



Guide for Youth Workers and Educators

ABCDemocracy - Political literacy for Young vulnerable people



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Introduction

Civic education is essential for a free, open, and peaceful society. Without understanding their rights, people cannot fully participate in or shape society. Political education supports political participation and co-determination. Democratic literacy involves understanding democracy deeply and applying democratic values in life.

The **ABCDemocracy Project** aims to help vulnerable young Europeans understand democracy and prevent marginalization. Younger generations, heavily influenced by social media, are at risk of misinformation and extremist ideas. Familiarity with democratic values fosters tolerance and acceptance of diverse opinions, crucial for a democratic society.

ABCDemocracy provides educational materials, including microlearning lessons, audio and video content, and a digital escape room, all licensed under Creative Commons. This enables youth workers to adapt and use the materials freely.

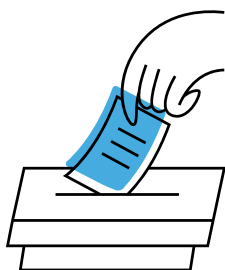
This guide introduces the ABCDemocracy Toolkit, highlighting its features and offering guidance for use with vulnerable youth.

Political Literacy Education



Political literacy refers to the knowledge and skills necessary to participate effectively in political processes and understand the structures and functions of government. According to the **Council of Europe**, political literacy includes the ability to understand political ideas, values, and concepts, and to engage with political debates and processes. It involves being informed about political systems, recognizing the roles of institutions and actors within those systems, and understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. This literacy enables individuals to critically analyze political information and media, form reasoned opinions, and actively participate in democratic governance (UNESCO).

Within this framework, the concept of Democratic Literacy is also crucial, and can be defined as...



... the ability to understand and engage with the principles and practices of democracy. It encompasses a comprehensive understanding of democratic concepts such as justice, equality, and freedom.

Those with democratic literacy can apply these principles in their daily lives and participate effectively in civic and political activities. This literacy involves recognizing the importance of tolerance, plurality, and the acceptance of diverse opinions. It also includes an understanding that conflicts of interest are natural and valuable in a democratic society, and it promotes active and informed participation in public life.

These literacies are critical for citizens to make informed decisions, hold governments accountable and contribute to the development of a fair and just society. By encouraging political and democratic literacy, educational initiatives such as the ABCDemocracy project seek to empower young people and prevent political and social marginalisation.

But what are the benefits of encouraging young people to embrace democratic values and skills, and why is it even more important for vulnerable youth?

There are lots of advantages to promoting democratic values and skills among young people.



It helps them feel **more connected and involved in society**. Young people who understand and value democracy are more likely to be involved in community affairs and contribute positively to their environment.

Educating them about democracy and its principles will help them **develop critical thinking** and the ability to **engage in constructive dialogue**. It is very important that young people learn to analyse, question and debate in a respectful and evidence-based way.

We are currently facing very complex global challenges, such as climate change, inequality or human rights crises. We need **engaged and well-informed citizens** to work together to find solutions. By giving young people the tools they need to understand and engage with democracy, we are building a stronger, fairer and more resilient society.

Educating in democracy also means teaching people to be **empathetic** and to **work together**. Young people learn to appreciate different points of view and to work well in teams, essential skills in today's increasingly connected and diverse world.

Finally, we live in an era in which democracies face many challenges, both from within and from outside. It is therefore vital that the younger generations understand why it is important to protect and strengthen this system. By encouraging them to **embrace a culture of respect, justice and active participation**, we will be investing in a better future for our communities and for the world.



But vulnerable young people in particular can benefit from political literacy training.

Empowerment and Inclusion

Education in democratic values and skills empowers vulnerable young people by providing them with the knowledge and tools necessary to actively participate in society. This helps to break the cycle of exclusion and marginalisation, giving them a voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

Building Critical Thinking and Resilience

Vulnerable young people face many challenges, and teaching them democratic values can help them develop critical thinking and resilience. This education equips them with problem-solving skills and the ability to critically evaluate information, which is crucial in a digital society rife with misinformation and manipulation.

Promoting Social Cohesion and Reducing Inequality

By involving vulnerable youth in democratic education, we promote social cohesion and reduce inequality. When these young people understand their rights and responsibilities, they are more likely to engage in civic activities, advocate for themselves and their communities, and work towards a more equitable society.

Strengthening Democracy

A healthy democracy depends on the involvement of all citizens, including those from vulnerable backgrounds. By educating these young people about democratic values and skills, we can make the democratic process more inclusive and representative, ensuring diverse perspectives are heard and considered in decision-making.

ABCDemocracy Toolkit

The ABCDemocracy toolkit is a comprehensive educational resource designed to empower vulnerable young people by enhancing their understanding of democracy, European values and the importance of respect and tolerance. The toolkit is composed of four key elements, each offering benefits and methods for addressing democratic concepts.



What are the key features and benefits of each element of the toolkit?

Video testimonies



The video testimonies bring together interviews with **nine political actors and activists from Spain, Italy and Cyprus**, involving different generations and political backgrounds. They talk about their experience, ideas and views on democracy, European values and tolerance.

Giving young people access to the first-hand experiences of people who are active in the socio-political sphere helps them to understand the reality of the situation better. This can be a useful reference point and source of inspiration, which can motivate them to become more involved in their environment.

Podcasts



The podcast series is a key element of the political literacy toolkit, designed specifically for youth workers who want to raise awareness and engage young people in democratic values and practices. Each episode delves into key aspects of democracy, offering ideas that can be used to stimulate debate and build on for further education sessions.

Below is a summary of what each episode has to offer:

EPISODE 1 - What Does Democracy Mean? (14:32 minutes)

Giovanni is a radio producer and broadcaster of 'Democracy Decoded', a programme that focuses on unravelling the threads of governance and citizenship that bind our world together.

In this episode, Giovanni and Eleni, the guest, unpack the essence and core tenets of democracy through a dynamic dialogue. They explore the fundamental principles that democracy upholds, its significance in our communities, and the values it promotes.

- This episode provides a solid foundation for understanding what democracy is, which is crucial for any further discussion on the topic.
- The conversational style makes complex concepts more accessible and relatable for young listeners.
- The content serves as a great starting point for group discussions on democratic values and their relevance in everyday life.

Episode 2 - How Does Democracy Work? (11:42 minutes)

Giovanni and Eleni continue their conversation, delving into how democracy functions. They discuss the social contract, constitutional roles, electoral systems, political dynamics, and the importance of civic engagement.

- This episode breaks down the mechanisms of democracy, helping young people understand how democratic systems operate.
- Emphasizing the role of civic engagement highlights the importance of active participation, encouraging youth to get involved.
- The themes covered can be used to create interactive learning activities, such as mock elections or debates.



Episode 3 - What Does Democracy Do for Its Citizens? (5:45 minutes)

In this episode, Giovanni interviews Anna, to explore the impact of democracy on individuals. They discuss human rights, freedom of expression, and the vital role citizens play in shaping the democratic landscape.

- Emphasizing human rights and freedoms helps young people understand the personal benefits of living in a democracy.
- Highlighting the citizen's role empowers young people to see themselves as active participants in their society.
- The content can be supplemented with case studies or real-life examples to illustrate the impact of democratic practices on individual lives.

EPISODE 4 - What Does Active Participation Mean? (6:23 minutes)

A civics class is taking place in a high school; the professor explains the concept of active citizenship to his students and introduces the topic of youth participation. Given that the topic arouses a lot of interest among his students, he decides to focus on some tools that promote active youth participation.

It introduces the concept of active citizenship and explores tools like voting, youth councils, and digital platforms. Participatory techniques such as videos and photovoice are also discussed.

- Provides concrete examples of how young people can actively participate in democratic processes.
- Introducing participatory techniques like videos and photovoice can make learning more engaging and interactive.
- Encourages young people to take actionable steps towards participating in their communities and democratic systems.



EPISODE 5 - What is the European Union? (4:55 minutes)

Three young people are doing their Erasmus project and attending a semester in Brussels, the headquarter of the European institutions and the beating heart of Europe. They meet one evening at the end of their university classes to have coffee together.

They guide listeners through the European Union, discussing its history, institutional framework, and the diverse opportunities it offers to its citizens.

- Provides a broader context of how democracy operates within the European Union, which is especially relevant for young people in Europe.
- This episode can serve as an educational resource for teaching about the EU's structure and its impact on citizens' lives.
- Highlights opportunities available to young people within the EU, such as educational programs and exchange initiatives, fostering a sense of belonging and possibility.



Microlearning

The microlearning units in the toolkit have been developed to provide youth workers with concise, high-quality educational content that can be readily incorporated into their programmes. The units address fundamental aspects of democracy in a manner that is accessible and engaging for young people. The material is presented in five main lessons, with each unit focusing on a key topic that complements the podcast series. This provides a comprehensive understanding of democratic values and practices.

Lesson 1: What Does Democracy Actually Mean?

This lesson provides an introduction to the fundamental concepts of democracy, offering a comprehensive examination of its definition and historical development. It sets out the core principles that underpin democratic systems and differentiates between direct and representative democracies, with examples and an analysis of their respective advantages and disadvantages. The lesson provides an in-depth explanation of democratic institutions and the branches of government – executive, legislative and judiciary – outlining their respective roles and interrelationships. This lesson emphasises the intrinsic value of democracy in fostering equitable and just societies.



Lesson 2: How Does Democracy Work?

Focusing on the operational aspects of democracy, this lesson covers the social contract and the pivotal role of constitutions in defining and protecting democratic governance. It details the separation of powers, ensuring checks and balances within the government. The unit explores various electoral systems and their impact on political representation and governance. Additionally, it discusses the role of political parties and the importance of public participation, equipping youth with knowledge on how democratic systems function and how they can engage in the political process.



Lesson 3: What Does Democracy Do for Its Citizens?

This lesson emphasizes the tangible benefits that democracy provides to individuals, focusing on human rights and fundamental freedoms. It categorizes different types of human rights and outlines their main characteristics, drawing connections between democracy and the protection of these rights. The unit also explores the relationship between democracy and welfare, demonstrating how democratic systems contribute to the overall well-being and prosperity of citizens. Youth workers can use this lesson to highlight the personal and societal benefits of living in a democratic society.

Lesson 4: What Does Active Participation Mean?

Active citizenship is at the heart of this lesson, which explains why participation is crucial for a thriving democracy. It identifies various forms of participation, from voting to involvement in youth councils and digital platforms. The lesson encourages young people to see themselves as active participants in their communities, outlining the actions they can take to effect change. It also examines the advantages of information and communication technologies (ICT) in boosting participation, introducing innovative techniques like participatory video and PhotoVoice to engage youth in democratic processes.

Lesson 5: What is the European Union?

This lesson provides a comprehensive overview of the European Union (EU), with a particular focus on its motto "United in Diversity." It provides an overview of the principles and values that the EU upholds, together with a brief history of its formation and a summary of significant milestones. The unit provides an overview of the operational framework of EU institutions and outlines the Union's strategic priorities. Furthermore, the potential opportunities for young people within the EU are explored, including the possibility of living, working and studying across member states. The objective of this lesson is to enhance public awareness and encourage youth involvement in EU affairs, fostering a sense of European identity and engagement.

Microlearning units offer structured learning, building on democratic principles in a way that's easy to fit into different educational settings. They're designed to be flexible, with a mix of theoretical explanations and real-world applications. The units aim to empower youth to actively participate in and positively impact their communities and democratic systems by imparting both knowledge and practical tools.

Digital Escape Room



The digital escape room, entitled "**Democracy's Last Stand**", "**Rescuing the Orb of Europa's Light**", provides a novel method for youth workers to facilitate learning about democratic principles and civic responsibility among young people.

Set in a dystopian future where democracy is under threat, participants are tasked with reclaiming the "Orb of Europa's Light", a symbol of democratic values. Each trial within the escape room presents participants with a series of interactive puzzles and tasks.

To illustrate, the "Democracy Matrix" trial requires participants to decode the origins of democracy and match key concepts like human rights and transparency to their definitions. In the "Balancing the Power" trial, participants investigate the separation of powers. Additionally, participants must identify violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in "The Chamber of Melodies," and discern authentic voices of democracy in "The Library of Lost Voices."

This immersive experience offers a comprehensive education about democratic principles while fostering critical thinking, teamwork, and a sense of civic duty.

The Digital Escape Room is formed of several elements:

1. An **introductory video**, which immerses participants in the story.
2. Three sections for those interested in **more information** on this story, with more details on The Silencer, the Orb or the Guardians of Democracy.
3. The **Escape game** itself, with the different challenges, which allows for the assessment of knowledge of democratic values.

How to use it in educational activities

The Toolkit components can be used individually or as a set, when designing and implementing activities aimed at raise awareness and educate young people on political and democratic literacy.

Here you have some suggestions!

Integrate Video Testimonies into Discussions and Workshops

Begin sessions with video testimonies from activists and politicians to provide real-life perspectives and inspire discussions. Use these testimonies as conversation starters to delve into topics like democracy, civic engagement, and EU values.

Focus on vulnerable young people: Select testimonies that resonate with the backgrounds and experiences of young people. For example, if there are testimonies of individuals who have overcome significant challenges, highlight these to show the power of resilience and active citizenship.

Use Podcasts for Flexible Learning and Reflection

Assign podcast episodes as homework or during breaks, followed by group discussions or individual reflections. Encourage youth to share their thoughts on social media or in a blog format.

Focus on vulnerable young people: Ensure podcasts are accessible on mobile devices and do not require high-speed internet. Choose episodes that address issues relevant to vulnerable youth, such as social justice, equality, and rights.

Incorporate Microlearning into Daily or Weekly Routines

Use microlearning modules as quick, engaging activities to start or end each session. These modules can reinforce key concepts and provide a sense of achievement with each completed module.

Focus on vulnerable young people: Adapt the pace and content to the learning level of the participants. Provide additional support and explanation for those who may struggle with the material, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Facilitate Team-building and Critical Thinking through the Digital Escape Room

Organise group sessions where young people can work together to solve the digital escape room challenges. This can promote teamwork, critical thinking and the practical application of democratic principles.

Focus on vulnerable young people: Build diverse teams to ensure inclusive participation. Pay attention to group dynamics and ensure that each member has a voice and feels comfortable contributing. Provide guidance and support as needed to avoid frustration.



WHAT
DO YOU
THINK?



Some recommendations to prepare your activities with vulnerable youth...

Create a safe and inclusive environment

Make sure you create a supportive and non-judgemental environment where all young people feel valued and heard. It's key to create an inclusive environment where all young people feel supported and their opinions matter

Create a **POSITIVE**
and **INCLUSIVE**
Learning
ENVIRONMENT

Be sure you're focusing on the right issues

It's important to focus on topics and issues that directly affect the lives of vulnerable youth, such as social justice, equality, and human rights. Show how these issues connect to broader democratic principles to show how important they are.

Use Peer Mentorship

It's a good idea to pair up vulnerable young people with those who have more experience or confidence in discussing political and democracy-related topics. This kind of peer support can help to build confidence and foster a sense of community.



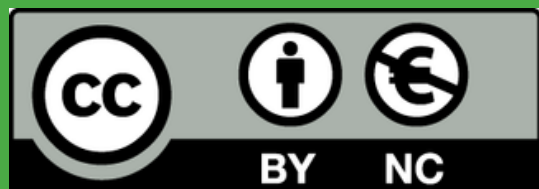
Provide Additional Support and Resources

Offer extra materials and resources for those who need a little extra help. This could be anything from one-to-one tutoring to extra reading material or access to support services.

Celebrate Achievements and Progress

Give everyone the recognition they deserve, no matter how big or small their contribution. This kind of positive reinforcement can really help to boost confidence and motivation.

<https://www.abcdemocracy.eu/>



Let your imagination run wild and adapt the materials to your needs!

All the resources generated in the ABCDemocracy project are available on the website. They can be freely used and adapted under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International license.