Barriers, Mechanisms and Strategies:

A Comparative Analysis of Marginalised Youth Participation in the UK and Selected

European Countries

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1st December 2024

Abstract

Youth participation in policymaking is essential for promoting social inclusion, particularly for marginalised communities. However, the UK faces challenges in ensuring the active involvement of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially in the context of post-Brexit policy shifts. This study employs a comparative policy analysis to evaluate youth participation frameworks in the UK, Portugal, Norway, and Czechia. The analysis involved a thematic coding of official policy documents, sourced from government and institutional websites in both original languages and English translations. Thematic codes and subcodes were developed to facilitate a structured comparison across the four countries. The findings reveal that while the UK has made progress in engaging youth, it lags behind Norway and Portugal in establishing formalised, decentralised, and inclusive structures for youth involvement. Norway's decentralised model, which includes local youth councils and tailored programs, and Portugal's comprehensive National Youth Plan, integrating youth at all stages of policymaking, stand out as effective models. Czechia's emphasis on data collection and policy evaluation highlights the importance of systematic assessment for improving youth participation. This study underscores the need for the UK to adopt legal guarantees, stable funding, and decentralised engagement strategies to strengthen its youth participation frameworks. The recommendations have significant implications for social justice and youth empowerment, offering a roadmap for more inclusive and equitable youth participation policies in the UK.

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INTRODUCTION

Youth participation is being increasingly recognised as a critical component in the development of inclusive policy-making processes. Engaging young people in shaping policies that directly affect their lives is not only a democratic imperative but also a strategic approach to improving the effectiveness of services and programs, especially those targeted at young people (Checkoway, 2012; Kraft & Manning, 2024). The concept of youth participation spans various social dimensions, involving young people from diverse backgrounds, including differences in race, class, gender, and geographical location, across social areas like education, housing, and employment (Checkoway, 2011). Fundamentally, youth participation involves engaging young people in decisions that affect their interests and rights, emphasising their involvement from the early stages of policy development. Effective youth participation not only promotes social justice but also ensures that diverse perspectives are included in decision-making processes (UN DESA, 2020). In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the level of support for the involvement of young people in the development of policies that address community needs, driven by the recognition that their perspectives can lead to more responsive and inclusive solutions (Driskell, 2017). Research suggests that involving young people in policy-making not only directly benefits them but also enhances the impact of programs designed to serve them, framing this involvement as a matter of social justice, active citizenship, and nation-building (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018; Zeldin et al., 2014). However, despite this progress, many young people, particularly those from marginalised communities, continue to face exclusion and discrimination that limit their ability to engage fully with societal opportunities (Shevlin & Rose, 2022).

The concepts of social inclusion, exclusion, and marginalisation are key to understanding how individuals and communities interact with social institutions and resources. Social inclusion is commonly understood as the process by which efforts are made to ensure that individuals have equal opportunities to access public services and participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives (United Nations, 2020). Inclusion policies aim to eliminate institutional barriers, fostering environments where individuals can express themselves and engage in meaningful decision-making (United Nations, 2020). The idea of social inclusion can be viewed from multiple perspectives. Social inclusion can be understood through a spectrum of interpretations, ranging from narrow views focusing on access to basic services to broader perspectives that emphasise active participation and empowerment (Gidley et al., 2010). The most extensive perspective sees inclusion as a process that enables individuals to reach their full potential, illustrating that true inclusion

extends beyond mere access to meaningful engagement and opportunities for personal growth (Gidley et al., 2010). Historically, social inclusion has been understood alongside its counterpart, social exclusion. Cuesta et al., (2024) define social exclusion as limiting individuals' ability to engage in social, economic, political, and cultural life, often due to discriminatory practices or lack of resources. Social exclusion's dynamic nature is also highlighted, encompassing systemic inequities related to socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or age, which interact to create compounded disadvantages.

Marginalised communities are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion. Often differentiated by characteristics such as race, disability, gender, culture, or socioeconomic status, these communities face greater obstacles in accessing opportunities and participating in societal processes (Harrison & Atherton, 2021). Harrison and Atherton (2021) describe marginalisation as the process of pushing individuals to the edge of sociocultural spaces, where they remain present but unnoticed or undervalued. Even compared to other disadvantaged groups, marginalised communities may be seen as out of place or even a distraction by policymakers and institutions (Harrison & Atherton, 2021). Messiou (2012), drawing from the United Nations Development Programme, defines marginalisation as being regarded as insignificant or undesirable, leading to inequality, deprivation, and a lack of access to power. For this study, marginalised communities are understood as those whose differences, whether based on race, disability, gender, or other factors, lead to diminished opportunities to participate in society, particularly in decision-making and policy-making processes.

Youth participation provides a vivid example of marginalisation in practice. Guided by policies to empower youth, numerous countries have introduced frameworks for youth inclusion in decision-making processes, with emphasis on integrating youth perspectives into broader societal development (USAID, 2014). However, this participation often reveals systemic barriers that continue to prevent marginalised youth from fully engaging in these processes. Five key barriers that inhibit participation among marginalised youth are:

1. Daily Life Constraints: Many from lower socio-economic backgrounds face limitations such as transportation issues, demanding family or work responsibilities, and financial challenges that prevent regular engagement (King, Feltey, & Susel, 2015).

2. Social Isolation and Distrust: Feelings of social isolation, depression, and past experiences of discrimination contribute to a sense of futility and distrust toward institutions, hindering engagement (Montesanti et al., 2017; Batts et al., 2022).

3. Cultural and Language Barriers: For immigrants and newcomers, language proficiency, literacy issues, and cultural norms can prevent active involvement, especially among women and ethnic minorities (Montesanti et al., 2017; Hedström & Smith, 2021).

4. Economic and Bureaucratic Challenges: Financial instability and complex bureaucratic processes can discourage marginalised individuals from participating due to cost and time constraints (Hedström & Smith, 2021; Bell & Reed, 2022).

5. Intersectionality and Representation: The overlapping identities of marginalised individuals (e.g., based on gender, age, and socio-economic status) often intensify these barriers, and insufficient representation in decision-making bodies further discourages engagement (National Democratic Institute, n.d.; Bell & Reed, 2022).

Inclusivity mechanisms are essential for fostering meaningful participation among marginalised communities in decision-making processes and for addressing systemic barriers that hinder their involvement. Various strategies have been identified to ensure these groups can effectively engage and influence policies that affect their lives:

1. Community Stakeholder Partnerships and Peer-Leader Training: Training peer leaders from within marginalised communities has proven effective in bridging communication gaps and fostering trust (Montesanti et al., 2017; ICMA, 2021).

2. Involvement of Civil Society organisations (CSOs): CSOs often amplify the voices of underrepresented groups, promoting their interests within policy discussions (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2023).

3. Participatory Budgeting: Participatory budgeting allows marginalised groups to directly influence budgetary priorities, which can align policies with community needs (OECD, 2022; Stacy et al., 2022).

4. Capacity Building and Inclusive Consultation: Developing leadership and advocacy skills, alongside structured consultations, empowers marginalised youth to participate effectively and have their perspectives integrated into policy design (UNDP, 2021; Shevlin & Rose, 2022).

This research seeks to explore how social policies address the participation of marginalised youth, and to what extent they acknowledge the barriers to their inclusion while incorporating mechanisms for their involvement in the policy-making process. A comparative policy analysis will be conducted, examining and contrasting policy documents from the UK and selected European countries, with an aim to assess the approaches taken towards youth participation and inclusion. This study is primarily focused on the UK given the significant political shifts it has recently undergone, particularly in the context of Brexit, which has redefined its relationship with the European Union, as well as entailing significant changes in social policies across various areas. The UK's departure from the EU provides a unique opportunity to examine how its approach to youth participation in social policies compares with those in EU member states that continue to operate under shared European frameworks. The selected European countries for comparison include Portugal, Norway and Czechia, chosen based on a ranking of the most inclusive countries in 2024 (Othering & Belonging Institute, 2024).

Hypotheses:

1. It is expected that Portugal and Norway, as the top two most inclusive European countries, will demonstrate more comprehensive and effective strategies for facilitating marginalised youth participation compared to the UK and Czechia.
2. Policies in Portugal and Norway are likely to be more proactive in addressing barriers to inclusion, incorporating participatory mechanisms that ensure diverse voices are heard and integrated into policy-making processes.
3. By contrast, the UK's approach may reveal gaps or limitations, particularly in the post-Brexit context, where social policy shifts might have affected the frameworks for youth inclusion.

By comparing UK policies with those in Czechia, Norway, and Portugal, this study aims to understand how well these approaches foster marginalised youth participation and inclusion. Identifying gaps in current policy frameworks will enable recommendations for more equitable, and representative strategies that support youth empowerment and social justice. The relevance of this research lies in the potential of youth, particularly those from marginalised groups, to drive meaningful societal change. By exploring their involvement in policies, this study will provide insights into the UK's social inclusion policies and how they address the needs of underrepresented communities. Ultimately, understanding the impact of

these policies is essential to shaping future initiatives that are more inclusive and equitable at the intersection of social justice, equality, and youth empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a comparative policy analysis to investigate how social policies in the UK and various European countries promote the participation of marginalised youth. A thematic content analysis of relevant policy documents was conducted, and it focused on the representation of marginalised youth, the mechanisms designed to involve them in policy-making, and how barriers to their participation are addressed. Documents were selected based on their relevance to youth engagement and inclusion, and the analysis examined both the extent and methods of youth participation across different contexts. The following criteria were established to guide the inclusion or exclusion of documents for this study:

- Relevance to the subject: The selected documents must specifically address the decision-making participation of youth from marginalised communities, ensuring a direct focus on the core topic of the research.
- Date of publication: Since the study is centred on the post-Brexit period, only documents published after February 2020 will be considered. This timeframe ensures the analysis reflects recent developments and current policy frameworks.
- Open Access: To facilitate accessibility and transparency, only documents that provide full-text open access will be included.

To ensure a comprehensive and accurate analysis, data was collected exclusively from reliable official sources throughout November 2024, including official reports, government studies, policy guides, and information from official websites. Documents were searched both in their original language and in English to ensure a broad and inclusive scope of information (For an overview of the analysed documents, see Appendix I). By relying solely on authoritative sources, the study aimed to provide a credible and thorough assessment of how social policies address the participation of marginalised youth. Additionally, the focus of the study was on marginalised communities as a broad category rather than concentrating on a specific group. This decision was driven by the nature of the available data, which was more focused on the broader term of marginalisation rather than specific subgroups. As such, it

made more sense to take a general approach to understand the overarching strategies and barriers affecting these communities.

Policy analysis, as defined by Dunn (2015), is an applied social science discipline that uses multiple investigative techniques to address real-world issues. The analysis was inspired by the work of Schmitt (2012), who emphasises the importance of comparative policy analysis as a means of systematically studying and comparing public policies across different jurisdictions to gain insights into the factors driving policy similarities and differences. Comparative analysis can also serve as a foundation for building theories on the determinants of variation in policy choices, as noted by Gupta (2012). To guide this process, the research utilised a thematic analysis of policy documents. Thematic analysis (TA) is a qualitative research method used to recognise, analyse, and interpret significant patterns or "themes" within qualitative data. This approach offers straightforward and organised techniques for developing codes and themes from such data. The primary objective of TA is not merely to summarise the content of the data but to uncover and interpret important aspects, focusing on key features that align with the research question, rather than attempting to address every element within the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Thematic analysis allows for the identification of key patterns related to how youth participation is promoted, what barriers are recognised, and what solutions are proposed. The coding process was primarily deductive, guided by predefined themes such as inclusivity mechanisms, youth engagement strategies, and barriers to participation, which were introduced in the Introduction to provide foundational context. These examples were intended to illustrate key barriers and highlight mechanisms identified as effective in existing research. However, the coding process remained flexible to account for the reality that the analysed documents might reflect different or additional insights. As a result, subcodes emerged inductively from the documents themselves, capturing the mechanisms and barriers that were actually implemented (Refer to the code tree in Appendix II).

The focus of this research was to compare marginalised youth inclusion policies across different countries, with particular emphasis on the UK. The cross-national comparative analysis examined policies in the UK, Czechia, Norway, and Portugal. This approach facilitated the identification of commonalities, divergences, and best practices, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of how social inclusion and youth participation are addressed in different policy contexts. The countries selected for comparison include Portugal and Norway, which are ranked in the top three of the most inclusive nations in 2024, and

Czechia, which is comparable to the UK in terms of inclusivity levels, as can be appreciated in the Inclusiveness Index provided by the Othering and Belonging Institute (2024).

The use of comparative policy analysis allows for a structured comparison of the UK's social inclusion policies with those of other countries, helping to pinpoint the UK's strengths and weaknesses. Through this process, the research aimed to identify patterns, and potential improvements that could enhance the design of youth participation policies in the UK. By focusing on key aspects such as inclusivity, and highlighting inclusivity mechanisms from other countries that could be innovative if applied in the UK this analysis provides recommendations that inform future policy-making efforts, as well as contribute to more inclusive and equitable social justice practices.

RESULTS

The findings are structured around three predefined codes: youth engagement and strategies, barriers to participation, and inclusivity mechanisms, reflecting the deductive framework outlined in the Methods section. Within each of these categories, subcategories (or subcodes) emerged inductively during the analysis, capturing additional insights from the documents. These subcategories represent the specific mechanisms, challenges, and strategies identified in practice. The sections below explore these themes and their corresponding subcategories in detail, offering a comprehensive view of the factors shaping youth participation and inclusivity.

Youth Engagement and Strategies

Legal and Policy Frameworks

Legal and policy backing for youth engagement reveals notable discrepancies across the UK, Norway, Portugal, and Czechia, reflecting varying levels of commitment and effectiveness in fostering youth participation. The UK relies on structured national initiatives such as the UK Youth Parliament and the Make Your Mark ballot, which provide valuable platforms for young people to voice their opinions and influence decision-making (Dunne and Mahmood, 2022; British Youth Council, 2024) .

In contrast, Norway has established youth participation within its Constitution and the Human Rights Act, establishing strong legal safeguards that ensure young people's rights to engage in governance (Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir), 2024).

Portugal adopts a comprehensive approach through the National Youth Plan (PNJ), introduced in 2018. This plan serves as the foundation of the country's youth policy, emphasising intersectoral coordination to address critical areas such as education, employment, health, and housing. The PNJ was developed through consultations with young people. (European Commission, 2023; IPDJ, 2022).

Czechia, on the other hand, faces significant challenges due to the absence of a comprehensive legal or policy framework. Since the expiration of its National Youth Strategy 2014–2020, the country has operated without a national youth policy, leaving youth engagement fragmented and lacking direction. Although efforts to draft a new strategy began in 2024, the prolonged delay has impeded progress, highlighting systemic gaps in fostering youth participation (European Commission, 2024).

These differences underscore the varying degrees of prioritisation and investment in youth engagement among the countries, with some establishing solid legal and policy foundations while others struggle with fragmented or absent frameworks.

Organisational Structures and Platforms

Youth organisations and consultative platforms play a crucial role in shaping youth participation across the UK and the selected European countries. In the UK, organisations like the British Youth Council (BYC) advocate for youth rights and help facilitate youth involvement in governance. Platforms such as the Youth Policy Development Group (YPDG) provide young people with opportunities to directly influence policy-making. However, these initiatives often face resource constraints that limit their overall impact and reach (Smith et al., 2024).

Norway benefits from a more robust organisational structure through the Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU), which plays a central role in influencing policy at multiple levels. The LNU's strength lies in its grassroots networks and municipal youth councils, which ensure that young people are involved in governance from local communities to national decision-making. This system empowers youth participation at various levels and enhances the effectiveness of youth representation (Landsrådet for Norges Barne-Og Ungdomsorganisasjoner, 2022).

In Portugal, a well-coordinated network of youth organisations, including the National Youth Council (CNJ) and the National Federation of Youth Associations (FNAJ), plays an integral role in shaping the National Youth Plan (PNJ). These organisations not only advise on policy but also have executive roles in implementing the plan. Additionally, Youth

Advisory Councils further strengthen youth engagement at the local level, ensuring that youth voices are heard in policy discussions across the country (European Commission, 2023).

Czechia's primary youth organisation, the Czech Council of Children and Youth (CRDM), represents over 100 member organisations and advocates for youth issues. Although CRDM plays a vital role in fostering non-formal education and supporting youth development, its influence is limited by the lack of a cohesive national policy framework. The Youth Chamber, an advisory body to the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, provides a platform for communication between youth representatives and government bodies, but its consultative role restricts its decision-making power and limits its ability to drive substantive change (Youthpolicy.org, 2024; Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2021).

In essence, while all four countries feature key youth organisations and consultative platforms, Norway and Portugal demonstrate stronger systemic support and influence compared to the UK and Czechia, where resource limitations and fragmented policies hinder the full potential of youth engagement.

Participations Trends and Challenges

Youth participation trends across the UK, Norway, Portugal, and Czechia reveal a mixture of successes and ongoing challenges, with each country adopting different approaches to engage young people, though each facing unique obstacles.

In the UK, youth engagement is largely channelled through formal platforms like the UK Youth Parliament and campaigns such as Make Your Mark, which encourage young people to participate directly in shaping policies. Despite these initiatives providing structured opportunities for involvement, there is criticism that marginalised groups are not adequately represented. Although organisations like YoungMinds have made targeted efforts to address these gaps, concerns persist about the inclusivity of youth participation in the UK (UK Youth Parliament, 2024; YoungMinds, 2020).

Norway stands out for its strong emphasis on grassroots participation, particularly through municipal youth councils. These councils empower young people by ensuring their involvement in local decision-making processes, creating pathways for long-term engagement. This focus on local governance helps foster a culture of youth influence, ensuring that youth voices are central to shaping policies at the community level (Ministry of Children and Families, 2021).

Portugal, meanwhile, has seen a shift in youth participation trends. Traditional forms of

political engagement remain low, but non-conventional methods, including online activism, petitions, and demonstrations, have become more popular among young people. This trend reflects a preference for short-term, cause-specific initiatives that resonate with the daily lives of youth, offering them a way to express their views and effect change in a way that feels more immediate and impactful (Costa et al., 2022).

In Czechia, youth participation is still limited, largely due to systemic policy gaps and the absence of a cohesive national youth strategy. Youth engagement in the country largely depends on the efforts of organisations like the Czech Council of Children and Youth (CRDM) and regional youth councils, with a heavy reliance on non-formal education. However, the lack of a national policy framework, measurable outcomes, and an overarching strategy hampers broader youth involvement in governance and limits the effectiveness of current engagement efforts (Youthpolicy.org, 2024, European Commission, 2024).

In summary, each country has made significant progress in youth participation, with distinct strengths and areas for improvement. The UK faces issues of inclusivity, Norway excels in grassroots involvement, Portugal has shifted toward non-conventional forms of participation, and Czechia struggles with systemic gaps that hinder broader youth engagement.

Funding and Systemic Support

Funding mechanisms for youth initiatives vary significantly across the countries under study, reflecting stark differences in the level of systemic support provided to youth engagement efforts.

In the UK, funding for youth participation tends to be project-specific, meaning that resources are often limited to short-term initiatives. This approach can result in financial constraints for organisations such as the British Youth Council (BYC), which rely on fluctuating funding to support their work. This piecemeal funding model makes it challenging for youth organisations to maintain long-term, sustainable efforts (Dunne and Mahmood, 2022, British Youth Council, 2024).

Norway, in contrast, benefits from more stable and coordinated funding models. Resources are allocated centrally through the Directorate for Children, Youth, and Family Affairs, which ensures consistent support for youth councils and other related activities. This centralised funding system provides a more reliable foundation for youth engagement and enables long-term planning and development (Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir), 2024).

Portugal's approach is more systematic, with funding allocated through the National Youth Plan (PNJ), which supports initiatives across key sectors such as education, employment, and health. The PNJ ensures that youth initiatives are adequately financed, providing a more comprehensive and integrated funding structure that supports a broad range of youth-focused programs and policies (European Commission, 2023).

In Czechia, however, there is a lack of a dedicated budget for youth affairs. Instead, funding is embedded within broader frameworks such as education and volunteering. This fragmentation of resources limits the effectiveness of youth engagement initiatives, as it prevents the creation of a cohesive, unified approach to youth policy and funding(European Commission, 2024; Youthpolicy.org, 2024).

As a conclusion, while Norway and Portugal offer more coordinated and consistent funding mechanisms for youth participation, the UK relies on project-specific funding that can create limitations, and Czechia faces challenges due to the lack of dedicated funding for youth affairs.

Barriers To Participation

Socioeconomic and Geographic Barriers

Youth participation across the UK, Norway, Portugal, and Czechia is hindered by a range of socioeconomic, geographic, and systemic barriers, though the extent and visibility of these challenges vary. In the UK, rural and marginalised youth face significant obstacles due to limited resources and engagement opportunities, compounded by geographic isolation and socioeconomic disparities. These challenges are further exacerbated by resource constraints within organisations tasked with fostering inclusion (Dunne & Mahmood, 2022).

Similar patterns are observed in Norway, where rural and economically disadvantaged young people encounter logistical difficulties and unequal access to digital tools, particularly in remote areas. These barriers mirror those in the UK, underlining a shared struggle to provide equitable participation opportunities (Ministry of Children and Families, 2021; LNU, n.d.).

In Portugal, socioeconomic disparities and educational inequalities play a decisive role in shaping youth engagement. Young people from wealthier households and those with higher educational attainment are more likely to participate in civic and political activities, leaving marginalised and rural youth at a disadvantage. These issues parallel the UK's challenges but are intensified by Portugal's structural disparities in education (Costa et al., 2022).

Czechia, by contrast, lacks sufficient data to comprehensively identify or address the socioeconomic and geographic barriers to youth participation. The absence of systematic documentation obscures the struggles of marginalised groups, leaving their challenges largely unacknowledged within policy-making frameworks. This critical gap highlights the need for more robust research to inform inclusive strategies.

In summary, despite differing contexts, the UK, Norway, Portugal, and Czechia face common challenges in fostering inclusive youth participation, particularly for marginalised and rural groups. While the UK, Norway, and Portugal demonstrate varying degrees of awareness and targeted efforts, persistent socioeconomic and geographic barriers limit progress. Czechia's lack of systematic data further underscores the importance of robust research and equitable resource allocation to address these shared obstacles effectively.

Institutional Frameworks and Accessibility

Institutional mechanisms for youth participation across the nations reveal significant challenges in fostering inclusivity and meaningful engagement. In the UK, platforms like the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) and Youth Policy Development Groups (YPDG) provide formal opportunities for participation but often fail to reach marginalised groups due to structural inequities tied to school affiliation and local council networks. These frameworks have been criticised for perpetuating social disparities and limiting participant diversity (Smith et al., 2023).

Norway's youth councils face similar accessibility issues, with marginalised groups, such as immigrants, reporting insufficient outreach efforts and limited influence on policy outcomes. This parallels the UK's challenges in creating inclusive participatory processes (Ministry of Children and Families, 2021).

In Portugal, the National Youth Council (CNJ) struggles to bridge the gap between youth representation and effective policy influence. The disconnect between representation bodies and governmental strategies leaves young people feeling excluded, echoing the UK's issues with tokenistic engagement practices (Costa et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, Czechia's Youth Chamber functions as an advisory body but lacks sufficient documentation to assess its impact or identify barriers faced by marginalised groups. This absence of systematic analysis hampers efforts to develop effective mechanisms for inclusion, further highlighting disparities in youth engagement across these countries.

Institutional mechanisms for youth participation encounter common barriers shared across the nations, including limited outreach to marginalised groups and tokenistic practices

that hinder genuine inclusion. Without addressing these systemic issues, the potential for these platforms to foster meaningful engagement remains constrained.

Distrust in Political Institutions

Young people across the studied countries frequently express scepticism regarding their impact on decision-making processes. In a study conducted by Dunne and Mahmood (2022), one of the systemic issues identified as a significant obstacle in the UK was young people's disenchantment with decision-making processes, stemming from the belief that their input is neither heard nor acted upon. This perception leads to disengagement and disillusionment, as they feel that their contributions do not result in meaningful change (Dunne & Mahmood, 2022).

In Norway, this distrust is similarly evident, with marginalised groups questioning the effectiveness of their participation in influencing tangible policy outcomes. Although high-profile events have temporarily boosted engagement, long-term trust remains elusive (Ministry of Children and Families, 2021).

In Portugal, distrust in political institutions is even more pervasive, as many young people feel their voices are consistently ignored. This widespread sense of disempowerment contributes to a broader culture of disengagement and apathy towards political participation (Costa et al., 2022). This challenge mirrors the UK's experiences.

In Czechia, the lack of research and data on youth participation leaves a significant gap in understanding the trust levels among marginalised groups. The absence of systematic documentation makes it difficult to assess the extent of this distrust, hindering efforts to develop strategies to address it.

In general, distrust in political institutions and decision-making processes is a major barrier to youth engagement, particularly for marginalised groups. While the challenges are similar in nature, the degree of scepticism and disengagement varies, with Portugal showing the most entrenched issues due to deeper structural limitations. The lack of data in Czechia further impedes understanding and addressing these barriers.

Tokenism and Superficial Engagement

The UK faces significant challenges with tokenistic practices in youth engagement, where programs tend to attract a specific demographic, primarily urban, middle-class youth, leaving marginalised groups underrepresented. Despite efforts to recruit more diverse

participants, gaps in representation persist, particularly concerning socioeconomic and geographic disparities (Smith et al., 2023). Similarly, Portugal struggles with tokenism, where young people's contributions are often not integrated into final policy decisions. This lack of meaningful influence discourages sustained participation and erodes trust in engagement initiatives, further hindering youth involvement in political processes (Costa et al., 2022).

In Norway, while youth councils are not explicitly framed as tokenistic, they are often perceived as symbolic, with limited influence on policy-making. This mirrors the superficial engagement seen in the UK, where the lack of tangible outcomes leads to disillusionment among participants (Ministry of Children and Families, 2021). In Czechia, there is no documentation on whether tokenism is a prevalent issue, but the absence of data on marginalised youth's participation raises concerns about the inclusivity and authenticity of the country's youth engagement frameworks.

Across these countries, tokenistic practices in youth engagement undermine meaningful participation, particularly for marginalised groups. While the specific nature of tokenism varies, the lack of authentic influence and representation is a consistent issue, limiting the effectiveness of youth engagement initiatives in these contexts. The absence of data in Czechia further complicates the ability to assess the scope of these challenges.

Data and Research Gaps

A lack of systematic data collection and research is a recurring barrier across all four countries, hindering efforts to understand and address the challenges marginalised youth face in participation. In the UK, many organisations acknowledge the need for improved support but struggle due to the absence of comprehensive data to guide effective strategies (Dunne & Mahmood, 2022). Similarly, Norway lacks national-level documentation on youth participation outcomes, which impedes the ability to address barriers and improve inclusion efforts (European Commission, 2024).

In Portugal, bureaucratic complexity and structural obstacles highlight the need for data-driven approaches to refine youth participation frameworks and ensure more effective engagement (Costa et al., 2022). Czechia, however, presents the most pronounced case of data scarcity. The absence of systematic research or analysis on marginalised youth's participation severely limits the understanding of their challenges, leaving their needs largely unaddressed in policy and decision-making processes (Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports).

The lack of systematic data collection is a significant barrier in each of these countries,

impeding efforts to understand and address the specific challenges marginalised youth face in the participation process. While some countries are beginning to recognise this issue, the absence of comprehensive data continues to leave critical gaps in policy and practice.

Inclusivity Mechanisms

Organisational Practices and Support Mechanisms

In the UK, efforts to promote youth participation, particularly for marginalised groups like youth with disabilities and those from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, are ongoing. Organisations supporting these groups play an active role in engaging youth in policy-making, yet challenges remain in full including certain demographics, especially those from rural areas or experiencing homelessness. Despite frameworks like the Youth Participation Framework and the Hear by Right program, these groups often still face barriers to meaningful participation in decision-making processes (Dunne & Mahmood, 2022). This highlights a gap in ensuring inclusivity for all youth across the nation.

In contrast, Norway employs a decentralised approach to youth participation, with local youth councils and programs such as Youth's Participation in Society (YPiS) designed to include marginalised groups, including children from minority and immigrant backgrounds. This system allows for more localised, tailored youth engagement. However, Norway faces challenges in documenting the full reach and effectiveness of these initiatives, which hinders the ability to assess their impact on a national scale. The focus on anti-discrimination programs like Dembra in schools, which promote inclusivity, is a positive step, but the country's reliance on informal structures may limit its capacity to measure success comprehensively (European Commission, 2024).

Portugal, on the other hand, provides a more formalised structure for youth participation through the National Youth Plan (PNJ), which ensures that youth are involved in all stages of policy development, from design to evaluation. This framework is characterised by the active inclusion of youth organisations, which play a central role in connecting marginalised youth with policymakers. Additionally, formal bodies like the National Youth Council (CNJ) offer a clear pathway for youth engagement, making the decision-making process more accessible and inclusive for young people across the country (European Commission, 2023).

Meanwhile, in Czechia, the primary mechanisms for youth participation include structures like the Youth Chamber and local youth councils. However, there is a notable gap

in the documentation and evaluation of these initiatives, particularly regarding their impact on marginalised groups. The lack of systematic evaluation or research about the inclusivity of these mechanisms suggests that Czechia's approach may not prioritise marginalised youth as effectively as it could. This limitation underscores the need for better data collection and assessment to ensure that all youth have equal opportunities to participate in shaping policy (European Commission, 2023).

While the UK, Norway, Portugal, and Czechia all aim to promote youth participation, they differ in their approaches. The UK and Norway both face challenges in fully including marginalised youth, with the UK struggling especially with rural and homeless youth, and Norway with documenting the effectiveness of its decentralised methods. Portugal offers a more structured framework, ensuring youth involvement throughout policymaking, while Czechia lacks sufficient evaluation of its youth participation initiatives, especially concerning marginalised groups. Despite these differences, all countries share the common need for better data collection and evaluation to enhance the inclusivity of their youth participation processes.

Frameworks and Programs for Inclusive Participation

The UK has established national frameworks like Hear by Right, which allow organisations to self-assess and enhance their inclusivity practices. These programs aim to ensure that all youth, including those from marginalised backgrounds, are included in policy-making. However, gaps remain in the representation of certain groups, particularly those from rural areas or other underrepresented communities, limiting the effectiveness of these frameworks in reaching all young people (Smith et al., 2023).

In Norway, a decentralised approach to youth participation is employed, with initiatives such as local youth councils and national programs like YPiS offering platforms for marginalised youth to express their views. While this structure fosters localised youth engagement, Norway continues to face challenges in ensuring comprehensive evaluation and data collection. This makes it difficult to fully assess the effectiveness of its inclusivity mechanisms and their impact on marginalised groups (European Commission, 2024).

Portugal's approach to youth participation is more structured, exemplified by the National Youth Plan (PNJ), which ensures youth involvement at every stage of policy development, from design to evaluation. The inclusion of formal representation through bodies like the National Youth Council (CNJ) guarantees that marginalised youth voices are directly incorporated into policymaking. Additionally, ongoing consultation processes ensure

that youth have a continuous role in shaping national policies, providing a clear pathway for youth engagement (European Commission, 2023).

In Czechia, youth participation is facilitated through platforms like the Youth Chamber and local youth councils. However, the lack of comprehensive evaluation and clear documentation of the inclusivity of these initiatives limits their ability to measure whether marginalised groups are adequately represented in national decision-making processes. The absence of robust data on the effectiveness of these platforms suggests a need for stronger focus on inclusivity in the country's youth policy framework (European Commission, 2023).

While each country has adopted different strategies to promote youth participation, all share common challenges in ensuring that marginalised groups are adequately represented and their voices heard. Comprehensive evaluation and data collection are critical to ensuring that inclusivity mechanisms effectively reach all young people, and addressing these gaps could improve the inclusivity of youth participation in policymaking processes.

Gaps and Challenges in Inclusivity

Despite efforts in the UK to promote youth participation, significant gaps remain in the representation of marginalised groups. Youth from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, homeless youth, and those from rural areas are often underrepresented in decision-making processes (Dunne & Mahmood, 2022). To address these gaps, the UK has called for increased resources, more flexible delivery methods, and inclusive outreach programs aimed at ensuring broader engagement and participation.

Norway also faces challenges in the effective inclusion of marginalised youth. While the YPiS project and local youth councils offer valuable platforms for engagement, the country lacks comprehensive data and consistent reporting on the reach and impact of these initiatives. This makes it difficult to assess their success and determine whether they are effectively meeting the needs of marginalised groups (European Commission, 2024).

In Portugal, the well-established framework of the National Youth Plan (PNJ) helps to mitigate challenges around inclusivity. However, there is still a need for continuous adaptation to ensure that marginalised youth, particularly those from immigrant or disadvantaged backgrounds, are consistently represented and included throughout the policymaking process. The institutionalised support for youth organisations and formal representation through bodies like the National Youth Council (CNJ) are strengths in ensuring marginalised voices are heard. Nonetheless, ongoing monitoring and adaptation are crucial to maintaining and improving inclusivity (European Commission, 2023).

Czechia, on the other hand, faces a major gap in documenting and evaluating the inclusivity of its youth participation mechanisms. While platforms like the Youth Chamber and local councils provide opportunities for youth involvement, there is little evidence to suggest that these initiatives effectively engage marginalised youth or influence national policy-making decisions. The absence of clear frameworks, systematic evaluations, or research into the inclusivity of these initiatives highlights a significant gap in ensuring that marginalised youth are adequately represented in national decision-making processes (European Commission, 2023).

In all four countries, while there are mechanisms in place to promote youth participation, the inclusion of marginalised groups remains a challenge. Addressing the gaps in representation, improving data collection, and ensuring that mechanisms are flexible and adaptable to the needs of marginalised youth are essential steps for enhancing the inclusivity and effectiveness of youth participation frameworks.

Summary of Findings

Youth Engagement and Strategies

The findings reveal significant variations in youth engagement across the four countries, driven by differences in legal frameworks, organisational structures, participation trends, and funding mechanisms. Norway stands out for its constitutional safeguards and robust support systems through youth councils, while Portugal's National Youth Plan emphasises intersectoral coordination. The UK relies on structured initiatives like the UK Youth Parliament, although it faces challenges in inclusivity. Czechia, on the other hand, struggles with a fragmented policy landscape and limited youth engagement initiatives. Despite these variations, Norway and Portugal demonstrate more stable and coordinated funding, which supports long-term youth participation, while the UK and Czechia face sustainability challenges due to project-specific funding and resource constraints.

Barriers to Participation

Several recurring barriers impede youth participation in all four countries, particularly among marginalised groups. Socioeconomic and geographic barriers remain significant, with youth from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds facing challenges in accessing digital platforms and engagement opportunities. The UK and Norway share struggles with equitable access, while Portugal's issues are compounded by educational inequalities. In Czechia, a

lack of data makes it difficult to fully assess the extent of these challenges. Institutional frameworks also often fail to engage marginalised youth effectively, with structural inequities and tokenistic practices limiting genuine inclusion, particularly in the UK, Norway, and Portugal. Distrust in political institutions further exacerbates disengagement, especially in Portugal, where deeper structural issues exist. Additionally, all countries face a critical data gap, preventing efforts to understand and address the unique needs of marginalised youth.

Inclusivity Mechanisms

Efforts to promote inclusive youth participation vary across countries. The UK continues to face challenges in engaging marginalised groups such as rural youth and those experiencing homelessness, despite frameworks like the Youth Participation Framework. Norway's decentralised approach fosters localised engagement but lacks comprehensive evaluation to measure its effectiveness. Portugal's National Youth Plan ensures that youth voices are central to policy making, but still faces gaps in representation, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Czechia's informal mechanisms lack sufficient evaluation, which undermines inclusivity efforts. All countries share the need for better data collection to improve inclusivity and ensure that marginalised youth are consistently represented in decision-making processes. Additionally, the findings reveal gaps in the reach and effectiveness of youth participation frameworks, highlighting the importance of flexible outreach methods and continuous adaptation to meet the needs of marginalised groups.

DISCUSSION

Barriers and Inclusivity Mechanisms in Youth Participation: Insights from Literature and Practice

The literature highlights several key barriers that hinder the full participation of marginalised youth, and these challenges are evident in the real-world practices observed in the UK, Norway, Portugal, and Czechia.

One of the most commonly cited barriers in the literature are daily life constraints, such as socioeconomic and geographic limitations. King, Feltey, and Susel (2015) identify daily life constraints, such as transportation issues, financial hardships, and demanding family responsibilities, as significant deterrents for marginalised youth. These challenges are mirrored in the practice across the studied countries. In the UK, rural and marginalised youth face difficulties accessing participation opportunities due to geographic isolation and limited

resources (Dunne & Mahmood, 2022). Similarly, Norway reports logistical issues and unequal access to digital tools, particularly for young people in remote areas (Ministry of Children and Families, 2021). Portugal and Czechia also experience similar socioeconomic disparities that limit engagement, with young people from wealthier backgrounds and urban areas having more opportunities to participate in civic activities. These barriers, as noted in the literature, are compounded by broader socioeconomic inequalities and institutional resource constraints, which limit the reach and inclusivity of youth participation frameworks.

Another significant theme in the literature is social isolation and distrust in institutions, which Montesanti et al. (2017) and Batts et al. (2022) argue contribute to a sense of futility among marginalised youth. This sense of alienation is evident in practice, as young people across the UK, Norway, Portugal, and Czechia often feel disillusioned with political processes. In the UK, research has shown that youth often perceive their input as ineffective, leading to disengagement (Dunne & Mahmood, 2022). Similarly, in Norway and Portugal, marginalised groups report distrust toward political institutions, questioning the effectiveness of their participation in influencing policy decisions (Ministry of Children and Families, 2021; Costa et al., 2022). This distrust in political institutions resonates with the literature, where the lack of perceived impact on decision-making is a major deterrent to youth participation.

Cultural and language barriers, especially for immigrant and minority youth, are also identified in the literature as key inhibitors of participation (Montesanti et al., 2017; Hedström & Smith, 2021). This issue is particularly relevant in the context of Norway and Portugal, where immigrant communities and ethnic minorities face challenges in engaging with policy processes due to language barriers and cultural differences. While the literature highlights these barriers, in practice, the countries' frameworks often fail to address them adequately. In Norway, for example, immigrant youth report insufficient outreach efforts and limited influence on policy outcomes (Ministry of Children and Families, 2021), reflecting a gap between theoretical inclusivity and practical application.

The literature also emphasises economic and bureaucratic challenges as significant barriers to participation. Hedström & Smith (2021) and Bell & Reed (2022) argue that financial instability and complex bureaucratic processes discourage marginalised individuals from engaging in policy-making. These issues are visible in practice across all four countries, where the complexity of participation frameworks, combined with a lack of resources, restricts access for marginalised youth. The UK, for instance, has established several youth participation platforms, such as the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP), but these have been

criticised for perpetuating inequalities by not reaching out effectively to marginalised groups (Smith et al., 2023). Similarly, the National Youth Council in Portugal faces significant challenges in bridging the gap between youth representation and policy influence, leaving marginalised groups feeling excluded (Costa et al., 2022).

Intersectionality and representation are also central themes in both the literature and practice. The literature highlights how marginalised youth face compounded barriers due to overlapping identities based on gender, age, and socio-economic status (National Democratic Institute, n.d.; Bell & Reed, 2022). In practice, these issues are evident in the countries studied. In the UK, for example, youth engagement platforms often attract primarily urban, middle-class youth, leaving marginalised groups underrepresented (Smith et al., 2023). This intersectionality is especially critical for marginalised youth who belong to multiple disadvantaged groups, making their participation even more challenging.

In conclusion, while the literature provides a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to youth participation, the practical application of inclusive youth policies in the UK, Norway, Portugal, and Czechia reveals persistent gaps and challenges. The barriers identified in the literature (socioeconomic constraints, distrust in institutions, cultural and language barriers, economic challenges, and intersectionality) are clearly reflected in the real-world experiences of marginalised youth across these countries. However, the implementation of policies often lack in addressing these barriers effectively, highlighting the need for more inclusive, data-driven approaches to youth engagement that are sensitive to the specific needs of marginalised groups. The gap between literature and practice underscores the importance of improving institutional frameworks, expanding outreach efforts, and collecting more robust data to ensure meaningful participation for all youth, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds.

The research on inclusivity mechanisms emphasises various strategies that have proven effective in fostering participation among marginalised communities, while the practical applications in different countries reveal both successes and challenges in implementing these strategies.

The literature emphasises the importance of peer-leader training as a means of bridging communication gaps and fostering trust within marginalised communities (Montesanti et al., 2017; ICMA, 2021). In practice, some countries, such as the UK, have incorporated similar initiatives to promote youth participation, especially among marginalised groups like youth with disabilities or those from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. However, the UK

still faces significant barriers, such as underrepresentation of certain groups, particularly those from rural areas or experiencing homelessness (Dunne & Mahmood, 2022). While peer-leader training is recognised in literature as a solution to these barriers, its practical application remains limited in some regions due to logistical and outreach challenges.

The role of CSOs in amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups within policy discussions is also stressed in research (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2023). This mechanism is somewhat reflected in the practices of the countries analysed. In Portugal, for example, CSOs play an integral role in youth participation through the National Youth Plan (PNJ), which connects marginalised youth with policymakers (European Commission, 2023). However, in countries like the UK, although CSOs are active, certain marginalised groups still face barriers to engagement, highlighting a gap between the ideal of CSO involvement in theory and its practical reach, especially for youth from marginalised backgrounds.

Literature suggests that participatory budgeting can empower marginalised communities by allowing them to directly influence budgetary decisions that affect their lives (OECD, 2022; Stacy et al., 2022). While this mechanism is not explicitly discussed in the practical examples of the countries studied, it aligns closely with the inclusive policy frameworks in Portugal, which ensures that youth are involved in every stage of policy development, from design to evaluation. Despite this, the UK struggles with the representation of some youth demographics, which suggests that even when mechanisms like participatory budgeting exist in theory, they may not always be implemented effectively or inclusively in practice.

Underscored in the literature is the importance of developing leadership and advocacy skills through capacity building and structured consultations to empower marginalised youth (UNDP, 2021; Shevlin & Rose, 2022). In practice, frameworks like the UK's Hear by Right program aim to enhance the inclusivity of decision-making by promoting youth participation through structured self-assessment tools (Smith et al., 2023). While these frameworks exist, challenges remain in their implementation, particularly in reaching underrepresented groups such as those in rural areas or facing homelessness. In Norway, the decentralised approach, exemplified by youth councils and the YPiS program, reflects similar principles but faces difficulties in evaluating the success of these initiatives at a national level (European Commission, 2024).

Despite the presence of inclusive frameworks and mechanisms across the countries studied, significant gaps persist. The UK, for instance, faces underrepresentation of

marginalised youth, particularly from rural areas and homeless backgrounds, despite the existence of national frameworks like Hear by Right. In Norway, while local initiatives are in place, challenges in documenting the reach and effectiveness of these programs hinder the assessment of their impact on marginalised groups. Portugal's more formalised structure, particularly through the National Youth Plan, offers a clearer pathway for youth engagement but requires continuous adaptation to ensure that marginalised youth are consistently included. Meanwhile, Czechia lacks systematic evaluation of its youth participation mechanisms, raising concerns about whether they are effectively engaging marginalised youth.

In summary, while the literature on inclusivity mechanisms provides valuable strategies for promoting youth participation among marginalised groups, their practical implementation in the UK, Norway, Portugal, and Czechia reveals that several challenges remain. These challenges primarily concern the underrepresentation of certain youth groups, difficulties in evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives, and the need for more flexible, adaptive frameworks that can better address the diverse needs of marginalised communities. To bridge the gap between literature and practice, it is essential to improve data collection, ensure comprehensive evaluation, and adapt frameworks to reach all youth, especially those who are often left out of decision-making processes.

Evaluating the Hypotheses: Strategies, Barriers, and Mechanisms in Youth Inclusivity

Hypothesis 1: Portugal and Norway, as the top two most inclusive European countries, will demonstrate more comprehensive and effective strategies for facilitating marginalised youth participation compared to the UK and Czechia.

The results support this hypothesis, especially in Portugal and Norway. Portugal's National Youth Plan (PNJ) and National Youth Council (CNJ) offer a structured framework that ensures marginalised youth can influence policy effectively, making it more inclusive than the less formal or poorly evaluated structures in the UK and Czechia.

Norway's decentralised initiatives, like local youth councils and the YPiS program, promote local engagement, particularly for minority and immigrant youth. However, the lack of national evaluation limits their overall impact compared to Portugal's top-down approach.

In the UK, despite efforts like *Hear by Right*, significant gaps remain in representing marginalised groups, especially rural, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, and homeless youth, making the strategy less effective. Similarly, Czechia's initiatives lack strong evaluation systems,

limiting their ability to address barriers to inclusion, which leaves both countries behind Portugal and Norway.

Hypothesis 2: Policies in Portugal and Norway are likely to be more proactive in addressing barriers to inclusion, incorporating participatory mechanisms that ensure diverse voices are heard and integrated into policy-making processes.

The hypothesis is supported by the results, particularly for Portugal, where the National Youth Plan ensures marginalised youth are involved in all stages of policymaking, backed by strong institutional support. This structured approach not only fosters participation but also addresses barriers by providing clear pathways to engage with policymakers.

Norway's local youth councils and YPiS program similarly target marginalised groups, but the lack of national evaluation limits understanding of their impact. While proactive, the absence of comprehensive assessment hinders their effectiveness in addressing inclusion barriers.

In the UK, *Hear by Right* acknowledges the need to address barriers, but outreach challenges and unequal representation, especially among rural and homeless youth, limit its impact. Czechia also lacks a clear framework and evaluation, making its approach less proactive in ensuring full inclusion of marginalised youth compared to Portugal and Norway.

Hypothesis 3: By contrast, the UK's approach may reveal gaps or limitations, particularly in the post-Brexit context, where social policy shifts might have affected the frameworks for youth inclusion.

The results support the third hypothesis, revealing significant gaps in the UK's youth participation framework, especially for marginalised groups like rural, Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, and homeless youth. These gaps may be influenced by post-Brexit policy shifts and resource constraints, contributing to the ongoing underrepresentation of certain demographics.

While initiatives like *Hear by Right* aim to enhance inclusivity, they struggle to engage all marginalised groups due to systemic issues and a lack of adaptive mechanisms. This limits the UK's effectiveness in addressing barriers, making its approach less inclusive compared to Portugal and Norway.

Answering the Research Question: Exploring Youth Participation in Policy

This study has explored how social policies address the participation of marginalised youth by comparing the policies of the UK, Czechia, Norway, and Portugal. The analysis reveals that while each country has made strides in promoting youth participation, there are notable differences in how well these approaches acknowledge and address barriers to inclusion, as well as in the mechanisms they incorporate to facilitate marginalised youth involvement.

The research highlights that, particularly in Portugal and Norway, policies are more proactive in addressing barriers to inclusion through comprehensive frameworks that emphasise youth engagement at all stages of policy-making. These countries demonstrate a more inclusive approach, integrating mechanisms such as local youth councils, formalised youth organisations, and participatory programs that enable marginalised youth to have a direct impact on policies. In contrast, the UK and Czechia show more significant gaps, with marginalised groups, such as homeless youth or those from rural areas, being underrepresented in decision-making processes. Furthermore, these countries face challenges in fully documenting and evaluating the effectiveness of their inclusivity mechanisms, which limits their ability to ensure that all marginalised youth have a voice in shaping policies.

Through this comparison, the research has identified key gaps in the policy frameworks of the UK and Czechia, such as the lack of comprehensive data collection and the underrepresentation of certain marginalised groups. These findings provide critical insights into how well these policies foster youth participation and inclusion, as well as areas for improvement. The study also offers recommendations for more equitable strategies, suggesting that future policy initiatives should better address barriers to inclusion and incorporate more robust mechanisms for youth empowerment.

In conclusion, this research answers the question raised by demonstrating that while progress has been made, there is still significant room for improvement in ensuring that marginalised youth are meaningfully included in the policy-making process. By identifying these gaps and comparing international best practices, this study contributes to the development of more inclusive, representative, and equitable social policies for youth, ultimately supporting social justice, equality, and empowerment.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the participation of marginalised youth in policy-making across the UK, Czechia, Norway, and Portugal, different limitations must be

acknowledged. The primary constraint of this research lies in the lack of open access resources from all the countries studied. Specifically, access to comprehensive and detailed data on youth participation mechanisms, particularly those targeting marginalised groups, was limited in some cases. This limitation affected the ability to compare policies and practices across all countries as thoroughly as would have been ideal.

Furthermore, the unavailability of up-to-date reports and evaluations of the inclusivity of specific programs hindered a more in-depth analysis of their impact. Although secondary sources, such as policy reports and studies, were used to fill in gaps, the absence of direct access to the primary materials from some countries means the findings are not fully comprehensive. Future research would benefit from improved access to such resources to facilitate a more complete and nuanced comparison.

Best Practices And Policy Recommendations

This study provides several valuable lessons for the UK, based on the practices observed in Norway, Portugal, and Czechia, that can enhance strategies for youth participation, particularly for marginalised groups. By adopting and adapting these practices, the UK can create a more inclusive and empowering policy framework that fosters meaningful youth involvement in policy making.

Engagement Strategies

- Legal Frameworks and Stability: One of the key lessons from Norway and Portugal is the importance of a strong legal and policy foundation for youth participation. Norway's constitutional guarantees and Portugal's structured National Youth Plan (PNJ) offer models for developing a more cohesive legal framework in the UK. By incorporating such structured and stable frameworks, the UK could ensure that youth participation is not only encouraged but also embedded in legislation, fostering greater consistency in engagement efforts.

- Funding Models: Another area where the UK could improve is its funding mechanisms. Norway's stable and predictable funding structures for youth initiatives could serve as a model for the UK. Moving away from a reliance on project-specific funding and adopting a more stable funding model would ensure consistent support for youth engagement activities, allowing for long-term, sustainable initiatives that benefit marginalised communities.

- Dynamic Participation: Portugal's use of non-conventional methods, such as online activism, and Czechia's focus on non-formal education provide innovative engagement strategies that could diversify participation models in the UK. By embracing a wider range of participatory channels, including digital platforms and community-based non-formal education, the UK can engage a broader spectrum of youth, particularly those who may not participate in traditional forms of engagement.

- Grassroots Empowerment: Norway's emphasis on municipal youth councils highlights the importance of grassroots engagement. This model could be adapted in the UK to strengthen local youth participation by empowering young people at the municipal level to shape decisions affecting their communities. Strengthening grassroots involvement could ensure that youth from different localities, especially those from marginalised areas, have a voice in policy making.

Inclusivity Mechanisms

- Formalised and Integrated Frameworks: Portugal's National Youth Plan (PNJ) integrates youth involvement at every stage of policymaking, ensuring youth voices are consistently heard and incorporated into national policies. The UK could enhance its inclusivity mechanisms by formalising youth involvement in policy making, ensuring that youth, especially from marginalised backgrounds, are not just consulted but are actively part of the decision-making process. Establishing bodies similar to Portugal's National Youth Council (CNJ) could provide structured platforms for youth to influence policy at the national level.

- Decentralised Approaches to Local Engagement: Norway's decentralised approach, particularly through local youth councils and programs like YPiS, ensures that youth from various backgrounds and regions can participate in local governance. The UK could learn from this by empowering local councils to tailor youth participation efforts to the unique needs of their communities. A more decentralised approach would ensure that marginalised youth, particularly in rural or underrepresented areas, have more opportunities to be heard at the local level.

- Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation: Portugal's semiannual and annual monitoring of the National Youth Plan ensures that youth policies are regularly assessed and updated based on feedback. The UK could adopt a similar approach to enhance the effectiveness of its youth participation mechanisms by implementing more frequent evaluations of policies aimed at engaging marginalised youth. Regular, transparent

feedback loops would help ensure that policies remain relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of young people.

- <u>Support for Youth Organisations as Intermediaries</u>: In Portugal, youth organisations play a crucial role as intermediaries between young people and policymakers. By providing institutional support to youth-led organisations, the UK could strengthen its youth participation mechanisms. These organisations can serve as channels for marginalised youth to influence policy making, ensuring their voices are heard in national discussions. Investing in these organisations through funding, training, and resources would enable them to play a more central role in youth engagement.

Conclusion

By learning from Portugal's structured frameworks, and Norway's decentralised approaches to local engagement, the UK can significantly enhance its mechanisms for ensuring meaningful youth participation. Strengthening formalised frameworks, increasing local-level participation, implementing robust monitoring and feedback systems, and supporting youth organisations as intermediaries are key steps to creating a more inclusive and responsive policy framework. Adopting these practices could strengthen the UK's approach to youth participation by creating more opportunities for marginalised youth, though their effectiveness will depend on how well they are implemented and supported in practice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I

Country	Type	Source	Reference
UK	Report	The Centre for Youth Impact	Dunne, J. H., & Mahmood, Z. (2022). Young People's Participation in Decision-Making: UK 2022 Survey Report.
	Impact study	UK Government	Smith, J., Fischer, F., Freitas, G., Williams, J., Manuch, M., Dixey, A., & Gill, V. (2023). Youth Engagement Impact Study. Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Retrieved October 16, 2024, from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64ac03a6c93 3c10012f9dffa/Youth_Engagement_Impact_Study__DCMS __-_final_report_2.0.pdf
	Guide/toolkit	YoungMinds	YoungMinds (2020). Supporting the participation of children and young people experiencing extra vulnerabilities. In Vulnerable Groups –Toolkit. https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/qs5luamr/vulnerabl e-groups-toolkit.pdf
	Official Website	British Youth Council	British Youth Council - National Youth Agency. (2024, October 17). National Youth Agency. https://nya.org.uk/byc/
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Appendix II