



LEARN BY PLAY



EU PLAYER

HANDBOOK

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Executive Summary

EU Player is an educational initiative that uses game-based learning to support young people in understanding the European Union and their role within it. Through a cooperative board game, the project translates complex EU structures, values, and decision-making processes into accessible, engaging learning experiences.

This handbook has been developed for youth workers, educators, and facilitators working with young people aged 13 to 25, including those facing social, economic, or educational disadvantages. It provides both a conceptual framework and practical tools to support participatory learning in formal and non-formal contexts.

The handbook explains the educational value of board games, introduces the foundations of EU governance, and offers concrete guidance on facilitation. A dedicated set of lesson plans and activities enables practitioners to implement EU Player directly in their own settings. By combining play, dialogue, and reflection, EU Player supports the development of EU knowledge alongside key skills such as cooperation, critical thinking, and democratic participation.

Ultimately, the handbook aims to empower young people to move from passive awareness of the EU to active engagement, supporting their development as informed and confident EU Ambassadors.



Foreword

Young people across Europe often experience the European Union as distant, complex, or difficult to relate to their everyday lives. At the same time, they are directly affected by EU decisions in areas ranging from education and mobility to social rights and inclusion. Bridging this gap between institutions and lived experience is a central challenge for youth work and education.

The EU Player project was developed in response to this challenge. By placing young people at the centre of a shared learning experience, EU Player uses play as a serious educational tool. Board games offer a space where complex systems can be explored safely, where cooperation and disagreement can be practiced constructively, and where learning emerges through experience rather than instruction alone.

This handbook reflects the collective expertise of youth organisations, educators, and practitioners from across Europe. It brings together research, practice-based knowledge, and concrete tools to support those working directly with young people. While grounded in EU policy and educational theory, it remains firmly focused on practice, adaptability, and inclusion.

We hope that this handbook supports you in creating engaging learning spaces, strengthens young people's confidence in engaging with the European Union, and contributes to more inclusive and participatory democratic cultures across Europe.



Part I - Introduction

Welcome to the EU Player Handbook. This handbook serves as a practical guide for youth workers, educators, trainers, and facilitators who wish to support young people in exploring the European Union through creative, game-based learning.

EU Player aims to strengthen young people's knowledge of the European Union, their confidence in engaging with it, and their sense of belonging. The project focuses primarily on young people aged 13 to 20, including those from disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds. By using a cooperative board game, EU Player turns learning about the EU into an experience that is accessible, engaging, and empowering.

Through gameplay, participants move from being EU Players to becoming EU Ambassadors. EU Ambassadors are young people who understand how the European Union affects their daily lives and who feel more motivated to participate in democratic and civic processes.

Who this handbook is for

This handbook is written for youth workers, teachers, mentors, and educators working in formal and non-formal education settings. No prior expertise in EU institutions or educational games is required. The handbook combines foundational information with practical guidance and supports you step by step in using EU Player with diverse groups of young people.

It is designed to help you:

- understand the EU Player board game, its mechanics, and its educational purpose;
- facilitate inclusive and engaging sessions for diverse groups of young people;
- use gamification and game-based learning to strengthen motivation and participation, particularly among young people facing disadvantage;
- support the development of transversal skills such as critical thinking, cooperation, communication, and reflection;
- connect gameplay with real-world civic engagement and active citizenship.

What you will learn

Across its chapters, this handbook introduces the concept behind EU Player and the educational thinking that underpins it. You will learn how and why game-based learning works, how board games can translate complex EU topics into accessible experiences, and how play can support both knowledge and personal development.

The handbook explains the game's narrative, rules, gameplay mechanics, and educational elements embedded in EU Player. It also provides practical guidance on facilitation, inclusion, and reflection, enabling you to adapt the game to different contexts and group needs.

In addition, the handbook highlights opportunities to connect face-to-face gameplay with follow-up and digital activities, including online tournaments, to sustain young people's motivation and engagement beyond a single session.

Our aim

By combining play, creativity, storytelling, and social learning, the EU Player Handbook equips you not only to teach about the European Union, but to make it tangible and relevant for young people. Above all, it supports you in creating learning spaces where young people feel curious, confident, and capable, ready not only to understand the EU, but to take an active role in shaping its future.

Learning, trust, and engagement

In many youth work contexts, engagement cannot be taken for granted. Young people may arrive with low expectations of participatory processes, shaped by experiences where their views were sought but not acted upon. Facilitators therefore need to pay close attention to how learning spaces are framed and experienced.

Trust-building is a gradual process. Clear explanations of why an activity is taking place, what participants can expect, and how their contributions will be used to help establish credibility. Consistency in

facilitation, transparent decision making, and respect for participants' boundaries all contribute to sustained engagement.

Attention should also be given to emotional and social dynamics. Group composition, existing relationships, and external stressors influence how young people participate. Allowing flexibility, acknowledging emotions, and adapting activities in response to group needs are key aspects of high-quality practice.



Practice tips

- Start each session by clearly explaining the purpose and how it links to young people's interests.
- Avoid promising influence that cannot be delivered. Be transparent about limits.
- Build in informal moments before and after activities to support relationship building.

Considering participation, voice, and power

Participation is frequently presented as an unproblematic good, yet in practice it is uneven and shaped by power relations. Young people may be invited to participate without having real influence over outcomes, leading to frustration or disengagement. Facilitators therefore need to distinguish between activities that are participatory in form and those that are participatory in substance.

In EU Player sessions, participation is embedded in decision making. Players must negotiate priorities, respond to constraints, and accept collective outcomes. This creates opportunities to discuss whose voices are heard, how decisions are justified, and how disagreement is managed. Facilitators can support learning by making these dynamics explicit during reflection, without assigning blame or judgement.

It is also important to recognise that not all young people will wish to participate in the same way. Some may be vocal and assertive, while others contribute through observation or support roles. Valuing

different forms of participation helps prevent dominant voices from shaping the experience and reinforces inclusive practice.

Managing disengagement and resistance

Disengagement should not be understood simply as a lack of interest. It may reflect previous negative experiences of participation, mistrust of institutions, or external pressures affecting a young person's capacity to engage. In such cases, insisting on participation can be counterproductive.

EU Player allows facilitators to offer choice and flexibility. Young people may observe before joining, take on limited roles, or step back temporarily. Over time, this often leads to increased engagement as trust develops. Acknowledging resistance as a valid response rather than a problem to be fixed can open space for dialogue and learning.

Informal learning within structured activities

Although EU Player uses a structured game format, learning remains informal. Conversations emerge organically; rules are negotiated, and meanings are constructed collectively. Facilitators should resist the urge to over direct these processes.

Instead, the role of the facilitator is to notice learning moments and build on them through reflection. This might involve pausing the game briefly to ask a clarifying question or returning to a moment of tension during the debrief. Such interventions help consolidate learning while preserving the informal character of the activity.

Part II - Board Games and Youth Engagement

Board games provide a strong entry point for youth engagement by drawing on young people's natural curiosity, desire for interaction, and enjoyment of play. For teenagers who feel disconnected from formal education or political institutions, games create a learning environment that feels approachable and non-intimidating.



Why games engage young people

Research on game-based learning shows that board games create highly motivating conditions for young people. Clear goals and feedback help participants understand what they are working towards and how their actions influence outcomes. Progress becomes visible through shared objectives and collective achievements, which is especially encouraging for young people who may be used to experiencing failure in traditional learning environments. Games also support autonomy and agency. Players make meaningful choices, decide strategies, and take responsibility for their actions within the game. This sense of control is a key driver of motivation. At the same time, the social nature of board games ensures that interaction and shared tension sustain attention, even among participants who might otherwise disengage.

Collaboration, communication, and negotiation

Many contemporary board games rely on collaboration rather than individual competition. These formats foster communication, negotiation, and shared decision making. Players explain ideas, listen to different perspectives, negotiate priorities, and adapt strategies together.

Within EU Player, these dynamics are central. Participants are asked not only what they know about the European Union, but how they will act together within its framework. Collaboration around the table mirrors democratic decision making in everyday life.

Reaching diverse groups

Board games are effective with diverse groups of young people because they rely on multiple forms of engagement. Visual elements, physical components, and structured turn taking support participation across different learning styles, language backgrounds, and confidence levels. Young people who are less comfortable with text-based materials can follow gameplay through symbols and actions. Those who are less confident academically may contribute through strategic thinking, observation, or social skills. The structure of the game also supports participants who find sustained focus challenging.

From engagement to reflection

Learning is strengthened when gameplay is followed by reflection. Short, guided discussions help participants make sense of their experiences and connect them to real-life contexts. In EU Player sessions, reflection can focus on decision making, cooperation, and the links between the game and EU politics or local realities.

Rules, power, and legitimacy in play

Rules are often experienced by young people as imposed and inflexible, particularly in institutional settings such as schools or public services. Board games offer a contrasting experience. Rules are visible, finite, and shared by all players. This visibility allows facilitators to explore how rules function, why they are accepted, and what happens when they are challenged.

In EU Player sessions, facilitators frequently observe that debates about rules emerge naturally. Players question interpretations, negotiate exceptions, or express frustration when outcomes feel unfair. These moments are valuable learning opportunities. Rather than resolving disputes quickly, facilitators can invite participants to articulate what feels unjust and why. This helps connect game experiences to broader discussions about legitimacy, accountability, and trust in institutions. Power dynamics also become visible through play. Some roles carry more influence, resources, or decision-making capacity than others. When participants experience this imbalance directly, abstract concepts such as representation or unequal power become tangible. Reflection can then focus on how power is exercised, how it can be balanced, and what mechanisms exist to challenge it.



Practice tips

- Pause the game briefly when disputes arise and note them for reflection rather than immediate resolution.
- Encourage quieter participants to describe how decisions felt, not only how they were made.
- Use questions about fairness and influence instead of explaining institutional concepts directly



Part III – Knowing the European Union

Understanding how the European Union works is essential for meaningful participation. This section provides a detailed yet accessible explanation of the EU's legal foundations, competences, institutions, and decision-making processes. It is designed to equip youth workers and educators with sufficient depth to answer questions confidently, while remaining usable with young people who may be encountering EU topics for the first time.

Throughout this section, the logic of a game is used as a pedagogical aid. Like any game, the EU has rules, defined roles, turn-taking procedures, and limits on what players can do. This framing helps young people grasp abstract institutional concepts through a familiar structure.

The EU Treaties: The Union's rulebook

The EU Treaties form the constitutional foundation of the European Union. They define the Union's values and objectives, establish its institutions, allocate powers, and set out decision-making procedures. In practical terms, the Treaties determine what the EU is allowed to do, how it does it, and where its limits lie.

Only the Member States have the authority to create or amend the Treaties. Treaty change requires unanimous agreement between national governments and subsequent ratification in each Member State according to national constitutional rules. This process reflects the fact that the EU is based on voluntary cooperation between sovereign states.

A core principle underpinning the Treaties is the principle of conferral. Under this principle, the EU may act only in areas where powers have been explicitly granted by the Treaties. If a policy area is not mentioned in the Treaties, the EU has no legal basis to legislate in that field. This is a key concept for young people to understand, as it explains why the EU is influential in some areas but limited to others.

The main Treaties in force today are the Treaty on the European Union, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Together, they define

the EU's institutional structure, policy areas, and fundamental rights framework.

EU values and membership

The Treaties also set out the EU's core values, including respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights. These values are not symbolic. They form the basis for EU membership and guide EU action internally and externally.

Any European state may apply to join the EU, but accession is conditional on meeting strict criteria. These include stable democratic institutions, respect for the rule of law and human rights, a functioning market economy, and the capacity to adopt and implement EU law. This process highlights the EU's dual nature as both a political and a legal community.

EU competences: what the EU can and cannot do

EU competences describe the areas in which the EU is allowed to act. The Treaties distinguish between three main categories of competence, which determine the balance of power between the EU and its Member States.

Exclusive competences are areas where only the EU may legislate and adopt legally binding acts. Member States may act only to implement EU law. These areas include the customs union, competition rules for the internal market, monetary policy for euro area countries, common commercial policy, and the conservation of marine biological resources.

Shared competences allow both the EU and Member States to act. However, once the EU exercises its competence, Member States must align their national laws with EU legislation. Shared competences cover a wide range of policy areas, including the internal market, environment, transport, energy, agriculture, consumer protection, economic and social cohesion, and aspects of social and public health policy.

Supporting competences are areas where the EU may support, coordinate, or complement national action but may not harmonise

national laws. These include education, vocational training, youth, culture, sport, tourism, civil protection, and administrative cooperation. Programmes such as Erasmus+ illustrate how the EU adds value without replacing national systems.

Understanding these distinctions helps young people make sense of political debates about what the EU should or should not do, and why responsibility is often shared between different levels of governance.

EU institutions: the main actors

EU decision making involves several institutions, each with a distinct role.

The European Council brings together Heads of State or Government of the Member States. It sets out the overall political direction and priorities of the Union but does not legislate. Its conclusions often shape the policy agenda and influence the work of other institutions.

The European Commission acts in the general interest of the Union. It has the exclusive right to propose EU legislation, manage EU programmes, and ensure that EU law is applied correctly. The Commission also represents the EU internationally in areas of its competence.

The European Parliament represents EU citizens and is directly elected every five years. It debates, amends, and adopts EU legislation and the EU budget together with the Council. It also exercises democratic scrutiny over the Commission and other EU bodies.

The Council of the European Union represents the governments of the Member States. National Ministers meet in different formations depending on the policy area under discussion. Together with the European Parliament, the Council adopts EU legislation and the EU budget.

The Court of Justice of the European Union ensures that EU law is interpreted and applied correctly. It resolves disputes between institutions and Member States. If an EU law or decision breaks the Treaties, the Court can declare it invalid. This is part of the EU's system of judicial review, which helps maintain the rule of law within the Union.

The EU legislative procedure

Most EU laws are adopted through ordinary legislative procedures. The process begins with a proposal from the European Commission, often following consultations with stakeholders and experts. The European Parliament and the Council then examine the proposal, propose amendments, and negotiate to reach agreement.

If both institutions agree on the same text, the legislation is adopted. If their positions differ, further readings and negotiations take place. In some cases, a conciliation process brings representatives of both institutions together to agree on a joint text. This procedure reflects the balance between supranational and intergovernmental elements in EU governance.

Limits to EU powers

Two key principles limit EU action. The principle of subsidiarity requires that decisions be taken as closely as possible to citizens. In areas of shared competence, the EU should act only if objectives cannot be sufficiently achieved by Member States alone. National parliaments play an important role in monitoring compliance with this principle.

The principle of proportionality requires that EU action does not go beyond what is necessary to achieve its objectives. The Court of Justice of the European Union may annul EU measures that breach these principles. Together, subsidiarity and proportionality act as safeguards against excessive centralisation and help maintain legitimacy.

Making the EU feel closer to young people

Many young people experience the European Union as distant, abstract, or disconnected from their daily lives. Facilitators therefore play a crucial role in translating institutional structures into lived experiences. This does not require simplifying the EU to the point of distortion, but rather anchoring explanations in contexts that are familiar and meaningful to participants.

One effective approach is to start with issues young people already care about. Topics such as education opportunities, mobility, digital rights, employment conditions, environmental protection, or consumer rights

provide concrete entry points. Facilitators can then trace how decisions in these areas are shaped at different levels, including local, national, and European.

Connecting EU policies to everyday experiences also involves highlighting rights. EU citizenship brings tangible rights related to movement, non-discrimination, data protection, and participation. When young people recognise these rights in their own lives, the EU becomes less abstract and more relevant.

Facilitators should also acknowledge ambivalence and criticism. Young people may express scepticism, frustration, or distrust towards the EU. Creating space for these views is essential for credibility.



Practice tips

- Begin explanations with a concrete example before introducing institutions or procedures.
- Invite participants to share personal experiences that relate to EU rights or policies.
- Treat criticism as a learning opportunity rather than something to correct.

Additional learning resources

In addition to the explanations provided here, this handbook refers to a range of youth-friendly educational resources developed through Erasmus+ projects involving the YES Forum and its partners. These materials, including infographics, short videos, and concise learning sheets, can be used to complement gameplay and support differentiated learning



Part IV – Practical Approaches

Choosing the right format and setting

EU Player can be implemented across a wide range of contexts, but the choice of format and setting has a significant impact on outcomes. Facilitators should consider whether the activity is a one-off session, part of a short workshop series, or embedded in a longer programme. Each format serves different purposes.

Short interventions are often used as entry points. They work well for raising curiosity, introducing EU-related themes, or engaging young people who may not yet be ready for sustained participation. In these settings, clarity of purpose and strong facilitation are essential. Activities should be tightly framed, with clear beginnings and endings, and reflection should focus on a small number of key insights.

Longer programmes allow for deeper learning. Repeated sessions make it possible to build trust, rotate roles, revisit concepts, and develop more nuanced understanding. Facilitators can gradually increase complexity, introduce more challenging discussions, and support young people in connecting learning to action beyond the activity itself.

The physical setting also matters. Schools, youth centres, community spaces, and outreach settings each shape how young people engage. In formal settings, facilitators may need to counter expectations of assessment or authority. In informal settings, maintaining focus and structure may require additional attention. Flexibility and sensitivity to context are therefore central to effective implementation.

Using board games with young people in fragile contexts

Board games are increasingly used in youth work with young people who experience social, emotional, or economic vulnerability. Across youth centres, NGOs, and informal education settings, practitioners report that structured play offers a rare combination of predictability, enjoyment, and interpersonal engagement. These characteristics make board games particularly suitable in contexts where young people may struggle with insecurity, low confidence, or fear of judgement.

Young people in fragile contexts often face overlapping challenges. These may include limited access to leisure activities, disrupted educational pathways, care experience, migration backgrounds, rural isolation, or situations linked to being not in education, employment, or training. Many share common barriers to participation, such as social withdrawal, low self-esteem, or previous negative experiences in group settings.

Board games provide a neutral and structured starting point. When a game begins, all participants share the same rules, information, and opportunities for success. This creates an equalising effect that reduces the influence of social hierarchies and academic performance. Young people who often feel marginalised can participate on equal terms, with outcomes shaped by cooperation and engagement rather than background or status.

Communication often emerges naturally through gameplay. Young people who are hesitant to speak in group discussions may find it easier to communicate when interaction is embedded in a shared task. Asking questions, negotiating decisions, and reacting to others' moves become functional parts of the game rather than social performances. Practitioners frequently observe increased participation from young people who initially appear withdrawn or anxious.

The structured nature of board games also supports emotional regulation. Clear rules, turn-taking, and predictable rhythms can create a sense of stability. For some young people, gameplay functions as a contained space where they can experiment with decision making and experience manageable levels of frustration without real-life consequences. Over time, this can contribute to increased confidence and reduced anxiety.

Creating low-threshold participation

A key strength of board games in fragile contexts is their ability to lower the threshold for participation. Activities that rely heavily on verbal expression or abstract reasoning can be intimidating. In contrast, board games provide concrete tasks that shift attention away from individual performance and towards shared action.

Facilitators often prioritise games with simple rules, strong visual elements, and short learning curves. Demonstrating rules visually

rather than explaining them verbally supports young people with lower literacy levels or concentration difficulties. Cooperative games are frequently used in early sessions, as they reduce fear of failure and support trust-building within the group.

Competitive games can also offer valuable learning opportunities, but they are usually introduced once the group has developed a sense of safety and cohesion. When used thoughtfully, competitive play helps young people practice resilience, manage disappointment, and respond constructively to setbacks. Facilitators may adapt rules or emphasise enjoyment over outcomes to prevent frustration from escalating.

The role of the facilitator

Facilitation plays a central role in ensuring that board games support inclusion and learning. Youth workers act as guides who observe group dynamics and intervene when necessary to maintain a respectful and supportive atmosphere. This may involve clarifying rules, encouraging quieter participants, or gently moderating dominant behaviors.

Emotional sensitivity is particularly important. When tensions arise, facilitators can help reframe frustration as part of the learning process rather than as personal failure. By modelling calm communication, active listening, and fairness, facilitators influence how young people interact with one another during the game and beyond.

Consistency also matters. Sessions that take place in familiar spaces, with predictable routines and a welcoming atmosphere, help young people feel secure. Simple practices such as allowing breaks, offering snacks, or maintaining a relaxed pace contribute to emotional safety and sustained engagement.

Tips and strategies for implementation

Effective implementation of board games in youth work depends on careful preparation and flexibility. Creating a predictable environment helps participants feel safe enough to engage. Clear, shared expectations emphasising respect, inclusion, and enjoyment support positive group dynamics.

Selecting appropriate games is essential. Youth workers often begin with games that are easy to learn and can be explained through demonstrations. Learning by doing allows participants to become comfortable with gameplay without feeling overwhelmed. Over time, a varied game collection helps sustain interest and challenge.

Flexibility is crucial. Young people arrive with different levels of energy, focus, and emotional readiness. Facilitators may adapt sessions by choosing shorter or calmer games, allowing participants to observe before joining, or adjusting group sizes. Such adaptations respect individual needs and prevent disengagement.

Short reflection moments at the end of sessions help consolidate learning. Simple questions about what worked well, what was challenging, or what could be tried differently encouraging self-awareness and group reflection. These discussions help link gameplay to broader personal and social development.

Board games as a tool for social inclusion

Board games support social inclusion by creating shared experiences and reducing social distance between participants. Their accessible structure enables young people from different backgrounds to engage on equal terms. Through cooperation and interaction, participants build relationships that may not have formed otherwise.

Gameplay encourages empathy and perspective-taking. Young people learn to recognise others' needs, negotiate fairly, and respond to emotions constructively. These skills are particularly valuable in mixed groups where participants may differ in language, culture, or life experience.

Board games also offer multiple ways to contribute. Some young people excel at strategy, others at communication, observation, or maintaining group cohesion. Recognising and valuing these different strengths supports confidence and belonging, particularly for participants who may not experience success in other settings.

When board games are used regularly, they can become a stable point of connection within youth work programmes. Many organisations report that young people who initially attend only for gameplay gradually engage in wider activities, volunteering, or leadership

opportunities. In this way, board games function as an entry point to broader participation and inclusion.

Adapting to diverse contexts

Partners implementing EU Player operate in diverse environments, including urban and rural areas, school-based programmes, open youth work, and outreach initiatives. Each context brings specific opportunities and constraints.

In school settings, time is often limited, and learning objectives may be predefined. Facilitators may need to align activities with curricular goals while preserving the participatory character of EU Player. Clear communication with teachers and school staff helps manage expectations and supports integration.

In non-formal youth work settings, participation is usually voluntary. Building motivation and trust may take precedence over content delivery. Facilitators can allow more time for relationship building and adapt pacing according to group dynamics.

In fragile contexts, flexibility is particularly important. Attendance may be irregular, group composition may change, and external pressures may affect engagement. Facilitators should be prepared to adjust session plans, repeat explanations, and prioritise emotional safety over completion of activities.

These variations underline that EU Player is not a fixed programme but a flexible framework. High-quality implementation depends on facilitators' ability to read their context, draw on partner experience, and adapt activities accordingly.

Part V – Sample Lesson Plans and Activities

This section provides ready-to-use lesson plans and activity formats that support the EU Player approach. The plans are designed for youth workers and educators working in formal and non-formal contexts. Each can be adapted to different group sizes, time frames, and levels of prior knowledge.

Lesson Plan 1: Understanding EU Institutions Through Play

Objective

Participants gain a basic understanding of the roles of the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of the European Union.

Target group

Young people aged 13 to 20, mixed ability groups.

Duration

60 minutes.

Materials

- EU Player board game,
- role cards,
- flipchart or whiteboard.

Steps

1. Warm-up (10 minutes): Short group discussion on what participants already know about the EU. Key ideas are noted visually.
2. Gameplay (30 minutes): Participants are assigned simplified institutional roles and play a guided round of EU Player focusing on decision making.
3. Debrief (20 minutes): Group reflection on how decisions were made and which roles had influence.

Adaptations

Use visual aids and simplified language for participants with lower literacy levels.

Lesson Plan 2: Competences Challenge

Objective

Participants understand the difference between exclusive, shared, and supporting EU competences.

Target group

Young people aged 14 to 20.

Duration

45 minutes.

Materials

Policy area cards, flipchart, markers.

Steps

1. Introduction (5 minutes): Brief explanation of EU competences.
2. Group task (25 minutes): Small groups classify policy areas under the three competence types.
3. Reflection (15 minutes): Groups justify their choices and discuss subsidiarity.

Adaptations

Provide concrete examples to support understanding.

Lesson Plan 3: EU Values in Everyday Life

Objective

Participants explore EU core values and connect them to everyday situations.

Target group

Young people aged 13 to 18.

Duration

50 minutes.

Materials

Scenario cards, EU values cards, EU Player board game.

Steps

1. Warm-up (10 minutes): Discussion on what values mean to participants.
2. Activity (25 minutes): Groups receive scenarios and identify which EU values are involved.
3. Debrief (15 minutes): Reflection on how values are protected or challenged.

Adaptations

Use real-life examples relevant to participants' contexts.

Lesson Plan 4: Active Citizenship in Practice

Objective

Participants explore what active citizenship means in practice and identify ways they can engage at local, national, and European levels.

Target group

Young people aged 14 to 20.

Duration

60 minutes.

Materials

Flipchart or whiteboard, markers, citizenship action cards (prepared by facilitator).

Steps

1. Introduction (10 minutes): Group discussion on what participants associate with citizenship and participation. Responses are mapped visually.
2. Activity (30 minutes): Small groups receive action cards describing different forms of civic engagement, such as voting, volunteering, youth councils, petitions, protests, or online campaigns. Groups discuss who can participate, at what level, and what impact each action may have.
3. Plenary discussion (20 minutes): Groups share reflections and identify which forms of engagement feel most accessible or meaningful to them.

Adaptations

Use examples drawn from participants' local context and everyday experiences.

Lesson Plan 5: Democracy, Power, and Decision Making

Objective

Participants develop a critical understanding of how democratic decisions are made and how power is distributed.

Target group

Young people aged 15 to 20.

Duration

60 to 75 minutes.

Materials

Scenario descriptions, role cards, flipchart.

Steps

1. Warm-up (10 minutes): Brainstorm what democracy means and where young people encounter it in daily life.
2. Scenario work (30 minutes): Groups are given fictional but realistic decision-making scenarios, such as allocating a youth budget or deciding community priorities. Each participant takes on a role with different interests.
3. Reflection (20 to 35 minutes): Discussion on whose voices were strongest, how compromises were reached, and how this relates to democratic institutions, including the EU.

Adaptations

Ensure clear facilitation to prevent dominance by confident participants and encourage balanced participation.

Additional activity formats

Micro-sessions

Short 20 to 30 minute gameplay sessions focusing on one concept, such as cooperation or decision making.

Role rotation exercises

Participants rotate roles to experience different perspectives and responsibilities.

Design your own scenario

Groups create new EU Player scenarios based on local or youth-related issues.

Reflection journals

Participants record thoughts and learning outcomes after gameplay.



Part VI – Challenges and Future Perspectives

Game-based learning and participatory education offer significant potential, but they also face structural and contextual challenges. This section expands on these challenges in practical terms and outlines realistic pathways for strengthening impact, sustainability, and relevance over time.

Democratic fatigue and unequal participation

Across Europe, many young people express frustration with formal politics and democratic institutions. This is often described as democratic fatigue. It reflects not indifference, but repeated experiences of limited influence, slow change, or perceived distance between decision makers and everyday concerns. Educational initiatives that promote participation must therefore work within a context of scepticism and uneven trust.

Participation is also socially patterned. Young people with higher levels of education, social capital, or institutional support are more likely to access participatory opportunities. Those facing economic hardship, discrimination, or unstable living conditions often encounter additional barriers. Game-based approaches like EU Player can lower entry thresholds, but they cannot remove structural inequalities on their own.

Facilitators should therefore avoid framing participation as a simple choice or personal responsibility. Instead, activities can open discussion about why participation feels accessible to some and not to others, and what conditions make engagement possible. This approach strengthens critical understanding without placing blame on individuals.

Limits of project-based participation

Many youth participation initiatives are delivered as short-term projects. While these projects can be innovative and engaging, they risk creating temporary experiences that are not sustained once funding ends. Young people may encounter participation opportunities that raise expectations without offering clear follow-up pathways.

EU Player addresses this risk by positioning learning within broader ecosystems. However, facilitators and organisations still need to consider how activities connect to longer-term opportunities, such as youth councils, volunteering, mobility programmes, or civic initiatives. Making these connections explicit helps prevent participation from feeling symbolic or disposable.

Strengthening sustainability

Sustainability depends on institutional anchoring. When EU Player is integrated into ongoing programmes, organisational strategies, or partnerships with schools and local authorities, its impact is more likely to endure. Training facilitators, documenting practice, and sharing learning across organisations contribute to this process.

Capacity building is particularly important. High-quality facilitation requires time, reflection, and support. Creating spaces for facilitators to exchange experiences, reflect on challenges, and adapt methods strengthens implementation and reduces reliance on individual expertise.

Digital development with caution

Digital tools offer opportunities to extend reach and maintain engagement between sessions. Online tournaments, shared platforms, or follow-up challenges can support transnational exchange and continuity. At the same time, digital expansion should be approached carefully.

Face-to-face interaction remains central to trust-building and social learning. Digital elements should complement, not replace, analogue play. Facilitators should remain attentive to issues of access, digital fatigue, and data protection when integrating online components.

Youth co-creation as a principle

Involving young people in shaping activities is both a democratic practice and a quality measure. Co-creation may include adapting rules, developing new scenarios, or shaping facilitation approaches.

These processes increase relevance and ownership, but they also require time and flexibility.

Clear communication about what can and cannot be influenced helps manage expectations. When co-creation is meaningful, it reinforces the core message of EU Player: that participation involves negotiation, compromise, and shared responsibility.

Looking ahead

Future development of EU Player should remain responsive to social change. Shifts in political debate, digital environments, and young peoples lived realities will continue to shape how citizenship is understood and practiced. Maintaining relevance will require ongoing reflection, openness to critique, and collaboration across sectors.

By embedding EU Player within wider participation pathways and supporting facilitators as reflective practitioners, the approach can contribute to more inclusive and grounded democratic learning across Europe.

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Annex – Key EU Knowledge & How it translates into the gameplay

These few pages are here to help you building bridges between the Europe United board game mechanics and how the European Union works in real life.

It gives Key Lessons to guide you, but for more details, it is advised to read Part III “Knowing the European Union” first.

Key Lesson #1: The European Union ... why?

Stronger together

Peace through interdependent economies

> The first “raison d’être” of the European Union is to ensure peace on a continent which has hardly experienced it in its history until the European project was born.

How is it reflected in the gameplay?

The cost of resources available to players in the game reflect this mechanism: they are cheaper if exchanged between the players, representing EU countries with no customs at their mutual borders (Action #6 in each scenario, *Exchange Resources with Active Player*, allows players to exchange resources at a 1:1 ratio), while they are more expensive if acquired “outside the European Union” because customs remain (in the game, *Acquiring a Resource outside the European Community* requires players to spend 1 Time resource, which is very valuable).

This concept is otherwise underlying, but not expressed more explicitly.



For more information: [The Schuman Declaration \(May 1950\), the EU's “founding act”](#)

Collaboration is a “positive sum game”

- > Pure competition is not a sustainable policy: Many contemporary issues affect European countries altogether and don't stop at borders, in such a way that acting alone is inefficient ... and everyone loses if they don't cooperate together.
- > Collaboration proves to be a more efficient strategy, both individually and collectively, for such issues.
- > Compromising is not easy though: Politics is an effort to master problems that affect the well-being and survival of the community. Institutions, such as frameworks of rules, are tools to solve problems. But conflict is always part of social and political life. While conflict cannot be eradicated, it is possible to control its disruptive potential, even between countries

How is it reflected in the gameplay?

The objectives in the game reflect this tension between:

- The need to collaborate: Players win or lose together, as a union of countries trying to solve the issues they are facing in common (in each scenario, players must reach 40 points collectively to win the game) ;
- National interests: Each player, representing an EU country and its specific context (*Member States* cards), also has its own goals (*Personal Objective* cards) potentially disrupting the collective goal's achievement (at the end of a playthrough, if the players won collectively, then *Glory points* are counted depending on the *Personal Objective* cards to find a winner among all players).



For more information: [Key European Union achievements and tangible benefits](#), European Union, Directorate-General for Communication [consulted on 26/03/2026]

Key Lesson #2: The European Union ... how?

EU Power and their limits

The framework of EU powers

The powers of the European Union are strictly defined, as well as what Member States can do on their own. Several “layers” are involved:

> **EU Treaties:** Member States have to unanimously agree to delegate any power to the EU, in the form of treaties, the “fundamental contract” between EU countries and the EU institutions. These treaties set the EU values and objectives, define the competences of the EU, as well as how the institutions work together, including the Member States.

> **EU competences:** The EU is not all-powerful, and can do more or less depending on the field.

Exclusive competences: In a few select areas, only the EU may act, and Member States can only implement EU law. In other words, this is the EU institutions’ sole kingdom. It covers the EU single market for instance.

Shared competences: In this case, both the EU and Member States are allowed to act. However the EU can play a trump card here: Member States are free to legislate in these areas as long as the EU does not exercise its own competence, or if it decides not to exercise it. Otherwise Member States have to follow the EU when it takes the lead. The list of policy areas in this category is the longest, with for instance environment, consumer protection, and transport.

Supporting competences: Also referred to as “coordinating or supplementing competences” sometimes, in these areas the EU has much less power. It can support, coordinate or complement the policies of its Member States, but not legislate in their stead. In other words, it cannot harmonize national laws, or replace it with EU law. These areas cover, for example, industry, culture, education and tourism.

How is it reflected in the gameplay?

In the game, players have more or less room for action:

- The core rules of the game illustrate the “exclusive competences” of the EU: in its “reserved areas”, the EU has already set rules that players have to follow (such as the EU single market with no customs between EU countries, explaining the lower cost of resources exchanged between players with the *Exchange Resources with Active Player* decision).
- The *Law* cards and on the board for each scenario illustrate, instead, “shared competences”: players who represent EU countries can do “as they please” during the playthrough as long as they follow the ground rules, until they adopt a new *Law* that leads the EU to legislate and create a new rule applying to all players from then on.



For more information:

- [Founding agreements](#), European Union, Directorate-General for Communication [consulted on 26/03/2026]
- [EU competences](#), Erasmus+ Project CitiGen'Z [consulted on 26/03/2026]

The EU does not “replace” Member States: they are key players in the game!

The EU is not the “all-powerful tyrant crushing sovereign states” that many politicians easily blame for all their woes: Member States themselves have a lot of influence and are “key players” in how the EU works.

> **EU Treaties:** The ground rules of the EU are all unanimously agreed upon by EU countries, which sign the EU Treaties once they have reached a compromise satisfying all of them. The EU cannot grab any power on its own: it all comes from the Member States’ own free will.

> **Role in the institutions:** EU countries are represented in many, many ways in the EU institutions themselves, they are not “side-players”. Among these institutions, the most important are:

European Council: It brings together the Heads of State or Government of all EU Member States, who set the Union’s overall direction, priorities and strategic guidance. That way, EU countries are the literal “captains of the EU ship”.

Council of the EU: It gathers National Ministers who meet in different formations depending on the policy area covered by a draft EU law. Together with the European Parliament, the EU Council negotiates and adopts EU laws and the EU budget. So Member States have a say from the very start to the very end of the EU decision-making.

> **Voting system, the so-called “qualified majority”:** The Council of the EU adopts EU laws along with the European Parliament. But it does not use a simple or absolute majority system (e.g. more than 50% of countries approve the draft EU law): in most areas (about 80% of EU laws), it uses a “qualified majority”, giving a slightly bigger influence in the legislative process to EU countries than with a simple majority. The Council of the EU indeed approves a draft EU law if:

- at least 55% of member states vote in favor (15 out of 27);

- those countries represent at least 65% of the total EU population.

In some areas (like the foreign policy), unanimity is even required.

How is it reflected in the gameplay?

Simple enough there: In the game, EU Member States are the very, very literal key players!

Moreover, for a new *Law* to be adopted and to create a new rule applying to all players for the rest of the playthrough, players representing EU countries have to collaborate: for instance, at the start of a game, one of the two *Laws* present on the board itself can receive 1 point already, but players have to choose together which of these to favour.



For more information:

- [European Council](#), General Secretariat of the Council [consulted on 26/03/2026]
- [Council of the European Union](#), European Union, Directorate-General for Communication [consulted on 26/03/2026]

Key Lesson #3: The European Union ... how?

EU Policies illustrated

Several areas involving the European Union exemplify the policies implementing the above-mentioned “positive sum game”, and the underlying tensions between the need for a collective compromise and national interests.

The EU Single Market

> **The EU Single Market:** To foster economic growth in the EU, borders have been removed between Member States, allowing free movement of goods, services, capital and persons. Beyond the peace it guarantees, this EU single market makes trade between EU countries cheaper, helping them to compete with other “big players” in a globalized economy.

How is it reflected in the gameplay?

The cost of resources available to players in the game reflect the EU single market: they are cheaper if exchanged between the players, representing EU countries with no customs at their mutual borders (Action #6 in each scenario, *Exchange Resources with Active Player*, allows players to exchange resources at a 1:1 ratio), while they are more expensive if acquired “outside the European Union” because customs remain (in the game, *Acquiring a Resource outside the European Community* requires players to spend 1 Time resource, which is very valuable).

This concept is otherwise underlying in all three scenarios, but not expressed more explicitly.



For more information: [Single market](#), European Union, Directorate-General for Communication [consulted on 26/03/2026]

Mission 2030 – Climate Breakdown!

The EU Environmental Policies

> **Environment, a shared competence:** Pollution does not stop at borders so for any single country, being environment-friendly on its own is useless if neighbours are not. That is why environment is a shared EU competence: EU countries can legislate on their own, but once the EU legislates, they have to apply common rules (they have to apply the minimum requirements and can go further in protecting the environment, for instance with stricter regulations).

> **The European Green Deal**, approved in 2020, is the “package” encompassing many sectorial policies, all following a similar objective: making the EU climate neutral in 2050. The achievement of this ambitious goal is still uncertain with the EU, under pressure on many fronts, having stepped back on several environmental initiatives lately. However key policies have had a positive impact already, like the “EU Emissions Trading System”.

> **EU Emissions Trading System:** This policy is a “cap and trade” system which functions like a pollution allowance game for big companies in Europe:

The EU puts a limit (a cap) on how much pollution companies can produce.

Companies get or buy permits that allow them to pollute a certain amount: If a company pollutes less than its limit, it can sell its extra permits to other companies, and if it pollutes more, it has to buy extra permits or pay a fine.

Because the total number of permits goes down each year, companies are pushed to pollute less and switch to cleaner energy.

How is it reflected in the gameplay?

The *Mission 2030 – Climate Breakdown!* illustrates the EU's environmental policies especially.

Its gameplay features (*Actions, Laws* etc) do not strictly correspond to existing EU laws: they illustrate their philosophy however, and the need to cooperate between players, representing EU countries, to manage their economies collectively so that their pollution does not reach a critical level. For example:

All players lose if, at any point, there are no purple cubes left in the reserve because that means they are overwhelmed by *Waste*.

However Waste can be managed through a collective decision among other features: the *Law #1* in this mission helps all players to do so by creating a new rule giving a perk for using *Action 7*.



For more information: [EU Emissions Trading System](#), European Commission, Directorate-General for Climate Action [consulted on 26/03/2026]

Mission 2040 - Last Zombie at Paris

The EU Health Policy

Health is also a competence of the EU, but it is split in two categories:

> Health, a shared competence when it can impact several EU countries : The European Union can legislate about health, when it comes to “common safety concerns in public health matters”.

Concretely, that means the EU is allowed to regulate what medicine is allowed in the single market or not for instance: since consumers can cross borders to buy medicine in any neighbouring EU country or even purchase it online, common regulations are needed, and the European Medicines Agency was created to manage a “centralised authorisation procedure”.

> Health, a supporting competence otherwise: However in all other aspects which do not concern such “common safety concerns”, the EU cannot create binding laws and the Member States remain sovereign.

Concretely, that means the EU cannot harmonize healthcare systems: Member States remain sovereign and can implement different measures (public or private healthcare or a mix, reimbursement rates etc). At most, the EU can help them coordinate their healthcare systems, like with the European Health Insurance Card: it does not replace national healthcare systems, it only helps them communicate in case an EU citizen needs care in another EU country.

> The Covid-19 crisis demonstrated how single countries were powerless, and coordination necessary. That is why the EU introduced a wide range of measures in response to the pandemic. These were in areas such as healthcare (by procuring vaccines) and the economy (in the form of stimulation packages). All designed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

How is it reflected in the gameplay?

The *Mission 2040 – Last Zombie at Paris* illustrates the EU's health policies especially.

For instance, just like the EU helped Member States coordinate their response to a common health crisis during the Covid pandemic, players can *Call for Reinforcements (Action #8)* and act collectively for their common benefit.

For more information: [The common EU response to COVID-19](#), European Union, Directorate-General for Communication [consulted on 26/03/2026]



Mission 2050 – The New World

The EU Migration and Asylum policy

Migration has been among the trickiest topics in the European Union, both at national and EU levels, since the early 2010's especially, with humanitarian crises around the world leading to a record influx of asylum seekers and migrants in the EU.

> Originally, "every man for himself": rules to manage migration existed at the time, but proved to be extremely inefficient and unsustainable for EU countries. Under the former Dublin Regulation, for example, the core principle was simple: the first EU country a migrant entered was responsible for their entire asylum claim. But in the end, Mediterranean countries and especially Italy and Greece, because of their geographical situation, became the de facto "waiting rooms" of Europe and were legally responsible for housing, processing, and fingerprinting everyone arriving by sea, while other EU states refused to take people in, leading to an unmanageable situation. Meanwhile, frustrated by the wait and the increased processing times in countries which did not have the means to manage the situation properly on their own, many migrants simply left Italy/Greece to head for Germany or France for instance.

> The new Migration and Asylum Pact (fully active by June 2026) replaces this "every man for himself" policy with an actual solidarity. With this new system, other EU countries must help frontline states, and their contributions can take the form of:

- relocations of asylum seekers and of beneficiaries of international protections ;
- financial contributions such as supporting projects in third countries ;
- alternative solidarity measures such as capacity building or placement of personnel.

How is it reflected in the gameplay?

The *Mission 2050 – The New World* illustrates the EU’s Migration and Asylum policy especially.

In that scenario, the new Migration and Asylum Pact’s focus on solidarity among EU Member States is illustrated in particular with the possibility for players, representing EU countries facing an influx of friendly aliens who have fled their planet, to *Relocate aliens (Action #3)* among themselves, a feature made even easier with *Law #1* in this mission.



For more information:

- [EU migration and asylum policy](#), General Secretariat of the Council
- A statistical overview of refugee populations, globally and by region/country can be found here: [Refugee Data Finder - Key Indicators](#) [consulted on 26/03/2026]



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Translation into XX [language] by XX [name/organization]

February 2026



Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however, those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

