

Adopted by
the General Assembly

Ghent, Belgium
22-23 November 2024

Policy Programme

Contents

1. Democracy	3
1.1. Durable and Resilient Democracies	3
1.2. Recognition and Protection of Youth Rights	3
1.3. Youth Perspective to European Integration	4
1.4. Young People and Democracy	4
2. Youth Organisations and Safeguarding Young People’s Civic Space	5
2.1. Funding for Youth Organisations	6
2.2. Recognition of Non-Formal Education, Youth Work, Volunteering and Learning Mobility	7
2.3. Recognition of National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organizations	8
3. Ecological Crises	8
3.1. Environmental Protection and Resource Justice	8
3.2. Just Transition and Sustainable Fiscal Policy	9
4. Social and Economic Inclusion	11
4.1. Quality Employment	11
4.2. Life Out of Poverty	12
4.3. Youth Emancipation	12
5. Equality, Inclusion and Diversity	14
6. Digitalisation	15

1. Democracy

1.1. Durable and Resilient Democracies

Young people have been at the heart of most recent social movements, leading protests and campaigns, as well as activism on social media worldwide. However, there is a gap between the way young people are participating in politics and the forms of participation that institutional politics is built on. Moreover young people continue to be overlooked as stakeholders in our political systems.

Young people's concerns have been absent from political debate, legislative reform, and institutional processes and young people lack the spaces and structures to contribute in a meaningful way to policies. This leads to policy decisions that, at best, do not positively impact young people, and, at worst, negatively impact young people.

The path to building the trust of young people in democracy is to include them fully in its functioning, to reduce the distance between policymakers and young people and, importantly, to show results that improve the lives of young people.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Governments to include civic education as an obligatory part of formal education curricula, and to ensure adequate support and recognition for youth organisations who also provide civic education to young people through non-formal methods.
- The recognition and safeguarding of independent and democratic youth councils at all levels, from local to European, to bring young people's concerns to the attention of policymakers.
- Policy-making to include co-management and co-creation structures where young people and youth organisations cooperate directly with decision-makers.
- Governments to structurally assess the impact proposed policies are likely to have on youth and future generations, during legislative processes,

and to introduce mitigation measures where negative impact is identified.

- Governments and institutions to meaningfully include young people and youth organisations, especially those that are from marginalised backgrounds, throughout all policymaking processes that affect them. This means youth participation in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies.
- Youth participation and representation mechanisms that are democratic, inclusive, transparent and accountable, to ensure a rights-based approach, underpinned by democracy and representation, inclusiveness, transparency and accountability, and effective and meaningful participation.
- Governments and institutions to commit resources to encouraging young people to self-organise, particularly young people from marginalised backgrounds.

1.2. Recognition and Protection of Youth Rights

Youth rights refer to the universal and inalienable rights and freedoms of young people. This includes the creation or elaboration of certain rights to eliminate intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality.

A rights-based approach to youth recognises young people as rights-holders, and holds decision-makers, states and institutions accountable, as duty bearers. It supports young people to claim their rights, ensures that all policies work for young people, and strives towards the meaningful and systematic inclusion and empowerment of those in the most vulnerable situations.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Youth rights to be recognised, protected, respected, fulfilled, and mainstreamed across existing and future legal frameworks.
- A rights-based approach to youth to be recognised as a tool for ensuring that young people

are recognised as rights-holders and that governments are recognised as duty bearers.

- A rights-based approach to be applied to all policies as a key tool to tackle the root causes of inequalities and address structural injustices.
- The recognition of youth as a transition phase between childhood and adulthood up until and including 35 years old, and the rights held during this period.
- The adoption of a legally binding UN Convention on the Rights of Young People with an accompanying monitoring mechanism.
- Youth rights to be mainstreamed in human rights monitoring mechanisms.
- The establishment of a UN Special Procedure on the human rights of young people, such as an Independent Expert or Special Rapporteur.
- Government and other data collection bodies to provide more disaggregated and inclusive data on youth, which is easily accessible and transparent.
- Young people's right to equal opportunities and non-discrimination to be ensured, and for governments and institutions to develop anti-discrimination policies, especially addressing age-based and multiple other types of discrimination suffered by youth and specific groups of young people.
- Measures to be taken to increase young people's awareness of their rights, affirmative action for marginalised groups, as well as redress mechanisms in case of discrimination.
- Young people and youth organisations to be recognised as promoters of peaceful and inclusive societies, including through the implementation of UN, CoE and EU resolutions on youth, peace and security across all policy fields.

1.3. Youth Perspective to European Integration

The European Union is a peace project, founded on the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy,

equality, rule of law, and human rights, which young people have a fundamental role in shaping and promoting. Membership in the EU should remain open to all European countries that are not yet, or are no longer, part of the EU, provided they meet the necessary criteria for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

The European Union should develop and maintain strong cooperation with neighbouring countries who are not members of the EU but who are committed to the EU's founding values and foster active European citizenship through education and learning.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- The accession of countries that wish to join the EU, provided they meet the necessary criteria for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.
- Facilitation of European mobility and fostering of cross-cultural integration by improving the Schengen Area decision making mechanisms and streamlining visa procedures for young people. Further, supporting the integration of non-EU states into the ERASMUS+ programme, as a means of improving youth mobility across Europe.
- Expand the outreach and impact of EU Youth Programmes, including the EU Youth Dialogue process, by involving all willing non-EU European countries that uphold democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.
- The national institutions to work with youth organisations and to actively incorporate youth perspective and youth needs into the national accession plans for EU candidate and potential candidate countries.
- Stronger integration of the European Union, more effective leadership, more collaboration between countries and stronger social cohesion between European citizens.

1.4. Young People and Democracy

Representative democracy is the cornerstone of making policies relevant to all citizens. Yet young people's activism and participation is not reflected in

institutional politics as participation within this space has been declining for more than two decades. This trend is most evident in diminishing youth turnouts in elections and decreasing youth membership in political parties.

In a situation where electoral turnout and party membership amongst young people is low, political parties and candidates are less inclined to include youth issues and perspectives in their campaigns and policy agendas. This creates a vicious cycle where young people are increasingly disengaged from politics. This issue is particularly detrimental to young people from racialised and ethnic-minority communities, who are already significantly under-represented in political spaces.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- The lowering of the voting age to 16 in all elections.
- The age limits for the right to vote and the right to stand for elections to be aligned in all public elections.
- Active measures to raise the number of young people voting and running in elections, in partnership with youth organisations, such as increased access to voting in elections, including via e-voting.
- Political parties to ensure the promotion of youth interests.
- Political parties to earmark funding and to work with their youth organisations to select, train and promote young candidates, and especially those with diverse backgrounds, to elections at all levels of legislature.
- Public institutions to inform voters, especially young people, of electoral processes explaining why, when and how to participate in elections.
- Election campaigns to include debates that focus on young people and the issues they care about, and provide youth with platforms to challenge and debate all topics with electoral candidates.

- Free, easy and inclusive access to information and transparent governance in institutions and public authorities.

2. Youth Organisations and Safeguarding Young People's Civic Space

Civil society organisations, including youth organisations, perform a number of functions that are necessary in promoting and safeguarding basic human rights and democracy. An open civil society is one of the most important safeguards against tyranny, oppression and other anti-democratic tendencies. Expanding spaces for youth organisations is key to fostering active citizenship, social cohesion, and empowering young people to shape a society that reflects their values.

Yet, civil society organisations face serious obstacles in their work, some even experience or fear retribution from their governments when expressing their views. Youth civil society is especially vulnerable to these types of pressure.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- A wider and stronger recognition of the transformative influence of youth organisations and their positive impact on society.
- A strong civic space for young people, in which youth organisations can operate autonomously and free from any government interference and retribution.
- The protection of the rights of young people to engage in youth advocacy and to freely express their political preferences by allowing peaceful gatherings, demonstrations, and other public manifestations, and protecting young people from violence and subsequent politically motivated detention.
- The effect of disinformation, polarisation and hate crime on the realisation of civic and political rights to be tackled in a manner which itself does not hinder the exercising of those rights.

- The rule of law to be safeguarded, and the protection and promotion of young people's individual civic and political rights to be ensured.
- Strengthened monitoring (and research on) anti-democratic actions as well as governmental and institutional actions which otherwise shrink or limit civic space.
- Governments to be held accountable for infringements on civic space.
- Governments to support young human rights defenders from all around the globe and to ensure their right to political asylum when needed.

2.1. Funding for Youth Organisations

Sustainable and inclusive funding for youth organisations is essential for a strong civic space, where young people have opportunities and youth organisations can thrive.

Insufficient institutional and core funding opportunities, along with the widespread practice of project-based funding, hinder youth organisations from consistent and self-determined work. For youth organisations to reach out to all young people, further develop and offer quality learning opportunities for young people, and represent the interests of their members, sustainable institutional funding opportunities adapted to the needs and realities of youth organisations are key. Access to such funding would also decrease the organisation's vulnerabilities and dependencies and therefore boost the impact of youth organisations' work.

By sufficiently funding youth organisations, young people are enabled to participate in quality non-formal education, youth work, volunteering and learning mobility opportunities. The product of these opportunities are young active citizens, who uphold multicultural and democratic values, active in our democracy and decision-making processes.

Youth organisations are essential actors in democracies and are key enablers in young people's enjoyment of basic rights, in complement to the representation of the voices of young people in their whole diversity towards decision-making

processes. If youth organisations lack sustainable funding mechanisms, our democracy grows weaker.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Sustainable and inclusive funding for youth organisations.
- Youth organisations to be financially supported to perform their role as legitimate representative voices of young people.
- Burdensome administrative procedures faced by funding applicants to be simplified and the structural barriers preventing young people of diverse backgrounds from accessing youth funding schemes to be removed, ensuring greater inclusivity.
- The removal of barriers and thresholds imposed on youth organisations to acquire funding, including from foreign sources.
- Additional funds to be provided to advance inclusion and diversity in programmes for youth and the activities of youth organisations.
- Additional funds to be provided for youth organisations to organise global cooperation activities (e.g. between the global south and global north) to support climate and social justice.
- Transparency regarding the management of public funding.
- Governments and public institutions to acknowledge the horizontal nature of youth policies by ensuring needed investments and funding for youth in all relevant policies.
- Governments, institutions and donors, to ensure sufficient and sustainable funding for youth organisations in order to financially and structurally operate freely and conduct activities autonomously.
- Governments and institutions to grant structural funding schemes in order to ensure that youth organisations do not rely solely on short term project funding.

- The European Commission, national authorities and Erasmus+ National Agencies to involve youth organisations in advisory and consultative bodies on the functioning of funding programmes for youth, particularly the EU Youth Programmes.
- The Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes to be recognised respectively for their unique purpose, and to ensure they remain independent of one another.
- The Council of Europe to continue its dedicated and essential support for the youth sector and youth organisations in Europe through the European Youth Foundation.

2.2. Recognition of Non-Formal Education, Youth Work, Volunteering and Learning Mobility

Youth organisations play a crucial role in providing education that goes beyond formal settings, particularly through non-formal education programmes.

As key providers of youth work, these organisations, including volunteer-based initiatives, deserve recognition for the value they bring to communities. Not all youth workers are paid or hold formal qualifications, but their contributions remain essential to the broader landscape of youth development across Europe.

Recognising the importance of non-formal education and learning mobility in shaping young people's skills, competencies, and agency offers them unique, transformative experiences, especially in cross-border settings. Youth work and volunteering further promote inclusivity by removing barriers to participation and building resilient, democratic communities.

Learning mobility enhances cultural understanding, multilingualism, and European citizenship, empowering young people with the intercultural skills needed for today's interconnected world. The European Cultural Convention facilitates these exchanges, enabling youth to gain personal, professional, and intercultural competencies. To broaden

access, mobility schemes should maintain low entry barriers and minimal administrative requirements.

By integrating non-formal education, youth work, volunteering, and learning mobility, young people are empowered to contribute meaningfully to their communities and society, fostering a more inclusive and peaceful world.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Non-formal education, youth work, volunteering and learning mobility to be recognised and supported as key pathways for quality civic and citizenship education. Governments to ensure free and equal access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- Governments and institutions to recognise and support youth organisations as providers of quality education and to support partnerships between youth organisations and formal education providers.
- Governments and institutions to recognise and validate the competences and skills gained through non-formal education, youth work, volunteering, and informal learning through youth organisations.
- Governments and institutions to recognise the role and value of volunteer-based youth work, as a complement to paid youth work.
- Education providers to empower learners to take an active role in their own learning, and to become agents of change within their own educational process.
- Governments and institutions to promote youth mobility by increasing opportunities, removing barriers and facilitating direct cross-border contacts, with particular support for young people with fewer opportunities.
- The provision of financial and administrative assistance to ensure the sustainability and inclusivity of learning mobility programs.
- The creation of distinct visa categories for different types of learning mobility, such as study, internships, volunteering, and exchanges.

2.3. Recognition of National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organizations

National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations, which bring together millions of young people across Europe, are the representatives of young people in their diversity. They play a crucial role in collecting and bringing forward young people's demands, reflecting the realities of young people in an intersectional way.

Young people have the right to decide who represents them towards institutions and in policy-making processes. Beyond just consulting with young people, institutions need to treat their respective National Youth Councils, as well as the International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations, as equal partners in decision-making processes.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Legislation that formally recognises independent, democratic and youth-led National Youth Councils (NYCs) and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs) as the chosen representatives of young people, establishing their legal status and ensuring their voices are institutionally respected and included in decision-making processes.
- The creation of transparent and structural consultation processes that require governments and European institutions to seek input from NYCs and INGYOs on policies affecting youth, and co-creating and monitoring youth-focused strategies.
- Governments and institutions to provide consistent and sustainable funding to NYCs and INGYOs to ensure they have the resources to participate effectively in decision-making processes.

3. Ecological Crises

3.1. Environmental Protection and Resource Justice

Young people and youth organisations are key actors to deliver solutions that work toward sustainable development, foster a healthy environment and ensure that no one is left behind.

The environmental crises, especially the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis, are emergencies that require immediate and decisive action from all states, institutions and sectors of society and economy. Overconsumption by rich countries and the EU, is a major driver of global environmental degradation and resource depletion. As a result, poorer countries face disproportionate impacts from ecological crises, including severe climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource scarcity, which hinder their development and exacerbate inequality.

However, the current efforts to address these crises are significantly insufficient and progressing far too slowly. Youth are leading the global social movements demanding climate action. Despite being the most affected by having to live with the consequences of inaction, youth are often excluded from decision-making processes. This exclusion often leads to the development of short-sighted policies and insufficient ambitions by governments and other stakeholders to the detriment of young people and future generations.

To effectively work towards solving these crises, sustainable development must be embraced as the guiding principle across all domains of society, economy, and environment. This principle envisions a future where the needs and rights of all, including future generations, are met within the planet's ecological limits, particularly without exceeding the Earth's natural resources and life-supporting systems.

However, current policy and investment decisions frequently overlook key indicators of environmental health, wellbeing and social equity. As central actors in the push for sustainable development, young people and youth organisations must be meaning-

fully included in the decision-making processes to create a more just and sustainable future.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Governments, institutions and agencies to recognise young people as crucial actors in decision-making processes and impactful governance related to climate action, environmental protection and sustainable development, given that young people will face the harshest consequences as a result of inaction.
- Governments, institutions and agencies to recognise youth organisations as key actors in decision-making processes related to climate action, environmental protection, resource justice and sustainable development, given their unique insight in creating spaces to support young people to learn, develop and create impact.
- The principle of sustainable development, as defined in Agenda 2030, to be mainstreamed across all policy making, ensuring all future policies contribute to a society where the needs and rights of all, including future generations, are met within our planetary means.
- Social justice to be central to climate policies, guided by a principle of climate and resource justice vis-à-vis the Global South and marginalised populations within Europe, ensuring affordable and accessible climate solutions particularly for young people.
- The recognition of formal and non-formal education as an important mechanism to combat the climate crisis, hence supporting the accessibility of education relating to climate change, environmental protection, sustainable development and active citizenship.
- A sufficiency approach which centres on green energy transition, circular economy, green industrial policy, sustainable mobility and environmental protection in order to address the climate and ecological crises.
- Decision-makers to recognise and prioritise the climate and biodiversity crises as emergencies when developing and implementing policies

and integration of environmental impact into all decision-making processes.

- Decision-makers to acknowledge that the climate crisis and biodiversity loss are cross-cutting challenges linked to other policy areas including, but not limited to, health and wellbeing, forced migration, poverty, and security.
- Governments and institutions to implement concrete, binding, and immediate plans with updated Nationally Determined Contributions aligned with outcomes of the first global stock-take from COP28 (CMA.5) to not only meet obligations under the Paris Agreement, but to set more ambitious targets based on scientific evidence to stay below 1.5 degrees warming.
- The EU to reduce its emissions by at least 65% by 2030 and to support Member States in transitioning to climate neutrality.
- We call the EU to be at the forefront of a global movement to phase out fossil fuels by shifting fossil fuel subsidies to renewable energy by 2030 at the latest, endorse the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (FFNPT) and encourage other countries to also commit to a time-bound phase-out of fossil fuels.
- European Institutions and governments to establish a legal objective to reach a sustainable level of resource consumption to its biocapacity in order to protect our environment, based on equitable exchange with the Global South.

3.2. Just Transition and Sustainable Fiscal Policy

To achieve the goal of fostering a just transition, it is essential to align the priorities of European governments with the needs and aspirations of young people. A just transition envisions a shift to an economy focused on providing good lives for all within ecological limits, moving away from fossil fuels to 100% renewable energy, more democratic control by workers and fair income distribution, and global solidarity. This requires not only a shift in how economic progress is measured and pursued but also a commitment to policies that ensure fairness and sustainability. A green and fair tax system,

quality public spending, and strong cooperation with national governments are crucial components of this shift. These measures must be designed to protect vulnerable populations, support workers affected by the transition, and prioritise investments that secure the wellbeing of current and future generations. Additionally, comprehensive formal and non-formal education on sustainable fiscal policy and just transition is important to equip young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to drive and adapt to the changes ahead.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Fiscal policy emphasising sustainability, based on the polluter-pays principle, and prioritising spending on a green and just transition
- Taxes to contribute to the inclusion of negative externalities into prices, starting with greenhouse gas emissions, with consideration for low-income households and others disproportionately affected by the rising cost of living.
- An accelerated just and sustainable transition to a 100% renewable energy supply, that is clean, affordable and does not lead to energy poverty.
- We call for an encouraging plant-based food systems that support local food productions sustainably as well as for it to be supported by government subsidies and investment, emphasising on the mitigation benefits, also in the light of global food security, environmental degradation, and antibiotic resistance and diseases
- Institutions to reform the fiscal rules that obstruct necessary investment in climate-change mitigation and carbon-free transition, providing more flexibility and better democratic accountability.
- Governments to adopt a broader vision of progress, beyond GDP and economic indicators, by focusing on wellbeing, social and environmental impacts when assessing policies.
- Governments and institutions to step up green and sustainable investments, with a special focus on intergenerational solidarity that is fairer and far less costly than postponing those necessary investments to the future in return for less public debt today.
- Governments to uphold the principle of intergenerational solidarity in fiscal policy in order to not arbitrarily and unfairly shift the cost of necessary investments onto young people and therefore limit the ability of today's and tomorrow's young people to access their rights.
- Sustainable pension funds restructuring, addressing demographic challenges, ensuring intergenerational justice and addressing intersectionality, and providing generation-appropriate solutions like fair adjustment of retirement ages and life-expectancy-linked benefits
- Austerity measures to not apply to essential investments, particularly those needed for the transition. Governments should explore alternative revenue sources before making cuts to public services.
- Tax systems to be simpler by implementing a common EU-wide tax year for personal taxation, that aligns with the calendar year (1st Jan - 31st Dec), and by using common terminology and definitions in national regulations around taxation.
- Tax systems to be fairer by adopting more progressive taxation and wealth redistribution, addressing intergenerational equity and intersectionality.
- Tax systems adhering to the principle of always maximising efficient use of public money, bearing in mind that governments are spending the taxpayers' money. Maximising value for money allows governments to lower the tax burden or provide more public services.
- Proper representation and inclusivity in the decision-making process of pension reforms and fiscal policy, with a strong emphasis on transparency, youth participation, and international cooperation to set global standards.

4. Social and Economic Inclusion

4.1. Quality Employment

The world of work is increasingly characterised by rising worker economic insecurity, as experienced through a growing number of temporary and low-pay jobs that lack long-term stability.

Young people have been at the forefront of this trend, making it difficult for them to secure and organise their time, achieve a sense of dignity and obtain the necessary material means to attain broader financial security and independence. This has negative long-term consequences, as the first years of someone's entrance to the labour market have an exponential impact on their working lives, pensions, and it is harder to plan long-term and become home-buyers. Such precarious working conditions also have a detrimental effect on young people's mental health.

At the same time, and on a broader level, the rise of artificial intelligence in the workplace, the climate crisis, demographic changes and lower trade union density are having a significant impact on how work is organised and distributed, creating new challenges for young people's access to quality employment. This is occurring against a backdrop of longer and non-linear transitions from education to the labour market.

Access to information related to the labour market and employment should be easy to attain. Clear and accessible guidelines should be readily available to help employers ensure fair treatment of all employees, with particular attention to protecting young workers. Free movement of employees should be secured, and every European state should strive to have a fair job market. Young people should have access to quality internships and traineeships with fair compensation. There should always be accessible opportunities to enable people to learn new skills or transition into different professions, especially in a constantly evolving labour market.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- The implementation of young people's right to stable, meaningful employment with decent

working conditions, including fair remuneration, quality training and learning content, access to social security, democratic participation, good work-life balance and protection of physical and psychosocial health, regardless of the type of contract.

- The recognition of full working rights for all people with disabilities.
- The recognition of understanding the links to precarious work and the negative impacts on young people's mental health.
- Governments to work towards a progressive reduction of the working week within full-time contracts.
- Governments to ensure young workers have access to fair wages and the removal of any sub-minimum rates targeting young people, to guarantee no young worker lives in poverty or at risk of poverty and severe material and social deprivation.
- Governments to ensure that back-to-back temporary contracts are kept to a minimum and that permanent employment contracts are made the rule rather than the exception.
- Governments to ensure that zero-hour contracts are kept to a minimum and that such workers have the right to request regular hours.
- Governments, together with, and in support of, trade unions, to ensure that young people entering the workforce are well-informed about their rights and protections in the workplace, and that democratic participation in the workplace is supported.
- Governments to enforce the right to disconnect, ensuring young people maintain a decent work-life balance without fear of reprisal.
- The EU and European countries to uphold and strengthen free movement of young workers for them to be able to travel and seek employment in the country of their choice, while implementing protective measures to ensure that free movement is not used by employers to bypass national social protection schemes.

- Governments and institutions to ensure young people's right to quality transitions from education to employment, in particular through schemes to create quality jobs for young people and the implementation and monitoring of quality standards for internships and apprenticeships, by banning unpaid internships and ensuring access to remuneration, training, and social protection.
- Public and private employers to provide quality jobs. This includes ensuring that internships and apprenticeships adhere to quality standards (such as on remuneration, right to training, and access to social protection) and do not lead to the replacement of standard jobs, also through better monitoring by public authorities.
- Governments and institutions to ensure adequate funding for youth employment programmes, promoting social inclusion and aiming to reach and support those most vulnerable and furthest away from the labour market.
- Decision-makers to ensure the effects of automation on young people in the labour market are mitigated through lifelong learning programmes

4.2. Life Out of Poverty

Poverty and social exclusion among young people is experienced as more than just material deprivation; they also result in a profound loss of agency, empowerment, and social relations. When young people are deprived of basic necessities, their capacity to make choices and shape their own lives is acutely restricted.

This loss of agency can have a lasting impact, suppressing potential and perpetuating generational poverty and social exclusion. In addition, those experiencing poverty do not have the means to attend social and cultural events, deepening their social exclusion.

Addressing poverty is intrinsically linked to promoting social inclusion. Social inclusion is about society ensuring the realisation of young people's economic and social rights. This includes the right to education and professional training, the right to decent work, the right to social protection, protection of and assistance to the family, the right to

decent housing, to mental and physical health, and an adequate standard of living.

However, our current economic system prioritises profits and growth over people's well-being, failing to provide the necessary conditions for young people to fully enjoy these rights. To ensure a thriving future, we must address the failing economic system and the root causes of harmful inequalities.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Decision-makers to ensure youth autonomy and inclusion, and that all young people, including those belonging to marginalised and vulnerable groups, have access to all their social and economic rights.
- Governments and institutions to promote education about social and economic rights among young people.
- The implementation of young people's right to welfare, housing, education and social assistance; social protection to be fair and allow a life of dignity above the poverty line.
- Governments and institutions ensure guaranteed access to high quality publicly funded, physical and mental healthcare, prioritising prevention.
- The recognition of the important role of sport, youth work, and youth organisations in promoting good mental health and strengthening resilience to prevent mental health issues, as well as strengthening social inclusion and cohesion.
- A follow-up to the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan which actively works towards the achievement of the 2030 targets, with a focus on quality opportunities which reach those most vulnerable.

4.3. Youth Emancipation

Youth emancipation is the process by which young people gain the independence and ability to fully participate in society on an equal footing. A large number of young people live with their parents until their mid-30s due to societal and economic factors such as high unemployment rates, low wages and

a challenging housing market, limiting their ability to achieve emancipation and independent living.

The right to affordable and decent housing is a fundamental building block that young people rely on to gain autonomy and live as active rights-holders. It is more than just shelter; it is a universal right and necessity that holds considerable social value. Without it, young people's participation in social, political, cultural and economic life is severely hampered.

And yet, for many young people, access to decent, secure, and affordable housing has become increasingly unattainable. This crisis is shaped by sky-rocketing rental costs, temporary rental contracts lacking long-term security, housing-price inflation and a shortage of quality publicly owned homes for social rent and affordable private ownership.

Housing is a vital prerequisite for youth emancipation and autonomy, essential for all young people. It should be of high-quality, affordable and secure as a foundational requirement, available to all young people irrespective of their economic or social status.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- An understanding of housing, as first and foremost, a lived, universal right and necessity possessing considerable social value.
- Building more homes in all sectors, especially for young people and students. This ensures affordable private ownership, affordable rent on the private market, and enough supply of publicly owned homes for social rent.
- Access to housing benefits for young people to be ensured, providing targeted subsidies to reduce housing costs and support their ability to secure and maintain stable housing.
- Security of tenure and the quality of homes in the private rental market to be guaranteed, as well as some form of control on rent levels - indexed to the cost-of-living - to be implemented, ensuring that rent is affordable.
- Enhanced tenant protections and rights, including measures to prevent eviction without just cause,

the requirement of a reasonable notice period, and the enforcement of maintenance standards in rental properties.

- The introduction of regulations on short-term rental platforms to prevent excessive conversion of long-term housing into short-term rentals, particularly in areas facing housing shortages. These regulations should include restrictions on the number of days a property can be rented short-term and enforce penalties for non-compliance to ensure housing remains accessible and affordable for young people and local communities.
- Strong protections to prevent evictions and displacement of marginalised groups, establishing clear pathways to ensure access to social housing and housing benefits without facing discrimination, including providing targeted support and outreach to assist these groups in meeting their housing needs.
- Lifting barriers to simplify establishing non-profit and cooperative housing models, building community ownership and long-term affordability for young people throughout their lives
- The implementation of strategies to address and prevent youth homelessness, developed in collaboration with those directly impacted emphasising the "the housing first" approach through access to secure and long-term housing solutions.
- Robust measures, including public investment, to develop affordable and decent student housing, while ensuring rent controls and tenant protections to safeguard students from exploitative housing practices.
- Policies that promote rural development, focusing on improved infrastructure and affordable and decent housing, to ensure that rural areas become a viable and attractive option for young people to develop their life projects.

5. Equality, Inclusion and Diversity

Young people are far from being a homogeneous group, and accessing their rights can be particularly challenging when age intersects with other individual characteristics. This often complicates the recognition of young people's rights.

Discrimination and inequalities are deeply rooted cultural, systemic, and intersectional issues, entrenched in systems of exploitation, patriarchy, colonialism, and racism. Young people who do not conform to societal norms and expectations face additional barriers and prejudice due to factors such as age, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, migrant background, religion, language, disabilities, illness, socio-economic status, physical appearance, or political beliefs.

Negative representation, misinformation, stigmas, social bias, and prejudice against minority groups can fuel marginalisation, exclusion, and discrimination. In its most extreme forms, they can lead to direct violence regarded as hate crimes, including physical and psychological abuses.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- The protection, respect, and fulfilment of the rights of all marginalised groups, ensuring they are free to express their identities.
- Governments and institutions to lead by example by developing and implementing specific national and institutional strategies through a bottom-up approach, in direct consultation with youth, civil society organizations, communities, and other actors responsible for addressing the different types of discrimination. These should incorporate education, healthcare, law enforcement authorities, workplaces, etc.
- Governments and institutions to recognise racism as a structural issue and to take comprehensive action to combat racism in all its forms.
- Governments and institutions to enact policies and legislation addressing age-based and multiple forms of discrimination, while providing clear and accessible mechanisms for reporting discrimination and seeking redress.
- Efforts to combat discrimination and a shift from making marginalised groups more acceptable to the wider population, to reassessing societal norms, and considering privilege and power structures.
- Eliminate Pink and Tampon taxes by removing VAT on all feminine hygiene products and delivering feminine hygiene products for free in schools to protect girls coming from lower income families
- The official recognition and adequate representation of minority groups.
- The fostering of positive identities for minority groups.
- Establish research, evaluation, and assessment mechanisms to enhance current educational practices in line with existing policy objectives. To promote citizenship, diversity education, and anti-discrimination, it is essential to ensure that all minority groups are positively represented across the curriculum, not just in history classes, reflecting Europe's diverse society. This includes providing accurate information about various minority groups, their histories, cultures, and identities, fostering a comprehensive understanding of diversity that encompasses the full range of experiences across Europe.
- Governments and institutions to commit to taking legal measures to prevent and combat violence against individuals facing discrimination and to ensure redress for those affected.
- Governments at all levels to analyse new policies from an intersectional perspective, considering the individual, systemic, institutional, and historical dimensions of inequality.
- Governments and institutions to commit to enacting policies that address online discrimination and hate speech, along with strategies to effectively combat them.
- The recognition of and support for youth organisations as key promoters of equality and non-discrimination.

- Awareness to be raised among young people about all forms of hate and intolerance, and the urgency of fighting it both online and offline, while promoting inclusive language that represents all identities and subjectivities.
- People of all genders to have access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights, including education, contraception, and abortion.
- Governments to guarantee universal rights, equal opportunities and non-discrimination for all genders, including, but not limited to, the right to same-sex marriage and civil union, and equal rights to inheritance, adoption and parental leave.
- Governments and institutions to protect and uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples.

6. Digitalisation

Digitalisation has rapidly transformed many aspects of everyday life over the past few decades. The concept of digital rights has emerged as a natural extension of human rights in the digital age. As the group most connected to the internet, young people are among the most impacted by the new risks associated with digitalisation.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Decision-makers to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, place of residence, abilities, or other characteristics, have equal access to information and communication technologies (ICT) and to a free, open, and neutral internet.
- Decision-makers to establish specific educational programmes for youth on digitalisation and the use of digital technology, while also increasing awareness of individual rights regarding personal data.
- The creation of an international, legally binding framework to ensure and protect young people's access to their digital rights.
- Governments to implement measures that protect against online discrimination and hate

speech, and to prevent the impact of biased algorithms, particularly on young people. These measures should never threaten the right to privacy and especially end-to-end encryption.

- The extension of the roaming free zone with the EU to candidate countries for EU membership and the United Kingdom.
- The integration of a European Digital Single Market: Move towards a streamlined legislative framework that enables digital companies to operate in other Member States just as easily as in their home states while respecting national labour laws.
- EU Member States to increase their use of the structural funds in investing in spreading internet access to the regions with inadequate or no internet access.
- Big Tech companies and public institutions to be more transparent and accountable regarding the development and use of AI systems, including the extraction and utilisation of personal data.
- A digital-friendly regulatory framework of the EU as a general principle, which would encourage innovation, global competitiveness, and opportunities for young entrepreneurs, while respecting digital privacy.
- Further exploration of how digital technologies can expand opportunities for young people to participate in democracy, including digital voting options, while also addressing the limitations of digital participation.
- Governments to recognise digital literacy, including media literacy, the development of critical thinking and other digital skills as key aspects of education.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Council of Europe. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

