



AKTI Project and
Research Centre



Hellenic Centre
for Marine Research



Nature Trust FEE Malta

Policy Tool for Effecting Participation in Climate Change and the Green Transition

Developed by: AKTI Project and Research Centre

Hellenic Centre for Marine Research

Nature Trust FEE Malta

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1. Introduction

The Mediterranean is a climate change hotspot, and Euro-Mediterranean islands are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. The European Green Deal and the European Blue Economy strategy aim at building a more resilient future for Europe, so it is imperative that actions and policies implemented are inclusive, considering the needs of all European territories and people, especially the most vulnerable ones. The increased vulnerability of Mediterranean islands to climate change and environmental degradation mandates policy-making that is inclusive and equitable.

The Cypriot NGO AKTI Project and Research Centre, the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (HCMR) in Crete and the environmental organization Nature Trust FEE Malta (NTM) joined forces and mapped the reasons behind the lack of citizen participation, particularly among young people, in democratic dialogue, within the purposes of the EU-funded project RESIsles (*Resilient Euro-Mediterranean Islands: Democratic Participation for Informed and Responsible Decisions on Climate and the Environment*-Project number: 101146782).

One of the key objectives of the RESIsles project is to engage citizens, with emphasis in youth, women and those living in less urbanized areas, in designing new policies for switching to a greener way of living, while promoting citizen dialogue to discuss and propose solutions to decision-makers. To this end, the RESIsles partners implemented six co-creation cafés between July 2024 and May 2025 on all three islands, engaging 169 participants, from Cyprus, Malta, Greece, Austria, Serbia, Hungary and Romania, to identify the gaps, needs and solutions for increasing participation in democratic processes that concern specifically the environment and climate change.

Furthermore, AKTI co-organized a rural festival in Cyprus, where 3,400 people participated and more than 170 people responded to a mini survey implemented during the festival, to gather information on the barriers and main difficulties to the green transition and participation in democratic processes faced by the participants. The same survey was also applied during a dedicated workshop on Climate Change Impacts, with the participation of the vice-Mayor of Athens and several Greek NGOs and Academia representatives.

The results from the aforementioned activities, resulted in this policy tool, which focuses on the gaps and needs of Mediterranean island residents regarding climate change, the green transition and participation, as well as on the proposed solutions to bridge those gaps and needs. The target is to support EU and the competent authorities in shaping new policies to support a greener way of living and encourage active citizenship.



2. Policy Tool for Effecting Participation on Climate Change and the Green Transition

The policy tool developed, is based on the results from the six co-creation cafes that were organized in all three participating islands and the mini survey that was implemented during the Loukoumi Festival in Cyprus and the dedicated workshop on Climate Change Impacts, with the participation of the vice-Mayor of Athens and several Greek NGOs and Academia representatives.

All three islands share similar gaps and needs regarding the lack of youth participation, making it possible to identify attributes and develop suggestions to enhance public participation in climate change and the green transition.

The participants feel strongly the feeling of **powerlessness** and that there is a **lack of impact**, that their voices won't be heard or won't make any difference, leading to frustration and disengagement, while at the same time, the feeling of not being included in decision-making appears, in combination with the feeling of being disillusioned by political inaction and corruption.

Fear of judgment, lack of confidence and societal norms discourage participation. Our participants believe that society puts youth in 'boxes', creating a sense of alienation and passivity. Additionally, climate change and civic issues are not perceived as immediate threats or as directly affecting daily life, since there is often a **lack of visible short-term impact** that reduces engagement.

The participants also mentioned that there is **lack of motivation** or interest, since youth often prioritise work, studies or leisure over civic participation, while personal comfort and convenience outweigh long-term environmental or civic concerns. Laziness, boredom, or different priorities were frequently cited by the participants from all three islands.

Time, effort and resource barriers were amongst the common gaps and needs identified in all three participating islands, where youth often feel too busy or tired to engage in participation processes or activities, since these activities or processes are deemed as time and energy-consuming. It also appears that youth connect participation to **financial means**, since economic pressures or lack of resources are included in the reasons why youth do not participate.

Youth have **lost trust in government and institutions**, which are slow, corrupt or unresponsive. Youth do not see policies being effectively implemented or believe that policies take too long to be enforced, which discourages future engagement and participation as active citizens.

The **lack of sufficient green infrastructure** appears to be a significant challenge that prevents living a more sustainable lifestyle.

The participants mentioned that youth are **absorbed by technology** and digital means of entertainment, which **diverts their attention from civic life**, making them 'too busy looking at



screens’, while social media consumes their daily life, and they end up preferring social media exposure rather than community participation.

There is a **lack of awareness, knowledge and education**, where youth do not understand what exactly participation means, how to get involved or how impactful their actions might be. Many participants mentioned that youth do not know how to get information to participate and are not aware of the civil society organizations that are active on their islands. When discussing about climate change and civic engagement, these subjects are not sufficiently integrated into education or even family values.

Education systems, political structures, and lack of accessible opportunities hinder youth participation, while few platforms or incentives for involvement exist, mentioning that there is no mobilisation, no cooperation, no rules to motivate, while the educational system promotes passivity and not enough outlets to participate.

Figure 1 summarizes the common attributes from all the islands regarding the gaps and needs for active citizen participation.

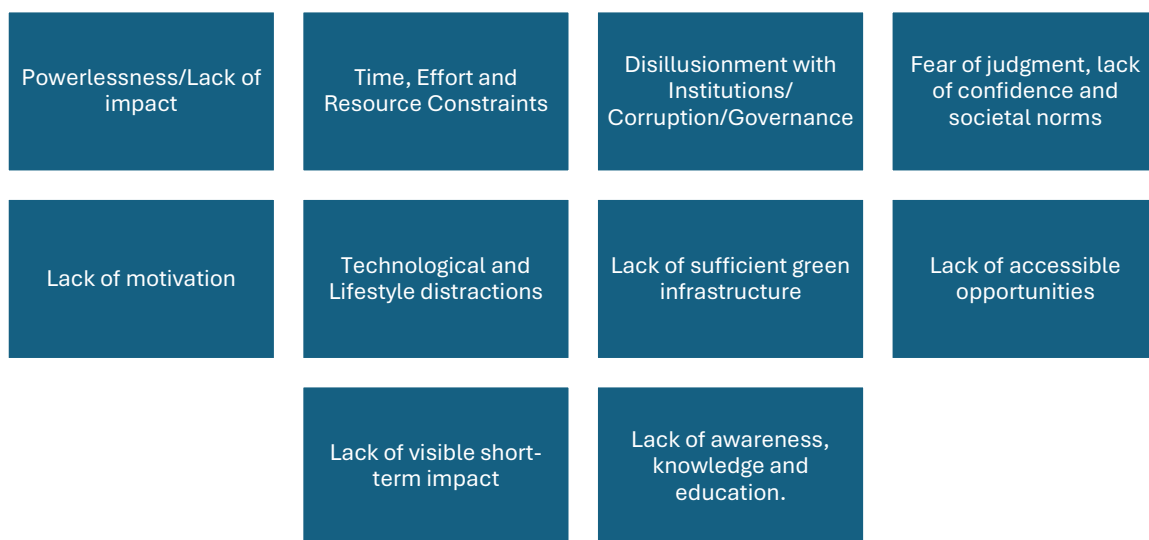


Figure 1: Common attributes between all three islands, regarding ‘Why youth/people do not participate as active citizens.’



3. Recommendations to policy makers

Engaging decision-makers and local policymakers in this dialogue is therefore important, as it will facilitate the uptake of the suggested solutions for building resilience against climate crisis. Based on the solutions proposed by the participants, the following recommendations to policy makers can be described as follows:

- **Introduce financial and non-financial incentives** (e.g. refund schemes, prizes, certificates), to recognize and motivate participation, to create the feeling that engagement and participation are worthwhile and rewarding.
- **Provide funding and infrastructure** for youth-led initiatives, organisations, and environmental projects, **reduce bureaucracy** and **ensure faster implementation of climate and civic policies**, supported by strong government action, stricter regulations, and enforcement.
- **Develop online platforms** and local opportunities, to provide accessible pathways for involvement, creating organised, well-structured activities with clear objectives, **reducing barriers such as time, effort, cost, transport, bureaucracy**.
- **Use social media**, influencers, podcasts, digital content, documentaries and campaigns tailored to youth trends to communicate more effectively and **increase public awareness of where, when, and how to participate**.
- **Create safe spaces** where opinions are respected and valued, so that youth will be able to see that participation leads to *real change*, because there is a need for visible results, feedback loops, youth-led councils, and meaningful influence in decision-making.
- **Organize social events with collaborations with well-known public figures** to frame participation as enjoyable, trendy and socially valued.
- **Organize and promote community-building activities** and group involvement (nature clubs, volunteer groups), to promote positive role models, such as teachers, activists, influencers, policymakers, to encourage participation at home, and schools.
- Promote accessible ecological alternatives, **create accessible green infrastructure**, such as improve public transport, create more green spaces, promote recycling systems etc, to make green choices more accessible to young people.
- **Promote environmental and civic education from a young age** (school, home, university), with practical, experiential learning (e.g. clean-ups, workshops, applied projects) to ensure clear and accessible information about climate change, consequences, and ways to participate.

Figure 2 presents the gaps and needs and corresponding recommendations to Policy Makers, to bridge those gaps.

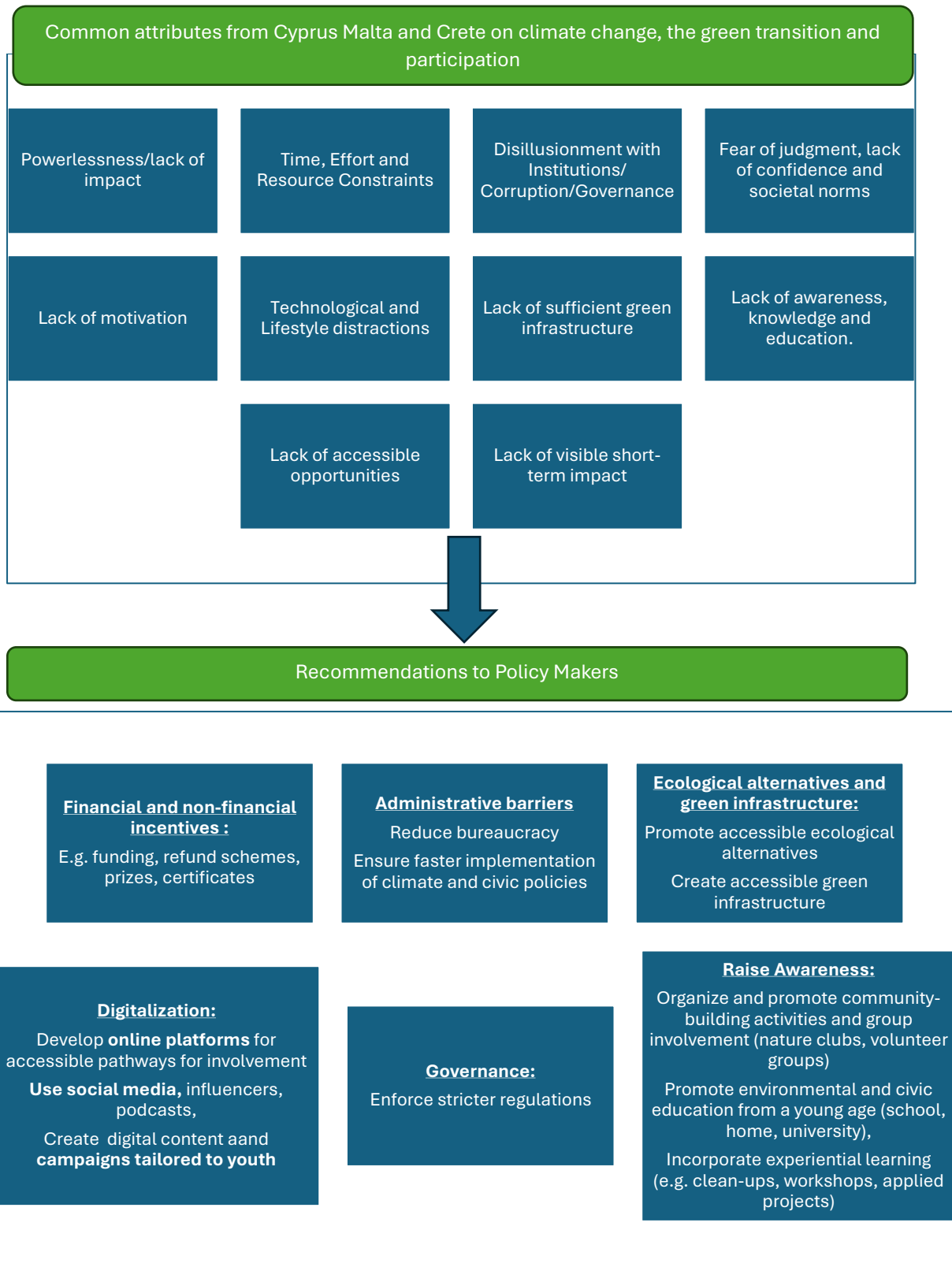


Figure 2: Schematic representation of the common attributes from Cyprus Malta and Crete on climate change, the green transition and participation and the recommendations to policy makers.

4. Conclusions

Civic participation remains low among youth in the EU.¹ 44% are not participating in any type of civil society organization, youth or sports club, or political party. Over 40% of young Europeans consider that critical thinking, media and democracy are ‘not taught sufficiently’ in school.²

Based on the results extracted from the co-creation cafes implemented in Crete, Cyprus and Malta and the mini survey implemented at the Loukoumi festival in Cyprus, the policy tool was created on the gaps and needs regarding climate change, the green transition and participation, as well as the proposed solutions.

Youth often do not participate as active citizens, due to a combination of **low awareness and understanding of civic engagement**, a belief that **their actions will not have a real impact**, and **limited motivation** or interest compared to competing priorities such as studies, work, or personal comfort. Many **feel powerless** or disillusioned by unresponsive institutions, **slow policy processes**, or **corruption**, which reinforces a sense of helplessness. **Time, energy, and financial pressures** also act as barriers, while cultural norms, **individualism**, and **fear of judgment** further discourage involvement. Finally, climate and social issues are often viewed as distant or **irrelevant to daily life**, and the fast-paced, technology-centered lifestyle offers few accessible opportunities for meaningful participation.

Across all groups, participants emphasized the need for **incentives and rewards**, whether financial or social, alongside **stricter regulations** to ensure responsibility. There is **strong demand for youth involvement in decision-making**, reassurance that their **actions create real impact**, and the creation of trendy, engaging, and instantly **rewarding participation methods**—especially through **social media**. The participants, stress the **importance of green infrastructure**, **reduced bureaucracy**, **well-resourced educators**, and **policies that make sustainable behaviour easy**, attractive, and integrated into everyday life. They also highlight the **need for better education**, **accessible information**, and meaningful opportunities for climate participation from a young age.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/reports/flash375_en.pdf

² https://www.campaignplaybook.eu/how_engage_europe_youth_ahead_of_2024_european_elections

5. Annex 1: The method

This section of the report presents the methods developed for the co-creation cafés and the mini survey that was conducted during the festival in Paphos. This also includes the method for the development of the policy tool, that will be shared with local policy and decision-makers, as well as to the EU.

A key objective of the RESisles project is to engage citizens, including youth, women and people living in less urbanized areas, in co-developing recommendations for policy interventions and best practices that will:

- (i) support citizens to switch to a greener way of living and take personal actions that can contribute to combat climate change,
- (ii) become more active in democratic processes relevant to the environment and climate change.

To this end, the project partners implemented a series of six co-creation cafés in Cyprus, Malta and Crete. These café-style discussions engaged citizens, through a participatory process developed by AKTI Project and Research Centre, in the identification of their gaps and needs regarding these topics and the co-development of solutions to address key gaps/needs.

The co-creation cafés brought together a total of 169 people, 122 women, 40 men and 12 individuals that didn't disclose their gender, and were implemented as follows:

- **Cyprus:**
 - The first co-creation café was implemented on 27th of July 2024 and engaged 13 participants, including 2 university students from Austria and 1 from the Netherlands.
 - The second co-creation café was implemented on 11th of February 2025 at the University of Cyprus, with the participation of 34 students, including 3 university students from Hungary, Romania and Serbia.
- **Malta:**
 - The first co-creation café took place on the 25th of October 2024, engaging 45 educators.
 - The second co-creation café took place on 17th of January 2025, engaging 21 students.
- **Crete:**
 - The first co-creation café was implemented on the 14th of May 2025, engaging 21 participants-women from two different associations, one from Heraklion city and a second one from Hersonissos town)
 - The second co-creation café was implemented on the 15th of May 2025, engaging 35 university students from the Hellenic Mediterranean University located in Heraklion city.

Further to the six co-creation cafés, AKTI also co-organised a rural festival on 26th and 28th September 2025 in Geroskipou Paphos. Through the festival, AKTI aimed to (i) empower citizens



to raise their voices and publicly express their views regarding all areas of EU action, with emphasis on climate change and the environment, (ii) share good practices that can be implemented to minimise climate change impacts in rural and agricultural areas, and (iii) engage citizens in less urbanized areas in discussions and actions related to climate change and the environment. To this end, a mini survey was implemented, aiming to gather information on the barriers and main difficulties for green transition and for participation in democratic processes faced by the festival participants. 3,400 people visited the festival, and 177 responded to the mini survey (KPI:150).

Four university students from Italy, Germany, Austria and Bulgaria travelled to Cyprus to participate at the festival.

5.1 Co-Creation Café method

AKTI, using previous experience and expertise, developed the following methodology for the implementation of the cafés, which incorporates aspects of collective intelligence, participatory decision-making and multi-criteria analysis:

1. Ice Breaker activity:

The participants were asked the following question: ‘What is your first thought when you hear the term ‘Climate Crisis/Climate Change’, to initiate the conversation on the topic.

2. Introduction to the RESIsles project and the impacts of climate change:

The project and the topic of the impacts of climate change were introduced to the participants, followed by an interactive discussion on how these are perceived across the islands.

3. Structured participatory process:

The participants were divided into groups and given 20 minutes to discuss the question, “*Why do youth/people do not participate as active citizens?*”, to identify the relevant gaps/needs. Each group then shared their opinions in an open discussion.

To identify potential solutions, the participants were given another 20 minutes to answer the question, “*What would be needed to enhance participation?*”, and then shared their opinions for an open discussion with the rest of the group

4. Wrap up and conclusions:

After the completion of the co-creation cafes a quick recap of the results took place, followed by the completion of the ‘EU survey on Justice, Rights and Values’.

AKTI’s team travelled to Malta and Crete to facilitate the first café together with the local partners, thus ensuring a consistent methodological approach.

5.2 Mini-survey method

Using a collective intelligence approach, a brief questionnaire with two multiple-choice questions was developed, forming a mini survey. This mini survey was implemented at Loukoumi





Festival in Paphos Cyprus in September 2025, in Athens, in October 2025 during a dedicated workshop on Climate Change Impacts, with the participation of the vice-Mayor of Athens and several Greek NGOs and Academia representatives. It was also implemented in Crete, during the networking session of the Knowledge Transfer event- which was organised within the purposes of WP6 and Task 6.1.

The two multiple-choice questions focused on the barriers and main difficulties the participants faced regarding green transition and participation in democratic processes.

During these events, the participants were first introduced to the RESIsles project and then were encouraged to answer the two multiple choice questions, through an interactive voting activity which best reflected their views.

The results were analysed and used to develop the policy tool outlined at this report.

5.3 Policy Tool development Method

To develop the policy tool, the results from the co-creation cafes and the mini survey were analysed to identify common points related to each islands gaps and needs in addressing climate change, the green transition and participation. The analysis presents also the proposed solutions for bridging the gaps and needs identified. This Policy Tool is intended for submission to local policy and decision-makers, as well as to the EU.





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