

OBSERVATORY FOR SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE



YOUTH POLICY IN THE EU

“What does the EU do for me?”

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Editorial

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16 percent or about 73 million people in the European Union (EU) are between the ages of 15 and 29. The EU has declared 2022 as the [European Year of Youth](#) and thus wants to focus on adolescents and young adults, especially after the difficult years of the COVID-19 pandemic, and provide them with better opportunities.

Young people were deprived of many things during the pandemic: home-schooling, closed recreational facilities and restrictions on mobility have made many experiences unavailable to them. Moreover, the effects of the pandemic have hit adolescents and young adults in the labour market particularly hard.

Even beyond the pandemic, many young people face an uncertain future: climate change, technological and demographic trends, political instability as well as Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine are changing society and democratic interactions. In our interconnected world, many young people are concerned with these global issues and are looking for solutions for a sustainable society. At the same time, however, young people are underrepresented at the political level, and their interests are often given too little attention and consideration.

Against this backdrop, the newsletter presents selected EU youth policy initiatives – and actively involves young people with their own contributions via the [European Pool of Young Journalists](#), which was created as part of the European Year of Youth. In an introductory contribution, [Sarah Molter](#), research officer at the Observatory, presents **EU strategies and programmes** in the field of youth policy. The following contribution by [Aleesha Wiegandt](#) focuses on the **effects of the COVID-19 pandemic** on adolescents and young adults, taking a special look at mental health aspects. In an interview, [Sakiye Boukari](#), EU Youth Representative for Germany in the EU Youth Dialogue, and [Kristóf Papp](#), Policy Officer at the European Youth Forum, answer questions on **political participation** of young people in the EU. In his contribution, [Kacper Król](#) looks at the **removal of barriers in EU programmes on transnational mobility**.

Introduction:

Youth policy in the EU

Sarah Molter, social scientist, is a Research Officer at the *Observatory for Socio-political Developments in Europe*. She works on topics in the field of social policy in the EU and its Member States.

“This is our most educated, talented and motivated generation. And it has missed out on so much to keep others safe. [...] If we are to shape our Union in their mould, young people must be able to shape Europe’s future.”

(Ursula von der Leyen, State of the Union 2021)

EU INDICATORS ON YOUTH

For an overview of the economic and social situation of young people in the EU, Eurostat provides data for 38 indicators in a [dashboard](#), spanning the areas of demography, participation, employment, youth and the digital world, education and training, health and wellbeing as well as social inclusion.

In the area of participation of young people (16–29 years) in society, for instance, four indicators are monitored – some of the most recent data date back to 2015. The indicators show the share of young people who are active in the respective areas.

- Participation in formal activities / organisations: 19 percent (2015)
- Participation in informal activities: 23 percent (2015)
- Active citizenship: 12 percent (2015)
- Use of the internet for civic and political participation: 24 percent (2021)

Youth policies in the EU are intended to help improve young people’s lives. These policies cover areas that particularly affect young people, namely those between 13 and 27 years of age. This includes, for instance, vocational training and employment, but also civic engagement and political participation. At the same time, giving the youth a voice in shaping EU policies is increasingly understood as a cross-sectoral task at European level.

Legal basis and objectives

According to Article 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the main competence in the field of youth lies with the Member States. Accordingly, the EU has **coordinating and supporting competences** in this field and should above all stimulate the further development of national youth policies as well as the professional exchange between Member States. However, the EU can also take own initiatives. On the basis of Articles 165 and 166 TFEU, it has explicit competence for

- the promotion of cross-border youth exchanges,
- the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe and
- the facilitation of access to vocational training as well as the promotion and facilitation of mobility in the field of vocational training.

The **Open Method of Coordination** is central to the development and implementation of European youth policy. It is used for the EU and the Member States to agree on common objectives, priorities and instruments by means of consultations and negotiations, for example through Council resolutions or recommendations of the European Commission to the Member States, and partly supported by action plans or strategies.

Beyond the topics of youth exchange, political participation and vocational training, other EU measures are also relevant for adolescents and young

EU STRATEGY ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The European Commission adopted its first comprehensive [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) on 24 March 2021. This strategy contains six thematic areas and associated measures for children and young people (under the age of 18), including the area of "Participation in political and democratic life" which encompasses measures to strengthen political participation.

Among other initiatives, the European Commission intends to establish an EU platform for the participation of children and young people and to conduct child-oriented consultations on initiatives that affect children. Child-oriented materials are also to be developed for important EU instruments, and EU employees are to be sensitised to child and youth participation.

Member States should, among other things, use the [Child Participation Assessment Tool of the Council of Europe](#) to analyse and expand children's participation opportunities. Professionals should be sensitised to child and youth participation. Civic education and participation in schools should be promoted and expanded.

adults, for instance in the areas of general education, health or protection against violence. Legal bases for these issues include the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union¹ (Article 24 on the rights of the child and Article 32 on the prohibition of child labour and protection of young people at work) as well as other international agreements such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child². In addition, the first → [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) was adopted in 2021.

Strategic frameworks and programmes

Youth policy is a comparatively young policy field in the EU, although → [trans-national mobility programmes](#), in particular the Erasmus programme, were implemented as early as the 1980s.



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Increased attention has been paid to youth policymaking at EU level since 2002. Based on a Council resolution of 27 June 2002³, which emphasised the use of the Open Method of Coordination and the mainstreaming of youth concerns in other policy areas, several initiatives have been developed since then, aiming to increase the participation of and support for young people. This includes the **European Youth Pact**⁴, adopted by the Council of the EU on 24 November 2005. The Pact is an instrument geared to achieve the growth and employment objectives of the renewed Lisbon Strategy. The European Parliament's resolution on the **renewed social agenda** of 6 May 2009⁵ also prioritises young people and children and aims to implement a modern social policy that keeps pace with current challenges.

YOUTH GUARANTEE

The Youth Guarantee was launched on 22 April 2013 in the form of a [Council Recommendation](#). It aims to ensure that all young people are offered a quality job or training, or a quality apprenticeship or traineeship within four months after becoming unemployed or leaving school.

Member States have documented the most important infrastructure measures at national level in [implementation plans for the Youth Guarantee](#) and appointed [coordinators for the Youth Guarantee](#).

Based on a proposal from the European Commission, the Youth Guarantee was strengthened by a Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020, and the age limit was raised from 25 to 30 years. Furthermore, there is a focus on avoiding any form of discrimination and on making the Youth Guarantee more future-proof in view of the ecological and digital transformations.

The Youth Guarantee is part of the EU's [Youth Employment Support Package](#) and will be funded through the [European Recovery Plan](#) and the future EU budget.

The **EU Youth Strategy 2010–2018**⁶ provided the first comprehensive framework for youth policy cooperation in the EU. The strategy had two general objectives: improving young people's educational and labour market opportunities as well as promoting their civic engagement, social inclusion and solidarity. The EU Member States set targets and potential initiatives for eight areas of action, covering both core youth policy areas (namely participation, volunteering, creativity and culture, youth in the world) and socio-economic issues of young people (education and training, employment and entrepreneurship, health and wellbeing, social inclusion). In order to monitor progress towards the youth policy goals, the **EU Youth Report** was introduced. It is to be published every three years. According to an evaluation in 2015/16⁷, the first years of the strategy's implementation fell into the context of the economic crisis in Europe. Therefore, youth policy initiatives, especially the → [Youth Guarantee](#), focused in particular on the employability of young people. However, also in later years, other important youth policy issues such as participation and engagement received rather little attention.

This is one of the reasons why the current **EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027**⁸ should pay closer attention to these issues. In addition, eleven → [European Youth Goals](#) were developed by means of a Europe-wide consultation with young people. The Youth Strategy is to incorporate and implement these goals.

EUROPEAN YOUTH GOALS

The [European Youth Goals](#) provide the content framework for the new EU Youth Dialogue. They were developed in 2017 and 2018 by around 50,000 young people across the EU by means of discussion groups, projects, conferences and online surveys, and reflect the ideas of youth and young adults for the future of Europe:

- connecting the EU with youth
- equality of all genders
- inclusive societies
- information and constructive dialogue
- mental health and wellbeing
- moving rural youth forward
- quality employment for all
- quality learning
- space and participation for all
- a sustainable, green Europe
- youth organisations and European programmes

More information on the individual goals and translations in 16 languages can be found on the [website](#) of the Youth Goals Lab project.

The focus is on three core areas:

- **Engage:** The inclusive and democratic participation of young people and active involvement in policymaking processes should be strengthened. This involves the development of experiential and learning opportunities for participation, especially in digital and inclusive formats, as well as the implementation of the → [EU Youth Dialogue](#). The latter should create a space for regular exchange between young people and political decision makers.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE INITIATIVES ON YOUTH POLICY

It is not only the EU which is active in the field of youth policy: The Council of Europe, as an international organisation for the protection of human rights in Europe, has also developed [programmes and strategies](#) to promote young people's commitment to human rights and democracy.

Central to this is the [Youth Sector Strategy 2030](#), adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 22 January 2020. This strategy builds, among other things, on the Council of Europe's previous Agenda 2020 on the Future of Youth Policy from 2008. The objectives are to strengthen youth participation, youth rights as well as knowledge and expertise in the field of youth. Alongside specific bodies, the two European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest, the European Youth Office and the partnership with the European Commission, the [Council of Europe's Youth Advisory Board](#) is an outstanding instrument of youth participation in the international context. It is part of the Council of Europe's co-management, in which representatives of European and national youth organisations and government representatives have been taking joint and equal decisions regarding the Council of Europe's youth section for decades.

The Council of Europe is also home to the [European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy](#).

The European Movement Germany has developed an [overview chart](#)²⁹ on structures and working methods of the Council of Europe in the field of youth policy and youth work.

- **Connect:** Cross-border mobility for young people and professionals should be made possible, especially within the framework of the **Erasmus+** and **European Solidarity Corps** programmes. Obstacles should be removed, and support measures be created for young disadvantaged people with fewer opportunities. Important in this context is, for example, the European Youth Portal⁹, which provides information to young people and other stakeholders on opportunities and initiatives at EU level, especially regarding political participation and periods abroad.
- **Empower:** Youth work in Europe is to be strengthened. A new European Youth Work Agenda¹⁰ should promote quality-building measures, such as the further vocational training of professionals or the allocation of sufficient resources. Furthermore, easily accessible **youth contact points** are to be expanded. These contact points are to, among other things, offer advice on financial issues, occupation and health, as well as on opportunities for education, culture and employment.

In addition, the strategy aims to promote **evidence-based youth policy** and **knowledge building**. To do so, it relies on the Youth Wiki¹¹, an online platform with information on youth policy in the EU, as well as on cooperation with international organisations such as the → [Council of Europe](#), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)¹² and other bodies, including youth organisations.

The strategy also provides for an **EU Youth Coordinator** for cross-sectoral cooperation, knowledge-building and exchange on youth issues within the European Commission. This coordinator works closely with various youth stakeholders. Since 1 June 2021, Biliana Sirakova has taken on this role.

The EU Youth Strategy is implemented in three-year planning periods, with priorities and actions set out in **EU work plans for youth policy**. By the end of 2023, the European Commission must also carry out a mid-term evaluation of the strategy.

European Year of Youth 2022

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced in her State of the Union 2021 address¹³ that 2022 would be declared the European Year of Youth¹⁴. On 22 December 2021, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a joint decision for the implementation of a European Year of Youth¹⁵. The initiative was also intended as a response to the difficult situation of adolescents and young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim is to involve young people and their priorities more in policymaking (including through the → [EU Youth Dialogue](#) and the involvement of young people in the → [Conference on the Future of Europe](#)) and to open up new opportunities for them. This should include highlighting the potential of the environmental and digital transformation for society in general and the young generation in particular. Young, disadvantaged people with fewer opportunities should be involved and supported in particular.

RECOVERY PLAN NEXTGENERATIONEU

NextGenerationEU is a temporary recovery instrument to cushion the immediate COVID-19-related damages and losses in Europe. It has a budget of 800 billion euros. With 724 billion euros in loans and grants to support Member States' reforms and investments, the Recovery and Resilience Facility is at the heart of NextGenerationEU. The aim is to alleviate the impact of the pandemic on the economy and society. It also aims to make Europe's economy and society more sustainable and resilient to crises as well as better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the environmental and digital transformations ahead. To apply for funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Member States draw up corresponding plans. In addition, funds will be made available for the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) and for other EU programmes.

The European Year of Youth is expected to create synergies with the → [Next-GenerationEU](#) recovery plan and other existing EU programmes targeting adolescents and young adults. These include, for example, **Erasmus+**, the **European Solidarity Corps**, Creative Europe¹⁶ and the European Social Fund Plus. One focus lies on expanding employment opportunities for young people in the post-pandemic recovery, including through the launch of the new exchange programme **ALMA**.

To implement the year of action, the EU, its Member States and regional and local levels are called upon to organise activities under the umbrella of the European Year of Youth together with civil society actors and young people. Different formats are possible, such as events, debates, political projects, information campaigns or publications. The European Commission coordinates the activities at EU level. Each Member State has also set up national coordination bodies. The activities are supported by the EU programmes Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, among others.

In a survey conducted by the European Commission on young people's expectations for the European Year of Youth, the surveyed young people identified the following four issues as the most important: 1. improving mental and physical health (34 percent), 2. protecting the environment and combating climate change (34 percent), 3. improving education and training, including free mobility for students, trainees, pupils (33 percent) and 4. combating poverty and social inequality (32 percent).¹⁷



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Adaptation pains: The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people's mental health and wellbeing

EUROPEAN POOL OF YOUNG JOURNALISTS

Together with the youth information network Eurodesk, the European Commission has set up a [pool](#) of twelve young journalists aged between 16 and 30 to write articles and produce videos and podcasts on issues that concern them and young people in Europe in general. They also report on events in the framework of the European Year of Youth.

All articles and digital media are published on the European Year of Youth [website](#) under the heading "[Voices of young Europeans](#)".

Within this newsletter, we present some articles and media of journalists from this pool.

Aleesha Wiegandt, 21 years old, is a member of the → [European Pool of Young Journalists](#) which was initiated by the European Commission and is implemented by Eurodesk. She studies Political Science and French at the University of Cork, Ireland. Her journalistic work focuses on mental health, environmental protection, the Sustainable Development Goals, intercultural learning and global justice. Aleesha Wiegandt has worked on various digital media, including the podcast → "[Let's queer some things up](#)" together with → [Kacper Król](#).

Aleesha Wiegandt, European Pool of Young Journalists: "I am passionate for youth participation, which has been at the core of all the projects I have embarked on. Being a true believer in young people rests at the heart of all the major political and social issues that face today's ever-changing world."

COVID-19 came into our lives and changed everything. Young people (persons aged 18–25) in particular have felt the effects of this as multiple facets of their lives ended or changed significantly overnight. Jobs were lost, university was moved online, bars and cafés closed, trips were cancelled and families and friends were denied each other's presence. The effects of this massive upheaval have had a serious impact on the mental health and wellbeing of Europe's young population, and there is much more to be done if we are to ensure that the negative long-term effects of these changes are kept to a minimum. This article seeks to explore the state of affairs in this regard at the moment, and what should be done to ensure our young people see a future of hope, mutual care and wellbeing.

What do young people need in order to feel secure and well?

There are certain elements that need to come together for me to be able to imagine creating a fulfilling life and future for myself. I would argue that they are pretty similar for young people across the board. We all need to sustain ourselves financially, continue to learn, grow and foster lifelong curiosity and maintain our mental and physical wellbeing. These are areas that were disrupted for millions of young people across Europe when the pandemic hit. The aforementioned factors correlate closely with the areas examined by the European Youth Forum¹⁸ on how young people were and continue to be affected by COVID-19.



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VOICES OF YOUNG EUROPEANS: THE PANDEMIC AS A PATHWAY TOWARDS DESTIGMATISING MENTAL ILLNESS?

Leonie Kirstein, journalist at the European Pool of Young Journalists, describes in her article [“The pandemic as a pathway towards destigmatising mental illness?”](#) the situation of young people in Germany who already had mental health problems before the COVID-19 pandemic. She sees the fact that many people experienced isolation, loneliness and mental health challenges during the pandemic as an opportunity to overcome the taboo and stigma around mental illness: “When prejudices are overcome and stigmatisation becomes a thing of the past, no one will need to hide away.”

Leonie Kirstein, European Pool of Young Journalists: “Being a part of the European Pool of Young Journalists allows me to make my voice heard and work towards a better future because I really believe in the importance of spaces where participation of young people in Europe is encouraged. The causes close to my heart are animal welfare, feminism and equality.”

Economic wellbeing

In March 2020, Europe came to a halt. This included the closure of many sectors, and subsequent job losses ensued. Young people were some of the most affected by this as a result of them being commonly employed in some of the most highly affected sectors such as accommodation and food with a high degree of seasonal work. The study carried out by the European Youth Forum found that financial instability leads to increased levels of stress and mental fatigue. If young people are uncertain about their future and unable to embark on fulfilling career paths, it is no wonder that symptoms of depression and anxiety pervade. In addition, the financial insecurity of unemployment or reduced hours means that physical and mental health suffers as a result of insufficient treatment, medication, nutrition etc.

Social wellbeing and connection

According to studies carried out by “The Campaign to End Loneliness”¹⁹, loneliness is a risk factor for developing depression later in life, and social isolation puts individuals at a greater risk of the likes of cognitive decline and dementia. What does this mean in a pandemic context? We were not built to stay in our homes day after day and this is clearly visible in the data. With those from marginalised backgrounds suffering the most, survey results showed that nearly two thirds of participants were affected by mental health and wellbeing issues during the pandemic. This is a deeply worrying figure. It is clear that young people missed out on key experiences as a result of the lockdowns and that certain basic needs such as social connection were not being met. For certain young people who had to move back into their family homes, they did not feel safe in these environments, whether it be due to living with family members who did not accept their sexuality or gender identity or because of the threat of living in an unsafe space. However, for many there was no choice in the matter, as loss of income meant that it was impossible to pay rent elsewhere. Young people identified a feeling that this led to what they called “life stalling”, where they were on hold, waiting to get their lives back.

VOICES OF YOUNG EUROPEANS: “LET’S QUEER SOME THINGS UP”

In their podcast, **Aleesha Wiegandt** and **Kacper Król**, journalists at the European Pool of Young Journalists, focus on sexual and gender diversity:

“At ‘Let’s queer some things up,’ we discuss topics that are important to us as young Europeans. The focus of our podcast, as outlined in [episode 1](#), is to raise awareness on the reality of the LGBTQI+ community in Europe. The people we invite to our podcast can inspire you in many ways. Perhaps our interviewees can also help you accept yourself and change your life for the better. Unfortunately, there are still many people who for most and sometimes even all of their lives cannot admit to others who they are and what they would like to do in life. Our interviewees also had similar problems and experiences. However, they had the courage to change something in their lives and they certainly do not regret it!”

What has the policy response been to the issues faced by young people?

As found by the European Youth Forum, the response from policymakers was and continues to be far from adequate. They note that “to date, there are no substantial responses from national policy-makers to supporting young people’s mental health during and beyond the pandemic”. Not only were there no mental health specific policies put in place by national governments, only 12 of the 1,283 national economic policy responses were aimed at young people. This is proof of a trend that is prevailing throughout Europe: young people are being left behind when they need support the most.

What do we want to see from policymakers on both an EU and a national level?

In order to ensure that our young people are being cared for, there must be a holistic approach by governments in recognising that mental wellbeing is largely dependent on other factors, such as financial stability, housing, quality education etc. For example, I am from Ireland and know that the housing crisis in tandem with the lasting effects of the lockdowns has caused much distress and hopelessness among the young population. It is imperative that national strategies are formulated to support young people’s access to basic needs: a safe home to live in, enough income to eat, socialise and be involved in the community, affordable healthcare and career prospects. The ways in which this could be effectively implemented are numerous, from providing free of charge mental health support to quality job promotion. “Young people are the leaders of tomorrow” is a phrase we hear time and time again. I would also argue that young people are the leaders of today, pushing social movements and contributing to society in a countless number of ways. We must ensure that these young leaders are kept *well* to ensure a safer and healthier society for all.

Participation for a more sustainable and inclusive Europe

EU YOUTH DIALOGUE

Within the [EU Youth Dialogue](#), young people can talk to decision makers from politics and administration and discuss their concerns and demands.

Each 18-month-long cycle focuses on a theme that is aligned with the European Youth Goals. From January 2022 to July 2023, the 9th cycle runs under the title "Engaging together for a sustainable and inclusive Europe".

The Youth Dialogue takes place at different levels (EU, national, local) and in different formats. In each Member State, there is a national working group in charge of organising activities bringing together young people, youth organisations and politicians. More information on how to get involved can be found at the [European Youth Portal](#) website.

In addition, each Member State has one or more EU Youth Representatives who discuss young people's demands and opinions with policymakers at both national and EU level. A steering group coordinates the implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue at European level. It brings together the youth ministries and the national youth councils of those Member States that currently hold the trio presidency of the Council on the one hand and the European Commission and the European Youth Forum on the other.

Sakiye Boukari, 19 years old, is one of the two EU Youth Representatives for Germany in the → [EU Youth Dialogue](#) for the 9th cycle from January 2022 to July 2023. **Kristóf Papp** is Policy Officer in the field of youth participation at the European Youth Forum, the largest umbrella organisation of youth organisations in Europe. The [European Youth Forum](#) is run by young people who are democratically elected every two years.

Sakiye Boukari, EU Youth Representative for Germany in the EU Youth Dialogue: "I would like youth participation to become more diverse and accessible. One of my personal goals is not to speak for other people, but to encourage them to speak for themselves and to learn and shape many things for themselves."

Kristóf Papp, Policy Officer, European Youth Forum: "We bring the voices of young Europeans to international fora and facilitate their participation in policymaking. We help young people claim their rights, and we promote the exchange of ideas and experiences. We believe that every young person should have a say about matters that concern them, and we make this a reality."

What does political participation of young people in Europe mean to you? Why is it important?

Kristóf Papp: Young people in the age of 15 to 35 years make up 25 percent of our society, and we have key roles in all aspects of life: innovation, activism, culture and arts are some of the fields where you see young people take the lead. But when it comes to participation in political systems, young people have a lot less opportunities available. All states set age limits on participation in elections (often 16 or 18) and running for political positions (often higher than that!), which means that young people interested in politics are virtually unseen for the first years of their coming to adulthood. The quality of political participation also matters: Studies show that young people are increasingly expressing mistrust towards political institutions, due to the lack of meaningful engagement. They don't want to be tokenised; they are demanding transparent and accountable politics, in which their opinions and input matter and are consistently taken into account.

Sakiye Boukari: Put simply: first of all, we talk about the right of children and young people to participate in shaping the world. The political participation of young people in Europe is very important to me, because I see in it a sense of community, of working together across national borders towards tackling global problems. Our actions always have an impact on the future, which af-



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RELEASES AND PUBLICATIONS BY THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM

- On the occasion of Democracy Day on 15 September 2022, the press release "There are as many Martins in the European Parliament as MEPs under 30" was issued to highlight the under-representation of young people in the European Parliament. Out of 705 MEPs, six are under 30 years old.
- The publication "Making digitalisation work for young people" of August 2022 illustrates the situation of the first generation who spends a large part of their lives online – and the related challenges in terms of safety, privacy and wellbeing of young people.
- The publication "Generation Austerity: When governments cut budgets young people suffer. Don't do it again" of June 2022 points to the negative consequences of EU countries' austerity programmes after the 2010 economic crisis for young people and warns against taking such measures again after the COVID-19 pandemic.

fects us young people in particular, all over the world. That is why we have to be able to represent our own interests ourselves.

In what way do you participate or do you ensure that young people can participate? What are your main topics and what does your work look like in concrete terms?

Sakiye Boukari: In the past year, I have ventured into many new projects. One of them has been the → [EU Youth Dialogue](#). As one of two EU Youth Representatives, I am voluntarily active in living and shaping youth participation by taking the demands and concerns of young people in Germany to the EU Youth Conferences. There, we discuss them with youth representatives from all Member States as well as political leaders such as the youth ministers of the EU Member States and representatives of the European Commission. The demands come, for example, from workshops with young people that take place within the framework of the EU Youth Dialogue which I also help to organise. The issue of social justice is particularly important to me, and I am always motivated to engage in exchange and learn more.

Kristóf Papp: The European Youth Forum is a platform that brings together over 100 youth organisations from 41 countries. We represent young people, who share their knowledge with us through consultation processes, and we amplify youth voices. Some of our work is participating in structured youth engagement processes, such as the → [EU Youth Dialogue](#). We also work in less formal spaces, such as our partnership with the Body Shop to campaign for lowering the voting age to 16, and our petition to ban unpaid internships

across the EU²⁰. We believe that young people's voices matter not just on youth-specific issues, and that our members make meaningful contributions on other issues such as social and climate policies.

How do you perceive the position of young people in the political process in Europe? In particular, what about the participation of marginalised groups such as LGBTIQ* young people or people of colour (PoC), young people with disabilities?

Sakiye Boukari: I have the feeling that more and more young people are getting involved in politics – though of course many more people are needed. Especially for marginalised groups, it is super important that we break down barriers and create safe and inclusive opportunities for participation. We are missing important perspectives of a large group of people so far. These perspectives are not visible enough in our everyday life. Addressing this problem, which does not only affect young people, can start with youth participation. I would love to meet more people in participation projects who, for example, come from a weaker socio-economic area or from rural regions. I am convinced that all young people would bring great skills to the table. It's just that there is sometimes a lack of space where sustainable and inclusive exchange can in fact take place.

Kristóf Papp: Nearly 60 percent of young Europeans have been active in the societies they live in and have participated in one or more youth organisations over the last year.²¹ This activism starts as early as the early teens, with supporting various causes on social media, making informed consumer choices, joining protests and, in the case of Fridays for Future, starting global movements. But when it comes to elections, too many of us feel unseen and, so, many young people disengage from institutionalised politics. This is particularly true for youth in marginalised communities, who are overlooked by decision makers not just because of their age, but also because of other forms of discrimination.

What can be done to strengthen the position of young people in general and of marginalised groups in particular in the political process?

Kristóf Papp: To fight this trend, political institutions will have to adapt to allow for more youth participation, for example by lowering the voting age and by strengthening their engagement with youth organisations. Young people from all backgrounds are often more likely to engage in dialogue with representatives who share commonalities with them and have a close understanding of their daily lives.

Sakiye Boukari: Youth participation has many levels and dimensions, all of which are important. I am attracted to youth participation because it can be easy to link involvement with one's own hobbies and interests. This also means that participation and opportunities have to be presented and visible where young people live – in order to meet them in their own lives and realities. Some time ago, I could not relate much with terms like Europe and politics, but creating connections, bringing these terms closer and breaking them down, goes a long way.

INTEGRATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The Conference on the Future of Europe was launched on 9 May 2021 by French President Emmanuel Macron together with the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission. The conference was intended to open up a new space for debate among the European population and to enable citizens to participate in shaping the future of Europe.

To this end, wishes and expectations could be expressed on a freely accessible [online platform](#) as well as through national and four [European Citizens' Panels](#), whose participants were drawn by lot. These contributions have been fed into the [plenary sessions](#) of the conference on 29/30 April 2022 in a consolidated form and have been included in the [final conference report](#). The European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission, within their respective spheres of competence and in accordance with the Treaties, will consider in a timely manner how to move forward effectively.

Adolescents and young adults were explicitly involved in the Conference on the Future of Europe. In addition to the possibility of low-threshold submission of proposals on the online platform, numerous decentralised, mostly civil society-organised, events for young people on the Conference on the Future of Europe took place in the Member States. In addition, one third of the participants in the citizens' forums were under 25 years of age. Moreover, the [European Youth Event 2021](#)²³ took place in Strasbourg on 8–9 October 2021. There, too, young people were able to share their ideas on the future of Europe and feed them into the consultation process for the Conference on the Future of Europe.

VOICES OF YOUNG EUROPEANS: THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE AND THE YOUNG GENERATION"

In the podcast episode "Conference on the Future of Europe. Citizen participation as the saviour of the young generation" (in German), [Leonie Kirstein](#) from the European Pool of Young Journalists talked to three young Europeans who participated as panellists in the Conference on the Future of Europe in Maastricht, The Netherlands. They shared insights on how citizen participation could work in the European Union.

What is the significance of the Conference on the Future of Europe in this context?

Sakiye Boukari: The → Conference on the Future of Europe was a step towards making the "EU complex" more accessible to European people who are not part of the "EU bubble". Structures in political youth participation definitely need to become more transparent, not only at the EU level, but in general, to make processes more comprehensible. In many places, there is a lack of political education. And the voting age should be lowered to 16 years. This could be the key to empowerment and more inclusion of young people.



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What can the European Year of Youth 2022 achieve in this context or what did it achieve and what follow-up is needed from 2023 on?

Sakiye Boukari: The → European Year of Youth 2022 has a lot of potential. The general awareness created by this Year of Youth through a lot of media presence and funding of various youth projects alone has already brought us and our concerns to the fore. Now, however, this momentum must not flatten out, but the actual concerns behind the project's name must become better known. It is not about celebrating youth for one year, but about taking us seriously and working sustainably on the implementation of young people's demands by involving us. This means: even if the term or description "European Year of Youth" is no longer there in 2023, the funding, the work and everything behind it must be maintained.

Kristóf Papp: The → European Year of Youth 2022 is a great initiative, because it creates numerous opportunities to centre policymaking on young people. Europe should build on this success and make this year a turning point for an entire generation, by adopting an EU Youth Test²² – an evaluation of the impact that any new draft law may have on youth in the EU. For the EU Youth Test to be effective, we believe it needs to include three elements: consistent consultations with young people, youth organisations, and youth experts; systematic assessments of the impact that EU law may have on young people and especially vulnerable youth, and mitigation measures if the assessment reveals any potential negative impact. This is the legacy that young people stated they would like to see come out of the European Year of Youth, and we still hope to see it become a reality.

Transnational mobility of young Europeans. How to overcome existing barriers?

PROGRAMMES FOR TRANS-NATIONAL MOBILITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE EU

The *Erasmus+* programme promotes the mobility of learning individuals and supports people of all ages in acquiring employability and intercultural skills. In the current funding period 2021–2027, the budget has been increased to 28 billion euros – almost twice as much as in the previous funding period 2014–2020. *Erasmus+ Youth* is the programme part for out-of-school youth exchanges within *Erasmus+*. In the new funding period, the programme is to become more inclusive and to reimburse participants with fewer opportunities 100 percent of their travel and accommodation costs.

DiscoverEU is a programme within *Erasmus+*. It gives away train tickets to young people aged 18, allowing them to travel by train across the EU for 30 days. Since the start of the programme, more than 130,000 young people have received a Travel Pass.

The *European Solidarity Corps*, launched in 2016, is an initiative that offers young people between the ages of 18 and 35 the opportunity to participate in solidarity activities in their own country or abroad in various fields such as health or environmental protection, through a volunteer project, internship or work. The budget for the current funding period 2021–2027 is around one billion euros.

Complementing *Erasmus+* and the *European Solidarity Corps*, the new *ALMA* (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) programme of 2022 will particularly target young people who are not in employment, education or training. People who often need special support will be offered supervised stays abroad of two to six months in which they can expand their skills, knowledge and experience. The programme is thus also part of the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee. It is implemented by the Member States within the framework of the European Social Fund Plus and supported at EU level by the European Commission.

Kacper Król, 23 years old, is a member of the → *European Pool of Young Journalists*. He studies Media Production and International Law at the Maria Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland. Kacper Król has already visited several countries through different *Erasmus+* projects and gained experience in a *European Solidarity Corps* project in North Macedonia. He wrote his Master's thesis on the influence of participation in the *European Solidarity Corps* on tolerance towards other cultures and minorities.

Kacper Król, European Pool of Young Journalists: “Promoting trips within the framework of various EU programmes and changing other people's perceptions of reality by showing them development opportunities is my passion. Remember to cross the borders – not only of other countries but also your own!”

European integration, modern technological development and globalisation provide young people, especially Europeans, with many opportunities to develop and gain valuable experience, which can be crucial in finding their dream job. European-funded programmes such as *Erasmus*, the *European Solidarity Corps* or *DiscoverEU* open the way to travel to many countries. This is an opportunity for young people to develop professionally, get out of their comfort zone and information bubble, and change their views and behaviour for the better.

Professional development and success can be a driver for self-confidence and satisfaction, which is, after all, very important from a psychological point of view. This is especially true for young people, who are struggling with a number of issues such as reduced social contact and remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, unfavourable prospects due to inflation and the unfolding crisis, climate change, and furthermore pressures specific to the younger generations such as emotional problems, issues with employment or housing. This in turn causes a lot of stress, which leads to an increased risk of diseases like depression or anxiety.

EU programmes aimed at the young confront pressing social problems. Participation in them allows us to gain valuable, inspiring experience that can broaden our horizons and change the lives of many young people for the better. Living in the rush of the modern world often makes young people choose not to participate in a particular project. Often this is not determined by the decision of the individual but by a number of barriers that should be dealt with by EU institutions and individual countries.



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This article describes the barriers that should be solved by policy in order to better plan future tools to support mobility in terms of the new generation of EU programmes in the field of education and youth.

BOLOGNA PROCESS

The Bologna Process, launched in 1999, aims to improve the coherence of higher education systems in Europe. 49 countries in the EU and Eastern Europe are involved.

The exchange of students and university staff is to be facilitated, national higher education systems further developed and the qualification of specialists improved. To this end, comparable study structures (namely tiered study structure with Bachelor's and Master's degrees), quality assurance based on common standards and guidelines as well as transparency instruments such as qualification frameworks, diploma supplements and ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) are to be created.

At regular meetings of the science and education ministers of the Bologna area, developments in the European higher education reform are assessed and priorities for the next working period are defined. The rotating chairmanship for the twelfth Bologna Ministerial Conference, taking place in 2024, will be held by Albania.

More current information about the Bologna Process can be found at the Albanian chairmanship's [website](#).

Mobility is undoubtedly an important part of EU policy. It can influence the strength of the European Union in the future with new generations in power. European Union publications and Bologna Process documents emphasise the added value of mobility. An example is the Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué²⁴ in which we can read: “**Mobility is important for personal development and employability; it also fosters respect for diversity and the development of the ability to interact with other cultures**”. Another example testifying to the essence of mobility is the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of December 18, 2006, on transnational mobility within the Community for education and training purposes and the adoption of the European Quality Charter for Mobility²⁵. As the document reads: “**Mobility in education and training is an integral part of the free movement of persons, and one of the main objectives of the European Union's action in the field of education and training based on both shared values and respect for diversity**”.

Just two years later, the Council Recommendation of November 20, 2008, on the mobility of young volunteers in the European Union²⁶ was published. The document reads that in order to put Europe on the road to economic recovery, it is imperative to improve the quality of human capital and increase employability by raising skill levels. Also, the right to improve skills should not be an exclusive good, a luxury that only a few individuals can afford, as it is a necessity for everyone at the current stage of development. The latest recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers in the European Union²⁷ was issued on April 5 this year. In the document, the Council recommends promoting transnational volunteering in Europe and beyond. This is through the implementation of properly prepared activities such as facilitating the exchange on practices between member states on eliminating obstacles that may pre-

vent young people from participating in volunteerism and providing targeted support for the development of volunteering. The Council states that mobility brings with it a myriad of benefits which can be divided into personal, social, economic and professional benefits.

How to make mobility a reality for everyone?

In order for the above-mentioned benefits to really reach young people in Europe it is the potential participants who must take part in the selected projects. And it's hard to believe, but there are still many barriers to overcome. Challenges that potential participants face are very diverse and dependent on the individual or the country in question.

One of the biggest problems is the **lack of knowledge** about travel opportunities under various programmes, especially in smaller towns. Despite the fact that the European Union has a policy of cohesion and equal opportunities, there is still much to be done in the field of education. Many schools do not establish cooperation with other institutions and organisations, which makes the opportunities for development smaller. The creation of networks for support and development of educational mobility through the creation of partnerships at national, European, regional and local levels is therefore very important for changing this situation. Next-generation programs should include activities for target groups of different ages – both in formal, non-formal and informal education.

Another important problem is **funding**. As the EUROSTUDENT report²⁸ shows, mobility is mostly the privilege of students with high social status. In most countries, students from high-education backgrounds are more likely to take study-related stays abroad; in some countries, their share is more than three times that of students from lower-educated families. Two-thirds of Erasmus participants say the stipend is insufficient, so it will be necessary to increase the average stipend or provide other financial support to make mobility more accessible, attractive and socially equitable within the programme.



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VOICES OF YOUNG EUROPEANS: THE YOUNG GENERATION BETWEEN MOBILITY AND CLIMATE CRISIS

In her article "The Dilemma of the Young Generation: Between Mobility and the Climate Crisis", Leonie Kirstein from the European Pool of Young Journalists describes the environmentally harmful consequences of mobility for the young generation and the respective need for action.

Scientific research on sustainability and mobility of young people

With the project [Learning Mobility in Times of Climate Change](#) by the International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany (IJAB), the first study on the connection between youth, mobility and climate change from the perspective of young people was carried out in 2022. The results from seven EU and non-EU countries show that young people consider climate change to be a serious issue. Young people who travel more often estimate their climate impact to be higher than those who travel less often. Being mobile is enormously important to young people and from their point of view, digital formats cannot replace travel. However, they are willing to adapt their mode of travel, for example by using climate-friendly means of transport or travelling less frequently. One fifth of the respondents were involved in groups or political parties dedicated to the climate. The study contains a number of suggestions for international youth work regarding the climate-sensitive design of programmes and the question of how international youth work can support and promote engagement in the context of climate issues.

A common reason for not deciding to participate in EU programmes aimed at young people is **language competence**. Students with lower social status are more likely to have insufficient language competence. It is therefore clear that efforts should be made to increase language competence and the availability of appropriate courses.

Looking at the above data and my own observations, one can see that through the problems the young are currently facing and the pressures they are imposing on themselves, making decisions that require courage and are in any way risky is a major challenge. After returning from projects abroad, many of my friends asked me what they needed to do to take advantage of the opportunity to go on an Erasmus+ trip, for example. Most of them were surprised how easy it is. Lack of information is, in my opinion, one of the main problems why young people, despite so many opportunities, do not develop the desire and courage to take advantage of them. Often it is not the fault of these particular people. Many of them are not even aware that their reality could be completely different being somewhere else and making new experiences. I can tell from my own experience: after a volunteer experience, you will never be the same again.

ABOUT THE OBSERVATORY

The Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe is a project by the Institute for Social Work and Social Education (ISS). The team of the Observatory analyses sociopolitical developments in Europe and their potential impact on Germany. We publish working papers on relevant sociopolitical topics, monitor European social policies and organise European Expert Meetings. The aim of our work is to connect key sociopolitical actors across Europe, promote the exchange of expertise and foster mutual learning. The Observatory is funded by the German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ).

Endnotes

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