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Training Course

DEMOCRACY IN PLAY

31 May - 3 June 2026

Varna, Bulgaria

Report



Youth for Equality · HESSA · Creative Youth Academy Hungary · SFERA INTERNATIONAL · Youthpath · ФПКО FECE

About the project

The training course **Democracy in Play** aimed to equip youth workers with practical and interactive resources and competencies to promote active youth participation, democratic engagement, and EU values through experiential learning. Game-based and non-formal education approaches have proven to be effective tools for engaging youth, fostering critical thinking, and translating abstract democratic concepts into tangible experiences. The youth workers in the training course dived into the educational board game *Democracy in Play* and explored practical NFIL tools that offer innovative ways to explore democracy, participation, and decision-making in a playful yet meaningful manner. The overall aim of the training course was to strengthen the capacity of youth workers to promote democratic participation, active citizenship, and EU values among young people through game-based and non-formal education methods.







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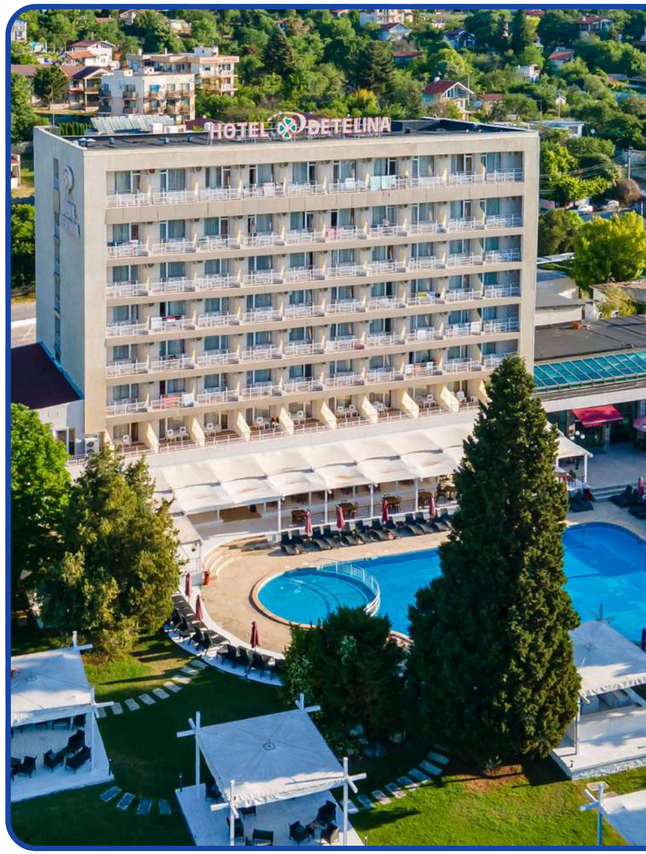
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Venue

The TC Democracy in Play took place at Golden Sands seaside resort on the Northern Bulgarian Black Sea coast. The chosen accommodation was **Detelina Hotel**. It proved to be an ideal place for conducting the activities as it is located away from the big city, making it easy to work outside and enjoy the last sunny days of the summer.

16 youth workers aged 18+ took part in the exchange, from six European Countries: Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, North Macedonia, Slovakia and Greece. The participants arrived at the hotel on 30 May and left on 4 June..



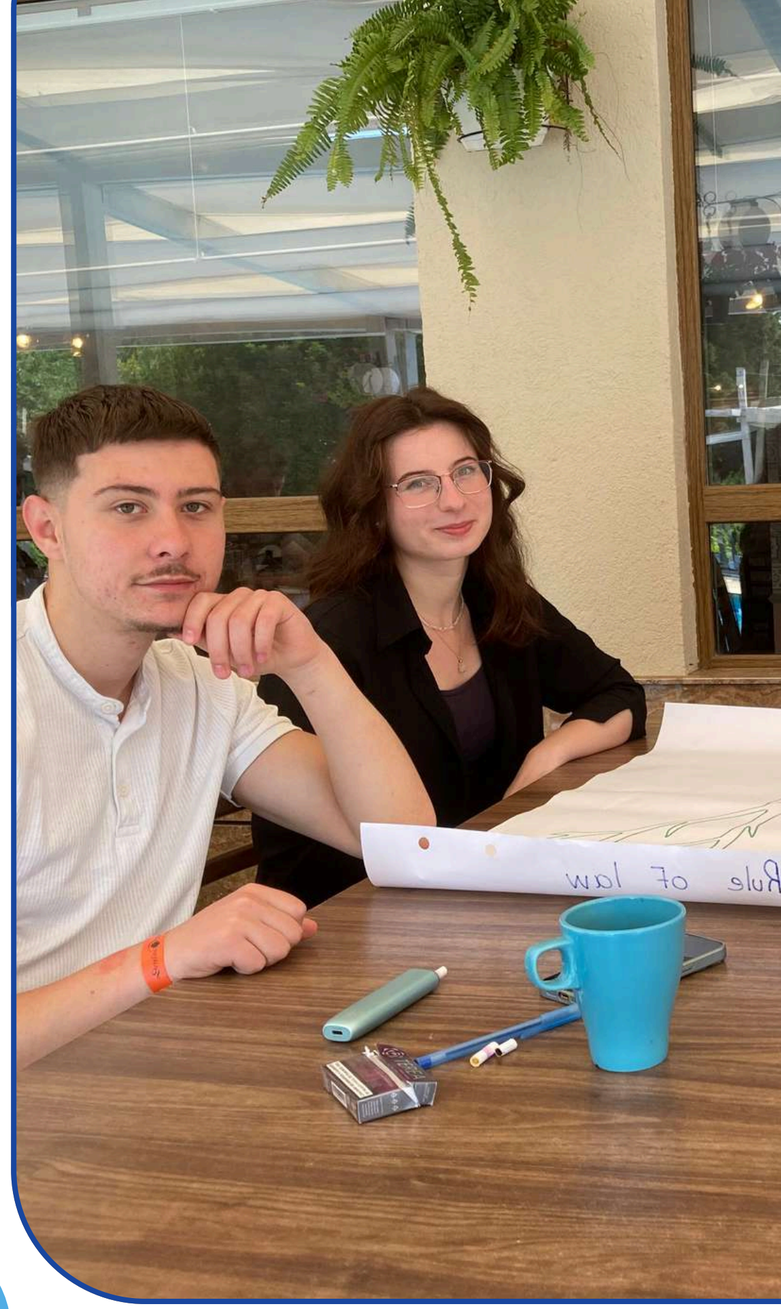
Learning Objectives

- Increase youth workers' understanding of democracy, active participation, and youth involvement in decision-making processes;
- Build practical skills in using educational board games and training toolkits as learning tools;
- Enhance participants' ability to facilitate inclusive, participatory, and reflective learning experiences;
- Promote EU values such as democracy, human rights, equality, solidarity, and active citizenship;
- Encourage youth workers to adapt and transfer game-based methods to their local contexts and target groups;
- Foster networking and cooperation among youth workers and organisations across Europe.



Reached Results

- Increased understanding of the importance of active participation and youth involvement in decision-making processes and the tools/ methods to foster youth participation
- Recognition of board games as an education and political literacy tool
- Enhanced ability to facilitate inclusive, participatory, and reflective learning experiences
- Improved understanding of democracy, human rights, equality, solidarity, and active citizenship
- Improved collaboration, teamwork, and leadership skills
- Intercultural competences



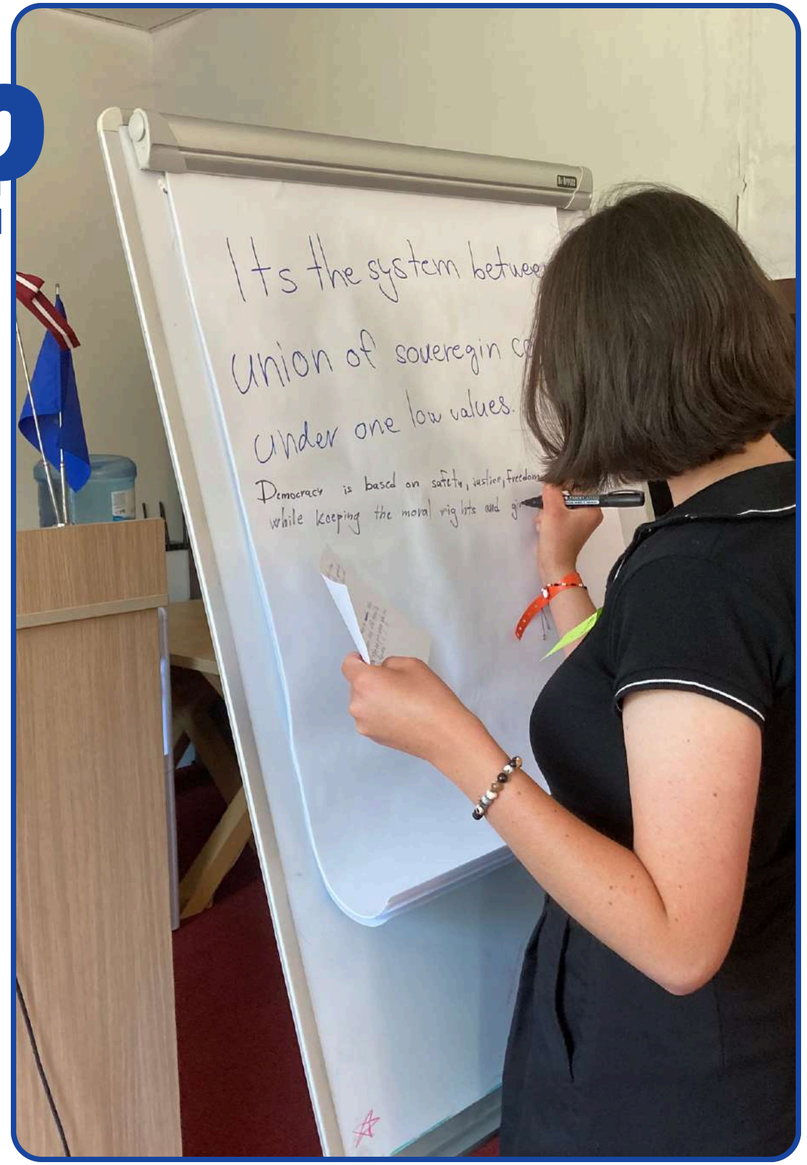
What is Democracy?

In this activity the participants had to first list their individual associations to “democracy” and afterwards discuss in pairs and bigger groups one agreed definition of “democracy”.

Group 1: “Democracy is the system between union of sovereign countries under one (common) law values.”

Group 2: “Democracy is based on safety, justice, freedom and peace, while keeping the moral rights and giving everyone equal chance to express themselves.”

Group 3: “Democracy is a form of state where there is equality through voting and freedom to move.”



EU Values Three

In this group activity, the youth workers had to choose one of the 6 core EU values, highlight its importance and brainstorm a project on how to promote it among youth and engage young people to advocate for the chosen goal:

Group 1: Freedom

- Freedom is important because it protects human dignity, supports democracy and accountability, while different points of view are heard.
- Support freedom with respect for different opinions, participation in democratic processes, and promote equal opportunities
- Promote the value through social media awareness, youth workshops, open discussions, human rights campaigns, community events, active citizenship and sharing real-life examples
- Engage other young people with it, organise events, use social media to raise awareness about the importance of freedom, engage young people to participate in exchange programmes, share real-life examples of how freedom positively affects people’s lives







EU Values Three

Group 2: Rule of law

- The value is important because it guarantees economic stability, predictability, justice and equality.
- Advocacy for this value could be fostered through education, awareness of laws and the right to protest.
- The value will be disseminated through social media campaigns and school workshops.

Group 3: Equality

- Promoting equality maximises human potential and strengthens social cohesion across society.
- You can advocate for this value by initiating peer discussions and running targeted digital campaigns.
- Disseminating equality requires a structured plan that identifies local gaps and partners with youth organisations to address them.







EU Values Three

Group 4: Respect of human rights

- The value is important because human rights are the basis of society, guarantees respect, protection, and fulfillment
- Advocacy for social, civil, political, economic and cultural rights through protests and support for existing campaigns
- Promoting the value through Erasmus projects, discussions, Play & Test





What is Active Participation?

In a group discussion, the youth workers outlined various forms of participation and discussed their characteristics:

- Traditional forms: voting, joining a political party, complaint form, referendum, joining a trade union
- Alternative forms: boycotting, procotting, stricking, sit-ins



Participation into practice

Divided in groups, the participants had to explain the form of participation and come up with a plan for how to use different participation forms.

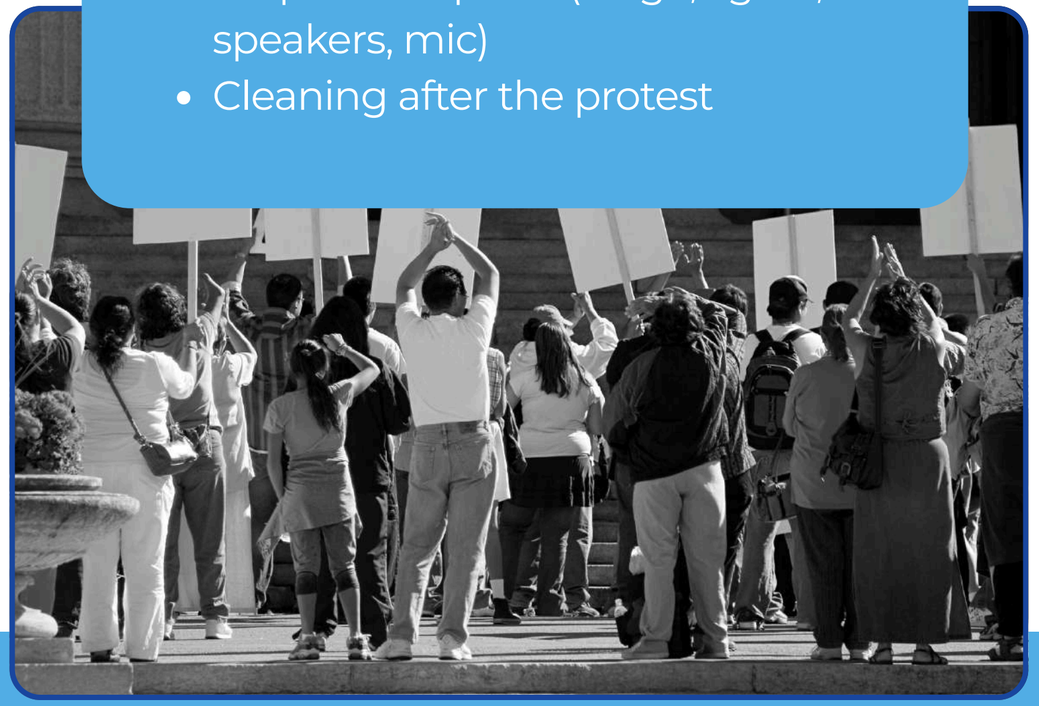
Group 1: Boycotting

- Boycotting means to buy from, use, support or deal with a person, company, organisation or country as a form of protest.
- Identify corrupt companies or organisations
- Stop buying their products or using their services
- Raise awareness and inform others about the issue through discussions and campaigns
- Support honest and transparent businesses instead
- Peacefully encourage others to join
- Ask for reforms and accounability



Group 2: Protesting

- Organisation: when, where, what for, permission, informing the police
- Promoting: advertising on social media, posters
- Find speakers
- Prepare the place (stage, lights, speakers, mic)
- Cleaning after the protest



Group 3: Joining a political party (and solving corruption)

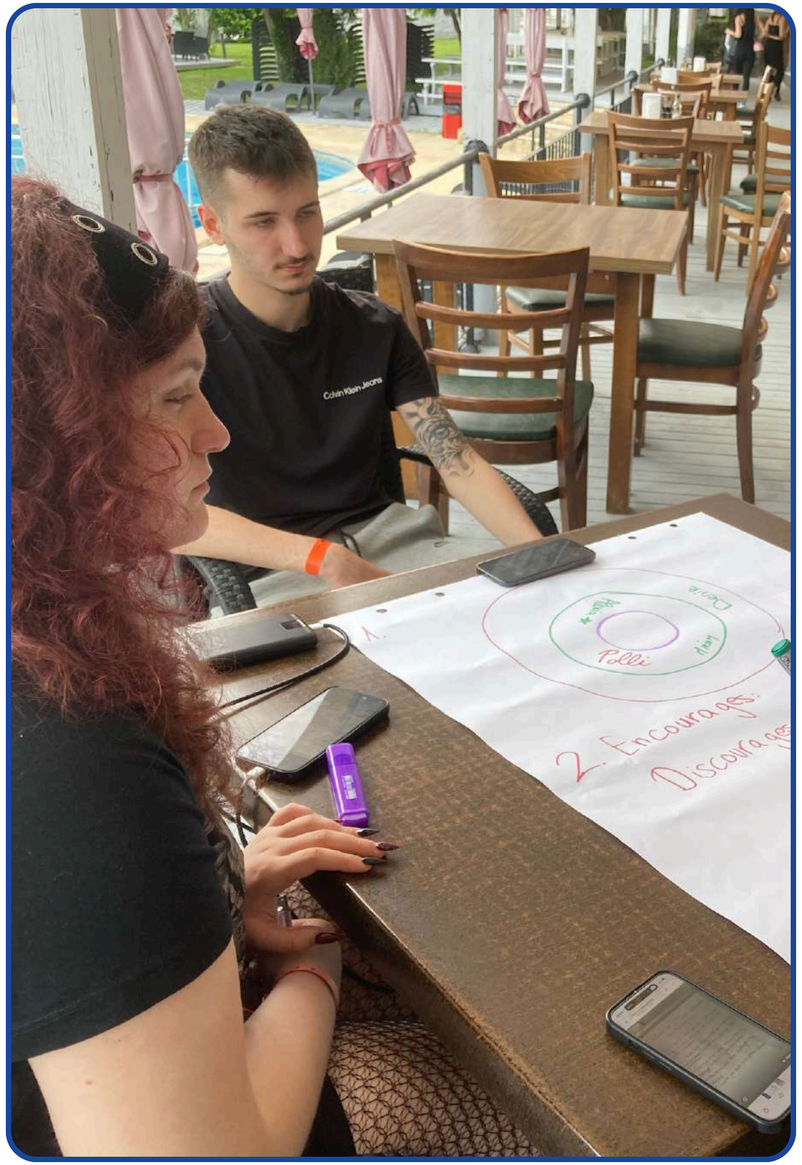
- Research for political party that matches with your views
- Identify where the corruption is: In our political party/ in other political parties
- Own party: background checks, working internally to solve the corruption, demoting the corrupted members, implementing laws/ actions that would prevent similar activities in the future
- Other parties: background check, using the information for our advantage to solve the corruption, run agains them, implementing laws/ actions that would prevent similar activities in the future

In & Out: Understanding Youth Participation

In this activity the participants had to reflect how they feel in terms of various forms of youth participation (comfort/ stretch and panic zones), list factors that encourages/ discourages them to participate and think of specific challenges and solutions related to youth participation.

Group 1: In the stretch zone

- Factors that encourage the group to participate: influence and importance
- Factors that discourage the group from participating: not enough power, no time
- Key challenges: not enough knowledge, fake information, attitude, abusing democracy
- Solutions: education, develop critical thinking, raising awareness



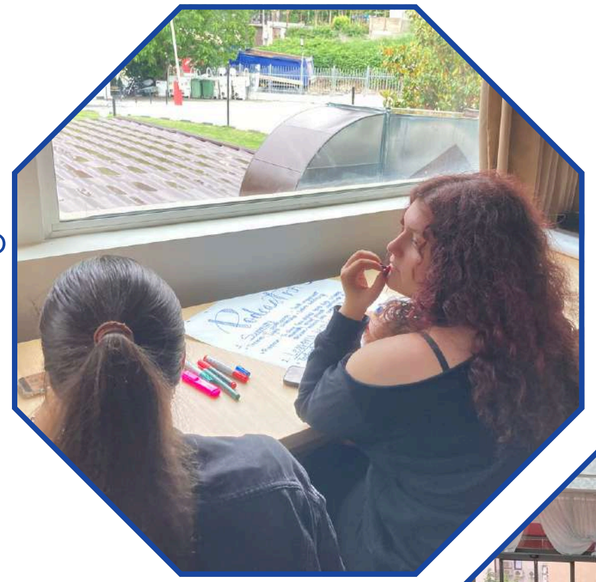
In & Out: Understanding Youth Participation

Group 2: In the comfort and stretch zones

- Factors that encourage the group to participate: seeing that their ideas can create real impact
- Factors that discourage the group from participating: belief that one vote won't matter
- Key challenges: lack of information, lack of self-confidence, limited opportunities to influence decisions
- Solutions: better promotion of opportunities through social media, training and workshops for young people, more youth councils and consultation processes

Group 3 In the stretch and panic zones

- Factors that encourage the group to participate: it's beneficial for our future
- Factors that discourage the group from participating: you don't reach the expectations
- Key challenges: catching the interest, lack of awareness, not paying attention to the news
- Solutions: more information on social media, friends should warn each other about it, short-form summaries





ACT IT OUT

Split into groups, the youth workers created and showed short theatre performances representing violations of various human rights articles, such as No discrimination, Equal before the law, Right to privacy, Freedom of movement and residence and Freedom of opinion and expression.

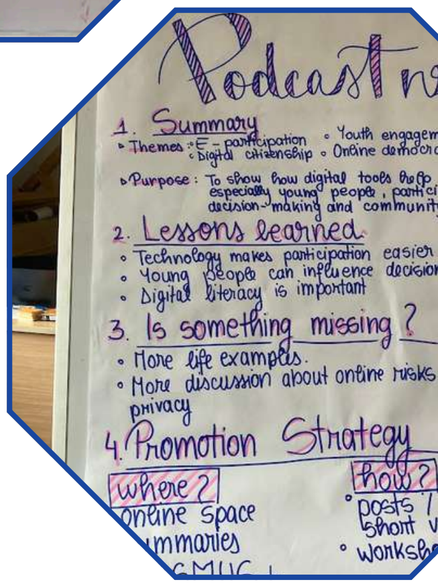
SHINE PODCAST

The youth workers explored SHINE educational podcast reflecting the European Commission's framework for citizenship competence, summarised some of the episodes and outlined the lessons learned.



SHINE Podcast





Group 1: E-participation

- Themes: E-participation, youth engagement, digital citizenship and online democracy
- Purpose: to show how digital tools help citizens, esp. young people, to participate in decision-making and community issues
- Lessons learned: technology makes participation easier, young people can influence decisions, digital literacy is important
- Is something missing: more life examples, more discussions about online risks and privacy
- Promotion strategy: Where - online space, summaries, Erasmus+ projects, How - posts, highlights, short videos, workshops/games

Group 2: Human rights & EU Values

- Themes: Values (human dignity, equality and no discrimination, democracy, separation of power, freedom of speech, gathering, religion, rights of education, owning property, accessing information) and free travel
- Defending rights through Ombudsman, court or Solvit website
- Lessons learned: EU values and how to defend oneself
- Is something missing: no
- Promotion strategy: through social media, in schools

DEMOCRACY IN PLAY BOARD GAME

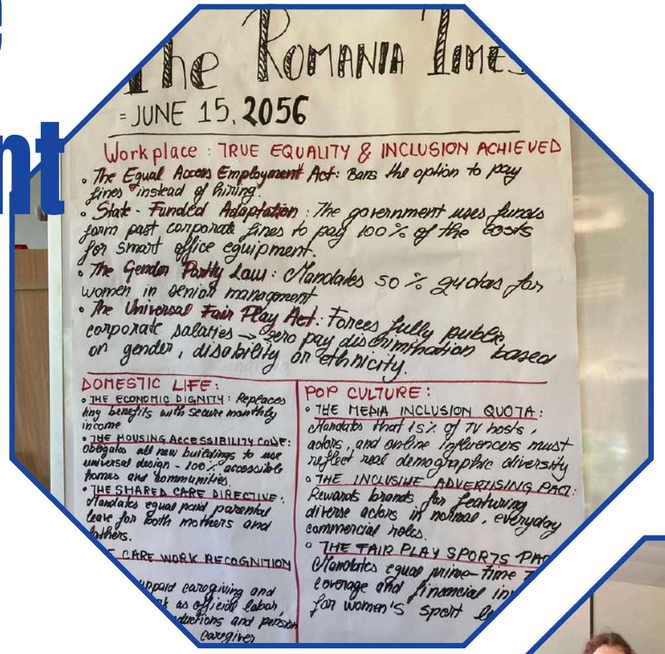
The youth workers explored the Democracy in Play board game (developed within the SHINE project), whose main goal is to foster political literacy and critical thinking by involving players in a simulation of voting process and debate.

THE FUTURE WE ALL WANT TO LIVE IN

This activity started with a short discussion about the current situation and the main challenges in each participating country related to equality and inclusion in three domains: domestic life, professional life, and popular culture representation. After the discussion, each national team had to imagine a utopian future in 2056 and list the solutions they imagined for all existing challenges and present them as a newspaper front page.

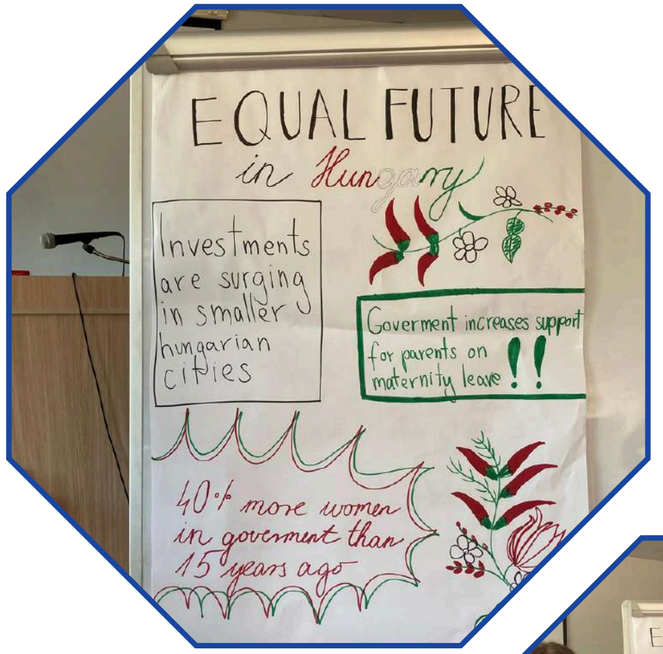


The future we all want to live in

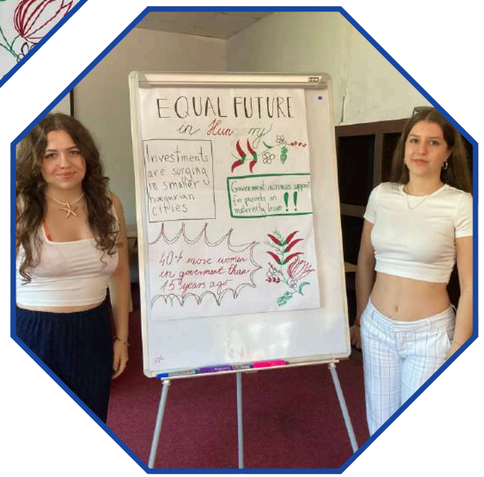


Romania

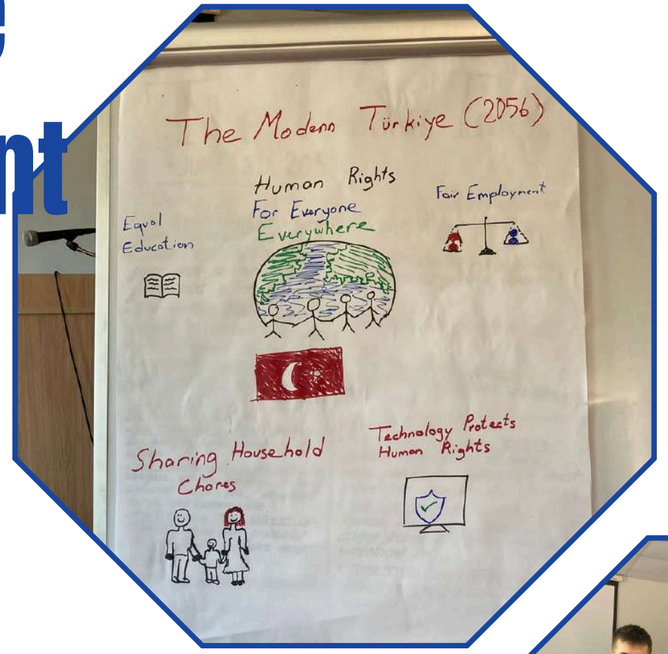




Hungary

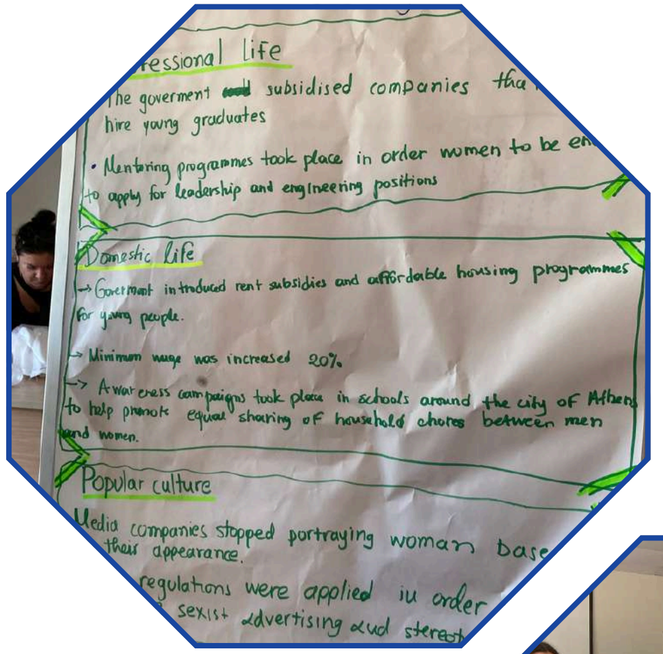


The future we all want to live in





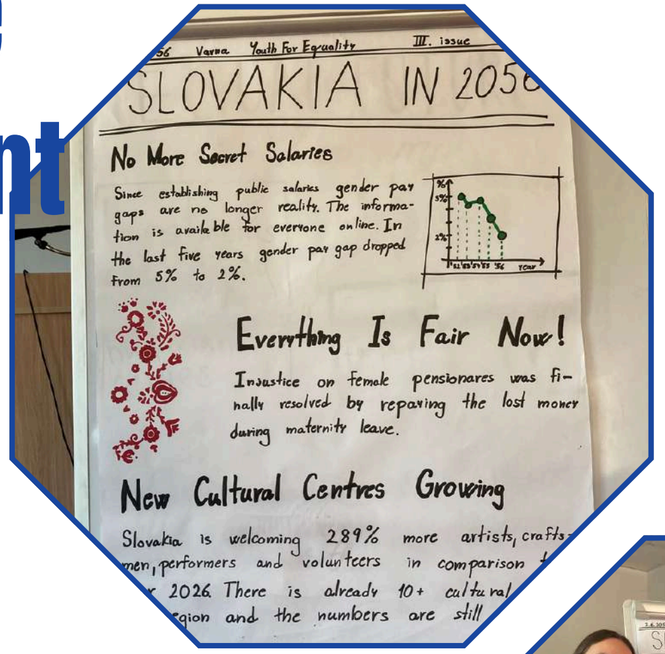
Turkey



Greece



The future we all want to live in



Slovakia



Erasmus+ Programme

The participants were introduced to the specifics of the Erasmus+ Programme, its main priorities and thematic fields. Afterwards, they created group ideas for sample Erasmus+ KA1 projects.

Group 1: Erasmus+ Youth Exchange on Migration

- Youth Exchange
- Germany, Nürnberg
- 5 days
- Countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, Turkey and Romania
- Outcomes: improved integration of migrants into the local community, improved language, digital and employment skills, stronger cooperation between partner organisations
- How will we guarantee the results: set clear targets and indicators, monitor participation and progress, collect feedback and evaluate outcomes throughout the project

Erasmus+ Programme





Group 1: Erasmus+ Youth Exchange on Migration

- 18-30 years old
- Impact: The project will improve public perceptions of migrants by promoting understanding, inclusion and positive intercultural dialogue.
- Dissemination: social media

Group 2: Remembering for Peace Youth Exchange

- Preserving historical memory and promoting awareness of past events among youth
- Krakow; 7 days
- 5 participants (18-30) and 1 team leader (18+) from Poland, Turkey, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Germany
- Activities: Get to know each other, brainstorming WW1, storytelling, workshop on the impact on countries and people, intercultural night, Auschwitz visit, Erasmus+ presentation and dissemination
- Outcomes: knowledge about WW1 and WW2, critical thinking, promote peace
- Impact: historical awareness among youth to ensure preservation of peace
- Dissemination: through social media

Training Course

DEMOCRACY IN PLAY

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E-mail: foundation.ece@gmail.com
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