

Providing structures to make VOICES heard Policy Brief

The VOICE partners support young people from various backgrounds, and work with them to create a culture of participation and a society in which all voices are included. Our project underlines how promoting creative methods in youth work can equip professionals with innovative tools to assist young people to elevate their voices.

In particular, the VOICE project explored the photovoice method. Photovoice is a participatory research method combining a creative and accessible tool, photography, with a ready-to-use step-by-step process backed by robust theory. Through its youth and social worker training opportunities and local experiments with young people in each partner country, VOICE demonstrates the great potential of the method for the civic engagement, participation and creative expression of young people.

Following a participatory approach, this document was developed based on the feedback provided by the students and youth work practitioners involved in the project, ensuring their perspectives and voices are heard. The partnering youth and creative organisations complemented this policy brief by contributing with their own expertise.

Based on the VOICE experiences and results, we summarised the following key messages in the form of recommendations for a) education and training institutions (especially the ones training future youth workers), b) organisations and practitioners in the youth and social field and c) policy-makers.

Education & Training Institutions



Recognize photovoice as an effective tool in youth work!

While the photovoice method is absent in most educational and vocational curricula, it has proven to effectively offer valuable input for social and youth work researchers and professionals that other research methods generally lack. We therefore suggest and encourage:

- *The official, administrative recognition of the photovoice method, and the inclusion of similar creative approaches in youth work competence models.*
- *Provision of "hands-on" training on the method, which builds on the experimentation and implementation in the field, to aid the preparation of future youth workers.*



Integrate photovoice in your curricula!

Photovoice is a tool with multiple functions. For instance, it can be used as a tool facilitating integration, youth empowerment and needs assessment. As such it should be included in school curricula, either as an activity used on a regular basis, or occasionally. Our local experiments demonstrated the following:

- *The photovoice method can be used as a workshop introduction activity during integration weeks, and/or as a closing activity at the end of the year. It can work efficiently both as an ice-breaking activity for newly formed groups, and as a tool for needs assessment at different points in time.*
- *It is a great tool for schools to assist learners to discover new interests and talents, and it may be applied to facilitate discussions over more challenging topics like sexual education, bullying, cultural differences, etc.*



Use the photovoice method to encourage youth-led discussions!

It is important to create environments for young people, where they can speak their minds freely. The photovoice method, according to the VOICE participants, has been a great starting point for them to begin to reflect on certain topics, to articulate their thoughts and to eventually feel heard and appreciated by their fellow participants. We thus suggest to:

- *Motivate your students to discuss problems openly and encourage them to find solutions. The collective discussions on the produced photographs will identify patterns, helping to raise personal problems from the “local” sphere, as well as emerging trends and solutions on a global scale.*



Use photovoice inside and outside the classroom!

The method can be effectively used outside the classroom, as well. It has been tested with diverse groups of people, and the school environment, where educators and researchers trained to the method may choose to apply it, is an ideal arena for the conduct of such initiatives. We suggest you to:

- *Dedicate time and resources to train your school counsellors in the photovoice method. As they apply innovative creative methods, their guidance may prove more interesting and effective for students.*
- *Use the method in parents-teachers’ group meetings to create a friendly environment and raise important issues. The method can be adapted to involve children themselves into such discussions!*

Youth and Social Field Organizations & Practitioners



Reflect on your own role as a youth worker!

Youth workers' tasks involve assisting young people to gain self-confidence, to be able to express themselves and their ideas in the private and public spheres. Often youth workers need tools to help participants overcome sentiments of reservation, shyness, illegitimacy and awkwardness related to self-expression and public speaking. The photovoice method is characterised for its power to liberate speech among participants. Our recommendations to youth and social field practitioners are to:

- *Reflect on your didactic approaches and how these encourage or suppress creative expression among your participants.*
- *Experiment with new methods. Search for training and learning opportunities to add new skills and innovative participatory methods, like photovoice, to your skill set and daily work.*



Empower your participants through photovoice!

Photovoice is characterised by its potential to reach and actively engage diverse groups. Being invited to respond to a question and build their responses through visual storytelling, gives participants a sense of pride and ownership. To reinforce their participation and motivate them to make the most of your activity, we suggest you to:

- *Encourage the young participants to come up with meaningful questions and actively search for answers that will provide policy-makers with actionable solutions. Our experience implementing the method showed us further engagement of the young participants in light of their pictures being shared with relevant stakeholders.*
- *Implement the method in ways that overcome any linguistic, gender- or origins-related obstacles, which make participation challenging for young people. Show them that their backgrounds add value to their personal and collective messages.*



Act as a multiplier for the photovoice method!

A photovoice activity can take place with different groups, in various locations, as long as the appropriate tools (cameras/ smartphones) are available to them. The high adaptability of the method in different contexts and the highly visible results it produces make the method attractive to its audiences. As a youth worker who enjoys the benefits of the photovoice method, we suggest you to:

- *Use social media/influencers to make photovoice more visible reaching a wide range of stakeholders online and offline, within and beyond your own networks.*
- *Organise spontaneous street events to raise public awareness on the flexible use of the method. Doing so, you can add to the method's impact on the participants, as well as on audiences not directly involved.*

Policy-makers



Reflect on your own position, privilege and responsibilities!

Policy-makers have a central role in the decision-making process. Your duty and privilege as representatives of the people is to listen to what they have to say, and respond accordingly to provide them with solutions. Open consultations are available at all policy-making levels, but they are often not accessible to all, resulting in some people being left aside. To avoid social exclusion we recommend you to:

- *Bring marginalised youth's voices into policy-making discussions. Photovoice facilitates the participation of people who don't usually take part in formal public debate spaces. Make it clear that voicing opinions and experiences should not be the privilege of a few.*
- *Be open to non-formal forms of advocacy, and adopt a more welcoming attitude towards artistic means of expression.*



Use photovoice as a needs-assessment tool!

The method is applicable in various fields and can address different topics. Whenever clarity and visibility of the needs of a community are missing, photovoice can be utilised to identify problems and suggested solutions. We believe that photovoice can be initiated or implemented by policy-makers and their associated institutions as a bottom-up approach to public policy. More specifically:

- *Build your own photovoice capacity. Municipalities closer to the community level can utilise photovoice as a great tool for needs assessment. Starting from the local level, citizens' recommendations can be later promoted to the upper levels of decision making, nationally and internationally.*
- *Use photovoice with focus groups of local residents/citizens at the start and end of mandates to identify the needs of your citizens and monitor the impact of your policies on them over time. The implementation and results of photovoice experiments can have substantial impact over future policies, if taken seriously by elected officials and administrative staff involved with impact evaluation.*



Be ambassadors of photovoice!

As your position grants you with high visibility and the potential for significant positive influence in the public sphere, giving recognition to the photovoice method and implementing it in your own contexts can inspire more people in your networks to take advantage of it. No matter what role you occupy and at what level, you can be an ambassador of photovoice yourself. We recommend you to:

Providing structures to make VOICES heard: Policy Brief

- *Spread the word, especially in circles where people are not familiar with the method. A guest speech, or the participation in a roundtable in the context of youth participation and civic engagement events can be suitable occasions to inform others about the method.*
- *Advocate for updated competence models for youth workers. For example, the "Competence Model for Youth Workers to Work Internationally" lacks emphasis on the importance of arts and creative expression in youth work, omitting outside-the-box methods such as photovoice.*

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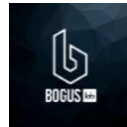


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Disclaimer

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