.
3. Objectives and outcomes: Demonstrations are often organised with the aim of achieving specific policy changes, such as pushing through a new law or expressing opposition to current policies. They can have different outcomes:
- Raising awareness: Demonstrations can raise public awareness of important issues.
 - Political influence: They can generate political pressure that leads to changes in policy or legislation.
 - Social change: Demonstrations can lead to changes in social norms, such as human rights or equality.
4. Participants and organisation: Demonstrations can be organised by different groups - political parties, non-profit organisations, civic initiatives, or individuals who want to get involved in a particular campaign or issue.

Benefits of activism and demonstrations:

- **Raising awareness:** Activism and demonstrations are effective tools for raising awareness about important social issues such as climate change, poverty, human rights and more.
- **Promoting political change:** In many cases, activism and public protests lead to political change, such as changes in legislation, reforms in justice systems or improvements in public policies.
- **Strengthening civil society:** these forms of expression promote democratic values and civic engagement, contributing to a stronger civil society.
- **Building community:** Demonstrations and activism can create strong communities that share common goals and values, which can be a source of strength and motivation for further change.

Activism and demonstrations are important tools for promoting change in society. They allow citizens to express their opposition or support on issues they consider important. These forms of public expression are key to the functioning of democratic societies and strengthen citizens' right to free expression and political engagement.

1.3 ORGANISING AND INITIATING PROJECTS

Organising and initiating projects is the process by which individuals, groups or organisations create, plan and implement projects to achieve specific goals or improve a particular area of life. The process involves all the steps necessary to move from the initial idea to its successful implementation and completion. Organising projects can focus on different areas such as education, culture, social welfare, ecology, business or community.

Key steps in organizing and initiating projects:

- Identifying the goal and idea - The first step is to identify what we want to achieve. This involves defining the goal of the project, identifying the problem we want to solve or the area we want to improve.
- Project Planning and Preparation - Developing a detailed plan that includes the steps and tasks needed to achieve the goal. The plan includes a timeline, budget, resources needed, and staffing.
- Team Formation and Task Assignment - Creating a team of people to work on the project and assigning specific roles and responsibilities to each team member.
- Sourcing and Funding - Securing the necessary resources to implement the project, such as funding, materials, technology, or

space. This may include seeking sponsors, grants, or volunteers.

- Project implementation - Carrying out specific activities as planned. This is the actual implementation of the project, where the idea is turned into reality, and individual tasks are completed according to a schedule.
- Monitoring and evaluating progress - Ongoing tracking of the progress and effectiveness of a project. Evaluating whether the project is moving in the right direction and making any adjustments or changes to the plan based on the findings.
- Project Completion and Evaluation - Once the project has been successfully completed, a final evaluation will take place to assess whether the objectives have been achieved and what could be improved in the future.
- Presentation of results and sustainability - Presentation of project results to the wider public, stakeholders or funders. It may also include plans for the sustainability of the project or its further development.

Types of projects:

- Social projects - Aimed at improving people's quality of life, helping vulnerable groups, promoting community life or addressing social problems.

- Educational projects - Projects that promote learning and skills development, such as courses, workshops, training or educational programmes.
- Cultural projects - Initiatives aimed at promoting culture and the arts, organising cultural events, festivals, exhibitions or art workshops.
- Environmental projects - Projects that focus on environmental protection, environmental education, ecological footprint reduction or biodiversity conservation.
- Entrepreneurship projects - Initiatives that focus on business development, support local businesses, job creation or support innovation and start-ups.

Objectives of organizing and initiating projects:

- Solving specific problems - Projects are often aimed at solving specific problems or challenges in society.
- Promoting community and civic engagement - Projects often engage the local community and strengthen social ties between community members.
- Development and education - Projects can contribute to the development of new skills, education or cultural enrichment of participants.

- Improving the environment - Many projects focus on nature conservation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles.
- Innovation and change - Projects can bring new approaches, ideas and innovations that contribute to positive change in society.

Organising and initiating projects is a way to get actively involved in solving problems, implementing ideas and improving the environment around us. It is an important tool for civic engagement and contributes to the dynamic development of society.

1.4 EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Education and information is the process of providing knowledge, skills and information to individuals or groups in order to increase their level of knowledge, develop their skills and improve their awareness of various topics. This process encompasses both formal and informal approaches, including school-based education, vocational courses, workshops, seminars, campaigns or information provided through media and technology.

Education is a purposeful learning process that can be formal (taking place in schools and institutions) or informal (taking place outside formal educational settings such as courses, trainings, workshops). The aim of learning is the development of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

Types of education:

- Formal education - Takes place in schools, universities and other educational institutions according to a predetermined curriculum and leads to the achievement of official certificates or diplomas.
- Non-formal education - Includes learning activities outside formal institutions, such as courses, training, workshops or self-education. It is a flexible way of learning without formal certificates.
- Informal learning - Takes place in an unorganised and spontaneous way, without set objectives or curricula. It is learning through everyday experiences, interactions with people or independent discovery.

Information is the process of providing accurate, relevant and timely information to individuals or groups to increase their knowledge about specific topics or issues. The goal of information is to ensure that people have access to the data they need and can make decisions based on accurate and validated information.

Forms of information:

- Media - Information provided through television, radio, print, internet or social media. The media play a key role in

disseminating news, educational programmes and information on current events.

- Educational campaigns - Organising campaigns to raise awareness on specific topics such as health issues, the environment, safety, human rights or social issues.
- Workshops and seminars - Events where participants learn new information, learn skills or discuss important issues. Workshops and seminars are an effective tool for education and information exchange.
- Fact sheets and brochures - Printed or digital materials that provide concise information on specific topics, projects or issues.
- Online platforms and social media - Websites, blogs, online courses, discussion forums or social networks where information on various topics is available and where people can educate themselves.

Learning and information objectives:

- Increasing knowledge - To provide people with the necessary knowledge and information to better navigate society and make informed decisions.
- Skills development - To help people develop practical and professional skills that will enable them to be more successful in their personal and professional lives.

- Enhancing critical thinking - To support individuals' ability to analyse information, assess its reliability and make evidence-based decisions.
- Promoting civic engagement - Educating and informing people about social and political issues to encourage active participation in public life.
- Raising awareness on important issues - Disseminating information on current issues such as climate change, health risks, human rights or social justice.

ERASMUS+

- is an EU programme to promote education, training, youth and sport in Europe.

It has a budget of around €26.2 billion. This is almost double the amount of funding compared to the previous programme (2014-2020).

The 2021-2027 programme has a strong focus on social inclusion, green and digital transformation and promoting young people's participation in democratic life.

It supports the priorities and actions set out in the European Learning Area, the Digital Learning Action Plan and the Skills for Europe agenda. It also serves to support the European Pillar of Social Rights, the

implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the development of the European dimension in sport.

Youthpass is the tool used to document and recognise the learning outcomes and experiences acquired by participants during Erasmus+ projects, particularly in the youth field. Youthpass is designed for young people who are involved in various activities such as youth exchanges, volunteering projects, training and other youth development projects.

Youthpass provides participants with:

1. Certificate of Participation - confirms participation in the project and documents what skills and competences the participant has acquired during the activities.
2. Reflection on the learning process - the participant can reflect on what he/she has learned, what skills he/she has developed and the impact the project has had on his/her personal growth.
3. Official recognition - Youthpass can be a valuable document when looking for a job or further education, as it confirms concrete experiences and competences.

Youthpass focuses on specific competences that are important for personal development and social

engagement, such as communication in foreign languages, intercultural competence, teamwork, problem solving, personal responsibility.

Youthpass is therefore not only a tool for recognising experience, but also for improving the personal and professional skills of participants in Erasmus+ projects.

Education and information are essential tools to empower individuals and society. They help to create better informed, engaged and critically thinking citizens who can contribute to positive change in their environment and society as a whole.

Active citizenship is the foundation of a healthy and vibrant democracy where individuals play a key role in shaping political, social and environmental processes. Involvement in public affairs, whether through voting, volunteering or organising and supporting various initiatives, contributes to greater accountability and justice in society. Active citizens are agents of change, building bridges between different groups in society and contributing to solving problems that affect us all.

In an era of globalisation and constant challenges brought about by changes in technology, politics and the environment, it is important that we become more than passive participants in social life. Active citizenship encourages us to take responsibility for our future and our loved ones, while creating an environment where every voice and every decision counts. In this way, we can contribute to building more just, inclusive and sustainable communities.