

# Europe for YOUTh YOUTh for Europe

## Space for Democracy and Participation

EU Youth Conference Report  
and Implementation Toolbox

12-15 March | Vila Nova de Gaia (Portugal)

8TH CYCLE OF THE  
EU YOUTH DIALOGUE



EDUCAÇÃO



Co-financed:



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## FOREWORD

The following report presents an overview of the second conference of the 8th Cycle of the European Union (EU) Youth Dialogue, under the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Written under the auspices of the Portuguese National Youth Council, it contains an overview of the conference's programme and sessions. It delves into the outcomes formulated by the hybrid online-physical conference participants, and whose Conference was broadcasted from Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal.<sup>1</sup>

The final purpose of this report is to provide the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Representatives of Member States' Governments, and other relevant stakeholders — such as policymakers, decision-makers, youth organisations and young people— with enough material to start forging youth policies and projects that reflect the views of European youngsters on Youth Goal #9: Space and Participation for All.

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<sup>1</sup>Disclaimer: Such outcomes reflect the views of the EU Youth Conference participants and by no means represent those of the Portuguese Ministry of Education, the Portuguese Government or the Portuguese National Youth Council and the partner institutions co-operating with them.

## CONCEPT

Within the framework of the Portuguese Presidency **of the Council of the European Union**, which runs from January 1 to June 30, 2021, the **Portuguese Ministry of Education** and the **National Youth Council** hosted the **European Union Youth Conference** from March 12 to 15, 2021.

The Portuguese EU Youth Conference is part of the 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, which focuses on Youth Goal #9 “Space and Participation for All”, under the motto “Europe for YOUTH - YOUTH for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation”. By gathering 150 participants from youth and ministerial representatives to organisations and European institutions working in the field of Youth, this event aimed to promote debates around several aspects of Youth Goal #9. It also provided a roadmap for decision-makers, youth organisations and young people to work on democracy promotion among youngsters at local, regional, national, and European levels during this Dialogue cycle’s Implementation Phase. These proposals—debated, shaped, and decided by the participants — culminated in a toolbox of actions, measures and political recommendations to help achieve European Youth Goal #9 and its seven targets<sup>1</sup>.

Simultaneously, between March 12-13, a 48-hour EU Youth Digital Hackathon “SOLVE THE GAP” also took place. Organised by the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the Portuguese National Youth Council, it aimed at promoting and supporting the

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<sup>1</sup> The European Youth Goal 9 and its 7 targets can be found here: <http://www.youthconf.at/youthgoal-9/>

development of youth-led innovative digital solutions to tackle the barriers young people find daily in participating in the democratic political decision-making, with the creation of a digital tool to boost young people's participation.

Both the EU Youth Conference and the Hackathon took place digitally and were broadcasted from Vila Nova de Gaia. Due to the COVID-19 safety measures, the only people physically allowed in the conference were the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU Youth Team and volunteers.

**However, this is not a one-off event!**

Each EU Youth Dialogue cycle runs over 18 months, under a Trio Presidency, which works together on a previously agreed topic and goal, in line with the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

The current cycle, running from July 1 2020 to December 31 2021, focuses on Youth Goal #9 "Space and Participation for All", and its seven targets and is currently held by the Trio Presidency of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia.

The Portuguese EU Youth Conference was the second of the current cycle. After an experimentation period, where the outcomes it conveyed are expected to be tested in the field, the Slovenian EU Youth Conference will undertake an evaluation and put forward some recommendations.

# PROGRAMME AND METHODOLOGY

Overview of the Portuguese EU Youth Conference programme:

**2021 PORTUGAL\_EU**

**Programme**  
(All times in WET - Western European Time)

**Friday, 12th March, 2021**

15:00 | Reception and technical check  
16:00 | Welcoming session  
*Message by the Mayor of the Host City Vila Nova de Gaia Eduardo Vitor Rodrigues*  
*Message by the Vice-president of the EU Commission Margaritis Schinas*  
*Welcome speech by the President of the Portuguese National Youth Council João Pedro Videira*  
*Welcome speech by the Portuguese Minister of Education Tiago Brandão Rodrigues*  
16:30 | Panel Discussion *Strengthening Democracy with Young people: the way forward*  
*Speakers: Lana Paiss, Research and Youth Policy Officer, EU-CoE Youth Partnership*  
17:15 | Presentation of the Hackathon and Conference programme  
17:30 | EU Youth Conference meets: Solve the GAP 48-hour EU Youth Hackathon  
*Breakout sessions with Conference and Hackathon participants*  
18:30 | End of 1st day of the Conference.  
19:00 | Cultural Programme  
*Quiz Night and Europa Grand Café*

**2021 PORTUGAL\_EU**

**Saturday, 13th March, 2021**

09:00 | Presentation of the programme for the day  
09:15 | Road to the Portuguese EU Youth Conference  
*Presentation of the main conclusions of the German EU Youth Conference*  
*Presentation of the Qualitative Consultations Report*  
*Speakers: Marius Schlotter, Vice President of the German Federal Youth Council; Dan Maxon and Maria-Carmen Ponte, European researchers*  
10:15 | Coffee break  
10:30 | Youth Goal #9 Become Youth Actions: working groups  
12:15 | Lunch break  
13:30 | Youth Goal #9 Become Youth Actions (Continuation of working groups)  
15:15 | Coffee break  
15:30 | Youth Goal #9 Become Youth Actions (Continuation of working groups)  
17:00 | End of the 2nd day of the conference  
20:00 | Cultural Programme  
*Game Night and Europa Grand Café*

**Sunday, 14th March, 2021**

09:00 | Plenary and preparation of dialogues with decision-makers  
09:30 | Dialogues with decision-makers  
(Breakout dialogue sessions with decision-makers on each target of Youth Goal #9)  
1. European Youth Goal #9, target 1: young people can adequately influence all areas of society and decision making  
*Dialogue with Mr. João Paulo Rebelo, Secretary of State of Youth and Sports*  
2. European Youth Goal #9, Target 2: Ensure equal access and inclusion of young people from all backgrounds in decision-making  
*Dialogue with Mr. Pedro Silva Pereira, Vice-President of the European Parliament*

**2021 PORTUGAL\_EU**

**Monday, 15th March, 2021**

09:30 | Presentation of the programme for the day  
10:00 | Announcement of the Hackathon winner and Address to the Conference  
*Address by the Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel*  
*Address by the Portuguese Minister of Education Tiago Brandão Rodrigues*  
10:15 | Presentation of Working Group Conclusions  
11:00 | Coffee Break  
11:15 | Panel Discussion *Future of Europe: Space and Participation for young people*

**2021 PORTUGAL\_EU**

**Speakers:** Director-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission Themis Christofidou; Portuguese Secretary of State of Youth and Sports João Paulo Rebelo; President of the European Youth Forum Silja Markula; President of the National Youth Council João Pedro Videira

12:15 | Official Closing session  
*Speech by the President of the Portuguese National Youth Council João Pedro Videira*  
*Speech by the Portuguese Secretary of State of Youth and Sports João Paulo Rebelo*  
*A symbolic transfer from Portugal to Slovenia*  
*Speech by the President of the Slovenian National Youth Council Miha Župančič*  
*Speech by the Director of the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, Ministry of Education, Science and Sports Daljeka Kores*  
13:00 | End of the EU Youth Conference

This event was implemented with **non-formal education methodologies**, combining formal plenary moments with interactive working groups. During the latter, divided by targets and having the reports of the qualitative consultations as a starting point, participants worked together to put forward concrete proposals with the support of our facilitators and rapporteurs. They identified the most pressing issues regarding each target and formulated action plans to tackle them. In doing so, youngsters had the opportunity to share their ideas and debate them with policymakers.



## Going digital: Portuguese EU Youth Conference best practices

To live through a pandemic is not an easy task, nor is it to organise a conference!

Since we understand the importance of continuing to organise youth events during the pandemic, the Portuguese National Youth Council took the liberty to provide you with some tips and tricks our team learnt while organising this conference.

✓ **Digital tools became our best friends.** | Both the plenaries and the working group sessions were facilitated entirely online, through tools such as the Portuguese EU Youth Conference platform, Zoom meeting rooms, Mentimeter and Padlet. These allowed us to capture our participants' attention and to keep the event as interactive as possible.

✓ **Together... but always two meters apart.** | Our in-person team, mainly composed of our excellent facilitators and rapporteurs, was divided into rooms spanning two floors of the venue. Each working group team — one facilitator and two rapporteurs — had their own assigned room and worked from the same room throughout the conference. These rooms were big enough to allow our team to practice physical distancing, were well ventilated, and equipped with hand sanitiser. Nevertheless, masks were mandatory at all times.

✓ **The day does not end until the cultural programme does.** | To provide our participants with as much 'normalcy' as we could, our cultural programme was tailored to allow participants, speakers, policymakers, and staff to interact with each other and to get to know a bit of the culture of Portugal and the EU Youth Dialogue. Thus, we have organised quiz nights, a live concert and played online games (such as the very popular Among Us) to keep our spirits up!

# Plenaries

# Plenary 1

## Welcoming Session & Strengthening Democracy with Young people: the way forward

*Friday, March 12 2021 | Rapporteurs: João Novais & Margarida Vale*

On the first day of the conference, the participants were digitally received in Vila Nova de Gaia, in northern Portugal. The participants were welcomed by some high-level policymakers and youth representatives, among whom were:

- ✓ Eduardo Vítor Rodrigues, Vila Nova de Gaia Town Hall Mayor;
- ✓ Margaritis Schinas, European Commission's Vice-President and Commissioner for "Promoting our European Way of Life";
- ✓ João Pedro Vieira, President of the Portuguese National Youth Council.
- ✓ Tiago Brandão Rodrigues, Portuguese Minister of Education;

All speakers emphasised the need to promote unity and stressed the role of youth as the guardians of democracy and change-makers for the future of Europe.



*"[...] we know that young people are underrepresented in decision-making processes that affect their lives, even though their involvement is crucial for democracy"*

*Portuguese Minister of Education, Tiago Brandão Rodrigues*

It was also widely recognised that mechanisms of change and debate must be settled to enhance participation rates and engagement in policy-making; and that youngsters are increasingly more participative within politics.



*“[...] apart from ensuring co-decision across all sectors of life that impact on young people, we want to aim higher and change the way young people engage in democracy and how democracy is accessible and appealing to young people.”*

*João Pedro Videira, President of the Portuguese National Youth Council*

According to a 2019 Eurobarometer survey (*Flash Eurobarometer 478: **How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people***), “77% of young people took part in activities of political movements, parties or unions; student or youth organisations; campaigns, strikes or street protests; volunteering activities or local community projects”.

The welcoming session was followed by a panel discussion on **Strengthening Democracy with Young people: the way forward**. This session included the insights of Lana Pasic, Youth Researcher and Policy Officer at the European Union-Council of Europe Youth Partnership team.

The panel debated how youth is essential for decision-making processes. Not only do they have the right to participate and possess different perspectives on the issues at hand, but also, as future decision-makers, it could be an excellent way for them to get in touch with the inner workings of democracy. Participation is often undermined by socioeconomic factors, lack of representation, role models and youth spaces for political participation. However, not even the COVID-19 pandemic stopped young people from

keeping their participation alive: even if they are eager to go back to physical spaces, digital participation has gained momentum among them — and it is expected to keep on being more present even after the pandemic is over. Nevertheless, special attention must be paid to the risk of radicalisation that online participation can pose.

The speakers concluded the session by stressing the need to create safe spaces and local participation hubs for young people to freely express their ideas and ideals, focusing on representation growth, creativity, initiative, entrepreneurship, among others. These aim at ensuring meaningful participation and countering hostile reactions against youth participation in public spaces.

## Plenary 2

### The Road to the Portuguese EU Youth Conference

*Saturday, March 13 2021 | Rapporteurs: Inês Filipa Monteiro, André Monteiro & Bruno Alves*

The second day of the conference started with yet another plenary session, looking into the work preceding the Portuguese EU Youth Conference. It counted on the following keynote speakers:

- ✓ Marius Schlageter, Vice-President of the German National Youth Council;
- ✓ Dan Moxon & Maria-Carmen Pantea, Members of the Pool of Youth researchers coordinated by the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth.

This session mainly focused on the main conclusions drawn out of the German EU Youth Conference and of the qualitative consultations to young people undertaken at national and European levels. Marius Schlageter enlightened the participants on the German conference process, the seven outcomes and political demands that came out of it, what they meant, and how they are equally crucial to the process.

The youth researchers then ensued with the presentation of the Qualitative Consultations Report. Dan Moxon, for example, focused on three significant findings and solutions:

1. Schools are the main places for participation and involvement of young people;
2. Training programs and projects convey a way for the inclusion and participation of young people;
3. Elections are the most challenging and complex form of engagement of young people — and politicians are one of the biggest obstacles. Many young people do not

feel represented in politics, and the solution could go through their involvement in youth political organisations and political participation spaces, paving the way for a better understanding and communication with politicians.

Maria-Carmen, on the other hand, stressed the importance of accessibility to physical and digital youth spaces. Even if schools are the primary place for youth participation, it still is not enough to ensure, support or even increase such participation. The leading suggestions put forward by young people include making youth participation spaces green, closer to their homes, of easy access and public. As for the digital world, youngsters would like straightforward, easy, and fun spaces — while also raising the concern of cyberbullying and asking for policies to address this problem.

Other pressing issues were mentioned: the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the quality of youth employment/work; and the lack of political preparedness of schools (fear of partisanship allegations), youth workers (avoidance of controversial topics), political parties (not proactive enough), and other public spaces to provide youngsters with trustworthy, youth-friendly and reliable information on politics. The latter is an incredibly worrying topic in the age of fake news and concerns over online safety. To counter these tendencies, some of the proposed solutions are the promotion of critical thinking in schools, classes on media literacy, accountability towards social media companies — and, ultimately, lowering the voting age to 16 was also mentioned to increase youth participation. As citizens of democratic systems, young people should be able to vote.

## Plenary 3

### Future of Europe: Space and Participation for Young People

Monday, March 15 2021 | Rapporteurs: Ema Gonçalves & Liliana Macedo

The closing panel of the Portuguese EU Youth Conference touched upon several aspects regarding the Future of Europe, youngsters and their genuine participation in political processes. The debate gathered the following high-level speakers:

- ✓ Themis Christophidou, European Commission's Director-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture;
- ✓ João Paulo Rebelo, Portuguese Secretary of State for Youth and Sport;
- ✓ Silja Markkula, President of the European Youth Forum;
- ✓ João Pedro Videira, President of the Portuguese National Youth Council.

During the debate, the speakers emphasised the need to effectively include young people in all parts of decision and participation processes — through, for example, the promotion of more events such as the EU Youth Conference. Education and training opportunities, vital for youth empowerment, are more critical than ever due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



*"More than ever, we need youth to be involved, to create a snowball effect and inspire more and more youngsters to get involved."*

*João Paulo Rebelo, Portuguese Secretary  
of State for Youth and Sport*

As a source of transforming, creative and innovative energy, youth need to have adequate spaces to express themselves and co-coordinate their own participation spaces and opportunities. These include the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth and the Youth Forum Lisboa+21, jointly organised by the Portuguese Government and the Portuguese National Youth Council in 2019. Thus, the need for safe digital spaces and an evaluation of how governments, institutions, and organisations might pose barriers and shrink youth participation spaces were addressed once again.

However, to reach these goals before 2030 requires some significant changes:

- ✓ More extensive inclusion of young people in decision-making positions, not only in politics but also projects and businesses;
- ✓ Open access to more opportunities, more information and more debates, without discrimination or fear of retaliation or repercussions;
- ✓ More funding and expansion possibilities for youth spaces;
- ✓ Transparency across processes.

The panel also highlighted this conference's results as a good step forward in implementing better spaces for youth participation. Simultaneously, as Silja Markkula put it, "**young people have to make sure they are not the forgotten generation** and participate in co-decision making". Even though there is still a long way to go, youth are the future of public policy and democracy, which they will uphold in a more inclusive, universal and participatory manner.

OUTCOMES  
OUTCOMES  
OUTCOMES  
OUTCOMES  
**TOOLBOX**

FOR IMPLEMENTATION PHASE  
FOR IMPLEMENTATION PHASE



## Target #1:

**Young people can adequately influence all areas of society and decision making**

*Facilitator: José Pedro Santos | Rapporteurs: Pedro Ribeiro & Luís Pliteiro | 13-15 participants*

During the working sessions, the group highlighted the following topics as the most important:

- ✓ Communication and transparency of political bodies and youth NGOs;
- ✓ Consultation processes in policy and law-making;
- ✓ Civic education accessibility;
- ✓ Participation methods.

The participants' showed concern over the lack of connection to decision-making, justified by the lack of involvement and even interest of young people in such processes. This can derive from various problems — failure in communications, for example, was highlighted, considered inadequate today, and seen as a future solution for young Europeans' involvement in decision-making processes. These issues were related to broad participation and consultation processes and how youth's influence in policies has impacted its implementation.

When discussing which actions to take forward, participants reinforced the need to include young people in decision-making processes. The Portuguese Secretary of State for Youth and Sport, João Paulo Rebelo, who was present during the action plan's construction, also stressed the group's diversity. The need to include young people in the discussion of all subjects, not just some of them, was also put forward, and a warning was made: most young people take democracy for granted, which poses a severe risk to democracy itself.

## Final actions proposed:

- ✓ **Action 1** | Taking inspiration from the EU Youth Dialogue, **Member States might set up similar mechanisms on the national/local level to consult young people on national/local topics.** There should also be commitments to update and report on the outcomes of consultations regularly.
- ✓ **Action 2** | Space & Participation for all can be achieved by **creating an informative online platform for NGOs & experts to allow people access to quality civic & NFE education.** This can be achieved by bringing together stakeholders to meet the needs of young people, educators and youth workers. Civic education can be a crucial change-maker and has a vital role in making young people's democratic engagement stronger. Shared knowledge for shared (online) spaces!
- ✓ **Action 3** | **Increase INGYOs' and NYCs' ability to reach, attract and represent all young people by establishing subsidiaries in the regions, adopting digital communication strategies, enhancing youth-led management, and setting up regular, direct meeting platforms for youth representatives and decision-makers.**
- ✓ **Action 4** | **Creating an online consultation platform for young people and youth organisations, and authorities at the local/national level to improve connection and make sure that everyone can participate in the decision-making process.**





# For Inspiration and Action

- ✓ **Action 1** | The EU Youth Dialogue itself!
- ✓ **Action 2** | Salto Youth has a platform exclusively available for NGOs, youth workers but excludes educators. No platform is widely available to everyone. The Council of Europe has a lot of manuals, toolboxes, handbooks and educational activities. However, a platform for NGOs, experts and organisations would allow for a more hands-on, tailored approach that people cannot get from having a one-size-fits-all toolkit.
- ✓ **Action 4** | Projects such as [Lisboa Ideia “ideation platform”](#) (Portugal); [Bowen Island Municipality public engagement platform](#) (Canada); [Consul Free software for citizen participation](#) (worldwide).



## Target #2:

### Ensure equal access and inclusion of young people from all backgrounds in decision-making

*Facilitator: Sonia Abbondio | Rapporteurs: Ema Gonçalves, Liliana Macedo & Diva Oliveira | 16-24 participants*

During the working sessions, the group highlighted the following issues as the most pressing:

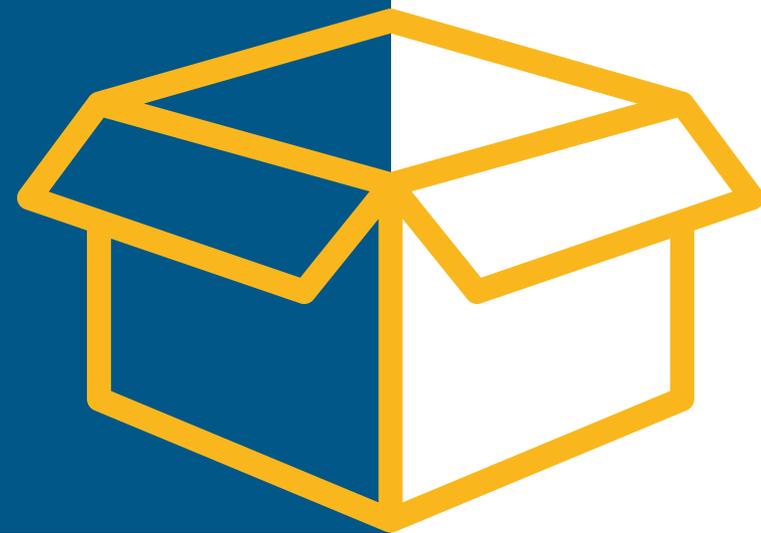
- ✓ Quality of political and civic education in schools;
- ✓ Access to information about decision making and participation programmes;
- ✓ Representation of people from minority backgrounds in politics and participation in general.

Inclusion, inequality, marginalised groups, civic and political education, youth information and outreach programmes were some of the topics brought about by the participants while talking about the issues mentioned above, which were somewhat related to the outcomes of the German EU Youth Conference. During the working group session, participants found worrying the lack of non-formal education in schools and the fact that civic education was not delved further into — which could be affected by lack of resources, recognition and local representatives proactive towards youth. Furthermore, it was said that youth opportunities are not as widely spread as they should, especially when looking into inequality across backgrounds. Frequently one's ability to participate or get access to such opportunities is undermined if, for example, they do not speak English or have to work to financially help their families — and lack of political representation also plays a significant role here. The most connected and the most represented are often the ones privileged enough to participate the most.

When discussing which actions to take forward, participants reinforced the need to fight structural racism and discrimination and use non-formal education to empower youngsters — especially those coming from minority and marginalised groups — to participate in politics. However, such education for politics must be done factually and neutrally. Pedro Silva Pereira, Vice-President of the European Parliament, was present during the construction of the action plan and also stressed that youngsters are not a homogenous group, and the inequalities such a diverse group bore before the pandemic were now exacerbated. Thus, there is a need to reach out to youngsters, especially those coming from groups traditionally left out and to include them in conferences such as the Conference on the Future of Europe. The Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union is very much in line with these issues, as it is working towards a more social Europe.

## Final actions proposed:

- ✓ **Action 1 | Non-formal education and advocacy training for youth to empower them.** Implementing training strategies based on peer-to-peer non-formal education would help overcome structural barriers youth from minority and marginalised backgrounds face. Through community-based activism, equipping them with tools and skills would also equally and inclusively empower youth participation as a whole. This bottom-up, locally anchored approach allows young people to create a sustainable and far-reaching impact.
- ✓ **Action 2 | Throughout the next year, it would be advisable for the EU to conduct quantitative and qualitative surveys concerning examples of best practices in the field of political/civic education.** These would contribute to creating a roadmap to educate young children on how to become active European citizens.
- ✓ **Action 3 | Involve young people from minorities when providing information for them,** especially regarding policies and other information concerning them. Inclusive language must be used, avoiding formal jargon and using youth/minority slang. A bottom-up strategy would be most effective: young people must be involved, and local and national youth organisations must act as information hubs and transmit the information.
- ✓ **Action 4 | Prioritise minority areas and groups when planning the expansion of physical infrastructures (through the European Recovery Fund).** The EU could set up user-friendly guidelines on how the Recovery Fund is to be spent. Given that cultural minority areas and groups are often overlooked in these plans, investments towards them should be higher, especially when planning physical infrastructures' expansion.





# For Inspiration for Action

- ✓ **Action 1** | The [Council of Europe's Study Sessions](#) are a good example and some other non-formal education training courses, which have been highly beneficial and establish concrete outcomes (increased engagement, upskilling, among others). Peer-to-peer training is excellent at empowering youth from marginalised/minority backgrounds — seeing success from within their communities might motivate their development.
- ✓ **Action 3** | In the Netherlands, an EU-funded project is gathering young people who have experienced Juvenile Law themselves, the police and the government. Together, they create information that the police then provides to victims or suspects.
- ✓ **Action 4** | In 2016, Sweden began a broadband strategy to provide the majority of the country with high-speed broadband and high-quality mobile service.



## Target #3:

### Increase youth participation and ensure equal representation of youth in the electoral process

*Facilitator: Albertina Magalhães | Rapporteurs: Hermínio Alves & Rita Miranda | 19 participants*

During the working sessions, the group highlighted the following topics as the most important:

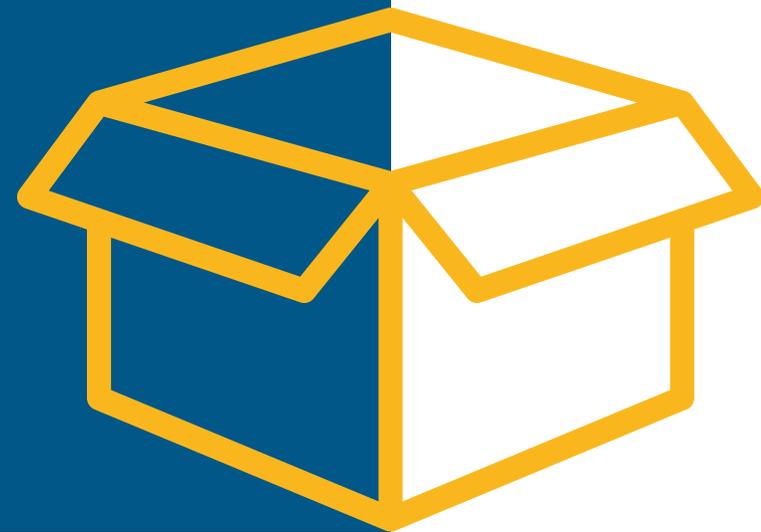
- ✓ Elections and voting (with a focus on lowering the voting age to 16);
- ✓ Politicians and political parties;
- ✓ Quotas and representation.

Focusing on the lack of youth representation in political bodies, participants highlighted that political agendas do not contemplate electing young people, possibly because politicians — and society at large — distrust them, especially when they run for office or try to be “good” decision-makers. This comes not only from older generations but also from their young peers. Distrust then causes under-representation, lack of support from organisations, and further stigmatising and stereotyping youth, leading them to lose confidence in democracy and politics. Furthermore, based on national constitutions, electoral laws make it difficult to lower the voting age, undermining their desire to participate. And the lack of political information is not helpful either: the current data is often targeted and partial/subjective (mainly from political parties), leaves young people out, and school curriculums are not equipped or up-to-date enough to tackle the void left.

When discussing which actions to take forward, participants identified the need for political parties to develop youth strategies so that more young people take part on their electoral lists and run for office. Having youth better represented and accounted for in the elected bodies may raise youth engagement in general. However, the group highlighted lowering the voting age to 16 years old as the most critical way to encourage and empower young people to participate in politics. This must be supplemented by schools, which must focus on democratic citizenship education. Inspiration could be drawn from non-formal education and youth organisations to create a European toolkit on citizenship education and adapting school curriculums to include political education.

## Final actions proposed:

- ✓ **Action 1 | Making young people meaningful democratic citizens: through citizenship education and lowering the voting age to 16.** Lowering the voting age would encourage and empower youth to vote in local, regional, national, and European Parliament elections. Looking into existing practices within the EU, this should complement democratic citizenship education (both formal and non-formal), toolkits and training.
- ✓ **Action 2 | Increase the number of young people in Parliaments and other elected bodies.** Underrepresentation of youth must be tackled by developing political parties' strategies to include more people in their ranks and electoral lists. This must be complemented by campaigns focusing on young elected politicians and their political careers (how did they penetrate the political bubble). These would tackle the question of representation and make youngsters more prone to participate and aware of political possibilities. Presenting young people as responsible and accountable for their role in democratic processes would regain trust from society at large, not only in politics but also in youth.
- ✓ **Action 3 | Creating a new school curriculum on electoral processes and systems.** Young people often encounter difficulties when looking for factual information on electoral processes. To challenge this, the suggestion of creating EU-level guidelines for national school curricula to bridge the gap between formal and non-formal education on electoral processes came about. To be developed by working groups composed of educators, officials and young people, it should focus on more practical ("learn-by-doing") approaches to the electoral process, as these would be more accessible to children of all ages and neurodivergent youth.





# For Inspiration and Action

- ✓ **Action 1 |** In Austria, the voting age was lowered to 16, together with educational initiatives to complement the new voting age.

In Sweden, a social media campaign was set up to counter the myths and arguments against lowering the voting age with facts.

In multiple countries, simulations of national assemblies and local city councils are held for school students.

In Denmark, there was a three-week course for school students on political issues, ideologies and debates with representatives from all political youth parties.

- ✓ **Action 2 |** There are youth-led segments of political parties (such as the [Young Greens](#)). National and European-level parties also have youth departments (for example, [LYMEC](#)).
- ✓ **Action 3 |** The Council of Europe's project "[Competences for Democratic Culture](#)".



## Target #4:

### Provide autonomous, open, safe, accessible and youth-led physical youth spaces

Facilitator: José Dias | Rapporteurs: Jorge Vinhas & Filipa Pereira | 12 participants

During the working sessions, the group highlighted the following issues as the most important:

- ✓ Youth-led youth spaces and their usage;
- ✓ Youth representation at the local level;
- ✓ Repurposing urban voids with public spaces;
- ✓ Recognition of non-formal education and youth skills.

The participants discussed the need to allow young people to be seen as users and partners in the physical spaces they use. These hybrid and fluid spaces must be well-thought in terms of architectural functionality; they can act as a stage for youth and student participation at large and must be politically neutral and safe for all (especially LGBTQ+ youth). The group also focused on the lack of funding and motivation for youth organisations to develop projects, mainly due to the bureaucratic hassle they have to go through. Lack of funding can also be a severe problem when it comes to making an organisation sustainable.

When discussing which actions to take forward, participants reinforced the need to include young people in decision-making and management processes, granting them a way to be involved in the use of youth-focused spaces. Antje Rothmund, Head of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, who was present during the construction of the action plan, spoke about how the COVID-19 pandemic made it harder for gathering youth in such spaces. She also invited participants to think about what gets lost in online meeting dynamics. There is no possible substitute for informal and physical spaces — and the feeling of belonging plays a significant role here.

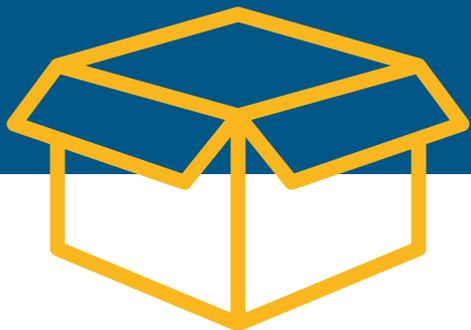


*“If we lack spaces where we can meet, we also lack spaces where we can commit.”*

***Antje Rothmund, Head of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe***

## Final actions proposed:

- ✓ **Action 1 | Fluid use of space.** This would allow youth to have an open space to develop their projects, skills, build new youth groups and organisations, socialise and network. It could also serve as a place to explore untapped resources while providing valuable facilities, storage spaces, and information about other shared spaces. This could take the form of a website and be maintained by NYCs.
- ✓ **Action 2 | Youth spaces should be led by youth.** Incentivising youth centres to allow and train young people to participate in decision-making and managing processes would result in a better, more efficient usage of resources. This way, youngsters would learn about active citizenship and centres would be better equipped to fulfil youth's needs. It would also attract more young people as well as empower them.
- ✓ **Action 3 | Hybrid use of spaces.** Creating friendly, free, safe, green, inclusive spaces for the participation and engagement of young people is essential to implement projects and activities for/by/with them. Inclusive youth work is vital. Furthermore, an official statement from the EU about the possibility of improving funding for youth spaces focused on non-formal education and for organisations with less capacity would help implement these projects.



**for Inspiration  
action**

- ✓ **Action 1 | Quality label for youth centres by the Council of Europe.**



## Target #5: Ensure safe virtual spaces for every young person

*Facilitator: Amal Haa | Rapporteurs: João Novais & Margarida Vale | 15 participants*

During the working sessions, the group highlighted the following topics as the most important:

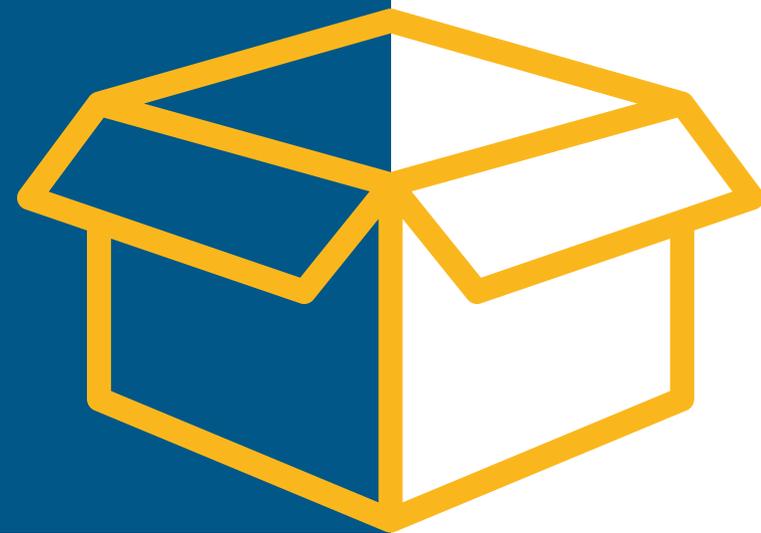
- ✓ Safe, open, inclusive and accessible digital spaces for everyone;
- ✓ Digital gap and competencies;
- ✓ Digitalisation of public services;
- ✓ Hate speech and fake news;
- ✓ Help-seeking platforms.

The participants recognised social interaction is over. Therefore, there is a more significant need to invest in digital spaces for youth. Websites and platforms focusing on youth content might attract youngsters to physical spaces in the future. However, we need to look into which platforms to use (the ones younger generations have migrated to) and tend for the existing ones: some governments have platforms tailored for young people, with helpful information and opportunities, but they are simply not popular. They also recognised the importance of establishing boundaries and online regulations, especially when it comes to fake news and online bullying. However, if disadvantaged youngsters cannot get access to hardware and education on how to use digital spaces, they will never develop their competencies and build upon their digital participation.

When discussing which actions to take forward, participants once again stressed that digital platforms and tools are not always accessible and inclusive for all — and some guidelines must be drafted to tackle these and other existing problems related to youth navigating digital spaces. The Director of the Slovenian Republic's Office for Youth, Dolores Kores, stressed the importance of non-formal education in bridging gaps that formal education might not cover. The pandemic came to accentuate systemic problems and aggravate some others — for example, mental health deterioration — but youth participation still improved. However, the speaker also mentioned that tackling accessibility (especially for people with disabilities) is still moving at a slow pace and what has been done is not enough.

## Final actions proposed:

- ✓ **Action 1 | Ratifying guidelines for safe, inclusive and accessible platforms and tools.** Within the context of a European legislative framework for digital youth spaces, guidelines should be ratified to assure youth-friendly, safe and inclusive digital spaces to all young people. For the drafting, a steering group of experts and young people must be settled. Once drafted, the guidelines should be converted into a legislative framework to pass on a European level by the end of next year. The last step would be the implementation by Member States.
- ✓ **Action 2 | Increasing young people's ability to influence the implementation of policy proposals originating from online consultations.** Providing young people who have participated or are interested in consultations with their respective results and information. The implementation of the proposals arising from online consultations should be gathered in a centralised platform — so that young people can do a follow-up and thereby hold decision-makers accountable.
- ✓ **Action 3 | Developing digital competencies, skills and equal access to all young people across the EU through formal and non-formal education.** Training and equipping young people with competencies on information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving would increase the above-mentioned overall basic skills. Learning communities must be physical and online and conducted by national authorities (but always involve the youth sector, young people, European Institutions, researchers, and universities).





# For Inspiration and Action

- ✓ **Action 1** | EU quality labels (in the context of a legal framework) for youth centres and hostels. If they are youth-friendly and fulfil a list of conditions/guidelines, they get this label.
- ✓ The [United Nations' UPR system \(Universal Periodic Review on the Human Rights Declaration\)](#) is another excellent example. Every country is under review every five years, and both the government and civil society are involved in the process. A similar review system could be settled, as well as guidelines for digital youth spaces.



## Target #6:

### Ensure sustainable funding, common recognition and development of quality youth work that supports youth participation

*Facilitator: Rafael Gomes | Rapporteurs: Inês Filipa Monteiro & André Monteiro | 10-15 participants*

During the working sessions, the group emphasised the following issues as the most pressing:

Consequences of COVID-19 on youth (funding & employment);

- ✓ Recognition of youth work;
- ✓ Support of youth structures.

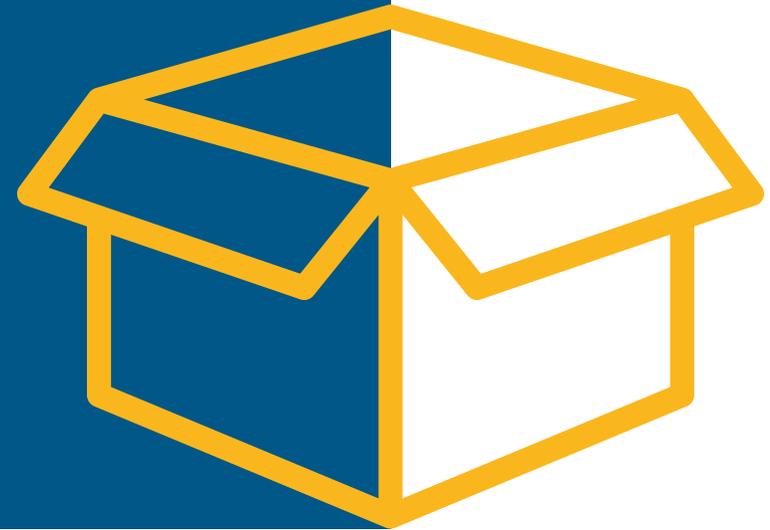
This working group's participants focused on the insurance of sustainable funding, common recognition and quality development of youth work relating to youth participation. Participants were mainly concerned about the underfunding of marginalised groups and smaller organisations (due to the considerable heterogeneity of youth work organisations) and the lack of legal basis for the access of youth organisations to structural and long-term funding — proposing that appropriate financing of Youth Work should become a right that youth organisations all over the EU should be entitled to. There is also a concern for the lack of flexibility, especially towards the projects affected by the pandemic (which had to be abruptly dropped and caused financial problems to the organisations involved). Youth work is not recognised, and youth organisations lack supporting staff (for example, psychologists, social workers, specialists in linking education and disability, interpreters, among others) and safe spaces for their activities. Furthermore, there is a bureaucratic problem: project calls

are designed to accept “perfect” proposals from professionals more efficiently than those of informal groups of young people.

When discussing which actions must be taken, the group recalled the need for bottom-up assistance and collaboration; and additional structural funding to decrease funding inequality among NGOs dependent solely on national funds. This extra funding would push organisations to become more resilient and prepared to face economic crises, such as the one provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ideas for a platform and mechanisms to follow up on youth work development in Europe were also put forward.

## Final actions proposed:

- ✓ **Action 1** | **Creating a platform for assisting bottom-up, youth-led initiatives and youth organisations**, via interdisciplinary teams and additional support staff, at local and regional levels. Such bottom-up initiatives might be supported through the allocation of the participatory budget.
- ✓ **Action 2** | **Setting up a monitoring mechanism to follow the implementation of the [European Youth Work Agenda](#)**. This gives Member States all the necessary tools and resources to have an implementation process while also keeping contact and each other accountable for their progress. Each country would have to report the actions taken every year for at least five years in a row to follow the Bonn process.
- ✓ **Action 3** | **Creating better and centralised data on European funding support**, where it becomes possible to find funding and training and mentoring to draft grant applications.
- ✓ **Action 4** | To provide high-quality youth work, **additional structural funding is needed to decrease funding inequalities between different national NGOs that depend on national funds** to make organisations more resilient to crises. Therefore, it is suggested to implement a mechanism of direct European funding by 2023, which would enable youth organisations and informal youth groups to continue their work.





# For Inspiration Action

- ✓ **Action 1 | [Education & Training Monitor](#)** → In the field of Education & Training, the EU has a similar tool called Education & Training Monitor. Every year, EU Member States have to report about their progress. The report collects national data regarding the implementation of the E&T framework, and everyone has access to the report and can compare the progress in every country.
- ✓ **[Bologna Process implementation report](#)** → Every two years, Ministers of Education discuss the implementation of the Bologna Process. During the ministerial conference, the Bologna Process implementation report is released.
- ✓ **Action 3 |** The European Commission has [something similar on their website regarding their Youth Strategy](#).
- ✓ **Action 4 |** In Germany, there is structural funding for youth organisations.
- ✓ In Slovenia, there is a [portal with all grant calls](#).



## Target #7:

### Provide youth-friendly, comprehensive information to enable youth participation

Facilitator: Ana Carolina Loureiro | Rapporteurs: Catarina Leite & Rita Spínola | 16-17 participants

During the working sessions, the group emphasised the following topics as the most important:

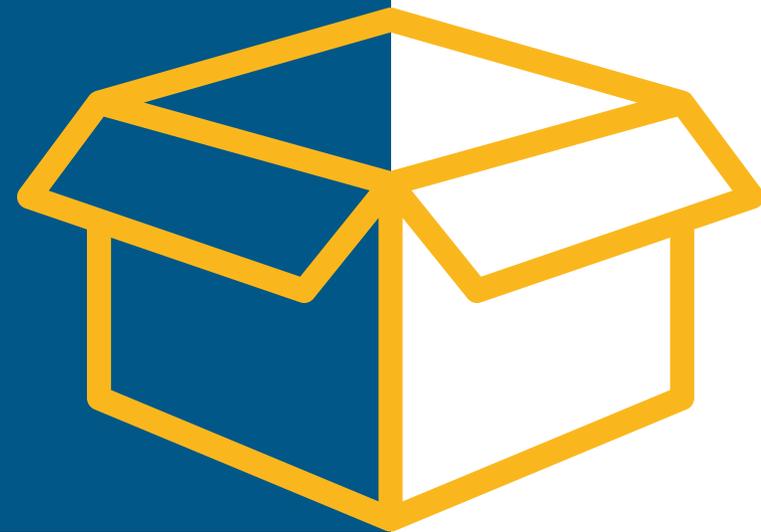
- ✓ Quality and accessibility to information;
- ✓ Format of information;
- ✓ Social Media.

The participants stated several times that there is an overload of information. There are too many sources of information — thus, it becomes harder to filter whether such information is reliable or not. This merges with the idea of lack of opportunities for young people to give information and the necessity for information to be more youth-friendly. Regarding accessibility, the group focused a lot on the different contexts young people might live in, including educational, cultural, geographical, and socio-economical. They highlighted that information must be easily comprehensible and, once again, youth-friendly. It was also often mentioned that the contemporary format in which information is shared should be digital. Lastly, when considering social media, information overload comes back to the discussion, to what participants called “information noise”. They also spoke about how hard it is to access, primarily due to a vast number of different platforms — so many that problems both with its quality and security, privacy and hate speech were addressed.

When discussing which actions to take forward, participants stressed the need to expand youth information and counselling services, break existing barriers, and reach more young people. The information provided must be reliable, clear, concise and focused on topics relevant for youth. Non-formal education was also brought to the debate, alongside the suggestion of including it in civic education, critical thinking and social media curriculum, capable of engaging young people politically and of improving the European societal discourse. To achieve the aforementioned, guidelines must be created, and funding must be provided. Lastly, participants advocated for a European youth-led space to share content and information regarding the Youth Goals.

## Final actions proposed:

- ✓ **Action 1 | Expanding the school curriculum by including national and international non-governmental organisations** in the employment of non-formal education methods concerning citizenship, critical thinking, and social media in schools. This would encourage youth to be more democratically and socially active within the EU while developing critical thinking and active citizenship skills, forging a more harmonious social media environment, and promoting NGOs and civil society's greater involvement. This would require creating guidelines and providing financial aid for projects that follow these aims.
- ✓ **Action 2 | Expanding youth information and counselling services online and offline.** Youth information and counselling services should be expanded online and offline to reach all youngsters and provide them with reliable, clear and concise information on a range of issues they find relevant. From local consultations to climate change, mental health, career choices, volunteering, leisure, housing, urban planning, curriculum and much more. Information for youth and by youth would empower young people to become active citizens. Furthermore, providing them with access to different sources and channels and training for youth and youth workers is recommended.
- ✓ **Action 3 | Creating a prototype for a European Youth Platform, an online space led by young people** (INGYOs, NWGs, NYCs, local organisations, among others). The EU Youth Platform would be a youth-led open space to share content in various formats for all young people across Europe. Initially, the platform could focus on the Youth Goals — however, its primary purpose would be to have a common, tangible outcome, to be accessed even between cycles, presidencies and EUYCs.





# for Inspiration for action

- ✓ **Action 1** | [Good practices in Denmark](#) → School elections in primary schools, where pupils learn by doing. Youth politicians go to different schools to debate and afterwards pupils have to vote. This could be expanded to include media, social media and other actors — and thus learn about media literacy and critical thinking.
- ✓ [Good practices in Belgium](#) → There is a “Citizenship and philosophy” course in many schools. This could be expanded to include media literacy, critical thinking, and other topics mentioned above.
- ✓ Good practice in Poland → There is a mandatory course for everyone in the first year of high school called “Civic Education”. It delves into political systems and democratic processes (constitution, laws, rights..) and includes education about media and information literacy. There is an elective course in the last year of high school, which further expands these concepts.
- ✓ Good practice in The Netherlands → In all educational levels in Dutch schools, ‘civic science’ is an obligatory part of education. This concerns political systems, with a focus on the Dutch system and democratic processes.
- ✓ Several pilots were started by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, where Dutch youngsters give their opinion and express their views on democracy and democratic values and participation and representation.

# for Inspiration for action

- ✓ An Instagram account by a national news broadcaster (@nosstories, 843.000 followers) specifically targets young people. Most posts consist of videos of 50 seconds with spoken word and subtitles on current news topics. For more in-depth content, they create IGTVs. For many young Dutch citizens, this is the primary source of (objective) news.
- ✓ Similar actions → Euroclasses by Eurodesk: the size and presence of local multipliers in member countries varies quite a lot. Therefore, not all countries have Euroclasses as a possibility. Thus, it is proposed to further encourage partnerships between youth organizations, NGOs, and Youth Information Centres as potential multipliers of Eurodesk to expand the implementation of Euroclasses in all Member countries, particularly in schools. By doing so, non-formal learning methods would be present — as well as civil society — in schools and thereby bring together big platforms (the school, connected to most youth) and actors active in citizenship promotion, European awareness, and education (NGOs).
- ✓ **Action 2** | Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on fostering democratic awareness and democratic engagement among young people in Europe.
- ✓ European Youth Information Charter.
- ✓ Good practices from Spain, France and Italy have the highest number of information points. Finland has a youth information competence centre (know-how).
- ✓ Eurodesk makes information on learning mobility comprehensive and accessible to young people and those who work with them.
- ✓ **Action 3** | European Youth Portal and Youth Wiki<sup>1</sup>, Café Babel and WYRED.

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<sup>1</sup> Both are not youth-led!

## CONCLUSIONS

After four days of dynamic and insightful dialogues and sessions, the Conference's end was brought about with a final plenary, where the main ideas drawn out of the Conference's working groups were presented. All these concern Youth Goal #9, the opinions of the Conference participants and the plenary's panel of high-level speakers.

- ✓ Information overload? | Youngsters need to be given relevant skills and knowledge. There needs to be an expansion of the school curriculum to include non-formal education: creative thinking, active citizenship, and practice decision-making (regarding the knowledge they receive). Digitalisation cannot be forgotten here.
- ✓ 16 as the new voting age. | This is believed to be a realistic objective for the next European elections. Allowing youngsters to vote at the age of 16 would ensure that their participation would become more direct and meaningful and raise awareness for political representation.

✓ Never enough talking about digital platforms! | A lot of digital tools and platforms can be unsafe, manipulative and hold incorrect information — and the COVID-19 pandemic accentuated these problems. Thus, the creation of EU guidelines and quality labels for platforms would be advisable. For youth participation to be positive and valuable, there must be a secure and responsible environment to practice it. But first, universal access to the internet must become a reality, and the COVID-19 pandemic is the perfect backdrop for accelerating investments in the digital transition and cyberspace security.

✓ More international NGOs. | These have to be as inclusive and diverse as possible, and no young person should be afraid to join youth organisations because of their governments. Furthermore, there is a strong political sense of responsibility and commitment towards building participation spaces/opportunities for youth with youth.

*“Ultimately, it is about what youth want — and it is our job to support them.”*

*Themis Christophidou, European Commission’s Director-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture*



Speakers also stressed that many young people take democracy for granted — which can cause their lack of participation. However, when there are causes that they are sensitive to and passionate about, youngsters know how to mobilise and change the political status quo. This is possible nowadays due to the increasing openness of political decision-makers, which can help the 2030 ambition of expanding youth spaces.

*“I invite policymakers to have this dialogue with young people, so they can learn, grow and truly be part of this process.”*

*Silja Markkula,  
President of the European Youth Forum*



## WHAT'S NEXT?

As no EU Youth Conference is a standalone event, the Portuguese conference hopes to inspire the pursuit for a fairer, more equitable and democratic participation of young people. The Portuguese EU Youth Conference's outcomes will be presented to decision-makers — national and European — and youth.

Thus, after sharing the problems, the solutions and the best practices identified by the young Europeans who participated in this event, we expect that governments, institutions and youth organisations alike can experiment and test them in the field, transforming them into real change. There will be an evaluation during the Slovenian EU Youth Conference, and some final recommendations will be put forward.

Furthermore, the outcomes of the EU Youth Dialogue's current cycle — comprising the German, Portuguese and Slovenian EU Youth Conferences — will contribute to the resolution to be adopted by the Council of EU Youth Ministers, to be held during the Slovenian Presidency in late 2021.

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