

Adopted by
the board

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Position Paper

Conference on the Future of Europe: European Youth Forum Position Paper

Executive Summary:

The European Youth Forum welcomes the EU's initiative to convene a Conference on the Future of Europe and to take forward a participatory dialogue with citizens from across the Union.

Young people in particular have a huge stake in these discussions that will impact their current and future realities and the futures of generations of young Europeans to come. It is essential that their views are heard and acted upon during the Conference process and beyond the immediate lifetime of this exercise.

The Conference is a unique opportunity for the institutions to listen, to be bold, to enact real change and to improve the lives of young people across Europe.

We therefore call upon the Joint Presidency and Conference structures to ensure that:

- **Meaningful, diverse youth participation** continues throughout the Conference and in all future EU decision making;
- **A binding legacy mechanism** is enshrined in the Conference follow up to ensure institutional accountability for implementing the Conference recommendations;
- **A Positive Youth Employment Journey** is a priority theme factored into the recommendations for action coming out of the Conference process.

Main Asks:

1. Continued, Meaningful and Diverse Youth Participation:

It is imperative that the Conference keeps **meaningful youth participation** at its heart, as promised in the decision to ensure that 30% of each of the European Citizen Panels and Conference Plenary delegates will be made up of 16-25 year olds. This and the granting of a seat to the European Youth Forum President in the Conference Plenary were important steps and a positive recognition of young people's key role in this exchange, as current and future members of the Union.

Looking back on the Conference process, young people should feel that they have played an integral part in the ideas discussed throughout the process and the decisions made on resulting priority areas for action.

Decision makers represented in the Conference structures need to listen closely to young people, consider their ideas and ensure they are included in the recommendations coming out of the Conference process.

The Conference should also not be limited to a conversation in the Brussels bubble between Brussels-based actors.

Instead, these discussions should be far more wide ranging and far reaching across the EU and represent a genuine, representative dialogue bringing diverse groups of people closer to the European project from across the Union.

The institutions should ensure that outreach efforts at EU and national/regional/local level continue throughout the Conference process to engage as many citizens as possible from all walks of life in the conversation and recognise the integral role of organised Civil Society in this process.

2. Youth Participation Legacy:

This participation of young people cannot stop once the Conference has concluded.

Youth participation on a wide and EU level scale must continue beyond the lifetime of the Conference and young people's perspectives should be considered during the drafting of legislation in all policy fields across all EU institutions.

EU Youth Dialogue is an important existing tool, but further instruments are required to widen participation further and ensure young people have a seat at the table in all future discussions on EU-level policy and decision making processes.

Young people's interests and concerns are wide-ranging, from climate change to digitalisation to the economy to health and touch multiple different sectors. It will therefore be more important than ever to recognise the cross-sectoral nature of youth policy and ensure that the view from youth is factored into all EU level decisions in the future, also beyond what are traditionally seen as 'youth topics', such as education.

The European Youth Forum will continue to work closely with the European Commission to ensure that this youth participation at EU level continues.

3. A binding Conference legacy mechanism:

The Conference is a seismic moment in the EU's history, bringing its citizens together to debate the future of the EU in truly candid terms outside the European electoral process.

Given the uniqueness of this event is unlikely to be repeated in the immediate future, the Conference cannot be a nice to have exercise, or a conversation for the sake of being seen to mobilise a discussion. Instead, the level of ambition evident in the original conception of the Conference must continue beyond the Conference itself.

The concerns, insights and ideas gathered from the process should not be lost or forgotten or abandoned, but should continue to drive future policy development at EU level.

At the close of the Conference next year, there must be a clear, binding mechanism that ensures the institutions are committed to following up on the ideas and priorities expressed during the Conference and presented in the final report.

4. Prioritisation of a Quality Youth Employment Journey

Young people have the right to a positive journey from education to further education, employment and training and equality of access in both urban and rural areas. They deserve access to quality jobs and the equivalent access to social protection mechanisms as other age groups. In the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis which has disproportionately affected young people's labour market prospects and access, it is more important than ever to recognise the challenges and barriers young people face in this space and take concrete, and where appropriate, legislative action to change this picture.

The European Youth Forum therefore calls for:

Fair remuneration for internships.

- The Youth Forum supports the Commission's upcoming proposed Review of the Traineeships Recommendation and calls for a ban of unpaid internships and for meaningful remuneration for all types of employment across Member States.
- The Youth Forum calls for a legal instrument to ban unpaid internships and to ensure decent remuneration for all interns.

The end of discriminatory remuneration and social protection practices.

- Young people are frequently paid less than their older peers and are much more likely to be subject to youth minimum wages set below the national minimum wage. Young people deserve meaningful remuneration for all types of employment across Member States that is on par with older age groups.
- Decision makers should act to remove any national, discriminatory minimum wage levels dependent on age and non-enforcement of minimum wages.
- Young people are frequently unable to access social benefits due to their age and the need for specific historic contributions. Member States and the EU should act to ensure these are accessible to all young people, by decreasing the minimum period of contributions needed to access support, ensuring that internships and apprenticeships count towards these contributions, lowering minimum age requirements and ensuring that young people do not receive less support than others.

The regulation of new and non-standard forms of work.

- New and non-standard forms of work are disproportionately taken up by young people.

- It is therefore important that the EU reacts quickly to regulate new and non-standard forms of work as soon as they become a working reality, and to ensure that legislation can be adjusted to regulate other new forms of work that may emerge in the future to safeguard young workers' rights, for example the current issue of platform workers.

Youth to be a core focus of Recovery and Resilience Funding:

- Youth organisations should be consulted in the delivery of national plans for the deployment of Next Generation EU Funding which should include schemes to promote quality job creation in rural and urban areas, mechanisms for outreach to young people who are most marginalised and wider access to education.

The reinforcement of young people's right to a quality offer of employment, further education or training:

- The reinforced Youth Guarantee should be implemented and national plans be constructed, implemented and monitored in consultation with young people and youth organisations and underpinned by sustainable funding that goes beyond shorter term recovery funds.

Better recognition of non-formal/informal learning, including volunteering by employers:

- Employers should commit to recognising the positive impact of the third sector, including youth organisations and non-formal and informal learning opportunities that they provide through activities such as volunteering.
- National validation strategies should improve the validation possibilities for the third sector and non-formal and informal learning through the establishment of more inclusive frameworks. The Youth Forum invites the European Commission to map the national strategies that

have taken the most positive and inclusive steps in order to share best practices among Member States.

A strengthened implementation of the EU's social policy ambitions

- Social rights defined at EU level (such as to quality employment and social protection, as indicated in the European Pillar of Social Rights) are often not delivered or implemented in practice.
- To remedy this gap between policy and reality stronger enforcement measures are needed, such as mandatory targets on poverty and quality employment for Member States, in addition to a clear strategy for ensuring that all social rights are implemented, particularly through binding legislation.

A prioritisation of the right to disconnect from digital spaces

- Regulate emerging technologies that monitor and survey employees, respecting the right to privacy of workers and giving them ownership over the data that they create at work.
- Explore the adoption of policies introducing the “right to disconnect” that ensure that young workers can switch off from work and safeguard their wellbeing.

European Youth Forum Background:

The European Youth Forum is the platform of youth organisations in Europe representing over 100 youth organisations bringing together tens of millions of young people from all over Europe.

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