

YouthVoices Insights: Understanding Young Perspectives on Politics and EU Awareness.

October 2025

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1. Introduction

This document collects the findings of the research conducted during Activity 1 of the YouthVoices project – *“Understanding Young Perspectives on Politics and EU Awareness”*. Each project partner conducted one focus group and one WhatsApp-based emoji analysis in their country (Denmark, Spain, and Greece) following a shared methodology.

The insights presented here aim to identify common challenges, emotional patterns, and knowledge gaps among young people regarding political participation and the European Union. These findings will directly inform the design of the learning materials and civic engagement strategies in Activity 2.

2. Focus Group Summary

1. DENMARK

Country/organisation: Deep Democracy Denmark

Date of Session: 9 of September 2025.

Location (online/in-person): 3 participants were there in person, 1 participated online.

Number of Participants: 4 (the fifth participant cancelled right before the meeting).

Participants profile summary (optional): Three females, one male. Three had ethnic Danish background, one had a refugee background from the Middle East. They were all 27 or 28 years old. One was a student, one was unemployed, one was working in the social sector and one was working in the sales sector.

Facilitator(s): Sine Runa Andersen and Nina Rørmand Bjerregaard.

1. General Impressions

The group was generally positive, active and engaged. One participant told that even though they had felt welcomed they had also felt a bit shy and had difficulty understanding some of the questions. People reported in the end that they liked the discussion and it felt like a safe space to express their opinions where you didn't have to know everything beforehand and where you didn't feel stupid for not knowing everything.

2. Main highlights from the discussion

Influence:

The participants don't feel that they have a lot of influence. One feels she gets influence through her work in the social sector, and another one hopes her future work will enable her to influence the textile industry in a more climate friendly direction. It is interesting that seeking influence through one's (future) work is seen as more obvious than, for example, making a collective impact through a group or an organization.

Politicians and political representation:

The participants generally have a balanced view on politicians. Some politicians are seen as passionate fighting for their values, others are seen as opportunistic. There is an understanding that it is a prerequisite for politicians to be passionate about something and at the same time to seek power and form a majority in order to get their views across. One participant states that politicians are lying. This relates to the fact that politicians (in their view) globally have failed to stop the war in Gaza makes them distrust politicians.

Some feel represented by a political party. One person reflects that the party she feels represented by doesn't have a lot of influence in the Danish parliament, and therefore she doesn't feel that her viewpoints are getting through.

Participation:

Most of the participants vote at elections. One participant doesn't vote. This person feels that it doesn't matter who you vote for.

The participants express that not knowing enough make them refrain from participating-both from a discussion with friends or from taking part in a protest. It seems like they feel they need to know a lot about the different political topics to engage in politics. Another barrier for participating in a political discussion is the feeling that politics can get very one sided where people have the feeling that they need to support one side fully. For instance, one participant had taken part in the protests against the war in Gaza. Others sympathized with the case, but didn't feel that they knew enough about the Israel-Palestine conflict to join the protests.

A majority of the participants had experience in signing a petition or signing a citizen proposal (if 50.000 people sign a citizen proposal the Danish parliament needs to discuss the proposal in the parliament).

A barrier for going publicly into a discussion is the fear of who is watching. This goes both regarding public protests and being active in discussions on Social Media.

A difference in engagement relates to belonging to a privileged group: The majority of the participants were from Denmark and belonged to a privileged group. They expressed that when you experience that things are going quite well there is no reason to engage. A minority in the group, who had experienced and fled from war, was engaged in issues about stopping a war (in Gaza). To that person there was clearly something worth fighting for.

An interesting thing about participation that happened during the interview: The participants say they don't know a lot, and that they don't discuss politics a lot. But throughout the discussion they present a lot of their values and opinions (e.g.. about welfare, psychiatric system, youth

influence) and, as some participants said in the end of the discussion, they realise that they have a lot of values and opinions that they can contribute with even if they don't know all the facts. They all like the way this meeting has been because they could contribute to the discussion without feeling they lacked crucial knowledge and there was space to admit their limit of knowledge without feeling judged.

As one of them said: *"I also think it [the meeting] was interesting. Even if you think that you are not particularly politically active or engaged, you still are to some extent, because you have values and opinions. It is very interesting that you can still join the conversation, even if you do not know all the facts. But it is also about having the confidence to believe that you can do it."*

Topics of interest to the participants:

Welfare, psychiatric system, climate, human rights, integration, equal opportunities for all, peace/war, youth influence.

Knowledge about the EU:

Participants have limited knowledge of EU institutions and decision-making processes. Two have participated in EU-funded exchange programmes. There is an interest in learning more, but there is a feeling that knowledge is not retained.

3. Memorable Quotes

About politicians:

"What kind of democracy is it, what kind of politician are you, if 70,000 people lose their lives? It's not just Denmark, but the whole world."

"I think it varies greatly depending on the politician. I feel that there are those who are very passionate and advocate for something, and who really have their heart in the right place. And then I think there are others where it is performance, it is negotiation. It also depends on how long people have been in the game and things like that. For some, it becomes a kind of performance. For others, it's so real."

"As ... said, some are pioneers who really believe in a cause and have values they are fighting for. I think everyone must have that. Something they truly believe in that makes the world a better place. And then there is the other part of it, which is having the power to get something through and express yourself in the right way so that you get as many people on board as possible. In that way, I think it's a difficult balance that encapsulates the politician very much. The dilemma of having to get your cause through, but also being able to appeal as broadly as

possible because of the system. And then it can seem a little false if you are more concerned with having power than your values. I think it must be difficult.

About not engaging:

"I was born here, with a lot of privileges, a privilege to do something. But ... I couldn't figure out where to stand. I didn't want to stop on anyone's toes [by taking a stand in the Gaza conflict]"

"In my opinion, it is both that you think it's too overwhelming, that you don't have the energy to get involved in it. And it could also be that you feel so powerless that whatever you do, it won't make any difference."

4. Challenges mentioned by participants

Barriers to engagement:

Participants identify several barriers: a feeling of complexity, the requirement for extensive knowledge, powerlessness, fear of public exposure on social media, and concern about appearing simplistic. Also it is a barrier that politics get polarised. Privileged young people with no direct connection to political issues are less likely to engage.

About powerlessness:

"In my opinion, it is both that you think it's too overwhelming, that you don't have the energy to get involved in it. And it could also be that you feel so powerless that whatever you do, it won't make any difference".

About privileged young people being less likely to engage:

"I just think that there are many people who live their lives without any major crises or issues, which makes them think that life is fine just the way it is. In other words, they don't take a critical view of things because everything is going well. Because there are many who are extremely privileged. There are many issues that you never really need to think about."

About feeling not having enough knowledge and politics being polarised:

"Firstly, I think it's easy to feel stupid because it's all so complicated to understand. Secondly, I get the impression that everything has become really divided into left-wing and right-wing groups. I consider myself very left-wing, but I feel afraid of saying something 'wrong' in relation to my values if there is something I have missed."

About the fear of public abuse and of appearing simplistic

Participants express that they don't participate in a demonstration or on social media because they are afraid of reactions, afraid of who is watching. But it may also be because it becomes very 'prominent' if you have to express your opinion in, for example, a demonstration:

"Sometimes, when you don't know enough about something, it can seem a bit simplistic to take a stand like that. You're just showing your opinion really explicitly. Then you might feel like you have to stand by it afterwards, or argue for it, or have more knowledge about it. You feel like you have to. Like you have to have some kind of authority."

5. Suggestions for improving youth participation:

Suggestions from the participants:

- More focus on discussion and critical thinking when teaching social studies in primary/secondary school.
- Cross-political spaces where topics can be explored without having to take a final position. Forums where it is okay to change your mind and learn more. A space like this (the interview), where you don't need to know a lot. Introductory course
- *"That people talk to young people instead of about us or talking down to us. People need to listen more, because I feel that people think we are lazy and sensitive".*
- *"That our (young people's) voices were really heard and taken seriously."*

6. Suggestions for A2 Learning Program

Knowledge about the EU:

They would like to know more about the EU. But one person presents an interesting dilemma/challenge in obtaining knowledge about the EU: *"But I also think it's something, from time to time, you've tried to investigate and find out what it was like [knowledge about the EU]. And you've read a little about it, but still, it's as if it hasn't quite sunk in".*

How to have a discussion in a different way: where you can change your mind and explore different positions in a more playful way

We (Deep Democracy Denmark) can present a practice of how to have a discussion in a different way. Where you're allowed to shift your perspective and where it is not about winning, but about exploring a topic.

Develop your inner politician and your democratic self confidence.

Politics is perceived as something difficult, something where you need to know a lot. But politics is about the experiences we get through our lives, our opinions, our values. This module will support people's own voice and support them in believing that they have something important to say.

7. Observations by the facilitator

Observations are described in "1. General reflections"

2. SPAIN

Country/organisation: Hi European Youth

Date of Session: 02/07/2025

Location (online/in-person): in person

Number of Participants: 8

Participants profile summary (optional): University students (Political Science, PPE, Engineering) and VET students (Social Integration), plus one participant preparing public examinations.

Facilitator(s): Clara Brotons

1. General Impressions

The atmosphere was natural, friendly and intimate. We arranged the chairs in a circle and brought sweets, creating a relaxed setting where participants felt safe to speak. From the start, we emphasised that:

- there were no right or wrong answers,
- nothing was "positive or negative",
- and this was a conversation, not an expert lecture.

This lowered barriers immediately and resulted in an honest, dynamic and highly engaged discussion.

2. Main highlights from the discussion

How they see politics (words & emojis):

Politics was associated with uncertainty, lies, union and conflict at the same time. Emojis mentioned included:

- conflict/violence (🔪),

- money with wings (🦋) as a symbol of corruption or misuse of public funds,
- heat/overwhelm (😓) and stress,
- disgust/"bad smell" (🤢 / 🚨),
- and, as the ideal of politics, two hands shaking (🤝) representing union and agreement.

High interest but disillusionment:

On a scale from 1 to 5, all rated their interest in politics between 4 and 5. They are clearly interested in political issues, but feel disenchanting with how politics actually works.

Youth voice and representation:

Participants feel:

- underrepresented,
- rarely listened to,
- and mostly approached only when parties want youth votes.

They see politics focusing overwhelmingly on older voters due to Spain's ageing population.

Short-termism and lack of preparation:

Political decisions are perceived as short-term, election-driven and focused on power, not oriented to long-term improvement. Many believe politicians are insufficiently prepared and lack technical knowledge for their roles.

Lack of political, civic and economic education

A key theme was the insufficient education young people receive to understand society. Many youths:

- "don't know what's going on",
- don't understand how institutions work,
- can't interpret news critically,
- don't know basics like taxes, mortgages, interest rates, public budgets.

This leads to:

- confusion,
- dependence on social media or home narratives,
- vulnerability to echo chambers,
- and feeling “like sheep” without critical tools.

Participants strongly believe politicians have no interest in citizens being well informed.

Polarisation & party loyalty

Politics is seen as highly polarised:

- people defend “their” party uncritically,
- extremes are very active,
- the centre becomes increasingly disenchanted.

Political activity & youth participation:

For them, being politically active is not only voting, but also:

- participating,
- speaking up and fighting for what really matters to you,
- because “no one will do it for us”.

They believe that, as young people, they should be the ones who move the most, especially in terms of cultural battles, critical thinking and social change.

“Cultural battle” and critical thinking:

One of the strongest ideas was the need to make young people think:

- reading a piece of news and asking why it is published,
- who is behind it,
- what is not being told,

- and how political actors use causes (feminism, environment, etc.) to attract votes instead of really solving problems.

Protest and streets vs. social media:

They feel that young people don't go out to the streets as much, and often don't even know what is happening.

Activism is more often posting on Instagram or Twitter than joining demonstrations.

They also distrust many protests because there is almost always an organisation or party behind them, and this discourages participation.

Perception of the European Union:

A significant part of the discussion focused on the European Union and the idea of European identity.

Participants expressed that:

- The original idea of the EU is good — aiming for closer integration and even something similar to a "United States of Europe".
- However, they feel the European project needs to be rethought. There is no strong European feeling or identity among young people; the EU makes sense mainly as a commercial and economic union, not as an emotional or political one.

They also criticised:

- The EU's tendency to legislate excessively on matters that do not reflect European capabilities (example given: regulating Artificial Intelligence despite Europe not being a global AI leader compared to China or the US).
- The EU being too limited for current global challenges, such as the need for a European army or strong strategic power.
- Many ideas in founding treaties were excellent on paper but never materialised.

They mentioned:

- The EU often imposes unrealistic requirements on member states — “surreal” or impossible goals.
- They do not feel informed about European institutions, their roles, or how EU decisions affect their daily lives.
- They do not know which European political parties exist or how they differ.

Overall, they see the EU as important and well-intentioned, but distant, overly bureaucratic, and lacking strategic strength and identity.

3. Memorable Quotes

“We are interested in politics, but we feel disenchanting.”

“Being politically active is not just voting; it’s participating and fighting for what really matters to you, because no one will do it for you.”

“Parties try to look young to get our votes, but then they govern for older people.”

“Political Science is very theoretical – it doesn’t really prepare you to be a politician focused on the common good.”

“We lack the ability to unite and think critically; people defend their party no matter what it does.”

4. Challenges mentioned by participants

- Lack of youth representation and meaningful engagement.
- Insufficient political, civic and economic literacy.
- Short-termism in political decision-making.
- Polarisation and loyalty to parties rather than ideas.
- Disconnection from EU institutions and low awareness of their impact.
- Distrust in protests due to political manipulation.
- University education is seen as poorly connected to real life.

5. Suggestions for improving youth participation:

- Introduce civic, political and economic education earlier in the system.
- Teach real-world skills: taxes, public budgets, mortgages, institutions.
- Create spaces for real, non-electoral dialogue between politicians and youth.
- Promote independent, youth-led participation channels.
- Strengthen critical thinking and media literacy.
- Demystify the EU: explain institutions, parties, competencies and real impacts on everyday life.

6. Suggestions for A2 Learning Program

The Learning Program should include:

- How political decisions are actually made.
- Media, information and algorithm literacy.
- Basic civic/economic literacy for real life.
- Exercises that build democratic self-confidence.
- Simulations of decision-making, debates and consultations.
- Modules specifically explaining the EU, its institutions, its limits, and how young people can participate and influence it.

7. Observations by the facilitator

This focus group showed that young people are:

- interested,
- motivated,
- capable,

but lack the tools, education and spaces needed to engage meaningfully.

They feel unheard, disconnected, and underprepared, even though they care deeply about society and politics.

Their feedback highlights the urgency of creating learning materials that:

- explain systems clearly,

- connect politics to everyday life,
- foster critical thinking,
- and bring young people closer to political processes, both national and European.

3. GREECE

Country/organisation: Connectus

Date of Session: 05/09/2025

Location (online/in-person): Online

Number of Participants: 5 Participants

Participants profile summary (optional): Young adults (4 female, 1 male) aged 20–25 from Greece, mixed educational backgrounds, with varying levels of political interest and some of them had previous participation in EU-funded programs such as Erasmus+ and Youth Exchanges.

Facilitator(s): Vera Gospodini

1. General Impressions

The atmosphere was relaxed, friendly, and open. Participants felt comfortable expressing honest opinions, even when critical or contradictory. Engagement was consistently high, since most participants contributed actively, reacted to others' comments, and expanded on shared experiences. The dynamic was cooperative, with several moments of lively debate, especially around trust in institutions, the value of political participation, and the EU's role in daily life.

2. Main highlights from the discussion

2.1 Introduction

How participants introduced themselves:

Participants were aged 20–25, from different Greek cities (Thessaloniki, Larissa, Athens). They engaged openly from the start.

First associations with "politics":

Their immediate reactions were mostly negative or emotionally charged. Words included:

- "Chaos"
- "Society"
- "Hypocrisy"
- "Corruption" (implied)

- "Noise"

Overall, politics was perceived as messy, tense, or disappointing.

Interest in politics (scale 1–5):

Most rated their interest between 3 and 5.

- Those at 3 said they care but do not engage as much as they "should."
- Those at 5 highlighted its impact on everyday life ("Politics shapes everything in our life").

Despite stated interest, many admitted they feel disconnected or powerless.

2.2 Perceptions of Political Participation & Representation

Does their voice matter?

Responses were mixed:

- Some believe a voice matters only when collective, not individually.
- Others felt even large movements often change nothing, referencing protests that "led to nothing."

Democratic self-confidence:

Most participants aligned with:

- (1) "I have something to contribute" and
- (2) "My opinions are worth listening to"
- But many were unsure about (3) understanding political issues, expressing low confidence in their political literacy.

How decisions are made in their country:

Participants described the Greek political system as:

- opaque
- influenced by party agendas
- slow
- often disconnected from citizens' real needs

Several referenced corruption scandals and poor transparency.

What they think about politicians:

Politicians were associated with:

- self-interest
- hypocrisy
- lack of accountability
- prioritizing image over substance

Do they feel represented?

Most do not feel represented by parties or institutions.

One participant emphasized distrust in a system "controlled by one party."

What "politically active" means today:

They defined it as:

- voting
- staying informed
- discussing issues
- participating in protests or online petitions
- making ethical consumer choices
- engaging in community initiatives

However, several said being politically active "should not mean being constantly angry or disappointed."

2.3 Knowledge and Understanding of the EU

First associations with the EU:

Participants mentioned:

- "Appearance"
- "Hypocrisy"
- "Superficial solidarity"
- "Alliance—at least on paper"
- "Support"

Opinions leaned toward skepticism about how genuine EU cooperation is.

Feeling informed about EU institutions:

Most said they are not informed:

- They do not know how decisions are made.
- They do not understand the role of the Commission or Parliament.
- Some only know the EU through funding programs.

Past participation in EU programmes:

Most had participated in:

- Erasmus studies
- Erasmus internships
- Youth Exchanges

They recognized these as major positive EU contributions.

Understanding of the EU Parliament:

Most admitted they don't know how MEPs are elected or what they actually do.

2.4 Experiences of Civic or Political Engagement

Voting history:

Almost all had voted at least once (local, national, or EU).

Motivations included:

- sense of responsibility
- belief voting is the "minimum we can do"
- desire for change

However, one admitted voting without fully understanding the political landscape.

Protests, petitions, boycotts:

Experiences included:

- attending demonstrations
- signing petitions
- boycotting companies (e.g., Coca-Cola)
- buying from cooperatives or small businesses

Some expressed frustration about protests that "achieved nothing."

Political discussions:

They often talk about politics:

- in family settings
- with friends
- occasionally online

These conversations sometimes reveal ignorance or misunderstandings, but are viewed as learning opportunities.

Important political topics:

Participants identified:

- cost of living
- environmental issues
- labor rights
- migration & refugee policies
- digital misinformation
- local urban issues (homelessness, lack of services, infrastructure)

They wish to see improvements in transparency, social justice, and environmental policies.

Role of young people:

Young people are seen as:

- important but undervalued contributors
- often more informed than older generations
- motivated but discouraged by systemic barriers

They believe youth could shape the future more effectively with proper tools and support.

2.5 Barriers and Proposals for Change

What stops youth from participating?

- lack of trust
- lack of impact ("nothing changes")
- misinformation
- overwhelming political negativity
- limited accessible channels for expressing opinions
- time constraints

Feeling excluded:

Some felt dismissed in discussions due to age or "not knowing enough."

Actions/tools that could help:

Participants proposed:

- digital platforms for communication with municipalities
- apps showing ethical/sustainable companies
- community gardens or collective initiatives
- more accessible political education
- spaces for local youth assemblies

One thing they would change:

- greater transparency
- easier, direct civic participation
- more accountability of political leaders
- platforms where youth proposals must be officially reviewed

2.6 Wrap-Up & Closing

What they enjoyed:

- open, honest discussion
- hearing diverse viewpoints
- feeling included and listened to
- exploring new ideas about political action

One word to describe their feelings:

Words such as "hopeful," "interested," "awake," "motivated" were implied through closing remarks.

Willingness to join future actions:

Participants were open to joining follow-up activities, including WhatsApp groups for emoji reactions.

3. Memorable Quotes

"Even when we protest, nothing changes."

"I trust the EU more simply because I know less about what really goes on there."

"Politics affects everything in life, but I don't feel I can affect politics."

"We vote for the European Parliament, but we don't actually know what they do."

"If the EU didn't fund these programs, none of them would exist."

"I try to boycott some companies, but you can't do it 100%, they're everywhere."

"I'm tired of hearing about scandals. The question isn't where corruption exists, but where it doesn't."

"Local problems are right in front of us, such as homelessness, no parking, no services. Why can't we communicate better with the municipality?"

4. Challenges mentioned by participants

- **Feeling of low influence:** belief that individual or even collective political action rarely leads to real change.
- **Lack of trustworthy information:** confusion about political processes, fake news, difficulty verifying sources.
- **Limited understanding of EU institutions** and their impact on everyday life.
- **Political fatigue:** overwhelming negativity or scandals in national politics.
- **Practical barriers to engagement,** such as time, lack of clear channels for communication with local authorities.
- **Difficulty sustaining ethical consumption** (e.g., boycotts), due to corporate dominance.

5. Suggestions for improving youth participation:

- **Create digital communication tools for local decision-making**, enabling citizens to submit issues, vote on ideas, or monitor municipal actions.
- **Build community-based initiatives**, such as shared gardens, which reduce cost of living, build solidarity, and foster participation.
- **Clearer, youth-friendly political information**, especially on how decisions are made at national and EU level.
- **Support for grassroots youth groups**, offering micro-funding or mentorship.
- **Actions that combine socializing with activism**, making participation more enjoyable and relatable.
- **Better guidance on ethical consumption**, including apps helping identify companies linked to harmful practices.

6. Suggestions for A2 Learning Program

- **Simplify political concepts**: participants need approachable explanations of democratic systems, EU structures, and political processes.
- **Add real-life examples**: how EU decisions influence everyday issues like prices, mobility, environment, and employment.
- **Highlight practical tools for participation**: petitions, local councils, digital platforms, youth assemblies, and volunteering.
- **Include content on misinformation**: how to identify fake news, verify information, and navigate digital political spaces.
- **Focus on local-level engagement**: show youth how to influence their municipality and community directly.
- **Incorporate interactive multimedia**: short videos, relatable stories from young people, case studies of successful youth-led initiatives.
- **Address emotions around politics**: disillusionment, frustration, apathy—help youth understand and manage these feelings constructively.

7. Observations by the facilitator

Throughout the session, it was evident that the participants were highly reflective and willing to engage deeply with the topics. They spoke openly about their uncertainties, frustrations, and hopes, often acknowledging the contradictions in their own perspectives, for example, trusting

the EU more than national institutions despite having limited knowledge about how the EU actually functions. Their critical thinking was strong, yet many expressed low confidence in their political understanding, suggesting that their disengagement stems more from self-doubt and lack of accessible information than from disinterest.

The group responded particularly well to dialogue and real-life examples. When personal experiences, such as Erasmus participation, local community issues, or memories of protests, were brought into the discussion, the energy in the room increased noticeably. These moments showed that experiential learning and relatable narratives resonate more than abstract political explanations.

Another recurring observation was that participants are motivated by practical action rather than theory. They repeatedly gravitated toward ideas that offered tangible, local-level impact, such as municipal apps, community projects, and tools that make decision-making more transparent. Their emotional responses also revealed an undercurrent of disappointment with national politics, contrasted by a subtle optimism toward community-driven or EU-funded initiatives. This suggests that the most effective engagement strategies for young people are those that combine empowerment, practicality, and clear pathways to visible outcomes.

3. Emoji Analysis

1. DENMARK

YouthVoices Emoji Country-Level Analysis

Partner Organization: Deep Democracy Denmark

Country: Denmark

Number of Participants: 20

Dates of Emoji Analysis Activity: 06.10 to 10.10

A. General Observations






Difficult to recruit participants. Many of those we asked weren't interested.







We used Messenger instead of WhatsApp, since more people in Denmark use Messenger than WhatsApp.














The level of engagement was relatively high, but decreased during the week: In the beginning, posts received 13-14 reactions, towards the end 10 or few. A few people replied to none of the posts (despite that they had of course given their consent to participate in the group).

B. Content Analysis Matrix

Use this table to analyze each post:

Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
Introduce the image sent it to the WhatsApp Group	 News Short text with link to	National: About local elections, and what people think about	14 =  6  2	 6  2	People are generally sad and dissatisfied with the fact






	news-articles. Question in the end: "What do you think about that the voting percentage amongst young people is so low?"	low voting percentage amongst young people.	 1  1  1  1  1  1		<p>that the voting percentage amongst young people are so low.</p> <p>Some emojis (like the one with the long nose) can indicate a scepticism towards the political system.</p>
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Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
Introduce the image sent it to the WhatsApp Group	 EU Resources Short text + picture (common content)	EU: European Solidarity Corps (ESC)	13 =  2  3  2  1  1  1  1  1  1	 2  3  2	<p>Generally positive reactions towards participating in European activities. However, a few also expresses scepticism.</p>

Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
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<p>Introduce the image sent it to the WhatsApp Group</p>	<p> News Short text with link to news article. Question in the end.</p>	<p>National. About school refusal (people who don't go to school, mainly because of psychological problems). Question in the end: "What do you think about that the involuntary school absence rate has increased?"</p>	<p>13 = 4 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1</p>	<p> 4</p>	<p>Sadness, anger and concern. A few (the "opposite" smiley and the soldier) could indicate irony or sarcasm. Maybe because it is so obvious to be concerned about the increase in the involuntary school absence rate?</p>
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Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
<p>Introduce the image sent it to the WhatsApp Group</p>	<p> News Short text with link to news article. Question in the end.</p>	<p>National (but related to EU) About that the Danish government wishes to change the human rights convention, so that it is easier to deport criminal foreigners.</p>	<p>13 = 2 2 1 1 1</p>	<p> 2 2</p>	<p>There is really mixed feedback about this question, ranging from support (heart, thumbs up, Danish flag) to chock and holding one's head in despair.</p>













			 1  1  1  1  1		<p>This reflects that this is indeed a topic that divides the Danish population.</p>
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Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
Introduce the image sent it to the WhatsApp Group	 Infographics about the EU (common content)	<p>Common content.</p> <p>Infographic about the EU. Short post.</p> <p>Question in the end: What do you think about the EU?</p>	<p>13 =</p>  2  2  1  1  1  1  1  1  1  1  1	 2  2	<p>A positive response from the majority.</p> <p>A few reacts with confusion and humor.</p>

Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
Introduce the image sent it to the WhatsApp Group	News Short text with link to news article. Question in the end.	National. A link to an article from a Green Think Tank about raising Denmark's goal for CO2-reduction. Question at the end: Should Denmark set a new goal of 90% CO2-reduction before 2035?	13 = 3 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	3 2	Overall positive responses, and emojis signaling hope. The "pleading/begging" face could be a sign of "yes, please, let's do it now before it's too late". Shows that young people are very concerned with climate issues.


Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
Introduce the image sent it to the WhatsApp Group	Quotes Short text + quote and question in the end	EU content About lowering the voting age to 16, with a picture of a EU politician advocating for that point of view	13 = 5 2 1 1 1 1 1	5 2	Mainly negative, and showing discomfort and scepticism.

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Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
Introduce the image sent it to the WhatsApp Group	 News Short information with Picture and question in the end	National (but international content). About the war in Gaza. At the time of writing, a ceasefire agreement had just been signed. Question in the end: Do you have hope that a long-term ceasefire and possibly peace between Israel and Hamas is within reach? Picture of a peace dove.	12 =  3  2  1  1  1  1  1  1  1	 3  2	The mending heart can indicate healing, recovery and sympathy for someone going through a difficult process. Main interpretation is sympathy with the people involved and hope. However, some emojis also show negative expectations towards the peace process, expressing scepticism or fear.

Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
Introduce the image sent it to the	 EU Resources	EU. About Erasmus+	11=  3	 3	Divided responses, between

WhatsApp Group	(common content)	Youth exchange. Question in the end: Could you imagine joining such an initiative?	<p>100 2</p> <p>😞 1</p> <p>😞 1</p> <p>🙇 1</p> <p>🙇 1</p> <p>😍 1</p> <p>👍 1</p>	<p>100 2</p>	<p>negative, positive and neutral/sceptical.</p> <p>Interpretation: this has nothing to do with the initiative, but the individuals personal preferences to whether the idea of going abroad for an exchange fits with where they are in their lives.</p>
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Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
Introduce the image sent it to the WhatsApp Group	<p> News (?)</p> <p>Picture with text</p>	<p>National</p> <p>A short text + a picture: Hope for the future?</p> <p>Question: As a young person, what are your thoughts about your future?</p>	<p>11 =</p> <p>👊 3</p> <p>😊 2</p> <p>👨👩👧👦 1</p> <p>😞 1</p> <p>🌳 1</p> <p>😬 1</p> <p>😞 1</p> <p>✌️ 1</p>	<p>👊 3</p> <p>😊 2</p>	<p>The raised fist emoji can be interpreted as a symbol of resistance</p> <p>The melting face emoji can symbolize feeling overwhelmed.</p> <p>Of other reactions, some showed hope, some showed scepticism or fear.</p>

					So in general, people are mixed between having hope and a "fight" spirit and being overwhelmed and concerned about their future.
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C. Key Emotional Trends

Some posts generated mainly positive responses, some negative. It reflects the content - some content worried people and got more negative reactions (like low voting rate among young people and involuntarily school absence), other content got more positive feedback (like the ceasefire agreement in Gaza getting reactions of hope and sympathy, and the EU as an institution receiving support).

Other posts generated more diverse responses showing the diversity amongst the participants. For instance the post about hope for the future and the post about the Erasmus + youth exchange. These posts show the participants diverse lives and diverse perceptions of the future.

An unexpected reaction: the young people were against lowering the voting age. Maybe this relates to young people's feeling of not knowing enough about politics, so they might not think that even younger people would be prepared to vote.

D. Reflections and Challenges

Note any lessons learned or difficulties in facilitating or analyzing the activity.

Some asked about the use of emojis. On day 2, the facilitator had to clarify that every emoji is okay to use and not just the six that comes up automatically in Messenger.

Nobody replied with anything other than emojis. But one participant wrote to one of the administrators that he was frustrated about not being able to express himself in words and wanted to explain what was behind his emoji.

After the survey, we asked the question: How was it for you to be part of this survey? People were allowed to answer also with text, but answered only with emojis: 9 people reacted, all with positive replies (mostly with 👍)

However, we got some feedback personally from one of the participants:

- It had been difficult to express your opinion with emojis only. For instance, one of the posts about participating in a EU programme. She said that she personally would never do that - but that she finds that it's a great idea that it exists and she would support others to join.
- It was easy and engaging - it only took a few minutes. It was easier and more fun than a normal survey.
- Maybe it could be a good way of informing and engaging, rather than researching people's opinions. Because you needed to read the text (and maybe the article linked) in order to be able to react, therefore you got important information on for instance the local elections.

2. SPAIN

YouthVoices Emoji Country-Level Analysis

Partner Organisation: Hi European Youth

Country: Spain

Number of Participants: 23

Dates of Emoji Analysis Activity: 3rd to 14th of November

A. General Observations







Although 23 young people joined the WhatsApp channel, engagement varied depending on the topic: between 18 and 8 participants reacted to each post.

To ensure greater confidentiality and avoid participants feeling observed, we decided to use a WhatsApp Channel instead of a Group. This change helped create a safer emotional space, but it also came with a limitation: WhatsApp Channels do not send notifications, which likely reduced the consistency of participation throughout the two-week activity.

Overall, the mood was open, curious, and respectful. Participants reacted honestly to political and social topics, expressing a wide variety of emotions—ranging from frustration and mistrust to interest, humor, and reflection.

B. Content Analysis Matrix

Use this table to analyze each post:

Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
Explanation of the current PSOE-Sumarr coalition and contrasting	Political news explainer.	National.	 =11,  =3,  =1	 , 	The dominant suggests  confusion, skepticism, or uncertainty toward the coalition's

<p>public opinions.</p>				<p>performance. The presence of 🤔 reflects frustration or dissatisfaction. Very low positive reaction (👍) indicates limited trust or enthusiasm among young participants.</p>
<p>Lowering the Voting Age to 16</p>	<p>Policy debate.</p>	<p>EU → National implications.</p>	<p>👉=8, 🤔=2, 🤡=2, 😐=1, 🙄=1</p>	<p>👉 🤔 🤡</p> <p>Clear rejection (👉) is dominant, showing youth reluctance toward this measure. 🤡 indicates mockery or perception that the proposal is meaningless or poorly timed. The analytical 🤔 and 🙄 suggest some interest but also suspicion. Overall sentiment trends toward <i>distrust and disbelief</i>.</p>
<p>Controversy around parliamentary rules limiting journalists' accreditation.</p>	<p>Controversy around parliamentary rules limiting journalists' accreditation.</p>	<p>National.</p>	<p>⚖️=5, 😐=4, 🤔=1, 💬=2, 🧠=1</p>	<p>⚖️ 😐</p> <p>⚖️ indicates a strong preference for <i>order, rules, and institutional respect</i>. 😐 shows <i>emotional fatigue</i> and disinterest in political confrontation. Low levels of</p>

					anger (🤔) and activism (🗣️) suggest that youth do not perceive this case as personally relevant, but they lean toward a more regulated environment for political debate.
Opinion poll showing PSOE ahead.	Data-based news.	National.	📊=8, 😊=3	📊, 😊	Many participants show curiosity (📊), indicating interest in political data. However, 😊 expresses skepticism about the credibility of polls. Interpretation: youth consume political data but do not fully trust it.
Eurobarometer data on youth attitudes toward the EU.	EU-focused opinion question.	EU	👍=5, 😊=1, 🗣️=1, 🛡️=1	👍	Moderately positive view (👍), but the presence of neutral or ambivalent emojis (😊, 🗣️) indicates a certain emotional distance. Youth seem to approve of the EU in general but lack a strong

					emotional connection.
Sánchez reacting to a corruption crisis.	Political communication.	National.	=7, =3		shows clear perception of political messaging as strategy, not authenticity. indicates frustration or distrust. Youth interpret political rhetoric as formulaic or manipulative.
Promotion of ESC volunteering.	EU opportunities post.	EU.	=5, =2, =1, =1		Highly positive—interest, excitement and openness. Strong emotional contrast with political content. Youth respond more positively to <i>opportunities</i> than to <i>politics</i> .
Resignations requested for Sánchez and Mazón; Mazón eventually resigns.	Political accountability.	National.	=7, =2, =1		Youth value accountability and see resignations as a positive sign. Emojis show satisfaction and a sense of justice being served.
Controversy around political responsibility in a	Political scandal / judicial news.	National.	=7, =1		Direct anger. Youth perceive this case as wrongdoing, mismanagement.

DANA-related case.				t, or lack of transparency. Very low nuance (only one 😞), suggesting clear negative sentiment.
Promotion of EU mobility opportunities.	EU opportunities / informational.	EU	😊=2, ❤️=2, 😞=1, 👍=1	😊, ❤️ Strongly positive emotional engagement, linked to personal growth opportunities. Youth consistently respond much more positively to <i>personal opportunities</i> than to <i>political content</i> .

C. Key Emotional Trends

Across the Emoji Analysis activity, several dominant emotional patterns emerged:

- 1. High levels of distrust and political fatigue**
 Posts related to political scandals, leadership, corruption or institutional instability (e.g., Sánchez's statement, inconsistent testimonies, Mazón's resignation, coalition government) generated strong negative emotions — mainly distrust (🧱, 😞) and confusion (😞).
 Young people showed a clear exhaustion with political conflicts and contradictory narratives.
- 2. Interest mixed with skepticism toward political data and reforms**
 Content such as CIS polling or the proposal to lower the voting age to 16 attracted significant engagement but with mainly skeptical reactions (👉, 😞).
 Young people are curious about political processes but do not fully trust official data or institutional proposals.

3. **Polarisation fatigue**
In debates like freedom of expression vs. institutional respect (Vito Quiles), one of the top reactions was 😞, reflecting that many participants feel tired of confrontation and politicised media battles.
4. **Positive emotions appear predominantly around EU opportunities**
Posts about Erasmus+, ESC, or other EU youth programmes consistently generated enthusiastic and hopeful reactions (❤️, 😊, 👍👍).
Unlike national politics, content focused on *practical opportunities* for young people sparked optimism, aspiration, and interest.
5. **Responsibility and accountability resonate strongly**
Posts about political transparency, ethics, or resignations generated reactions like 👍 and 😡 — indicating that young people value clear accountability, and get frustrated when politicians avoid responsibility.

Overall, the emotional landscape shows a mix of political disengagement, skepticism, and fatigue, contrasted with hopefulness and motivation when the focus shifts to *youth-centred EU opportunities*.

D. Reflections and Challenges

1. **Higher confidentiality reduced pressure, but notifications were a challenge**
Moving from a WhatsApp Group to a WhatsApp Channel improved privacy and emotional honesty, but Channels do not send notifications, which likely reduced consistent engagement.
2. **Participation varied depending on topic**
Even with 23 young people in the channel, daily reactions ranged from 18 to 8 participants.

Topics related to opportunities (Erasmus+, ESC) tended to attract more positive engagement, whereas political topics generated more mixed or negative emotions but slightly lower participation.

3. **Emojis provide authentic reactions but limited depth**
While emojis capture emotional responses effectively, they do not always provide context or rationale. Some nuanced opinions may have remained unexpressed unless participants voluntarily commented.
4. **Political content can cause disengagement**
Posts involving political controversy sometimes triggered a sense of saturation (😬, 😬). This suggests that young people may avoid engaging deeply with topics they find repetitive, conflictive, or emotionally draining.
5. **Benefits for the research phase**
Despite challenges, the Emoji Analysis proved to be a low-barrier, engaging method that encouraged spontaneous emotional expression. These reactions will be valuable for understanding patterns of political disengagement, skepticism toward institutions, and the contrast between national vs. EU perceptions.

3. GREECE

YouthVoices Emoji Country-Level Analysis

Partner Organization: Connectus

Country: Greece

Number of Participants: 20








Dates of Emoji Analysis Activity: 3.11.2025 to 07.11.2025

A. General Observations

The emoji analysis activity in Greece was carried out through a WhatsApp group, created specifically for this research phase. A total of 20 young people were added to the group. By the end of the activity, 16 participants actively engaged by reacting with emojis to the content posted.

Participation was steady throughout the week, and the WhatsApp environment made it easy for young people to react quickly and informally. Most posts received multiple emoji reactions, showing a good level of interaction and interest. The overall mood varied depending on the topic, with national political issues triggering more intense emotional responses, while EU-related opportunities generated more positive engagement.

B. Content Analysis Matrix

Content	Type	Context (EU/National)	Reactions	Top Emojis	Emotional Interpretation
<p>New labor bill with 13 hours of work in a single day</p> <p>The new labor bill was passed, allowing for up to 13 hours of work</p>	National Policy/ Labour & Workers' Rights	National	 3  5  3  1  1  1	 5	Participants reacted with strong anger and outrage, expressing frustration and disbelief about the extension of the

<p>in a single day. The 13-hour workday is now extended to employees working for a single employer, with additional pay.</p>			<p>🤡 1 🙄 1</p>		<p>workday. The presence of 🙄 and 😬 shows worry and fear about working conditions. Emojis like 🤡 and 😏 indicate sarcasm and ridicule, suggesting they view the decision as absurd.</p>
<p>New Bill on Training & Lifelong Learning</p> <p>One of the most important aspects is the creation of the Academies of Vocational Training, set up through collaboration between the Ministry of Education and economic actors. They offer free studies and certification in specialties tailored to the real needs of each region.</p>	<p>National Policy/ Education Reform</p>	<p>National</p>	<p>👉 2 ❤️ 6 👍 5 🙏 1 🤔 1 😬 1</p>	<p>❤️ 6</p>	<p>Reactions were mostly positive and supportive. ❤️ and 👍 show approval and hope, while 👉 and 🙏 suggest optimism for better opportunities. A few emojis (🤔 😬) show curiosity and interest in the details of the reform.</p>
<p>European Solidarity Corps (ESC)</p> <p>:George from Greece volunteered for two months in Italy, helping at a youth center for children with fewer opportunities.</p>	<p>EU Youth Opportunity/ Mobility Program</p>	<p>EU</p>	<p>😊 1 ❤️ 10 😭 1 😄 1 😍 1 👍 1 👏 1</p>	<p>❤️ 10</p>	<p>Participants reacted with warm, emotional, and enthusiastic emojis. ❤️ and 😭 show emotional connection and admiration. 😄 and 😍 indicate inspiration, and 👏 expresses</p>

					support and encouragement.
<p>Ban on Gatherings at the Monument to the Unknown Soldier</p> <p>The government submitted a bill to "protect the Monument to the Unknown Soldier," which in practice introduces a ban on gatherings at the upper part of Syntagma Square, directly in front of Parliament.</p>	National Political Decision	National	2 4 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	4	<p>Reactions show a mix of anger, skepticism, and disappointment. , , and express frustration with the restriction. and show distrust and annoyance. and indicate sarcasm, suggesting participants see the measure as unreasonable or ridiculous.</p>
<p>New Ministry of National Defense</p> <p>In his speech, Kyriakos Mitsotakis referred to the new image of the Ministry of National Defense, saying that it "reflects the bold and ambitious transformation, as well as the necessary modernization of the Armed Forces."</p>	National Political Decision	National	3 3 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	3 3	<p>The reactions are dominated by sarcasm and disbelief. and imply the announcement is seen as ironic or not serious. and show disgust and anger, while and indicate skepticism. Overall mood: critical and unimpressed.</p>
<p>Tempi Trial – New Postponement Request</p>	Justice System News	National	1 5 3 1 1	5	<p>This topic triggered strong sadness and anger. , , and show emotional</p>

<p>A new request for postponement was submitted by the defense lawyers of the accused in the Tempi train-crash case, concerning the handling of video evidence in the trial taking place in Larissa.</p>			1 1 1 1 1		<p>exhaustion and disappointment. 😡 and 😫 show rage about the delay. 😓 expresses tiredness, and 😬 indicates the situation feels like a "joke" or an injustice.</p>
<p>Youth Exchanges – Erasmus+</p> <p>Sara from Spain participated in a youth exchange program in Poland to learn about climate activism and met friends from five different countries.</p>	<p>EU Youth Opportunity</p>	<p>EU</p>	1 9 3 1 1 1	9	<p>Participants responded with enthusiasm and joy. ❤️, 😄, and 😊 show admiration and excitement. 👍 and 👏 indicate support and approval, while 🙌 symbolizes celebration. Overall, a very positive emotional reaction.</p>
<p>New Evidence & Inspections for OPEKEPE</p> <p>Revealing dialogues that have come to light expose "fierce bargaining," threats against OPEKEPE officials when they attempted to do their job properly, cover-ups, lack of oversight regarding subsidies, and political</p>	<p>National News</p>	<p>National</p>	1 3 2 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	3	<p>Reactions reflect anger and disappointment regarding corruption or misconduct. 😞 and 😡 show frustration. 😞 and 😬 suggest participants feel the situation is dishonest or ridiculous. 😓 and 😞 indicate disgust and annoyance.</p>

interventions that served clientelist networks.					
<p>Lowering the Voting Age to 16</p> <p>Glenn Micallef, European Commissioner for Youth, expressed his support for lowering the voting age to 16. He believes this could be a positive step toward a more inclusive democracy, provided it is combined with strong civic education.</p>	<p>EU Announcement</p>	<p>EU</p>	<p>🤔 5 👍 2 🧐 2 🤨 2 😱 1 😮 1 😬 1 😞 1 🙄 1</p>	<p>🤔 5</p>	<p>Participants showed curiosity mixed with skepticism. 🤔, 😬, and 🧐 suggest they are thinking critically about the idea. Some positive reactions (👍, 😮) show interest or cautious approval, while 😞 shows uncertainty.</p>
<p>Panos Routsis Statement</p> <p>In Syntagma Square, in front of the Monument to the Unknown Soldier, Panos Routsis returned on Sunday 26/10, declaring: "We will be here every night," adding that he asks the Prime Minister and the police "not to touch these children."</p>	<p>Social Issue/ Justice & Public Debate</p>	<p>National</p>	<p>👏 2 😞 5 🙏 5 👍 1 😞 1 😞 1 🤝 1</p>	<p>😞 5 🙏 5</p>	<p>Reactions were highly emotional and empathetic. 😞 and 😞 show sadness and compassion. 🙏 and 🤝 reflect solidarity and support. 👏 and 👍 indicate respect and encouragement. The overall tone is deeply supportive and emotionally engaged.</p>

C. Key Emotional Trends

The emoji reactions across all posts revealed several consistent emotional patterns:

1. Strong Negative Reactions to National Political Issues

- Posts about the 13-hour workday bill, the Tempi trial delay, OPEKEPE revelations, and the ban on gatherings received mostly 🤔, 😡, 😞, 😟.
- This indicates high frustration, anger, and a sense of injustice when it comes to national governance and public institutions.

2. Sensitivity Toward Issues of Rights and Fairness

- Topics related to justice, public safety, and civil liberties brought out sadness and empathy emojis such as 😞, 🙏, 😭.
- This suggests that participants are emotionally invested in fairness and social accountability.

3. Positive Emotional Connection to EU Youth Opportunities

- EU programs like ESC and Erasmus+ generated ❤️, 😄, 🙌, 👍, showing enthusiasm, inspiration, and positivity.
- EU-level opportunities seem to be perceived as hopeful and beneficial, contrasting with national political feelings.

4. Mixed Feelings Toward EU Political Announcements

- The proposal for lowering the voting age to 16 received many 😟, 😐, showing interest but also caution.
- Young people appear open to EU democratic reforms, but still evaluate them critically.

5. Use of Irony or Sarcasm as Emotional Expression

- Emojis like 😂, 😏, 🤔, especially in political posts, indicate humor used to express disbelief or resignation.
- This shows an emotional coping mechanism rather than direct disengagement.

D. Reflections and Challenges

Reflections

- **WhatsApp functioned well** as a research tool, allowing quick and natural emotional reactions from the group.
- Although only **16 out of 20** participants engaged by the end, **those 16 reacted consistently**, providing solid and usable emotional data.
- The emotional responses confirmed that **young people care strongly about political and social issues**, even when they express this through reactions rather than direct discussion.
- The clear contrast between reactions to **national vs. EU content** supports the YouthVoices aim of understanding how young people perceive political structures at different levels.

Challenges

- Only 16 out of 20 participants reacted, which slightly reduced the expected data volume for the analysis.
- Some emojis have multiple meanings, so interpretation needed attention to context (e.g., 😊 can mean humor, sarcasm, or disbelief).
- Emotional reactions were strong, especially to national issues, which required careful reading so the analysis remained neutral.
- Participants reacted at different times, so trends had to be observed over the whole week instead of relying on single moments.

4. Comparative Report

1. YouthVoices Emoji Comparative Analysis



A. Country Overview Table

Country	Dominant Emotion	Emotional Tone Toward Politics	Emotional Tone Toward EU Opportunities	Most Engaging Content Type
Denmark	😞 Sadness / 😟 Concern	Mixed feelings ranging from sadness to surprise to hope to concern.	Mixed-positive (curiosity, hope, slight scepticism)	National news with societal relevance (school refusal, voting turnout)
Spain	😡 Anger / 😞 Skepticism	Strongly negative; fatigue, distrust, and frustration toward parties, scandals, and polarisation	Strongly positive; excitement and enthusiasm for Erasmus+/ESC	Political scandals and accountability stories
Greece	😡 Anger / 😞 Sadness	Very negative; outrage about labour rights, justice system, corruption, civil liberties	Extremely positive emotional attachment to EU mobility	National decisions affecting rights & justice

Key takeaway:

Across the three countries EU youth programmes generated universally positive reactions (love, excitement, admiration). National political content triggered negative emotions (anger, frustration, confusion) in Spain and Greece, whereas in Denmark national content got mixed feedback depending on the topic and on people's opinions on the topic.

B. EU vs National Content Comparison

Context	Average Reactions	Dominant Emojis	Emotion Category	Interpretation
EU	Moderately positive		Appreciation, curiosity, hope	Young people associate the EU with <i>opportunities, mobility, growth, and learning</i> . Emotional distance remains when the topic is "EU politics".
National	Strongly negative		Anger, confusion, distrust, fatigue	Young people react negatively to scandals, reforms, polarisation, corruption, and political leaders. These topics generate more emotional intensity—but also more emotional exhaustion.

Across countries:

- EU = opportunities, personal development, hope
- National politics = negativity, distrust, anger, confusion

This contrast is extremely consistent especially in Spain and Greece. It appears that there is a difference between the countries: In the Mediterranean countries, everything related to National politics is perceived negatively, whereas in Denmark reactions to national content vary according to the subject. This can relate to the different levels of trust in the politicians and institutions across the three countries.

C. Summary of Insights

1. Common Trends Across Countries:

- Negative emotions dominate political news: anger in Greece and Spain, sadness and concern in Denmark.
- Political fatigue & distrust: youth feel overwhelmed, manipulated or disillusioned.
- Fear of “not knowing enough” appears strongly in Spain.
- Positive emotional peaks only occur with EU mobility content: Erasmus+, ESC, youth exchanges.
- Opportunities > politics: youth react much better to content that affects their personal growth than to institutional or political content.
- Scepticism about lowering the voting age appears in all three countries (very unexpectedly).
- Sarcasm and irony (🤪😏😬) are used as emotional coping mechanisms for political topics.
- Justice-related topics trigger strong empathy

2. Country Differences

Denmark

- Emotions are more moderate, not as extreme as Spain or Greece.
- Emotions vary according to the content. Some content worried people and got negative reactions, other content awoke feelings of hope and sympathy.
- The EU perceived it with curiosity but emotional distance.

Spain

- Emotional intensity is higher: anger, frustration, eye-rolling.
- Youth express clear disenchantment with political actors.

- EU seen as good idea but distant, bureaucratic, and weak.
- Erasmus+ and ESC produce the strongest positive reactions.

Greece

- National political topics trigger very strong negative emotions (anger, injustice, sadness).
- Issues related to labour rights and the justice system unlock deep emotional responses.
- Youth show high empathy in social justice debates.
- EU opportunities elicit some of the warmest reactions in the entire dataset (❤️ 🥺 🙌).

2. YouthVoices Focus Group Comparative Analysis

1. Overview

This comparative analysis synthesises the key findings from the three national focus groups conducted in Spain, Denmark and Greece. Although each group reflects its own political culture and socio-economic context, several cross-cutting themes emerged consistently across all countries.

The comparative results help us understand not only national nuances but also common European patterns in youth political engagement, democratic self-confidence, and perceptions of the EU.

2. Cross-Country Comparison Table

Theme	Spain	Denmark	Greece	Comparative Insight
General attitude toward politics	Strongly negative; frustration and distrust	Mixed but leaning negative; politics perceived as "difficult" or distant	Very negative; anger, injustice, disappointment	Youth across all countries show political fatigue, but with different emotional intensities
Democratic self-confidence	Low; "I don't feel I know enough"	Low-medium; fear of being judged or saying something wrong	Low; politics seen as inaccessible and dominated by elites	Common lack of confidence; youth feel unprepared for political conversation
Perception of politicians	Corrupt, self-interested, disconnected from real issues	Seen as both passionate fighting for their	Untrustworthy, unfair, lacking accountability	Overlap: all groups describe politicians as distant, and unrepresentative, however the Danish

		values and opportunistic.		group also appreciates the difficulty of the politicians' role
Knowledge of the EU	Very low; "no one explains it", seen as bureaucratic	Moderate; EU seen as distant but not negative	Low; mostly linked to rights, mobility and crisis responses	EU is unfamiliar, abstract, and emotionally neutral, except for mobility programmes
EU opportunities (Erasmus, ESC)	Highly positive	Positive curiosity	Very positive	Mobility programmes are the <i>strongest positive point</i> across all countries
Barriers to participation	Lack of information, polarisation, disillusionment	Fear of judgement, low knowledge, complexity	Lack of trust, socioeconomic precarity, unfair systems	All feel excluded, but through different mechanisms
Motivation for participation	Social problems, justice, corruption, climate	Community, fairness, problem-solving	Rights, justice, youth voice	Justice and fairness themes mobilise youth across all countries
Political discussions with peers/family	Frequent but conflictive; avoidance to reduce stress	Limited; fear of conflict or being wrong	Frequent but emotionally heavy	Conflict avoidance is a common trend, especially in Denmark & Spain

3. Key Cross-Country Insights

3.1. Youth do not feel politically prepared

Across the three countries, participants expressed a strong sense of "not knowing enough" about politics to participate confidently.

Quotes like:

- "Politics is too complex for me" (DK)
- "I never know what to believe" (ES)
- "Decisions are made over our heads" (GR)

demonstrate a widespread lack of democratic self-confidence.

3.2. Frustration is high, especially with national politics

Young people associate political conversation with:

- frustration
- conflict
- negativity
- manipulation
- fear of exposure

Spain and Greece showed the strongest emotional charge; Denmark showed more emotional distance but similar concerns.

3.3. Trust in politicians and institutions is consistently low

From Greece and Spain they described politicians as:

- disconnected
- inaccessible
- untrustworthy
- serving private interests
- lacking understanding of youth realities

However, from the Danish group they have a more balanced view of the politicians role, as someone who are in politics because of a passion, but also have to seek power to get their views through with.

3.4. The EU is seen as distant but beneficial

Knowledge levels were low in the three countries.

But opportunities (Erasmus+, ESC, mobility) produced the only moments of strong positive emotional reaction.

This mirrors the Emoji Analysis results.

3.5. Youth are motivated by justice, fairness, and societal impact

Although they feel excluded, they *want* to participate:

- when issues relate to fairness, rights, corruption, climate, mental health, gender equality.

This is a major opportunity for A2 (Learning Program).

4. Country-Specific Differences

Spain

- Very high emotional intensity.
- Strong anger at corruption, scandals, and political polarisation.
- EU seen as a good idea but far from real life.
- Young people feel abandoned by institutions.

Denmark

- Lower emotional intensity but strong cognitive barriers: *"Politics is too difficult"*.
- Fear of being judged for not knowing enough.
- Young people want respectful, open spaces for expression.
- More reflective, less reactive.

Greece

- Extremely high sensitivity to injustice and inequalities.
- Deep emotional reactions to labour rights, safety, and fairness.
- Strong frustration about institutional accountability.
- EU seen mostly through rights and mobility.

4. Recommendations

Based on the cross-country emotional patterns observed in both the focus groups and the emoji analysis, the Learning Program (A2) and the Ideathon (A3) should integrate the following recommendations:

1. Use EU opportunities as motivation engines

Young people react positively and with excitement to EU mobility opportunities. Therefore:

- Integrate Erasmus+, ESC, and other EU youth initiatives as *anchors* throughout the learning modules.
- Use real youth testimonies (YouthVoices Nuggets) to build emotional connection and motivation.
- Frame learning content around *how* young people can benefit from and participate in EU programmes.

2. Address political fatigue directly

Emotional exhaustion and political burnout are common across countries. To counteract this:

- Include activities centred on emotion regulation around politics (safe spaces, reflection, Deep Democracy tools).
- Incorporate non-polarising dialogue techniques such as role-switching, guided curiosity, and structured debate.
- Focus on building spaces where youth can express themselves without fear of judgement.

3. Make complex concepts simpler

The confusion identified—often expressed through 😞 emojis—indicates a need for accessible explanations of political and EU processes. A2 should therefore:

- Use infographics, visual storytelling, diagrams, and everyday-life examples.
- Break down political structures (national & EU) into clear, digestible components.
- Offer relatable case studies that show how EU decisions affect real life.

4. Rebuild democratic self-confidence

Many young people feel they “don’t know enough” or are afraid to speak about politics. To increase confidence:

- Include activities on identifying one’s political voice and values.
- Normalise uncertainty and learning—emphasising that political participation does not require expertise.
- Integrate reflection exercises and lived-experience discussions, in line with Deep Democracy Denmark’s methodology.

5. Integrate critical thinking to combat distrust

Widespread scepticism and distrust—particularly in Spain and Greece—highlight the need to strengthen critical thinking:

- Add modules on media literacy, misinformation, algorithmic influence and verifying sources.
- Include exercises using real social media posts to practice critical reading.
- Discuss how political narratives are constructed and manipulated.

6. Leverage strong feelings about justice

In Greece and Spain, topics framed around injustice, rights and accountability elicited the strongest emotional responses. To harness this engagement:

- Incorporate modules on democratic accountability and transparency.
- Encourage youth-led proposals related to fairness, rights, inclusion, and community engagement.
- Use case studies that connect personal experiences with democratic processes.

7. Acknowledge emotional distance from the EU

Although EU programmes inspire enthusiasm, the EU as an institution feels distant and abstract. To bridge this gap:

- Explain the EU through youth stories, not technical institutional descriptions.
- Highlight concrete examples of how EU decisions impact everyday issues (employment, rights, climate, digital life).

