



FAQs - Frequently Asked Questions

General Questions

Questions about Polling Stations

Questions about Election Preparation

Information about election implementation, evaluation and follow-up

In the diverse discussions we have had about the topic of U18, we found that several basic questions were repeated regularly. This is why we have compiled a list of the most frequently asked questions, answered and published them. This list of questions will be updated depending on new project developments.

General Questions

What is U18 good for?

A lot. On the one hand, children and young people are brought closer to the themes of politics, elections and voting in a very realistic way. On the other hand, we want to show that children and young people do actually have an opinion which should be heard. And which time period is more suited to this than shortly before the elections – European, parliamentary, regional or local elections – when parties are still in the middle of their election campaigns and the media and the public are particularly interested in the results of U18?

Who can go to vote in the U18 elections?

All children and young people under the age of 18 can vote in the U18 elections. In order to do so, they must either visit this website to choose a polling station to go to, or they can go to the polling station in their school, if there is one.

Is there a minimum age at which a child can vote?

No. We have deliberately not set an age limit, because we want to give all children and young people the chance to vote. U18 is a project of political education- and there is no such thing as starting too early!

Can non-German or non-European young people vote as well?

Yes. After all, if they live here, their lives are largely determined by politics in Germany. However, people without a German passport are unable to vote in general and regional elections. This topic is certainly suited for discussions leading up to the election.

Who are the organisers of U18?

U18 was initiated and is conducted nationwide by the Network U18 which is composed of both public and private supporters. These include the German Children's Aid Organisation (DKHW), the



German Federal Youth Council (DBJR), regional youth councils, many youth organisations, and the Berlin U18 network. On a regional level, the U18 elections are organised by coordination posts while on a local level they are organised by the people in each polling station.

What is a U18 coordination post?

A coordination post organises the implementation of U18 in its state, region, or district. For the parliamentary election in 2013, there was a U18 coordination post in almost every region which supported the polling stations as a point of contact. The contact details of the regional coordination posts can be found [here](#).

Has there been an U18 election before?

The idea for U18 came into being in 1996 in a youth club in Berlin. The parliamentary election in 2013 marked the eighth time that all people under the age of 18 were able to vote! While the U18 election in 1996 took place in only one single polling station, in 1999 U18 voting was already taking place in several polling stations in the district Berlin-Mitte on the occasion of the district council elections. In 2001, approximately 5000 children and young people voted for the Berlin House of Representatives election. This increased further in 2002 for the nationwide election, with 20,000 participants under the age of 18 voting in 278 polling stations in Berlin and several other cities all over Germany. 50,000 children and young people voted in 583 polling stations in the first nationwide U18 parliamentary election in 2005. For the second Berlin House of Representatives election in 2006, about 13,800 children and young people participated in 242 polling stations. At the last parliamentary election in 2013, U18 took place in every region in Germany: about 200,000 children and young people went to vote in over 1,500 polling stations throughout the whole country! Berlin was the most active region with over 30,000 votes.

Is this the first time U18 is taking place for a European election?

Yes, the U18 European election 2014 is a first! The project is taking place in the context of a European election for the first time. Now that the project has been implemented successfully for all other types of elections in Germany, the first U18 election for the European parliament election is taking place in the regions Berlin and Brandenburg.

Do the U18 elections only take place in Germany?

So far, U18 has only taken place in Germany. However, the regions Berlin and Brandenburg are making an effort to relay the idea of the U18 project to partners and organisations in other European countries for the 2014 European elections. They are working towards the project becoming more “European” for the U18 European elections.

How and where can I find out about U18?

We are trying to publish all important information on the website www.u18.org and are regularly updating the information. We are also happy to answer general questions in the central national coordination post in Berlin: U18 c/o Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk e.V., info@u18.org, Tel.: (+49) (030) 308693-20. If you would like to know which U18 events are occurring in your region, and how you



can participate, turn to the regional coordination post in your region. You can find the contact information [here](#).

Does U18 want to campaign for the lowering of the voting age with this project?

Yes and no. U18 is a political education project. We want to bring young people closer to the themes of politics and elections. At the same time, we want to make the public aware of the fact that children and young people have a voice which should be heard. We want to show them that young people are able to articulate this voice competently if they gain enough knowledge through political education work. One of our goals is to encourage a discussion about the lowering of the voting age limit. However, we have not stated a specific age at which we would like young people to legally be allowed to vote. With this project, we want to collect experiences across the nation and to keep on discussing this theme with different target groups.

How is U18 financed?

U18 is supported through the great commitment of the participating institutions. A lot of voluntary work was involved in the preparation. The 2013 parliamentary elections was funded by the Federal Ministry of family, seniors, women and young people, and the Federal Centre for political education, for example. Individual regions invest their own resources for the implementation of U18.

How does U18 aim to awaken the political interest of young people with an „I can't be bothered" mentality? Won't you just reach those children and young people who are already involved in associations and/or already have a basic interest in political issues?

Of course U18 will reach those children and young people who are in the participating organisations particularly well. But because the U18 election takes place in youth recreational facilities, partly even in mobile polling stations in public places and in schools, the project is actually open to everyone. Additionally, very few young people keep their (supposed) I-can't-be-bothered mentality, when they experience, for example in the context of U18 campaigns leading up to the elections, that they can help determine and positively change their own living environment. A survey of over 1000 young people in 2011 in the context of the U18 election for the Berlin House of Representatives showed that the political interest of three quarters of the surveyed U18 voters increased due to U18.

Questions about Polling Stations

How do I find out if there is a polling station in my area?

Closer to the time of the election, there will be a list of all registered polling stations, in which young voters can give their votes, on the webpage [Polling stations 2013](#). Every day new ones will be added- you can register a polling station as well!

Where can and should there be polling stations?

Everywhere where there are young people: schools, youth clubs, recreation centres for children and young people, sports clubs, libraries, swimming pools or on public streets and squares in the form of



a mobile polling station. Due to the strict party political neutrality of the U18 project, parties and their youth organisations are not able to establish polling stations. Extremist and anti democratic groups are also not allowed to establish polling stations.

What do we have to do to open a polling station?

First you need to register your polling station on the U18 website. Various documents, which are needed for the implementation of the election, will be available for download on our homepage. These documents should then be put on display at the polling station on the day of the elections. Additionally, a ballot box, a voting booth, a handful of biros and the multiplied ballot cards will be needed. And then it can begin. For more details, please refer to the concept and our newsletter.

How much does the implementation of U18 cost for our organisation?

Almost nothing. In order to carry out the election, you need to copy however many ballot cards you need, which will be available for download online. You will also need to create the ballot box and voting booth. Project follow-ups, such as discussion rounds or election parties, are desirable but not a requirement. We know that additional campaigns can create additional costs. Therefore, we do not require that organisations use their own resources for this, but would be glad if they did. However, a lot can be done even with very few resources- political education work can even be free (and it is never in vain!) We have compiled some suggestions and inspiration in our [Method Database](#).

Who is responsible for the costs of U18 in our organisation?

You are. Unfortunately, the U18 Network only has very limited resources available, so we can't support every polling station financially. Instead, we are attempting to make various materials, which are necessary for the implementation of the election, available for free. We bear the costs for the organisation of the project, for example, the cost of the website and the evaluation of the election. Additional costs which are incurred in the regions or in individual polling stations must be paid using own resources. However, experience has shown that the implementation of the project locally is very cheap.

Questions about Election Preparation

Which documents do the polling stations receive from the U18 Network?

We will upload a comprehensive package of election documents to our website to aid the implementation of the election in an organisation. The following items are included in the download package.

- Overview of the main messages of the party programmes about youth specific and youth relevant themes (synopsis)
- Brochure: About the Elections
- Election rules



- Documents for the evaluation of the election results
- Ballot cards (as a template in Excel form, on which the direct candidates (first vote) of the relevant constituency can be entered)

Where can we get U18 flyers and posters from?

Flyers and posters can be requested from the coordination post in your region. You can also request templates to copy and print yourself.

Where can we get ballot cards from?

The coordination post will create a template in Excel format and will put this template online. The ballot cards will be different in every constituency only in that it will have a different direct candidate, which the polling stations will enter individually. You can find the name of the candidate/ an original ballot card, on the website of the electoral management body.

Where can we get ballot boxes and voting booths from?

Polling stations are not provided with ballot boxes and voting booths. At this point, the creative potential of the children and young people at the polling locations is needed. After all, after the completion of the U18 election, the most beautiful ballot box will be selected!

How can we prepare for the election?

A polling station **MUST** achieve the following:

- It must name a contact person who is responsible for the correct implementation of the U18 election
- It must create a ballot box and a voting booth (if possibly through children and young people)
- It must display the voting documents, distribute flyers and hang up posters
- It must complete the ballot cards and provide enough copies for the expected number of voters
- It must organise the counting of the ballot cards in a way free of manipulation

A polling station **CAN** achieve the following:

- It can implement project ideas for political education (we will upload a collection of ideas in our method database on www.u18.org)
- It can organise discussion sessions with (local) politicians before, during or/and after the election
- It can involve the children and young people in the preparation and implementation of the U18 election
- It can participate in the regional election party or organise its own election party after the election

Are young people allowed to participate in the preparation and implementation of U18? How?



Of course we would like it if children and young people actively participated! Naturally, the involvement is dependent on personal possibilities. Everything is possible from simple involvement to an independently organised implementation. The pedagogues at the polling locations must discuss this individually with the children and young people.

How does U18 plan to prevent extreme parties influencing children and young people in advance of the event? And how does it plan to prevent them from distorting the election results through double voting for their own benefit?

By discussing and thinking about different parties and their positions in advance of the U18 election, the children and young people are also taught to question these in a critical way. The more intensely they engage with the topic of extreme right-wing parties, the sooner those inhuman ideologies will be recognised and exposed as such. The possibility of extreme right-wing parties registering as polling stations should be prevented by the regional coordination posts and their knowledge of the region. However, a thorough control of this is not possible, because U18 was initiated by people working voluntarily and therefore no significant budget is available. Ultimately, much depends on the efforts and commitment of the local supporters.

Information about election implementation, evaluation and follow-up

Should the election take place on only one day or throughout several?

The election can take place on one day or throughout several. That depends on the resources and the opening times of the polling station. The only condition is that the polling station must be closed on the U18 election day (which is always nine days before the “real” election) by 6 PM at the latest.

Is absentee voting possible?

Yes. You can fill out the ballot card before the election day and then either give it to the polling station in your area in a closed envelope, or send it by post. If you send it by post, fill out the ballot card, put it into an unlabeled envelope, put this envelope into another envelope which is stamped and addressed, and send it to the coordination post in your region. You can find detailed instructions on absentee voting [here](#).

Is it necessary for an electoral register to be created? If not, how can it be ensured that no one votes twice?

The election is not representative and is designed in a more simple way than traditional elections. At this point, we would like to point out that children and young people should vote voluntarily and not because they have to do so with their school class, for example. Of course, without an electoral register, we can't completely exclude the possibility of double voting. However, experience from past U18 elections has shown that children and young people handle their votes in a very responsible manner and would rather decline to vote in their youth club if they have already voted in school. In the context of the political education which is carried out in advance of the U18 election, the children and young people are of course taught the meaning of having a single vote. Additionally, each polling station is obliged to ensure an orderly election process. In short: the U18 election is not representative, but rather a project of political education.



How does the counting and evaluation of results work?

The counting of the U18 votes should happen publicly and therefore in the presence, or preferably with the participation, of children and young people. When and where the counting occurs is left up to the polling stations. Once the voting period is over, they can count the votes themselves in the polling station and then, using the recording sheet, they can transfer the results to the web-form, which will be activated just before the election. Alternatively, the polling station can take the sealed ballot box to the nearest election party at which a public counting will take place. The relevant documents and information about the organisational process (gathering, counting and transmission) will be put online under the menu heading “election documents”. Please send questions about the evaluation of the results to info@u18.org.

How will we find out the results?

From 6 PM on the election day, you can follow the evaluation of results live online on www.u18.org. The final result should be clear before 10 PM. You can find the nationwide results as well as the results for each region or just the results for a single constituency. The results of individual polling stations won't be published in order to prevent stigmatisation. Only the coordination post in Berlin and the organisation itself will know what was voted in which organisation.

How does U18 monitor the incoming election results?

U18 does not monitor the results of the polling stations very comprehensively, but counts on the fact that polling stations commit themselves to implementing the election process and evaluation in all conscience to the best of their knowledge. Previous experiences have shown that both the young people and the initiators of the polling stations treat the election in a very responsible manner. However, should extreme abnormalities be found in the results, the network plans to verify them.

Even though the result of the U18 election does not claim to be representative, won't the whole election be reduced to absurdity through the possibility of double voting?

No, because after all, it isn't the final election result which defines the U18 election. The concrete experience made by the participating young people of how they can participate in the decision-making process of a complex society is much more important.

What happens with the result? Will there be a follow-up if you realise that there was an excessive number of extreme right-wing votes?

The polling stations will receive suggestions for how they can continue working with the results. An excessive amount of votes for extreme right-wing parties would hopefully be a warning signal and a starting point for increased efforts to develop a democratic consciousness for politics and civil society in the affected regions. In these cases, we will provide materials for the follow-up of the election and a list of contact addresses.