

Target groups: partners' representatives, young people from partner countries, local young people, local stakeholders

Preparation activities preceded the Opening event: APS defined the agenda of the event, took care of all logistics, safety of all participants, and inclusiveness of the events itself. The event has been promoted at the local level through social media and municipal channels and cooperation from project partners ensured safe and successful implementation.

The opening event of the YMCA project took place on 19th March 2025 in Castelnovo del Garda, Italy, where partners' representatives and young people from all partner countries gathered for the first time in the framework of this project.

The event started with the presentation of this project, its partners and participants, its future events and the expected results and outputs. It was the occasion for the hosting partner and the local municipality to present themselves and the work they are doing in the area to preserve the natural environment and engage young people in related activities. Local stakeholders were also presented to partners, illustrating their activities in the area and presenting the activities included in this opening event and in the following one (Exchange of best practices in Italy). Institutional greetings from local authorities were added to this first part of the event. Subsequently, project partners and young participants had the chance to talk about the project and define together the future steps and strategies to achieve expected objectives and results.

Then, a specific presentation to all participants (international and local) was given by the Italian association "Plastic Free", a national movement part of an international network of organizations, fighting against plastic pollution through cleaning actions, educational presentations and workshops around the world, especially in schools and for young people. The Italian branch presented its organization during this event, highlighting its work in the region and in the whole country, explaining to participants the risks of plastic pollution, its causes and possible remedies and actions that everyone can take to improve the situation and preserve the natural environment. The presentation was highly participated, and it increased the knowledge and awareness of participants on the topic. It must be noted that this presentation substituted the foreseen upcycling workshop; this change was decided by APS as a more effective mean to engage participants and raise their awareness on the topic; it was also the occasion to properly prepare them for the following cleaning action.

After this presentation, which also included safety regulations and recommendations, an environmental clean-up (cleaning action) was organized by APS and Plastic Free in the city center of Verona (close to Castelnovo del Garda), where participants had the chance to witness firsthand the extent of waste and plastic debris scattered around the city. The action proceeded with the collection of waste around the city center, in the areas where overtourism increases its environmental impact. Participants also met the Verona municipal representatives in charge of waste management and stakeholders' relationships. This action was highly appreciated by all participants, as it was the first time many of them participated in this kind of activity. They had the chance to increase their awareness of plastic pollution and of the techniques to reduce it, increasing their knowledge of the matter and of how to take action to contribute to solving this problem. The action guided by Plastic Free allowed participants to get in touch with climate activists, who voluntarily run the organization: participants exchanged ideas and thoughts with them, understood the importance of activism and civic participation in the context of natural protection and fight against climate change. Young participants, in particular, profited from this activity as they exchanged knowledge with peers and gathered inspiration to replicate this kind of activity in their own cities and countries. It was the first time many participants had got in touch with environmental activism and this event can be considered highly satisfactory as all participants registered a higher awareness and improved knowledge on the matter. Many expressed the willingness to keep informed and contact the national branches of Plastic Free in their own countries.

A first insight on gender equality and GBV in climate action has been provided by young activists from Plastic Free, sharing their experience as part of an international movement; participants acquired a first basic knowledge of gender discrimination in this context, raising their awareness on gender issues, which pervade every sector, also the environmental one. Young girls and women activists from Plastic Free told their story and some episodes where they suffered discrimination, while young boys and men talked about episodes they witnessed, stressing the intrinsic GBV in all situations.

As part of this event, video clips were shot (following GDPR rules and with consent from all participants) and sex aggregated data on participants were collected through signed sheets.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	01.04.2022	Initial version (new MFF).