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DELIBERATE

Democracy, Engagement & Literacy to Build Inclusive European Representation and Trust in Elections



Inclusion Matters: Local to EU Voices – From
Community Stories to European Action



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1. Introduction

On 3 July 2026, **truAktiv**, a youth-led organisation based in Kosovo, organised the one-day workshop **“Inclusion Matters: Local to EU Voices – From Community Stories to European Action”** at the Hivzi Sulejmani City Library in Prishtina. The event brought together approximately 60 young participants from Kosovo, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Greece to exchange experiences, discuss common challenges, and explore ways to strengthen civic participation at both local and European levels.

The workshop was organised within the project **Democracy, Engagement & Literacy to Build Inclusive European Representation and Trust in Elections (DELIBERATE)**. Through facilitated discussions, community mapping, group exercises, and deliberative dialogue, participants reflected on issues affecting their communities and developed proposals aimed at improving inclusion, democratic participation, and youth engagement.

The programme opened with welcoming remarks from Hana Deva, Executive Director of truAktiv, who introduced the objectives of the project and the purpose of the workshop. The sessions were facilitated by Amalia Koleka, Psychologist and Mediator, and Adelina Hasani, Research Director at KIPRED, who guided participants through interactive activities centred on belonging, shared values, civic responsibility, democratic participation, and European citizenship.

2. Workshop Activities

The workshop combined personal reflection, collaborative exercises, and group discussions to encourage participants to examine the relationship between their local experiences and democratic participation.

The first two sessions, facilitated by Amalia Koleka, focused on belonging, shared values, and community engagement. The programme began with storytelling, trust-building exercises, and group discussions in which participants reflected on their experiences, shared personal perspectives, and identified the values they considered essential for inclusive communities.

Participants then worked in groups to create visual maps of their communities. Each group identified local strengths, existing challenges, and areas where change was needed. Building on

these discussions, participants developed proposals addressing issues affecting their communities and presented their ideas during a Gallery Walk, where each group had the opportunity to review, discuss, and comment on the work of others.

The afternoon sessions, facilitated by Adelina Hasani, introduced participants to the principles of European citizenship, democratic participation, and opportunities for civic engagement within the European Union. Participants discussed the relationship between local initiatives and European democratic processes before taking part in the deliberative exercise "What Would I Change If I Could?".

Working in groups, they identified challenges affecting their communities, examined their causes and consequences, and proposed recommendations addressed to local and European decision-makers. Each group presented its proposals during a plenary discussion, followed by collective reflection and prioritisation of the recommendations through voting. The workshop concluded with a reflection session, an evaluation survey, and the distribution of certificates to participants.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Shared Values and Inclusion

Participants reflected on the values they consider important for building communities where people feel included, respected, and able to participate. Although groups approached the discussion from different perspectives, several common values emerged.

Empathy was described as the willingness to understand the experiences and perspectives of others and to approach differences with respect.

Equality was associated with ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to express themselves and participate regardless of appearance, religion, ethnicity, or personal identity.

Justice was linked to respect for the rule of law, fair treatment, and public institutions that serve citizens equally, while integrity was described as honest and responsible involvement in decision-making and public life.

Participants also highlighted freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and peaceful coexistence among people with different backgrounds, beliefs, and perspectives. Listening to different opinions, even when disagreements exist, was seen as an important part of inclusive and democratic communities.

Discussions about belonging showed that participants often feel connected to their communities through shared language, culture, values, religion, hobbies, work, and everyday experiences. At the same time, some described feeling excluded when they did not feel represented, when their experiences differed from those around them, or when they felt that decision-makers did not listen to ordinary citizens.

Participants described an inclusive community as one where people are listened to, treated equally, and able to participate regardless of their background or identity.

3.2 Main Challenges Identified

The deliberative discussions highlighted four recurring challenges that participants considered particularly important for democratic participation and social inclusion.

Mistrust in Public Institutions

Participants identified mistrust in public institutions as a significant barrier to civic participation. They associated declining public confidence with corruption, nepotism, bureaucracy, limited accountability, and the perception that misconduct often does not lead to consequences.

They also highlighted the importance of transparency, investigative journalism, access to reliable information, institutional independence, and public institutions that are accessible to citizens.

Low Youth Participation in Democratic Processes

Participants observed that many young people remain distant from political and civic processes because they do not believe their participation will lead to meaningful change.

They linked low participation to limited opportunities for involvement, weak connections between young people and institutions, lack of information, and civic education that often focuses on theoretical knowledge rather than practical participation.

Participants also recognised that young people from marginalised communities may face additional barriers to participating in civic and democratic life.

Political Polarisation, Hate Speech, and Misinformation

Political polarisation was linked to hate speech, political manipulation, misinformation, and the role of some media outlets in reinforcing divisions between communities.

Participants expressed concern that these developments can contribute to hostility between groups, discourage constructive dialogue, and disproportionately affect minority and other vulnerable communities.

The growing influence of artificial intelligence and digital communication on political participation was also discussed, with participants highlighting the importance of helping citizens recognise misinformation and propaganda and critically assess the information they encounter.

Youth Unemployment

Participants described unemployment as both an economic and a civic challenge. They identified unpaid internships, limited entry-level opportunities, difficulties gaining work experience, and education programmes that do not always correspond to labour market needs as particular concerns.

Participants noted that prolonged unemployment and financial insecurity can reduce young people's confidence in their future and limit their ability or willingness to participate in community and civic life.

4. Civic Messages and Recommendations

Following the identification of these challenges, participants worked in groups to develop proposals for local and European decision-makers. Four main areas for action emerged.

4.1 Increase Trust in Public Institutions

Participants proposed:

- improving transparency and accountability across public institutions;
- ensuring that corruption and misconduct are investigated and followed by appropriate consequences;
- strengthening the independence of courts and other public institutions;
- making institutional procedures easier for citizens to understand and more accessible;
- encouraging civic action through petitions, peaceful protests, and dialogue with decision-makers, including across political differences.

Participants called for public institutions that are transparent, accountable, independent, and accessible. They emphasised that public confidence depends on clear responsibilities, equal treatment, and visible action when rules are not respected.

4.2 Increase Youth Participation in Democratic Processes

Participants proposed:

- involving young people more directly in local and national decision-making;
- strengthening youth councils and other mechanisms through which young people can contribute to public decisions;
- improving civic education by combining classroom learning with practical opportunities to participate in community life;
- creating more opportunities for volunteering and youth-led community initiatives;

- investing in spaces such as libraries, youth centres, schools, and community organisations where young people can meet, organise, and exchange ideas;
- increasing outreach to young people from marginalised communities to ensure their representation in civic and democratic processes;

Participants stressed that young people should not only be consulted during individual projects but should have regular and meaningful opportunities to contribute to decisions affecting their communities. Participation becomes more meaningful when young people understand how institutions work and can see how their contributions are considered.

4.3 Address Political Polarisation, Hate Speech, and Misinformation

Participants proposed:

- strengthening civic education on democratic participation, media literacy, and respectful public discussion;
- developing educational campaigns addressing hate speech, propaganda, and misinformation;
- supporting critical thinking from an early age through school curricula;
- increasing awareness of how to identify and verify unreliable online information;
- examining the influence of artificial intelligence and digital technologies on democratic participation and public debate.

Participants called for continued investment in education that enables citizens to recognise misinformation, think critically, engage in informed discussion, and participate in democratic life without discrimination or intimidation.

4.4 Improve Pathways from Education to Employment

Participants proposed:

- increasing the availability of paid internships and entry-level employment opportunities;
- strengthening cooperation between universities and employers;
- expanding mentorship programmes and opportunities for workplace experience;
- supporting workshops, field-based learning, and junior practice programmes;

- creating local networking opportunities connecting young people with employers and professional mentors.

Participants called for stronger links between education and employment, enabling young people to gain practical experience, develop relevant skills, and transition more easily into the labour market.

5. Conclusion

The workshop reinforced the importance of creating meaningful opportunities for young people to contribute to decisions that affect their lives and communities. Participants emphasised the need for accessible spaces for dialogue, responsive institutions, reliable information, and stronger opportunities for civic and professional participation.

The ideas and recommendations developed during the workshop reflect the perspectives of participating young people and can contribute to continued dialogue on building more inclusive, participatory, and responsive communities.