



KEY-YOU Local Study Report – Portugal

ERASMUS+ Project

Youth Civic Participation and Game-Based Learning in Portugal

Project Title: Creative Knowledge & Diversity-oriented Engagement for Youth UNLOCKED Participation (KEY-YOU)

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Work Package: WP2

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Date: August 20, 2026

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Section I: Introduction and Summary

1.1. Objectives: The KEY-YOU Project Framework and Local Goals

This local study was conducted within the framework of the European project KEY-YOU: Creative Knowledge and Diversity-oriented Engagement for Youth UNLOCKED Participation. The project aims to strengthen civic participation, equality and inclusion among young people, with particular attention to under-represented groups.

At local level, the Portuguese study focuses on the experiences and perceptions of young people aged 18–30 regarding civic participation, awareness of rights, understanding of democratic and institutional processes, barriers to participation, and preferences regarding game-based learning (GBL). The purpose is not only to identify existing challenges but also to translate these findings into practical recommendations for the development of the project's educational digital escape room and complementary card-based game.

The study is particularly relevant in the Portuguese context because the data include young people living in both urban and rural areas and participants with different social, educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. The survey reached young people with migrant or refugee backgrounds, ethnic or cultural minority backgrounds, physical disabilities or learning difficulties, and financial difficulties or low-income backgrounds. This provides an opportunity to examine barriers affecting young people with different circumstances rather than focusing on a single youth profile.

The research also incorporates qualitative evidence from the KEY-YOU: Fostering Cooperation workshop held in Braga, Portugal. The final impact evaluation report documents a two-day activity involving 30 young participants from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, including young people from marginalised and socio-economically vulnerable groups and immigrant households. Participants were engaged not only as learners but also as co-designers of ideas for the future digital escape room and thematic card game.

The local study therefore pursues four interconnected goals:

- to assess young people's awareness of civic rights and democratic processes;
- to identify the structural, informational and psychological barriers that affect participation;
- to understand local gaming habits and preferences relevant to GBL design; and
- to translate young people's experiences and co-created ideas into actionable design recommendations for the KEY-YOU game.

The report is structured to move from the research methodology and empirical findings towards an analysis of the most significant participation barriers and, finally, recommendations for an experiential, inclusive and locally relevant GBL tool.

1.2. Abstract: Overview of Key Regional Findings & Proposal for GBL Recommendations

This local study combines quantitative evidence from a survey of 75 young people aged 18–30 with qualitative evidence from the KEY-YOU Fostering Cooperation workshop in Braga, for which the supplied impact evaluation report documents 30 young participants.

The quantitative findings indicate that young people have a degree of awareness of their civic rights, but that practical knowledge is substantially weaker. While 57.3% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they understood their rights as young people living in Europe, 42.7% were neutral, unsure or disagreed. Furthermore, 80% recognised that they had the right to express their opinion if their city introduced a new rule affecting young people, but only 40% both recognised this right and knew how to exercise it. A further 40% knew they had the right but did not know how to act on it. Understanding of democratic procedures was weaker still: only 18.7% reported knowing the exact steps through which a citizen's idea becomes an official law or municipal regulation, while 32% had no idea how the process works.

The main participation barriers identified in the survey were lack of time (45.3%), complicated and bureaucratic language and processes (42.7%), not knowing how or where to start (32%), and participation spaces not feeling safe, welcoming or inclusive (30.7%). In addition, 24% did not believe that their voice would really change anything. These results correspond closely with the qualitative KEY-YOU findings, in which participants highlighted information gaps, bureaucratic procedures, language barriers, time constraints, financial limitations, limited youth-friendly participation opportunities and a perceived distance from decision-makers.

The qualitative workshop also indicated that young people see potential in digital technologies as tools for civic engagement, although digital platforms are not always used strategically for democratic participation. Participants developed ideas around youth participation, fact-checking and media literacy, privacy and digital rights, sustainability and community action, communication and advocacy, and digital solutions for social impact. Specific ideas documented in the impact evaluation included digital voting platforms, fact-checking applications, transparency portals, youth consultation tools, online mentorship networks and platforms connecting young people with policymakers.

The gaming data suggest strong potential for GBL. 70.7% of respondents selected card games, 69.3% selected videogames across PC, console or mobile, and 68% selected board or group games. In terms of digital gaming frequency, 58.7% reported playing digital games every day or several times a week. The most popular gameplay element was solving complex puzzles, riddles or logic challenges (61.3%), followed by cooperation (57.3%) and narrative engagement (54.7%). Competition was selected by only 25.3%. Regarding session duration, 41.3% preferred 20–45 minutes, and 70.6% preferred a session lasting between 20 and 60 minutes.

Taken together, the findings support a GBL approach based on practical civic participation, realistic institutional scenarios, accessible and plain-language information, collaborative problem-solving, narrative-driven dilemmas, and relatively short and modular gameplay sessions. The strongest design opportunity lies in using game mechanics to bridge the gap

between knowing that civic rights exist and understanding how those rights can be exercised in practice.

Section II. Methodology

2.1. Research Design and Common Methodology Framework

This local study was designed as a mixed-method research exercise, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative evidence from the KEY-YOU workshop in Braga.

The quantitative component targeted young people aged 18–30 and collected 75 responses. The questionnaire examined demographic characteristics, awareness of civic rights, understanding of democratic processes, participation barriers, experiences of social and political exclusion, accessibility of political information, and gaming habits and preferences.

The qualitative component formed part of the KEY-YOU: Fostering Cooperation workshop in Braga. According to the supplied final impact evaluation report, the activity was implemented over two days and involved 30 young participants from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. The workshop combined pre- and final assessment surveys with open-ended questions, simulations, role-plays, debates, quizzes, collaborative challenges, thematic working groups and co-creation activities.

The two components serve complementary purposes. The survey provides descriptive evidence from a broader group of 75 young people, while the Think-Tank/workshop evidence provides deeper qualitative insight into barriers, learning experiences, participant motivations and co-created ideas for the future GBL tools.

The research therefore follows the KEY-YOU local-study logic of linking civic knowledge, perceived participation barriers and gaming preferences to the design of educational tools.

2.2. Questionnaire Development and Translation

The quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire addressing the core themes defined for the KEY-YOU local study. The questionnaire includes demographic questions followed by questions addressing civic rights awareness, practical participation, understanding of democratic processes, participation barriers, experiences of exclusion, accessibility of political information, gaming habits, gameplay preferences and preferred educational-game duration.

The supplied response data contain the questionnaire items in Portuguese, ensuring that the questions used for the Portuguese sample are presented in language appropriate to the local context.

The available documentation does not provide details of the questionnaire's original drafting process, translation workflow, or any back-translation procedure. Consequently, no additional methodological claims concerning translation validation are made in this report.

2.3. Data Collection Platform and Dissemination Strategy

The quantitative component was conducted as an online survey, resulting in 75 responses.

The available information confirms the number and characteristics of the respondents but does not specify the exact survey platform, dates of collection, or dissemination channels used to reach participants. These details are therefore not inferred in this report.

The qualitative data were collected through the two-day KEY-YOU workshop in Braga, Portugal, using participatory and co-creation methods. The final impact evaluation reports the use of pre- and final assessment surveys, open-ended questions, simulations, role-plays, debates, quizzes, collaborative challenges and thematic working groups.

The qualitative workshop also served as a co-design environment in which participants developed ideas for the future digital escape room and card-based game.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

The available material confirms that the quantitative survey was conducted as a research activity within the KEY-YOU project and that the data presented in this report concern aggregated responses rather than individual identities.

However, the supplied documentation does not provide a detailed description of the specific consent procedure, privacy statement, data-retention arrangements or withdrawal procedure used for the online questionnaire. These elements are therefore not described beyond the information directly available.

The report does not reproduce any personally identifiable information, and all survey findings are presented in aggregated form.

The qualitative workshop likewise provided a group-based and participatory setting for discussion, reflection and co-creation. The findings presented here concern collective themes, learning outcomes and documented ideas rather than individual personal identifiers.

2.5. Sample Characteristics and Target Group

The quantitative target group was young people aged 18–30, in accordance with the KEY-YOU study framework. A total of 75 responses were collected, meeting the project's stated minimum target of 75 survey responses.

The quantitative sample covers the entire 18–30 age range and includes respondents living in both urban and rural areas. The sample also includes young people in different

educational and employment situations and respondents belonging to several groups identified in the framework as potentially facing additional barriers to participation.

In the qualitative component, the supplied final impact evaluation report documents a cohort of 30 participants in the Braga workshop. These participants came from different social and cultural backgrounds, with intentional inclusion of young people from marginalised communities, socio-economically vulnerable backgrounds and immigrant households.

The available documentation does not provide a detailed age-by-age or gender breakdown of the 30 workshop participants. These characteristics are therefore not estimated in the present report.

2.6. Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire followed a thematic structure designed to examine both civic participation and gaming preferences.

The first part collected demographic information, including age, gender, current situation, urban/rural residence and identification with groups that may face additional barriers.

The second part examined awareness of civic rights and democratic processes. Questions 6, 7 and 8 addressed respondents' understanding of their rights, their perceived right to express an opinion on local rules, and their understanding of how a citizen's idea can become an official law or municipal regulation.

The following section examined barriers to local participation. Question 9 asked respondents to select up to three main reasons preventing them from becoming involved in local decisions.

Questions 10 and 11 examined experiences of social or political exclusion and perceptions of the accessibility of official political information.

The final part examined gaming habits and preferences. Question 12 addressed preferred game formats, Question 13 addressed frequency of digital gaming, Question 14 addressed preferred gameplay elements, and Question 15 examined preferred session length for an educational game such as a digital escape room.

2.7. Data Analysis Procedure

The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, focusing on response frequencies and percentages.

The analysis of Questions 6–8 was used to identify patterns in civic-rights awareness and practical knowledge of democratic procedures. Question 9 was analysed to identify the principal structural and perceived-efficacy barriers to participation. Questions 10 and 11 were examined as complementary indicators of inclusion and information accessibility.

Questions 12–15 were analysed to identify game-format familiarity, digital gaming frequency, preferred gameplay mechanics and preferred gameplay duration.

The qualitative material from the KEY-YOU workshop was analysed in the supplied impact evaluation report through comparison of pre- and final assessment scores and thematic analysis of open-ended responses. The report documents an increase in average self-reported competency scores from 3.91/5 in the pre-assessment to 4.58/5 in the final assessment, with improvements across all assessed competency areas.

The combined analysis in this local study therefore uses the survey to identify the distribution of perceptions among 75 respondents and the qualitative material to provide complementary evidence about participant experiences, barriers and co-created ideas.

No inferential statistical analysis or causal testing is presented.

2.8. Methodological Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, the quantitative survey provides a descriptive snapshot of the 75 respondents and should not be interpreted as statistically representative of the entire population of young people in Portugal. The supplied documentation does not provide a probability-based sampling frame.

Second, the exact dates, platform and dissemination channels used for the online questionnaire are not documented in the information provided.

Third, Question 12 combines PC, console and mobile videogames into a single category. Consequently, the data cannot determine whether mobile phones, PCs or consoles are preferred individually. Any recommendation concerning a specifically mobile-first or PC-first design would therefore require additional evidence.

Fourth, the survey does not contain a direct measure of institutional trust. The report can therefore discuss perceived political efficacy based on the statement that respondents do not think their voice will change anything, but it cannot present institutional distrust as a directly measured quantitative variable.

Fifth, the qualitative workshop documentation confirms the participation of 30 young people but does not provide a complete demographic breakdown by age and gender. These characteristics cannot therefore be analysed separately for the qualitative cohort.

Finally, the survey percentages describe the respondents' reported perceptions and behaviours. They should therefore be interpreted as self-reported evidence rather than as objective measures of civic competence or participation.

Section III. Results

3.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 75 valid responses were collected from young people aged 18–30. The results provide an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents and establish the context in which their perceptions of civic participation, democratic processes and gaming preferences should be understood.

Figure 1. Age Distribution

The age distribution reflects the target population of the study, with respondents represented across the full 18–30 age range. The largest age group was 30-year-olds (12%), followed by 18-year-olds (10.7%) and 27-year-olds (9.3%). Participants aged 21, 24 and 25 each represented 8.0% of the sample, while the remaining age groups accounted for between 5.3% and 6.7% each.

Although the number of respondents was not equally distributed across all age groups, the survey successfully captured perspectives from every age within the target range. This provides a broad overview of perceptions across different stages of young adulthood.

1. Que idade tens?

75 responses

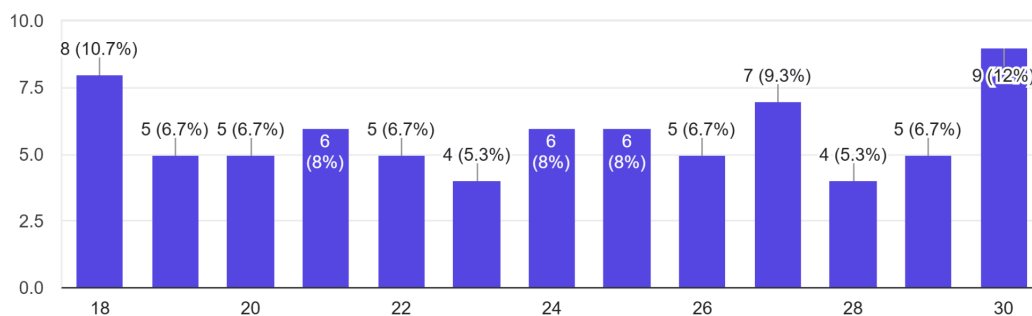


Figure 2. Gender Distribution

Regarding gender, 41.3% of respondents identified as female and 29.3% as male. A further 13.3% identified as non-binary or diverse, while 16% preferred not to answer.

The sample therefore includes perspectives from different gender groups, while also reflecting a proportion of respondents who chose not to disclose their gender. This diversity is relevant when considering experiences of inclusion, exclusion and accessibility in civic participation.

2. Como descreves o teu género?

75 responses

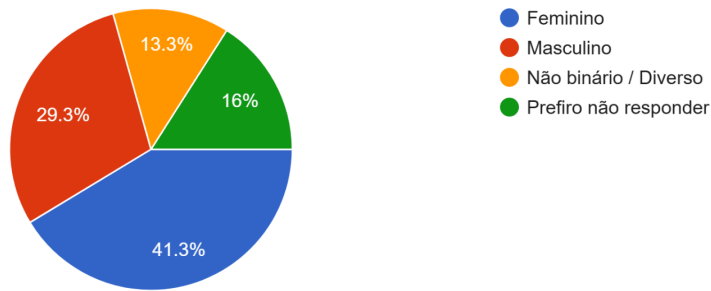


Figure 3. Current Educational and Employment Situation

Participants were also asked to describe their current situation. The largest group, 28%, reported working either full-time or part-time. A further 20% were attending school or university, while 18.7% were undertaking vocational training.

Another 18.7% reported carrying out unpaid work, volunteering or care work, and 14.7% indicated that they were not currently studying, working or participating in training.

The distribution demonstrates that the survey reached young people with different educational, professional and personal circumstances. This is relevant because the availability of time and opportunities for civic participation may vary according to young people's everyday responsibilities.

3. Qual das seguintes opções descreve melhor a tua situação atual?

75 responses

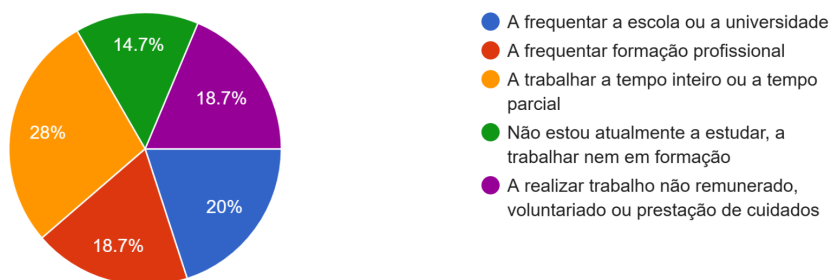


Figure 4. Place of Residence

The geographical distribution of respondents shows that 61.3% lived in urban areas, while 38.7% lived in rural areas. No respondent selected the option indicating uncertainty about their area of residence.

Although urban respondents represent the majority of the sample, the inclusion of almost four in ten respondents from rural areas provides an important perspective on youth participation across different local environments.

4. Como descreverias a zona onde vives?

75 responses

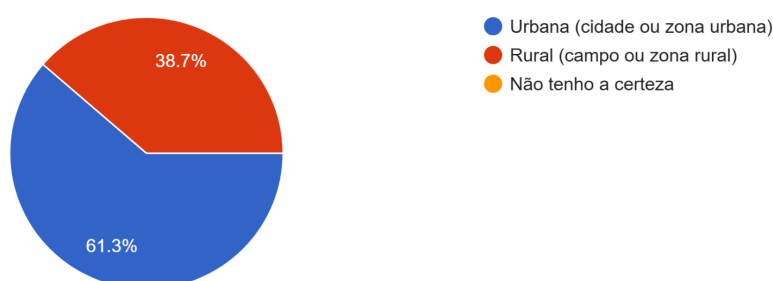


Figure 5. Self-Identification with Groups That May Face Additional Barriers

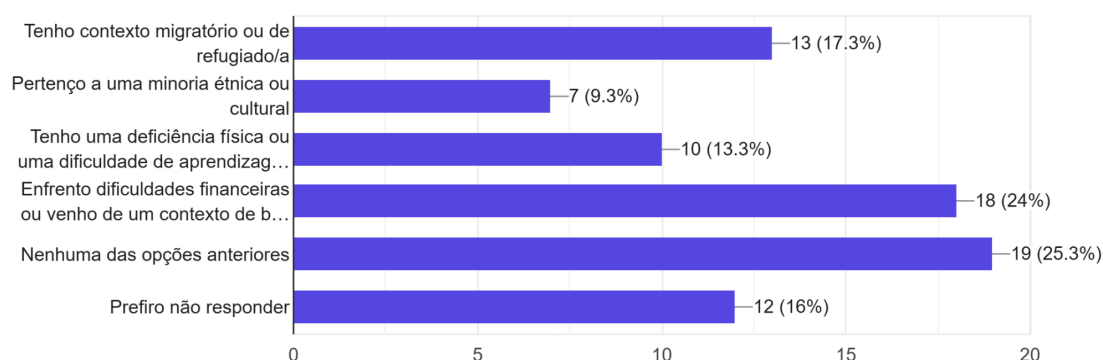
The survey also examined whether respondents identified with groups that may experience additional barriers to participation. Because respondents could select multiple options, the categories are not mutually exclusive.

The largest specific group was respondents who reported financial difficulties or a low-income background (24%), followed by those with a migrant or refugee background (17.3%), those reporting a physical disability or learning difficulty (13.3%), and those identifying with an ethnic or cultural minority (9.3%). A further 16% preferred not to answer, while 25.3% selected none of the listed options.

The inclusion of respondents from these different backgrounds is particularly relevant to the KEY-YOU framework, which places specific emphasis on under-represented groups and on understanding the factors that may affect equal access to civic participation.

5. Identificas-te com algum dos seguintes grupos? (Seleciona todas as opções aplicáveis).

75 responses



3.2. Awareness of Civic Rights and Democratic Processes

Figure 6. Self-Reported Awareness of Civic Rights

One of the central objectives of the study was to examine how young people perceive their understanding of their civic rights. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “I understand my rights as a young person living in Europe.”

The results show a generally positive perception of rights awareness. 40% agreed with the statement and a further 17.3% strongly agreed. However, 24% selected the neutral or unsure option, while 18.7% disagreed. No respondent strongly disagreed.

Overall, 57.3% of respondents expressed confidence in their understanding of their rights. At the same time, the relatively large proportion of neutral or uncertain responses indicates that a substantial part of the sample does not have a clear level of confidence regarding its civic rights.

6. Até que ponto concordas com a seguinte afirmação: “Compreendo os meus direitos enquanto jovem a viver na Europa.”

75 responses

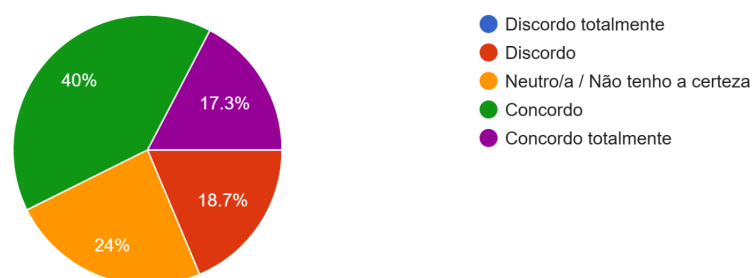


Figure 7. Knowledge of Civic Participation Procedures

To assess whether perceived rights awareness translates into practical participation, respondents were asked whether they believed they had the right to express their opinion if their city introduced a new rule affecting young people.

The results show that 40% both recognised this right and knew how to exercise it. Another 40% recognised the right but did not know how to do so. A small proportion, 1.3%, did not believe they had this right, while 18.7% did not know whether they had it.

These findings indicate that formal awareness of a civic right is considerably more widespread than knowledge of how to use that right in practice. While 80% recognised the existence of the right to express an opinion, only half of these respondents also knew how to exercise it.

7. Se a tua cidade criar uma nova regra que afete os jovens, acreditas que tens o direito de expressar a tua opinião?

75 responses

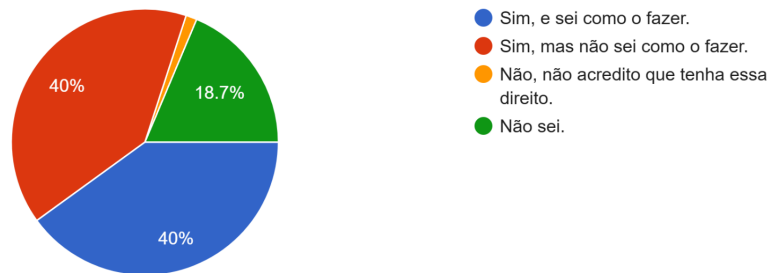


Figure 8. Understanding of Democratic Decision-Making Processes

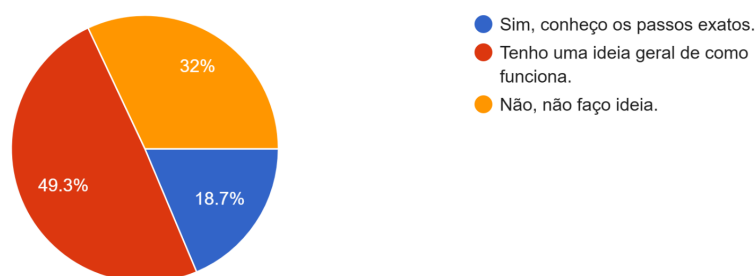
Respondents were also asked whether they knew, in general, how a citizen's idea becomes an official law or municipal regulation.

Only 18.7% reported knowing the exact steps involved. Almost half of the respondents (49.3%) said that they had a general idea of how the process works, while 32% reported having no idea.

The results therefore show that detailed understanding of democratic and institutional processes is considerably less developed than general awareness of civic rights. This finding is particularly relevant for the project's objective of developing tools that can strengthen practical civic knowledge and participation skills.

8. Sabes, de forma geral, como é que a ideia de um/a cidadão/ã se transforma numa lei oficial ou num regulamento municipal?

75 responses



3.3. Barriers to Civic Participation

Figure 9. Reported Barriers to Civic Participation

Participants were asked to identify up to three main factors preventing them from becoming involved in local decision-making.

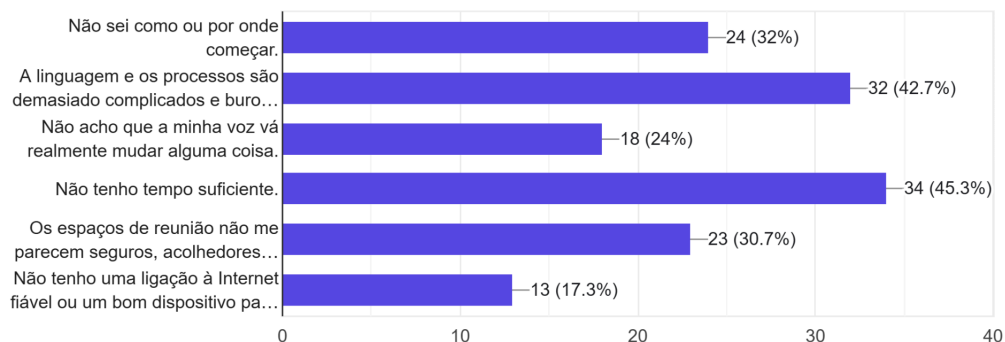
The most frequently reported barrier was lack of time, selected by 45.3% of respondents. This was followed closely by the perception that language and processes are too complicated and bureaucratic (42.7%).

A further 32% reported that they did not know how or where to start, while 30.7% stated that meeting spaces did not feel safe, welcoming or inclusive for someone like them. 24% felt that their voice would not really change anything, and 17.3% identified unreliable internet access or the lack of an appropriate device as a barrier to online participation.

The distribution indicates that barriers are varied and extend beyond technological access. Time constraints, procedural complexity, uncertainty about how to participate and perceptions regarding the inclusiveness or effectiveness of participation spaces all appear in the responses.

9. Quais são os principais motivos que te impedem de te envolveres nas decisões locais?
(Selecione até 3 opções).

75 responses



3.4. Experiences of Social and Political Exclusion

Figure 10. Frequency of Participants' Experiences of Social or Political Exclusion

The survey also examined whether respondents had ever felt excluded from a social or political space because of their gender, background or identity.

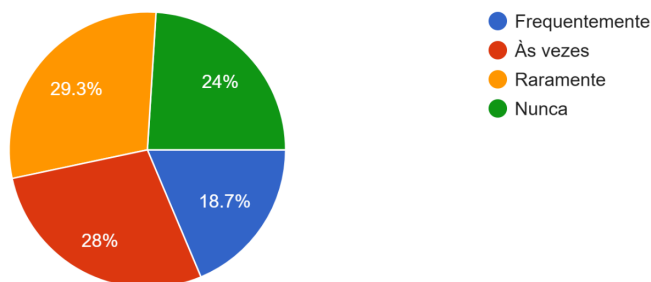
The results show that 24% reported never experiencing such exclusion, while 29.3% stated that it had happened rarely. However, 28% reported experiencing exclusion sometimes and 18.7% frequently.

Overall, 46.7% of respondents therefore reported having experienced this type of exclusion at least sometimes.

Although the responses show that not all young people experience exclusion regularly, the proportion reporting occasional or frequent exclusion remains relevant to the project's focus on inclusive participation and under-represented groups.

10. Já alguma vez te sentiste excluído/a de um espaço social ou político devido ao teu género, contexto ou identidade?

75 responses



3.5. Accessibility of Political Information

Figure 11. Perceived Accessibility of Official Political Information among Young People

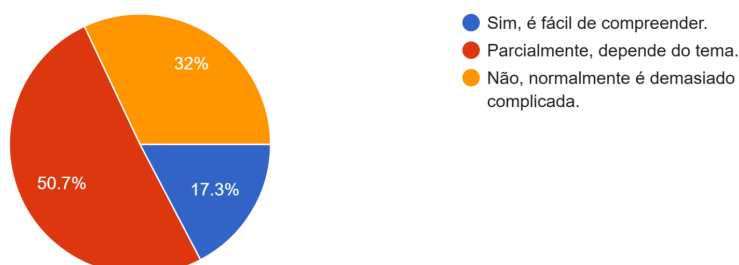
Another important aspect examined by the survey was whether official political information is communicated in a way that young people can easily understand.

Only 17.3% of respondents considered official political information easy to understand. The largest group, 50.7%, stated that its accessibility depends on the topic, while 32% considered it normally too complicated.

These findings indicate that political communication remains a significant challenge for a large proportion of the sample. Even where information and participation opportunities are available, difficulties in understanding official communication may make it harder for young people to identify opportunities for participation and engage confidently with civic processes.

11. Sentes que a informação oficial sobre política é escrita de uma forma fácil para os jovens compreenderem?

75 responses



3.6. Gaming Habits and Preferences

Figure 12. Distribution of Participants' Preferred Game Types

The survey explored the types of games respondents like to play or regularly engage with. Card games were the most frequently selected format, chosen by 70.7% of respondents. This was followed by videogames across PC, console or mobile platforms (69.3%) and board, group or party games (68%). A further 36% selected paper-and-pencil role-playing games.

These results demonstrate that respondents are familiar with a broad range of game formats, including both digital and analogue experiences. This diversity is relevant to the KEY-YOU project because it suggests that young people may be receptive to different forms of game-based interaction.

It should be noted that the videogame category combines PC, console and mobile games. The results therefore demonstrate broad videogame familiarity but do not allow direct comparison between these individual devices.

12. Que tipos de jogos gostas de jogar e/ou costumavas jogar regularmente? (Seleciona até 3 opções).

75 responses

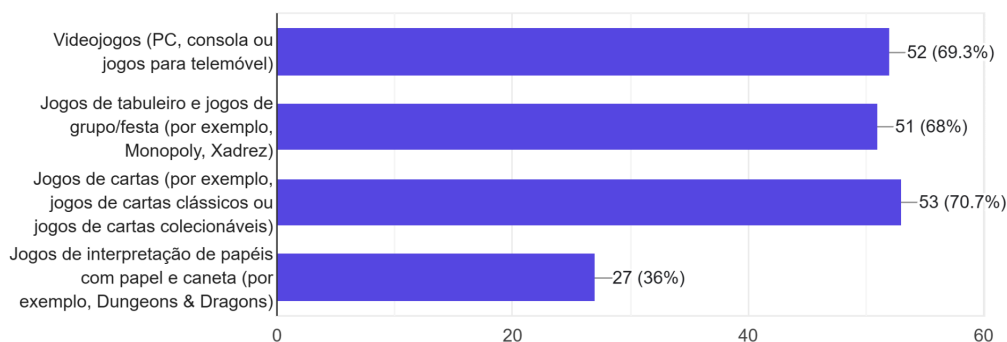


Figure 13. Frequency of Digital Game Playing

Regarding the frequency of digital gaming, 18.7% of respondents reported playing every day, while 40% played several times per week. A further 25.3% played several times per month, and 16% reported playing rarely or never.

Overall, 58.7% of respondents therefore play digital games every day or several times per week. At the same time, the presence of a smaller group with little or no regular digital gaming experience indicates that educational game design should remain accessible to participants with different levels of familiarity with gaming.

13. Em média, com que frequência jogas jogos digitais?

75 responses

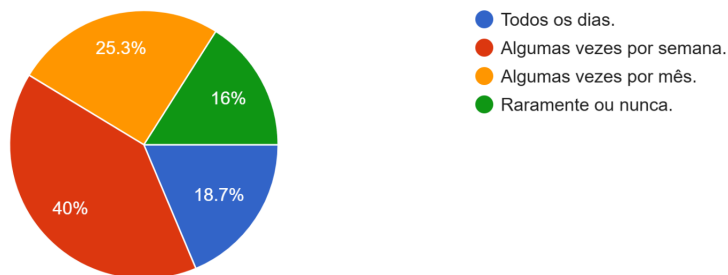


Figure 14. Participants' Preferences for Gameplay Features When Playing Games

Respondents were asked to identify the game elements they enjoy most, selecting up to two options.

The most popular element was solving complex puzzles, riddles or logic challenges (61.3%). This was followed by cooperation with other players towards a common goal (57.3%) and following a story, universe or engaging narrative (54.7%).

Competitive gameplay was selected by 25.3% of respondents, making it considerably less popular than the other three elements.

The results therefore show a particularly strong preference for gameplay that combines problem-solving, collaboration and narrative engagement. These preferences are highly relevant to the development of the KEY-YOU digital escape room, as they support an interactive rather than purely informational learning experience.

14. Quando jogas um jogo, de quais destes elementos gostas mais? (Selecione até 2 opções).

75 responses

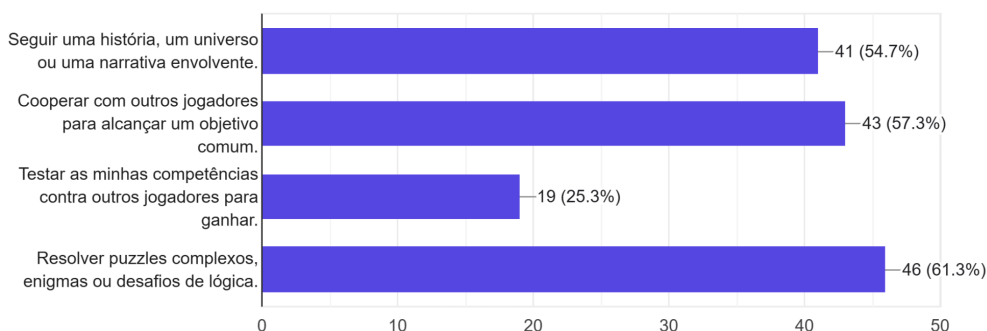


Figure 15. Preferred Duration of Educational Game Sessions

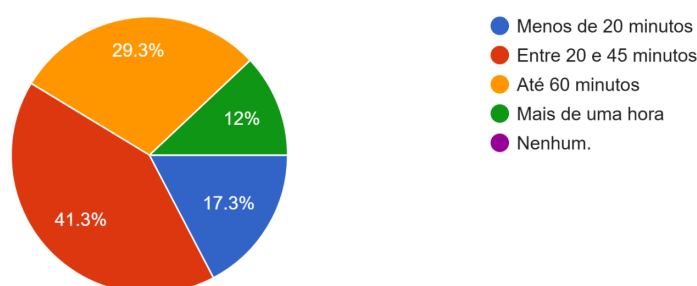
Finally, respondents were asked how much time they would ideally spend playing an educational game, such as a digital escape room, during a single session.

The most popular choice was 20–45 minutes, selected by 41.3% of respondents. A further 29.3% preferred sessions lasting up to 60 minutes, while 17.3% preferred less than 20 minutes. Only 12% indicated a preference for sessions lasting more than one hour. Only 12% indicated a preference for sessions lasting more than one hour.

Overall, 70.6% of respondents preferred an educational game session lasting between 20 and 60 minutes. These findings suggest that the future KEY-YOU game should favour relatively short and focused gameplay experiences capable of fitting around the everyday schedules of young people while still providing meaningful learning outcomes.

15. Quanto tempo gostarias de passar a jogar um jogo educativo, como um escape room digital, de uma só vez?

75 responses



Section IV. Barrier Analysis

4.1. Overview: Informational and Institutional Barriers

The combined findings indicate that youth participation barriers in the Portuguese study are strongly related to information, procedural complexity, practical constraints and perceived influence.

The quantitative evidence does not suggest that the principal challenge is a complete absence of awareness of civic rights. Instead, the findings reveal a recurring difficulty in understanding how civic participation works in practice, how to navigate institutions and whether participation is likely to have meaningful consequences.

The qualitative KEY-YOU workshop reinforces these findings. Participants identified information gaps, fragmented information, bureaucratic procedures, language barriers and limited opportunities for meaningful dialogue with decision-makers as recurring obstacles.

4.2. The Gap Between Rights Awareness and Practical Participation

The most significant finding in Questions 6–8 is the gap between general rights awareness and practical participation competence.

Although 57.3% agreed or strongly agreed that they understood their rights, only 40% both recognised the right to express an opinion on a new city rule and knew how to exercise that right.

Another 40% knew they had the right but did not know how to act on it.

This means that awareness of democratic rights does not necessarily translate into the ability to use those rights effectively.

For the KEY-YOU project, this gap represents an important opportunity for experiential learning. A game can move beyond explaining that participation is possible and instead allow players to explore how participation actually happens.

4.3. Limited Institutional Literacy

Question 8 shows that only 18.7% of respondents know the exact steps through which a citizen's idea becomes an official law or municipal regulation.

A further 49.3% have only a general idea, while 32% have no idea.

These results suggest a substantial lack of institutional literacy. Young people may recognise democratic participation as valuable but still find institutions, procedures and decision-making pathways difficult to understand.

This finding is also reflected in the qualitative workshop, where participants reported fragmented information and difficulties accessing relevant participation mechanisms.

The GBL tool should therefore make institutional processes concrete, visible and interactive.

4.4. Access to Political Information

Communication complexity is a major barrier.

In Question 9, 42.7% identified complicated and bureaucratic language and processes as a barrier to local participation.

In Question 11, 50.7% considered official political information only partially understandable depending on the topic, while another 32% considered it normally too complicated.

Taken together, these findings indicate that access to information is not simply about whether information exists. It is also about whether young people can understand, interpret and use it.

The qualitative workshop similarly highlighted information that was fragmented, difficult to locate or presented in language that was not sufficiently attractive to young people.

4.5. Perceived Political Efficacy

The survey does not directly measure institutional trust. However, 24% of respondents reported that they do not think their voice would really change anything.

This can be interpreted as a perceived-efficacy barrier: some young people do not expect their participation to have a meaningful effect on outcomes.

The qualitative workshop provides complementary evidence, with participants describing a sense of distance from decision-makers, frustration with slow institutional responses and limited opportunities for dialogue.

The implication is important for GBL design: the game should not merely explain procedures but should also help players experience the relationship between choices, participation and outcomes.

4.6. Time Constraints and Practical Obstacles

Lack of time was the most frequently reported barrier, selected by 45.3% of respondents.

This finding is particularly relevant in a sample where young people have different educational and employment responsibilities. The respondents included people in work, education, vocational training, volunteering, care work and other circumstances.

The qualitative workshop similarly identified lack of time as a structural barrier to participation.

This supports the development of flexible, modular and time-efficient learning experiences that can be completed within a manageable session.

4.7. Exclusion Among Vulnerable Groups

The survey shows that 46.7% of respondents had at least sometimes felt excluded from a social or political space because of gender, background or identity.

This finding is relevant to the project's inclusion focus and indicates that participation environments should be designed not only to be accessible but also to feel safe, welcoming and representative.

The survey included respondents with migrant or refugee backgrounds, ethnic or cultural minority backgrounds, physical disabilities or learning difficulties, and financial difficulties or low-income backgrounds.

The qualitative workshop also intentionally involved young people from marginalised communities, socio-economically vulnerable backgrounds and immigrant households, providing a complementary perspective on the importance of inclusive participation.

4.8. Summary of Key Barriers

The principal barriers identified in the Portuguese study can be summarised as follows:

1. Limited practical knowledge: Young people may know that they have civic rights without knowing how to exercise them.
2. Institutional complexity: Democratic and municipal procedures are not always easy to understand.
3. Difficult communication: Political information is frequently perceived as complicated or only partially understandable.
4. Time constraints: Lack of time is the most frequently reported participation barrier.
5. Perceived limited influence: A significant minority question whether their participation can make a difference.
6. Inclusion concerns: A substantial proportion of respondents have experienced exclusion linked to gender, background or identity.
7. Digital access: A smaller but still relevant proportion experience difficulties related to internet access or suitable devices.

These findings suggest that effective civic education should prioritise practical civic competence, accessible communication, institutional literacy, confidence and meaningful participation opportunities, rather than focusing exclusively on increasing awareness of democratic values.

Section V. Gaming Preferences

5.1. Familiarity and Comfort with Gaming

The survey demonstrates that gaming is highly familiar among the respondents.

Nearly seven in ten respondents selected videogames, card games or board/group games among the types of games they like or regularly play. In particular, 69.3% selected videogames, 70.7% selected card games, and 68% selected board/group games.

Digital gaming is also part of the routine of a majority of respondents: 58.7% play digital games every day or several times a week.

These results support the use of GBL as a potentially accessible educational format. At the same time, the 16% who rarely or never play digital games demonstrate the importance of keeping the educational game intuitive and accessible to people with different levels of gaming experience.

5.2. Diversity of Game Format Preferences

The results indicate that respondents engage with multiple gaming formats rather than relying exclusively on digital games.

Card and board/group games are nearly as common in the sample as videogames, while 36% also selected paper-and-pencil role-playing games.

This diversity is particularly relevant for KEY-YOU because the project includes both a digital escape-room experience and a physical card-based component.

The findings therefore support a complementary approach in which digital interaction can be combined with elements that encourage social exchange, discussion, cooperation and practical decision-making.

It should also be noted that Question 12 groups PC, console and mobile under the same videogame category. The survey therefore confirms broad videogame familiarity but cannot identify which digital device is preferred.

5.3. Preferred Session Duration

The most popular educational-game duration was 20–45 minutes, selected by 41.3% of respondents.

A further 29.3% preferred sessions of up to 60 minutes, while 17.3% preferred less than 20 minutes and 12% preferred more than one hour.

Overall, 70.6% selected a duration between 20 and 60 minutes.

This supports a modular design in which participants can complete a meaningful mission or chapter within a relatively short period while still contributing to a larger narrative.

5.4. Preferred Gameplay Mechanics

The strongest preference was for puzzles, riddles and logic challenges (61.3%).

This was followed by cooperation (57.3%) and narrative engagement (54.7%).

Only 25.3% selected competition against other players.

The results therefore point towards a game design centred on problem-solving, collaboration and storytelling, with competition used as a secondary rather than dominant mechanic.

These findings also align well with the qualitative workshop, where participants identified simulations, role-plays, escape rooms, debates, quizzes and collaborative challenges as particularly effective and engaging learning methods.

5.5. Implications for Experiential Learning Design

The gaming findings strongly support an experiential learning approach.

Puzzles can transform civic knowledge into practical challenges.

Cooperation can reproduce aspects of democratic participation such as discussion, negotiation and collective problem-solving.

Narrative can make abstract institutional processes more concrete by placing players in realistic situations involving young people and community issues.

The qualitative workshop further strengthens this approach. Participants worked collaboratively on themes including Democracy and Youth Participation, Fact-Checking and Media Literacy, Digital Rights, Sustainability and Community Action, Communication and Advocacy, and Digital Solutions for Social Impact.

The GBL experience should therefore encourage players to explore, decide, collaborate, test alternatives and observe consequences, rather than relying primarily on passive information delivery.

Section VI. Recommendations for the Design of the KEY-YOU Game

6.1. Emphasis on Practical Civic Participation

The game should place practical civic participation at the centre of the learning experience.

The survey shows that many respondents recognise the existence of civic rights but do not know how to use them. The game should therefore help players understand concrete participation pathways rather than simply presenting information about rights.

Gameplay can introduce practical scenarios involving issues such as expressing an opinion, identifying the appropriate institution, preparing a proposal, participating in a consultation or understanding what happens after a civic request is submitted.

The key objective should be to help players move from “I know I have the right” to “I know what I can do.”

6.2. Realistic Institutional Simulations

The low level of institutional literacy identified in Question 8 supports the inclusion of realistic institutional simulations.

The game can represent municipal and civic processes through simplified but plausible scenarios. Players could explore the roles of different actors involved in decision-making and understand how proposals, consultations and public decisions develop.

The qualitative KEY-YOU work also included simulations and role-plays, suggesting that this experiential approach is consistent with the learning methods already used in the project.

The game should not attempt to reproduce bureaucracy in all its complexity. Instead, it should make the logic of the process visible and understandable.

6.3. Narrative-Driven Civic Dilemmas

A narrative structure is recommended because 54.7% of respondents selected following a story, universe or engaging narrative as a preferred game element.

The narrative could follow a fictional young person or group of young people attempting to respond to a problem affecting their community.

Players could encounter decisions involving competing priorities, different perspectives, limited resources or institutional procedures.

The purpose would not be to teach that there is always a single correct answer. Instead, the game should demonstrate how civic decisions involve evaluating information, discussing alternatives, considering consequences and working with others.

6.4. Modular, Session-Length-Appropriate Content

Because 45.3% of respondents identify lack of time as a participation barrier and 41.3% prefer a 20–45 minute educational gaming session, gameplay should be structured in manageable modules.

Each chapter or mission should provide a meaningful objective that can be completed within a single session.

At the same time, individual missions can contribute to an overarching narrative so that the overall experience remains coherent.

This modular structure would make the game suitable for youth work sessions, educational activities and individual use.

6.5. Interactive Mechanics and Replayability

The strongest gameplay preference is puzzle-solving, selected by 61.3% of respondents, followed by cooperation at 57.3%.

The game should therefore incorporate interactive challenges in which participants:

- solve civic or information-related puzzles;
- connect evidence and identify relevant institutions;
- collaborate to combine different pieces of information;
- make decisions and observe consequences;
- revisit scenarios and explore alternative outcomes.

Narrative branching and multiple pathways can support replayability where appropriate, provided that these features remain connected to the educational objectives.

Competition should not be the central mechanic, given that only 25.3% selected competitive play.

6.6. Accessibility and Plain-Language Design

Accessible communication should be a central design principle.

The survey shows that 42.7% identify complicated language and bureaucratic processes as a barrier, while 32% consider official political information normally too complicated and another 50.7% consider it only partially understandable depending on the topic.

The game should therefore use:

- clear and concise language;
- explanations of institutional concepts in plain terms;
- short text sections rather than unnecessarily long instructions;
- intuitive navigation;
- clear visual cues;
- practical examples linked to realistic situations.

The objective should be to demonstrate that civic participation can be understandable regardless of previous knowledge of political or institutional terminology.

6.7. Inclusive Representation

The game should represent young people from diverse social, cultural, educational and economic backgrounds.

This recommendation is supported by both the survey and the qualitative workshop.

The survey includes respondents with migrant or refugee backgrounds, minority backgrounds, disabilities or learning difficulties, and low-income or financial difficulties. Furthermore, 46.7% reported that they had at least sometimes experienced exclusion from a social or political space because of gender, background or identity.

The qualitative KEY-YOU workshop intentionally included marginalised, socio-economically vulnerable and immigrant-background young people and used co-creation to ensure that their experiences informed the development of future tools.

Inclusive representation should therefore extend beyond character diversity. The game should also consider different levels of prior knowledge, different levels of gaming experience, and different ways of engaging with learning content.

Section VII. Conclusion

This local study provides a detailed picture of how the surveyed group of young people aged 18–30 perceive civic participation, democratic processes and game-based learning in the Portuguese context.

The findings indicate that young people are not necessarily disengaged from civic life because they lack awareness of democratic rights. Instead, a substantial gap exists between knowing that rights exist and knowing how to exercise them in practice.

While 57.3% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they understand their rights as young people living in Europe, only 40% both recognise the right to express an opinion on a new city rule and know how to exercise that right. Institutional literacy is weaker still, with only 18.7% reporting knowledge of the exact steps through which a citizen's idea becomes an official law or municipal regulation.

Participation barriers are predominantly practical, informational and perceptual. Lack of time is the most frequently reported barrier (45.3%), followed by bureaucratic language and processes (42.7%) and uncertainty about where or how to begin (32%). In addition, 24% do not believe their voice would really change anything.

These quantitative findings correspond closely with the qualitative KEY-YOU workshop in Braga, where participants identified information gaps, bureaucratic procedures, language barriers, time constraints, limited youth-friendly participation opportunities and perceived distance from decision-makers. The workshop also generated concrete ideas around digital

voting, fact-checking, transparency, youth consultation, mentorship and direct connections between young people and policymakers.

The gaming findings demonstrate strong potential for a GBL response. Respondents are familiar with both digital and analogue games, with card games, videogames and board/group games all selected by around seven in ten participants. Puzzle-solving, cooperation and narrative were the three most popular gameplay elements, while a large majority preferred educational-game sessions lasting between 20 and 60 minutes.

These findings provide a clear direction for the development of the KEY-YOU game. The strongest design approach is one that combines practical civic participation, realistic institutional simulations, narrative-driven scenarios, collaborative problem-solving, plain-language information, modular gameplay and inclusive representation.

The future game should therefore not simply teach young people about democracy. It should allow them to experience how civic participation works, understand where to start, navigate institutional processes, collaborate with others, evaluate information and observe the consequences of their decisions.

In this sense, the KEY-YOU game can address the central challenge identified by the local study: reducing the distance between civic awareness and civic action.

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**Co-funded by
the European Union**

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