OUR VOICES

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Empowering Young Carers across Europe: OUR VOICES project launched!

Background

Across Europe, thousands of children and young people provide care to a family member who is ill, disabled or facing addiction, often in silence and without recognition.

Young Carers, are children and young people (under the age of 18) who provide care for a parent or relative, often within their own home. They represent a vulnerable and often overlooked group and, as highlighted in the Feasibility Study for the Child Guarantee (2019), they are frequently exposed to multiple risks.

Young Carers play a vital role in their families, but their own needs and perspectives are too often overlooked in policies and services. OUR VOICES sets out to change that, by placing their experiences, voices and aspirations at the centre of decision-making processes, at local, national and European level.

What is the OUR VOICES project about?

OUR VOICES seeks to promote inclusive and systemic participation of young. The project aims to ensure that young carers are not only heard but actively listened to, especially in policy decisions that impact their daily lives. The project will:

- Create the conditions for active youth participation
- Develop tools and strategies that empower young carers to engage in policy discussions
- Advocate for more inclusive, responsive public policies
- Share best practices across Member States

OUR VOICES aspires to build a future where young carers are visible, valued, and empowered to shape the systems that serve them.

OUR VOICES aims to generate lasting change by empowering young carers and the professionals and systems that support them. The project's activities are expected to produce the following key results:

1. **Empowered Young Carers**
   Young carers will gain a better understanding of the value of participation and develop stronger advocacy skills to represent themselves in decisions affecting their lives.

2. **Better Equipped Professionals**
   Health, social care, and education professionals will enhance their ability to identify young carers and adopt effective practices that support their active participation in decision-making processes.

3. **Stronger Collaboration and Policy Influence**
   Improved cooperation among stakeholders, including young carers, policy makers, professionals, and educators, will promote a sustainable, integrated model of support, replicable in other EU Member States. Ultimately, this will increase the presence and influence of YCs within local, national, and EU-level participation mechanisms.

What are the main activities of OUR VOICES project?

Over the next two years, OUR VOICES project will:

- **Map gaps and promising practices** in youth participation across EU Member States
- Conduct in-depth **needs assessments** to better understand the barriers YCs face
- Develop **awareness-raising campaigns** targeting professionals, policymakers and the general public
- Create **innovative models and tools** to promote the participation of YCs
- Build **synergies** between stakeholders across sectors: education, health, social care and more.

Who are the project partners?

The project consortium is structured around 6 organizations and brings together a diverse range of complementary expertise, competencies, and geographic coverage to effectively support the achievement of the project's objectives. The partnership includes:

- **EUROCARERS** – European NGO (Project coordinator)
- **Anziani e non solo** - Italy
- **Linnaeus University** - Sweden
- **University of Ljubljana** - Slovenia
- **ZoJong!** - Belgium
- **Social Network VESTA** - Bulgaria

More information on the consortium can be found at: https://ourvoicesproject.eu/gallery/

Mapping of gaps and disparities and in-depth needs assessment

The first research task within the project was to investigate the existing knowledge on participation mechanisms for young carers. Our literature search followed a realist rapid review approach and included both scientific and grey literature (information produced outside of traditional publishing channels, including reports, policy literature, working papers, newsletters, government documents, etc.) published since 2010 in English, Swedish, Flemish, Italian, Slovenian and Bulgarian. The research protocol was published in the Open Science Framework, which you can read here. While the primary focus of the OUR VOICES project is on the participation mechanisms of young carers (YC), we deliberately broadened the scope of our literature review to include related groups such as children as next of kin (CNK), children with a migrant background, children in precarious situations and other socially vulnerable groups. This broader perspective enabled us to identify relevant material that may offer transferable insights into young carers experiences. Our research questiones are

> *What participatory mechanisms are in place for young carers, children as next of kin and other vulnerable children in the different partner countries and what are the challenges and areas for improvement (gaps) of participation of target groups?*
>
> *What are the differences in participatory mechanisms across participating countries? Could participatory mechanisms already in place for other vulnerable groups of children applicable to YC or CNK?*

Following a search of academic literature (in Scopus and Medline), as well as grey literature (government publications and policy briefs in the partner countries and at EU level), a comprehensive reference list was compiled based on the materials that met the inclusion criteria. We are currently in the data extraction phase, in which the articles that fulfil the inclusion criteria are systematically coded. This is followed by a thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and key findings. In parallel, we are developing country profiles, particularly for Sweden, Italy, Belgium, Slovenia and Bulgaria, as well as a profile of Eurocarers based on the findings from the grey literature.

In the coming months, these efforts will culminate in a detailed report that will provide a deeper understanding of how YCs participation is facilitated in practise in selected EU Member States. The report will outline current practises, identify key challenges and barriers, point to existing gaps and explore ways to strengthen participation mechanisms for YCs.

Kick-off Meeting in Brussels

The project has officially begun in April and, on June 17th 2025, international partners from Belgium, Italy, Sweden, Slovenia and Bulgaria gathered in Brussels for the official project Kick Off Meeting.

During this full day meeting, productive discussions were held and the next steps were agreed upon.

The in-person meeting and the fruitlfull discussion between partners has been very useful in order to strengthen collaboration, work in a coordinated manner and increase the quality of project results and outputs.

The partnership is highly committed and plans to carry out numerous local, national and international activities in the coming months. Among the first activities that the partners have undertaken in recent months there was the developement of a framework to map existing gaps and disparities in child participation mechanisms in the 5 EU Member States involved in the project with a specific focus on Young Carers.

Much has already been achieved within OUR VOICES project, but there is still more to be done to make the voices of young caregivers heard across Europe.

For more information and updates on OUR VOICES project,

please visit **https://ourvoicesproject.eu/**

and follow us on major social media using the hashtag

 # OURVOICES_PROJECT_EU

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