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INGAME
Gaming for Social Inclusion and Civic Participation

INGAME

INGAME – Gaming for Social Inclusion and Civic Participation – A holistic approach for a cultural shift in education and policy

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INGAME EU Report

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1. Introduction

Based on EACEA's "Youth Participation in Democratic Life¹" Annual Report, a normative conception of youth participation, one that draws on definitions of political participation broadly, concerns the engagement with opinion formation and taking actions to bring positive change in society. Youth participation can take different forms, for example:

- Participating in representative democracy: candidacy or vote in elections or membership in political parties;
- Promoting the involvement of young people in youth organizations, NGOs or voluntary associations, and;
- Participating in online debates and discussions; searching for information.

Young people are a fundamental resource for the future of the whole European Union. Investing in the youth of today is a way to promote peace, democracy, stability, security and sustainable development of the future. This is why it is necessary to implement actions aimed at making young people protagonists of change and to ensure that all young Europeans can access information without discrimination based on gender, socio-economic conditions or ethnic.

In this context, the INGAME project aims to promote the active participation of young adults between 18 and 35 years, with innovative methodologies and tools.

In particular, the project aims to address four issues relevant to young people: civic engagement, gender equality, social inclusion and the use of new technologies, in particular online games and their educational value in relation to young people. The project will enable users to learn from the simulated experience, improve critical thinking about social and political circumstances, acquire and strengthen new skills and stimulate interest in collective action.

This report describes and analyses existing policies, studies and projects aimed at promoting young adults' civic participation, social inclusion and gender equality, both in general and in relation to the use of new technologies in Europe. The resulting analysis aims to identify the gaps and needs for the social and political participation and inclusion of young Europeans to which the INGAME project can contribute through the application of the pedagogical affordances of online gaming in the process of promoting youth engagement in matters of civic and social interest.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/policy/youth_strategy/documents/youth-participation-study_en.pdf

2. Youth participation and civic engagement

“Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society”.
(Crowley & Moxon, 2018, p. 13).

Recent studies have shown a decline in voter turnout, membership in political parties, interest in youth politics, and, instead, a growing distrust of political institutions. Young people's distrust of institutional politics is seen as a widespread problem across Europe (Willems et al., 2012). The lowest levels of participation are recorded for young people who are socio-economically disadvantaged or at greater risk of marginalization, due to their ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, beliefs or political opinions.

When it comes to people's engagement in the civil society, from 12 to 18 February 2020, the European Parliament conducted a survey focusing on citizens' engagement with civil society organisations (CSOs) and their experiences with local public consultations². Across the EU, 47% of respondents engage with CSOs in some way, mostly through money donations (27%). (KANTAR, 2020, pp. 29-33). The percentage of workers involved in voluntary or charitable activities at least once a month reflects a slight distinction between women (12.2%) and men (11.4%). The issues considered most relevant to their lives are public health (57%), food safety (57%) and the environment (53%)³. Overall, such evidence points to a greater diversity nowadays to participation, ranging from political participation to engagement with civil society organizations.

The most powerful motivators to increase engagement with CSOs are 'being convinced that the engagement will have a real impact' (33%), and 'knowing how financial engagement will be used by the CSOs' (25%). In each country, one of these two factors is mostly mentioned.

² Process where a “government asks for and receives citizens’ feedback on policy-making”. <https://ecas.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/public-consultation-study-2.pdf>

³ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019/domain/time>

Finally, the survey shows that 45% of respondents said that in the last 12 months a public consultation took place in their city or village, but only 16% participated in it. For a large majority (72%) of respondents living in an area where such consultations have been held, public consultations are considered useful activities.

When we look at the participation of European citizens, we should not only focus on participation in traditional forms of participation such as voting or public consultations, but also on the participation and involvement of citizens in activities promoted by civil society organisations.

As far as youth participation is concerned, research conducted by the European Commission and the Council of Europe, shows that we are facing the so-called 'paradox of youth participation'. Voting turnout, membership in political parties, interest in politics and trust in political institutions are in decline, especially among youth. Only 37% of young people did vote in national elections⁴, far more than any other age category.

However, researchers believe that young people today are actors in today's democracy and participate mainly in unconventional ways. In order to understand the real degree of youth participation, we should not focus exclusively on conventional politics and look at the many other forms of youth participation. (EU-CoE youth partnership team, 2014, p.3)

Such forms of civic participation may include volunteering, signing online petitions, participating in political events, which are outside the electoral process or formal political institutions.

Young people's civic engagement is inseparable from the digital media landscape, which allows for a different kind of participation than traditional forms (Cho & All, 2020, p. 6).

Digital technologies, if accessible for all, have the capacity to remove barriers and promote communication at different levels. E-participation is a means to promote youth empowerment and active participation in democratic life.

It is with this objective in mind that the YouthMetre⁵ project was born. YouthMetre is funded by the European Commission and coordinated by the European Geographers Association. It is an NGO based in Belgium, with five partners located in different Member States of the European Union (EU). The project enables young people between 18 and 30 years old to get in touch with policy makers to improve youth policies in local authorities, regions and European countries. YouthMetre has

⁴ https://pip-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261980/Consolidated+papers_reflection+group.pdf/5d365dac-4ba0-4fd9-85bf-0785e09e3631

⁵ <https://youthmetre.eu/>

introduced an innovative tool, a digital dashboard, that gives young people access to information on how their policy makers are working in different youth sectors.

Promoting the participation of young people in political and social decision-making is essential to make societies more democratic and inclusive. Policies should, therefore, be developed taking into account the needs of young people, what interests them most. EU research by the London School of Economics and Political Science shows that factors encouraging youth participation are the following:

- To feel a cause close to one's own reality, ideas and values.
- To feel listened to by those who make decisions and see that this listening leads to real changes in the context in which you live.
- To act together and realize that you have the power to really change things (Crowley & Moxon, 2018, p. 19).

The EU has introduced a **Youth Strategy** (2019- 2027) to promote the participation of young people in democratic life, support social and civic engagement and ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to participate in society. The Youth Strategy recognises the importance of digital and virtual spaces, arguing that it is necessary to:

ensure secure virtual spaces accessible to all young people, providing access to information and services and ensuring their opportunities to participate, providing adequate, relevant and comprehensive information to young people, including information developed by and with young people to enable their participation.⁶

In the development of youth policies, the needs of young people should be taken into account, as well as the most appropriate instruments to foster their democratic participation. The changes brought about by digital communication affect democratic participation, since it is through new technologies that many young people nowadays participate in social affairs.

With the above backdrop in mind, we believe that INGAME can be a useful tool for young people to access information and knowledge in an innovative and engaging way. This project takes advantage of the opportunities offered by new digital technologies, making them available to young people, to

⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL&from=EN>

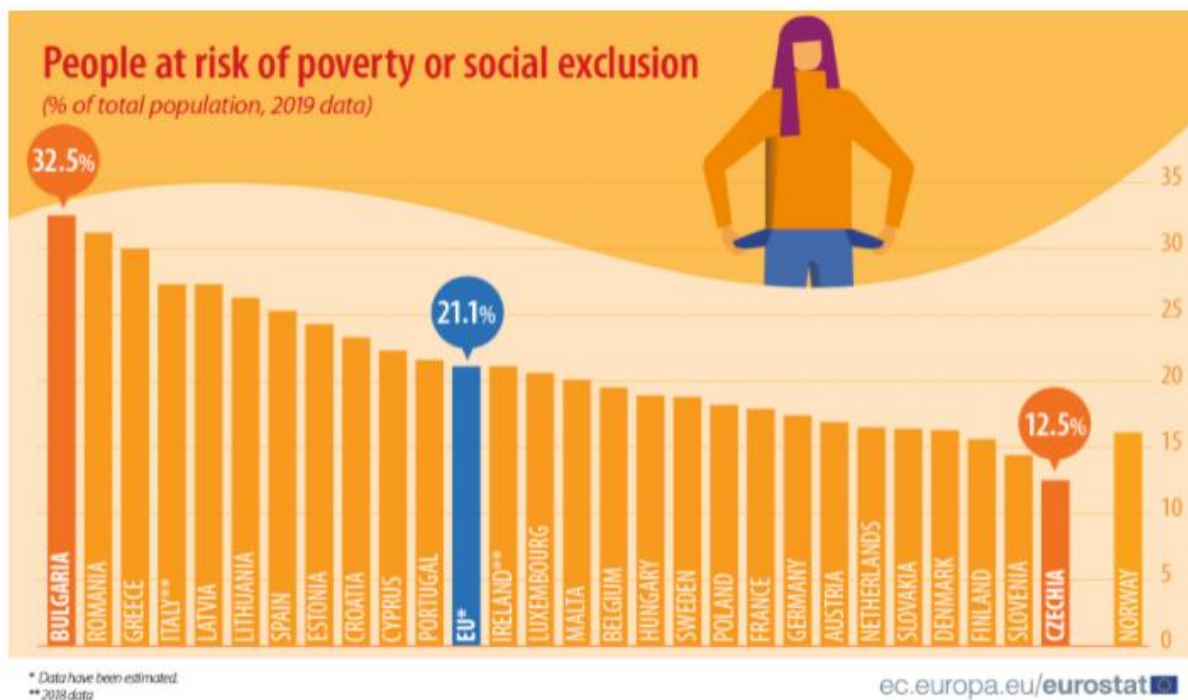
meet their needs for participation and understanding of contemporary social and political issues and problems.

3. Social Inclusion in Europe

Social exclusion is the result of "mechanisms that exclude individuals and groups from participation in social exchanges, practices and rights of social integration and identity". It goes beyond participation in working life, but manifests itself in the areas of housing, education, health and access to services⁷.

The fight against poverty or social exclusion is a key political priority for the European Commission. Since 2010, this has been integrated in Europe 2020, the EU strategy for growth and employment, which has been built around job creation and poverty reduction.

In 2019, 21.1%⁸ of the European Union (EU) population, or 92.4 million people, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion⁹. In seven Member States, more than a quarter of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion: Bulgaria (32.5%), Romania (31.2%), Greece (30.0%), Italy and Latvia (both 27.3%, 2018 data for Italy), Lithuania (26.3%) and Spain (25.3%)¹⁰.



⁷ The Commission's 1992 Communication "Towards a Europe of Solidarity".

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion

⁹ The data refer to the pre-pandemic period.

¹⁰ urly.it/3csn9

Compared to the EU average, **some population groups are more at risk of poverty or social exclusion than others**. This category includes women, children, young people, people with disabilities, the unemployed, single-parent families and those living alone, people with a lower level of education, people born in a country other than their country of residence, people without work and, in most Member States, those living in rural areas (EUROSTAT, 2019, P. 70). **Children's** vulnerability is largely determined by their parents' status in the labor market, especially when combined with limited access to social services and low-income support. The risk of poverty or social exclusion for the unemployed reached 66.6% in 2015. Moreover, the persistence of weak economic and labor market conditions has caused an unprecedented increase in the duration of unemployment, with the long-term unemployed reaching 48% of the unemployed.

The situation of the **non-EU population** in the EU is particularly relevant in light of the growing need to respond to the influx of asylum seekers. People from non-EU countries are generally in worse conditions than those living in their home country. In 2017, people living in the EU but being born in a third country had a risk of social exclusion rate of 38.3% (EUROSTAT, 2019).

People with disabilities are also very vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. A 2017 statistics analysis showed that, 36.0% of the EU population aged 16 years and over with severe activity limitations was at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared to 26.3% of people with some activity limitations and 19.9% of those without activity limitations. Despite large differences between countries, the at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion rate among people with activity limitations was higher than for the total population of all Member States (EUROSTAT, 2019, P. 71).

According to EUROSTAT, 20% of **young people** in Europe are exposed to a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion. Youth unemployment has increased by almost 8% compared to pre-2008 levels and stands at 20.3%. The recent migration phenomena have brought with them several social and inclusion challenges. Therefore, it is essential to work toward the implementation of the rights of all young people in Europe, including the most excluded and marginalized.

To promote social inclusion, the European Commission, in 2017, approved the **European pillar of social rights**, which aims to define new and more effective rights for citizens. It is based on 20 key principles, including¹¹:

- **Education, training and lifelong learning.** Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable him or her to participate fully in society and to successfully manage transitions in the labour market.
- **Gender equality.** Equal treatment and opportunities between women and men must be guaranteed and promoted in all areas, including labour market participation, working conditions and career advancement. Women and men are entitled to equal pay for work of equal value.
- **Equal opportunities.** Regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunity in employment, social protection, education and access to goods and services available to the public. Equal opportunities for under-represented groups are promoted.

The promotion of social inclusion goes hand in hand with the promotion of **equity** between people, whilst taking into account their unique and diverse needs and different starting points in life.

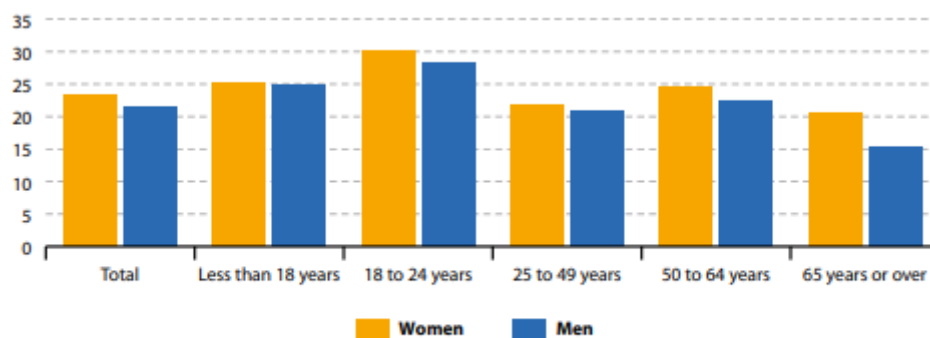
The **EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027** aims to promote social inclusion especially among marginalized young populations, provide legal protection and strengthen international legal instruments to combat all types of discrimination and hatred, recognizing that young people are subject to multiple forms of discrimination. Furthermore, the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 supports that young people should have equal **access to information and knowledge of the spaces, opportunities and experiences available to them**. Young people should have **access to formal and non-formal learning environments**. To this end it is necessary to strengthen the capacities of educators working with young people, provide more spaces, opportunities, resources and programs to strengthen dialogue, social cohesion and combat discrimination. Young people must be given the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and to be key players in processes that affect their rights, well-being and interests.

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf

4. European policies on gender equality

Equality between women and men is one of the fundamental principles of the EU and this has led to legislation that obliges Member States to ensure equal opportunities and equal treatment between women and men and to combat all forms of discrimination based on gender (EIGE, 2019, Domain 1). Following the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the EU and most European countries have begun approving laws on gender equality in a variety of areas, such as sexual harassment, equal pay, equal access to resources and services, work-life balance, and gender-based violence (European Commission, DG JUSTICE, 2015). Despite the increase in global legislation promoting gender equality, gender inequalities are still present in society. In 2017, women had a higher rate of risk of poverty or social exclusion than men (the rate for women was 23.3% compared to 21.6% for men) (EUROSTAT, 2019, p. 67), especially among the younger generations.

Figure 1: People at risk of poverty and social exclusion, by sex and age group, EU-28, 2017 (% of population).



Source: Eurostat (online data code: [lic_peps01](#))

Various European institutions have been among the first to approve such laws, setting a positive model for Member States (EIGE, 2019, Domain 1). EIGE, the European agency that monitors gender equality in the twenty-eight Member States, presented the fourth “Gender Equality Index”, which compiled a report card for each European country based on the gap that exists between men and women in six sectors based on 2017. Currently the European context sees Sweden (83 points) at the highest level along with Denmark (77 points); these are the countries that are getting closer to gender equality (100 points is equivalent to total equality); Greece and Hungary (both 51 points) are the Countries with the longest road ahead. The European average is equal to 67 points¹².

¹² Gender equality index - <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019>

As highlighted in the **Strategy on Gender Equality 2018-2023** women are discriminated not only because they are women, but also on the basis of their ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or age (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 11). In this context, the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) initiated efforts against gender inequality to ensure equal opportunities and access to rights for young people of all genders, including non-binary gender youth and LGBTQI+.

In 2016, the EIGE has prepared the **Guidelines Gender mainstreaming Toolkit** with the aim to stimulate investment in the gender equality skills of policymakers and public administration employees and to facilitate the process of designing effective gender equality training. The guidelines provide a set of principles that activate to commission effective gender equality training (EIGE, 2016). Systematic implementation of the principles of gender training were expected to bring about a positive effect towards gender equality and positive change in the perceptions of policy makers. EIGE research shows that civil servants are more likely to consider gender aspects in their work if they are trained in this area and are convinced that this is important (EIGE, 2016, p. 4).

Gender training makes a difference. If implemented systematically it facilitates more efficient actions and a positive change in the attitudes of policymakers

The **GET UP project** is an interesting project that acts on the discriminatory language used against women and based on gender stereotypes and prejudices. The project involved the development of an e-learning training program named Gender Equality Training (GET), which is based on the European Minimum Standard of Gender Equality Competences (EMSC). The program is addressed to human resources managers in the workplace (directors, employers, trade unions), vocational guidance professionals and teachers who support training and employment choices of young people. The project also includes the creation of Video Spots on the themes of talent waste, gender pay gap and work-life balance and a serious game (not yet available)¹³.

Gender-based violence and sexist language occur in educational contexts, among others, and in order to address them it is important that the design of educational programs follows gender-sensitive approaches. Challenging prejudices and gender stereotypes within the educational cycle can help reduce gender inequalities in other spheres of life. Therefore, it is essential that gender stereotypes are deconstructed and challenged in education and training.

¹³ <http://www.getupproject.eu/platform/>

A project such as INGAME can provide support to teachers, trainers and young people to address gender equality through simulated scenarios, and thus understand a complex issue while fostering commitment to a prejudice-free society.

5. Online games in informal educational environments

Education gives young people access to information and knowledge and in this way it promotes the development of critical thinking, helps them make informed choices, express themselves, engage, participate and shape the future of a democratic, supportive and inclusive Europe.

Digital technology enriches learning in a variety of ways, allows access to a huge amount of information and resources and allows, if available to all, to overcome physical barriers, taking into account young people's abilities and disabilities. Applications of technology in learning processes can promote the inclusion of people at a disadvantage and marginalised position.

In contemporary society, digital technologies are fully integrated into people's lives, in the way they interact, work and learn; however, they are not always in European education and training systems. A recent study¹⁴ on the state of digitisation at schools in the European Union has shown that 70% of teachers in the EU recognize the importance of training and learning with the use of teaching and learning methods with digital tools.

In the Rome Declaration of March 2017, EU Member States underlined their commitment to provide young people with "the best education and training" and with the proclamation of the **European Social Rights Pillar** they have enshrined people's right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning.

In October 2017, the European Council also called for education and training systems to be "adapted to the digital age"¹⁵ and to support Member States and education and training institutions in developing measures to promote the use of new digital technologies, developed the **Digital Education Action Plan (2018-2020)**¹⁶. The Plan also provides for the adaptation of all forms of education and lifelong learning to support the development of the digital skills needed to live and work in an era of rapid digital change. If education is to be the backbone of growth and inclusion in the EU, it is essential to prepare citizens to make the most of technology opportunities available and face the challenges posed by a globalised, interconnected and rapidly changing world.

¹⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/dae/document.cfm?doc_id=1800

¹⁵ EUCO 14/17, Conclusions of the European Council of 19 October 2017

¹⁶ COM (2018) 22 final. Communication from the Commission on the Action Plan for Digital Education

One of the most innovative methods applied to education is **gamification**. It involves the use of game elements in learning environments to achieve better learning outcomes for students. The playful nature of this methodology encourages learning, as it generates a positive experience for young learners, who learn while having fun.

When games and videogames are applied to exploring, understanding and addressing social issues, we speak of "serious games". Introducing a serious games approach in education environments suggests a change of teaching methodologies, including a new language, group activities, and a problem-solving mentality. For example, there are video games that deal with bullying, others with migration, or war victims, telling stories from the point of view of the injured party, conveying the concepts of "integration", "inclusion", educating to understanding and diversity¹⁷.

Immersive technologies, more specifically, allow students not only to develop empathy but also to learn by doing, stimulating and encouraging creativity, concentration, collaboration, an exploratory approach and critical interaction through use of digital media.

An example of educational initiatives based on gamification is the **GVETS project**, whose aim is the development of an interdisciplinary program of capacity building for professionals working with children in migrant contexts, in order to improve their skills and strengthen their role for the protection of minors.¹⁸ The use of gamification in the professional training of those who work in the field of child protection and support implies the use of experimentation, problem solving, communication and networking, critical thinking, contextualization and transferability of knowledge in the field.

Another interesting initiative is **The Powerplayer game**, a package that includes a strategy game, an online guide and materials for teachers. The main goal of the game is to introduce the concept of entrepreneurship developed in accordance with the principles of sustainable development among 12–15-year-olds, help them develop key competences and skills that are relevant to the labour

¹⁷ urly.it/3890x

¹⁸ <http://gvets.eu/about-the-project/>

market, increase student creativity and innovation in education and improve educational achievements of young people¹⁹.

Two interesting projects that use video games to address issues related to social inclusion, youth participation and gender equality are **Games4Sustainability**²⁰ and **E-games: Empowering youth work**²¹.

Games4Sustainability is a platform that collects more than 100 games and simulations organized in a "Gamepedia". The games are categorized according to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The user can search for the game most relevant to their needs²².

"E-games: Empowering youth work" is a project developed within the EC Youth Programme, which provides youth workers (working in youth centers and local authorities, for example) with a set of multimedia games for use in youth work. The games are categorised by themes: human rights, intercultural learning, tolerance, youth project management, youth information.

The aim of **INGAME** is to exploit the potential of simulated reality to promote the civic engagement of young adults by creating a role-playing adventure that will allow users to explore previously inaccessible settings and learn from the simulated experience. Players will move from one level of action to the next, while reflecting on issues of civic engagement. Thanks to INGAME, young adults will have the opportunity to engage with critical reflection on social and political issues, develop digital skills and develop interest in collective action.

¹⁹ <http://powerplayer.info/pl/strona-glowna/>

²⁰ <https://games4sustainability.org/>

²¹ <http://www.youth-egames.org/>

6. Good practices

In this paragraph we present some projects aimed at young people, trainers and youth organizations with a serious games approach. These are aimed at increasing young people's civic engagement and engagement with social inclusion issues.²³ The serious games serve as good practice examples for the development of INGAME.

- **Event Master** (Training game for mobile devices on entrepreneurship), **Green Skills** (Training game for mobile devices on waste separation), **Culture Trip** (Training game for mobile devices on intercultural learning) are three video games developed as part of the *mGames project*. The project, developed within an Erasmus+ program, aims to develop methodologies and tools to be used in non-formal education contexts for young people. The project also aims to train young operators and trainers in the use of these games in their training or information activities²⁴.
- **My life as a refugee**, by UNHCR. It is a decision-making game that entertains and educates players, compelling them to wrestle with dilemmas faced by millions of refugees. The app features three stories whose characters are separated from their families while fleeing persecution or armed conflict²⁵.
- **MissionEurope**, consists of 6 fun mini-games and quizzes related to topics of Community interest, ranging from the labor market, environmental protection, to mobility in Europe and immigration. The aim is to counter the widespread phenomenon of scepticism and dissatisfaction that is currently affecting many young Europeans, struggling with the uncertainty of the future²⁶.
- The **INCREA project** aims to promote the social inclusion of migrants through the development of training modules and activities that take into account the different characteristics of individuals to support them in their integration process in European societies, enhancing their language and business skills. In particular, INCREA has developed a Serious game, aimed at migrants and refugees and a manual that promotes creative entrepreneurship by exploiting their cultural background²⁷.

²³ Our research has shown a lack of games designed to promote gender equality.

²⁴ <http://www.mgames-youth.org/index.php/it/giochi>

²⁵ <https://unric.org/en/my-life-as-a-refugee/>

²⁶ <https://play.missioneuropeproject.eu/>

²⁷ <http://demos.ccseducation.com/demogames/eu/increa/>

- **ODISSEU** is an experiential game that gives the player the opportunity to identify with the events of a refugee / asylum seeker. The player is given information about the journey from the country of origin to the final destination where it is possible to apply for asylum by submitting an application for refugee status. The game aims to help young students to develop more empathy. Putting themselves in the role of a refugee they will be able to live the experience of the journey, overcome the obstacles they encounter along **the way and** face the stress that refugees experience every day²⁸.
- **Like Gender Equality**²⁹ - Erasmus+ Project (England, Bulgaria, France, Germany). The aim of the project is to create awareness of and provide training tools to tackle gender qualities in digital media. The media being targeted is any that contains gender stereotypical content, especially video games, advertising, and websites. Like **Gender Equality**, it is funded by Erasmus+, as part of the EU's drive to make gender equality a social and professional priority. The game is not playful or interactive in nature, but it makes one think about those stereotyped images that surround us and that affect us in our everyday life.

²⁸ <https://odisseu-project.eu/it/online-game>

²⁹ <https://fbcfn.gcm-corp.com/jeux-template/games/erasmus/v110/>

7. Conclusion

Although there has been a decline in young people's interest in traditional forms of participation (voting, party membership), recent studies have shown that young people in Europe are still committed to democratic and civic behaviour and still believe in democratic values. A change in the forms of participation conveyed through new technologies can be observed.

In order to strengthen the participation and integration of young people in society, it is essential that young people's perspectives, interests and ideas are taken seriously. And that the tools used to convey messages are more responsive to the needs and everyday practices of young people.

Young people want to have their voice heard and have a meaningful role in the decision-making process in their societies.

According to a research project conducted by Willems et al. (2012), education is the key to participation. Young people learn to participate by doing. They do so through formal education, such as school, and through non-formal education.

Schools and other educational institutions play an important role in the development of democratic identities and civic participation, as well as in civil society organizations. Digital technology enriches learning in various ways, offers learning opportunities that must be accessible to all and allows access to an enormous amount of information and resources. Using gamification in training and learning processes has the advantage of motivating learners and stimulating active involvement (Willems and al., 2012, p. 21).

As pointed out by the European Commission in the Action Plan for Digital Education (2018-2020), it is important that young people acquire the digital skills needed to live and work in an era of rapid change, and the INGAME project aims to respond to this demand. The INGAME will not only enable young people to acquire information and knowledge on the issues of civic participation, gender equality and social inclusion, but is also intended to help them develop digital skills. INGAME will contain the typical aspects of video games, such as prizes and scores, but the player will be faced with choices that affect the course of the game, thus offering opportunities for reflection, critical thinking and problem solving, all key competencies for Europe's democratic citizens.

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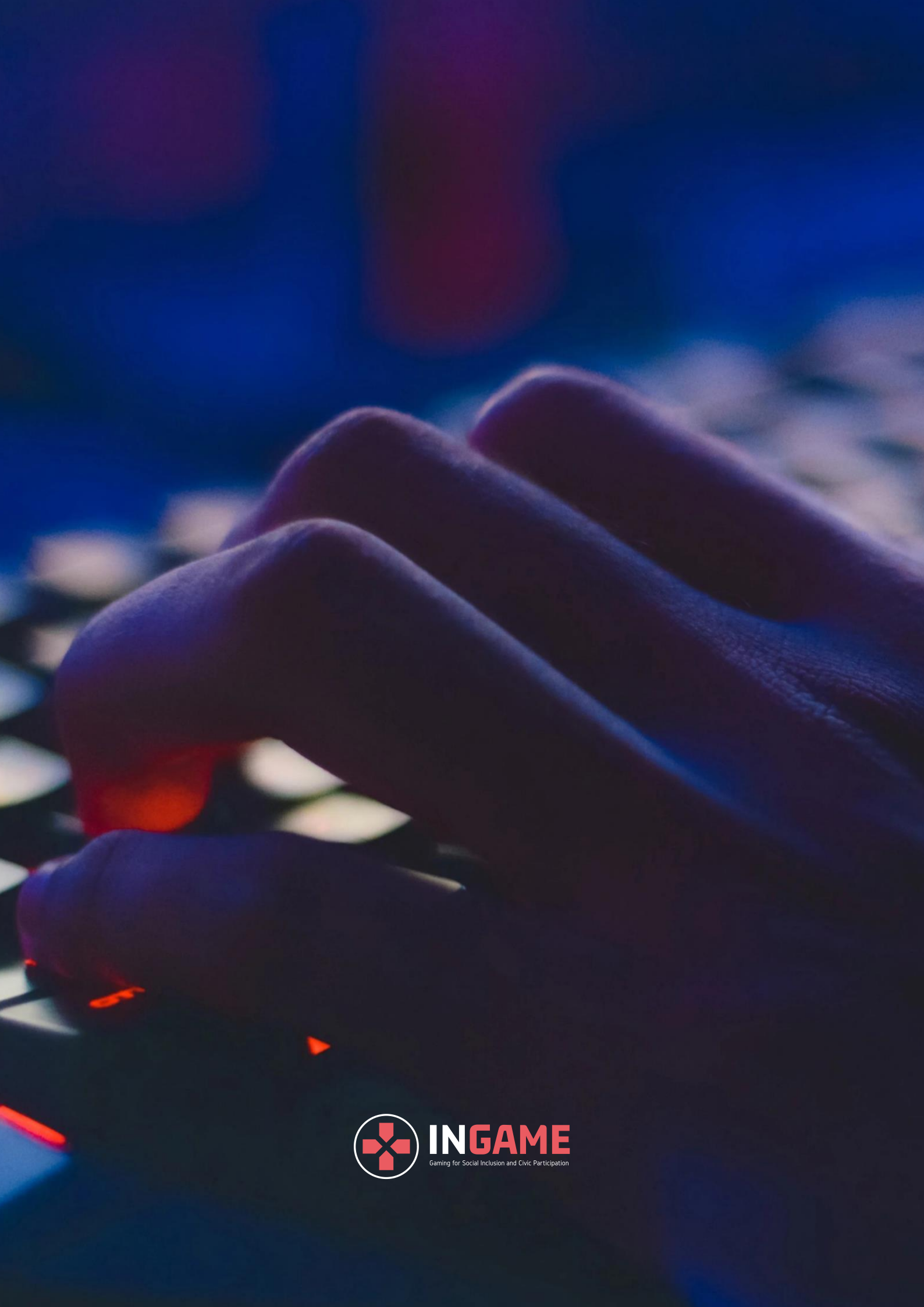
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