

Toolkit: Crafting Europe's Rural Tomorrow, It Starts
with You!

Bite sized learning 1.1: Active Citizenship for Youth



The ABC's of Active Youth Citizenship In Europe

Active youth citizenship is crucial for fostering a democratic, vibrant, and sustainable future for Europe.

Here's an easy-to-remember guide — the ABCs — to outline how young rural people can become active citizens in Europe.

A is for Awareness

- **Stay Informed:** Try to stay informed about local, national, and European rural development issues. Understanding the complexities of policies, current events, and social issues is the first step towards meaningful participation.
- **Educational Resources:** Utilise the wealth of platforms that are freely available like the [European Youth Portal | European Youth Portal \(europa.eu\)](#) and informational sites from the EU to learn about ongoing initiatives, policy changes, and opportunities for youth engagement.
- **Critical Thinking:** Develop skills in critical thinking to analyze information, challenge misconceptions, and make informed decisions. An active citizen works to improve the quality of life in their community by both political and non-political means, building a variety of knowledge, skills, beliefs, and the will to change the world.



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B is for Belonging

Belonging is one of the most powerful human needs. When young people feel a sense of belonging, it deeply influences their emotional, social, and even professional development.

It is the feeling of being connected and accepted within a group, community, or environment. This sense of belonging involves being recognized as a member or part of something larger than oneself. Have you heard of finding your tribe? It refers to the process of seeking out and connecting with people who share similar interests, values, or experiences. It's about finding a group where you feel you naturally belong, where your ideas and contributions are valued, and where you receive emotional and social support.

Belonging goes beyond just being physically present in a group—it encompasses emotional connections, shared values and interests, mutual support, and a sense of security and acceptance. When people feel that they belong, they are more engaged, happier, and generally more productive.



B is for Belonging, it can make us feel ...

- **Valued and Acknowledged:** Young individuals feel that their contributions and opinions are important and recognised. This acknowledgment boosts their self-esteem and confidence, encouraging them to more engagement and initiative.
- **Connected:** in the sense of connection to young rural peers, community, and broader society. This connectivity fosters relationships and networks that can support them both personally and professionally throughout their lives.
- **Supported:** Feeling part of a community provides emotional and social support. Young people who feel they belong are less likely to feel isolated; they know they have a network they can turn to in times of need.
- **Empowered:** With the support and confidence that comes from belonging, young people are more likely to take on leadership roles, advocate for themselves and their rural communities, and feel capable of effecting change.
- **Responsible:** A sense of belonging instils a sense of responsibility towards the community. Young people are more likely to engage in civic duties, participate in decision-making processes, and contribute positively to society.
- **Secure:** Belonging provides a sense of security and stability, which is good for mental health.
- **Motivated:** When young people feel that they are an integral part of their rural community, they are more motivated to contribute, achieve, and maintain the welfare of the community. They care and that community cares for them.



B is for Belonging, how

- **Community Engagement:** Participate in local community activities such as volunteering, local councils, or community-based projects. This contributes to societal well-being and strengthens your sense of connection and belonging.
- **Cultural Exchange:** Engage in study abroad and intercultural exchange opportunities e.g. Erasmus+ [Studying abroad | Erasmus+ \(europa.eu\)](#) to experience diversity, understand different cultures, and foster European unity. Volunteering abroad is another great opportunity to really broaden your horizons. Check out the European Solidarity Corps via [Go abroad | European Youth Portal \(europa.eu\)](#) and explore European and country level information about opportunities and initiatives that are of interest to young people who are living, learning and working in Europe.
- **Networking:** Build networks with peers and professionals across Europe. Attend conferences, seminars, and workshops that bring together young people with shared interests and goals. The [European Youth Portal | European Youth Portal \(europa.eu\)](#) is invaluable, check it out.



B is for Belonging, in Ireland engage with

- **Young Voices** - [Young Voices - National Youth Council of Ireland](#).

In Ireland, the EU Youth Dialogue is delivered by National Youth Council Ireland through the Young Voices programme, that offers ongoing opportunities for young people from age sixteen to thirty years who have an interest in change making. The mission for Young Voices is

- To create a better future by empowering young people to influence decision making.
 - To develop connections between young people, communities and decision makers.
 - To connect, empower, represent, change and make a difference!
- **Voices of Youth** – website where young people can post their blogs and voice their opinions on different matters.



B is for Belonging, in **Spain** engage with

- Consejo de la Juventud en España (Spanish Youth Council) - <https://www.cje.org/>

Its aims on young people participation in the design of policies that directly or indirectly affect young people in order to improve the quality of life for youth and address their problems, concerns, and aspirations.

The Spanish Youth Council (CJE) is a platform of more than 60 regional Youth Councils and youth organisations.

It promotes European programs for Education, Youth and Sports, Volunteering, the Spanish Youth Institute as well competitions for young talents



B is for Belonging, in **Spain** engage with

- INJUVE (Spanish Youth Institute) - <https://www.injuve.es/>

The Youth Institute is a public organisation attached to the Ministry of Youth and Childhood, whose main activity is aimed at promoting actions for the benefit of young people.

Objectives of the INJUVE:

- Promote equal opportunities among young people
- Foster the free and effective participation of youth in the political, social, economic, and cultural development of Spain
- Encourage collaboration with other ministerial departments and public administrations, whose activities impact this sector of the population.



B is for Belonging, in Slovenia engage with

MLAD.SI (Crossroads of youth) - <https://www.mlad.si/>

MLAD.SI is a portal which connects young people in Slovenia with the youth sector and decision-makers. It connects, informs and entertains young people and those who work with young people and care about their future.

Established by the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, the portal serves as a central communication hub, fostering youth engagement and active citizenship. It features articles, interviews, event listings, and project updates, supporting the development and participation of young people in various societal aspects.

It is a portal created by young people for young people and was launched by the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth in 2011 at the initiative of organizations from the youth sector.



B is for Belonging, in **Slovenia** engage with

- THE NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF SLOVENIA <https://mss.si/>

The National Youth Council Of Slovenia is an umbrella organization linking all national youth organisations irrespective of their various interests, ideological or political orientations. As a non-profit and non-governmental organisation, it represents the opinions of Slovenian youth at the national and international level.

It fosters collaboration among diverse youth groups, providing support through resources, training, and capacity-building activities to strengthen their advocacy efforts. MSS is dedicated to influencing youth policies, ensuring that young people's voices are heard in legislative processes, and improving their social, educational, and economic conditions through various projects and initiatives.

MSS also engages in organizing events, workshops, and conferences to facilitate dialogue among youth, policymakers, and other stakeholders. These events promote knowledge exchange and networking opportunities.



B is for Belonging, in **Denmark** engage with

- Each partner country to complete a one page, like Ireland



B is for Belonging, in **Malta** engage with

- Each partner country to complete a one page, like Ireland



B is for Belonging, on a global level engage with

Voices of Youth is an initiative created by UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, aimed at providing a space for young people to express themselves, engage with issues that matter to them, and take action. It serves as a vibrant global community for young individuals to learn about and influence world issues.

- 1. Platform for Expression:** a digital platform where young people can share their thoughts, stories, and ideas through blog posts, videos, and artwork. This is a way for youth to speak out on topics that matter to them - [Blog | Voices of Youth](#)
- 2. Engagement and Advocacy:** Voices of Youth encourages active participation in societal and global issues. It promotes youth advocacy by offering tools and guidance for young people to initiate change in their communities and beyond. This includes campaigns and projects that participants can join to promote causes such as climate action, mental health, and children's rights. [Opportunities | Voices of Youth](#) and [Get Inspired. Share. Act. React. | Voices of Youth](#)
- 3. Global Community:** The initiative connects young people from around the world, fostering a sense of global citizenship and shared purpose.



C for Contribution

Contribution is a vital aspect of active youth rural citizenship. It represents the practical ways in which young people can apply their knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm to make tangible changes in their communities and beyond. By actively contributing, young people can help address immediate challenges and perhaps shape long-term policy and community development.

Each act of participation, no matter how small, is a building block for a stronger European rural community. **How can it happen?**

- **Voting and Political Engagement:**

Your vote is your voice: One of the most direct ways to contribute is through voting. Participating in local, regional national, and European elections can influence decisions that will shape your future. Do not lose that contribution.

Engagement in Political Processes: Got an opinion on what your rural area needs? Contribute where your voice can influence real decisions. It's your community, so help direct it! Beyond voting, young Europeans can contribute by participating in public consultations, attending council meetings, or joining youth wings of political parties. These actions ensure that youth perspectives are considered in governance.



C for Contribution

- **Advocacy and activism** give you the power to champion the causes you care deeply about. By raising your voice, you can help shape the rural policies and attitudes that impact today and tomorrow. **How can it happen?**
- **Identify Your Passion:**
Choose Your Cause: Start by identifying an issue you are passionate about. It could be something global like climate change or more localised like mental health resources for young people in your community.
- **Educate Yourself and Others:** Thoroughly understand all aspects of the issue. Be wary of fake news. The more knowledgeable you are, the more effectively you can advocate and educate others. Create informative content, and engage in discussions to spread awareness.
- **Using Social Media for Advocacy:** Create Compelling Content: Use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, X, and Facebook to share stories, facts, and statistics that highlight the importance of your cause. Hashtags, videos, infographics, and live streams are really effective in catching attention and spreading messages.
- **Don't just post; interact.** Respond to comments, participate in relevant conversations, and join groups that share your interests.



C for Contribution

- **Petitions and Campaigns:** Tools like www.Change.org allow you to start petitions that can influence decision-makers. A well-crafted petition with a clear message and call to action can mobilise the public and be learning for policymakers.

If you want to go further, consider

- **Participate in Events:** Join existing events, conferences, and workshops related to your cause. Networking with other activists and sharing ideas can enhance your strategies and impact.
- **Coordinating a Campaign** that others can join. Get together. Gather like-minded individuals for discussion groups, site visits and taking action.
- **Longer-Term Advocacy** could involve building a network: Create or join networks of activists and organisations. Strong networks can provide support, resources, and increased legitimacy.

Let's look at an example to show our ABC in action !



Flossie Donnelly, Marine Conservation Activist from Ireland

Background: Flossie Donnelly is a young environmental activist from Ireland, who began her journey in marine conservation at the age of 11. Living near the coast (rural Dublin), Flossie was moved by the amount of plastic pollution affecting her local beaches and decided to take action.



A. Activities and Advocacy:

- **Beach Cleaning Initiatives:** Flossie started by organising beach clean-ups in her local community. Her efforts quickly gained support, attracting a significant number of volunteers and leading to the establishment of "Flossie and the Beach Cleaners," a group dedicated to regular beach cleaning events. ["Flossie's Fight Against Ocean Plastic" | Flossie Donnelly | TEDxDunLaoghaire \(youtube.com\)](#)
- **Educational Outreach:** Understanding the importance of awareness, Flossie has been actively involved in educational campaigns to teach other young people about the impact of plastic pollution on marine life and the broader environment. She visits schools and community groups to discuss marine conservation.



Flossie Donnelly, Marine Conservation Activist from Ireland

B: Belonging

Beyond Flossie and the Beach Cleaners, Flossie collaborates with national and international NGOs to advocate for stricter environmental policies and better waste management practices.

She has connected with other young environmentalists across Europe, creating a network that shares resources, ideas, and support.

C: Contribution

Flossie's work illustrates that passionate young activists can inspire communities, influence policies, and lead significant environmental change, even from a young age. Partnerships with Local Authorities have been vital. She has engaged with local government bodies to implement more effective waste management strategies and to install public facilities for proper waste disposal near beaches.

READ MORE ABOUT FLOSSIE : [Flossie Donnelly - Wikipedia](#)





Thank you
Any Questions?