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*Accompanying the document*

**Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European  
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

**on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2021)**

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## INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) Youth Strategy is the framework for the EU youth policy cooperation. The current policy cooperation phase started on 1 January 2019 for the period of nine years (2019-2027), based on a Council resolution adopted on 26 November 2018<sup>1</sup>. The EU Youth Strategy follows three-year work cycles, at the end of which the Commission draws up an EU Youth Report. The priorities and actions for the respective working periods are presented in the EU Work Plans for Youth, and the Council sets these EU Work Plans together with the Commission.

The EU Youth Strategy has a strong cross-sectoral approach and calls for mainstreaming youth as a priority amongst different policy areas. The Strategy fosters youth participation in democratic life, in line with Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. It supports social and civic engagement, and aims to ensure that all young people, within and beyond the European Union have the necessary resources to take part in society. Approximately 86 million young people live in the EU. Definitions of young people vary between countries. The age range 15-29 is often selected for statistical purposes at EU level. One in every six persons in the EU is aged between 15 and 29 years.

The Member States and the Commission take forward a number of priority actions under these core areas presented in the EU triennial Work Plans for Youth, which spans two Council Presidency Trios. This EU Youth Report 2021 evaluates progress towards the objectives and priorities of the EU Youth Strategy for 2019-2021.

The Strategy focuses on three core areas of action, around three key words:

- **ENGAGE** which aims towards a meaningful civic, democratic, economic, social, cultural and political participation of young people;
- **CONNECT** which is to foster different and inclusive forms of mobility for young people across the European Union and beyond with a view to make new connections, relations and exchange of experience, as well as to boost intercultural understanding, engagement in solidarity and volunteering activities;
- **EMPOWER** which aims to encourage young people to take charge of their own lives. Youth work in all its forms is to serve as a catalyst for empowerment.

The European Youth Goals<sup>2</sup>, designed by young people in 2018 in the framework of the EU youth dialogue and endorsed by youth Ministers, form an integral part of the Strategy. These goals identify cross-sectoral areas that affect young people's lives and point out challenges. The EU Youth Strategy aims at contributing to realising this vision of young people by mobilising EU level policy instruments as well as actions at national, regional and local level by all stakeholders.

The EU Youth Strategy also contributes to achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal – the EU sustainable growth strategy – by supporting its call for an inclusive and just

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<sup>1</sup> 2018/C 456/01 of 26 November 2018

<sup>2</sup> [European Youth Goals | European Youth Portal \(europa.eu\)](#)

transition, including in the areas identified by young European citizens as ones that matter most to them: protecting the environment and fighting climate change.

The implementation of the EU Youth Strategy is supported by several instruments, such as:

➤ **Mutual learning activities**

Mutual learning between Member States, the European Commission and relevant stakeholders is the preferable approach for the advancement of youth policy with regard to both core and cross-sectoral areas. Besides Expert Groups, which can develop policy guidance and practical tools and can share good practices, mutual learning activities include also peer reviews and peer counselling, high-level forums, analysis and studies.

➤ **Future National Activities Planners (FNAPs)**

The Future National Activities Planners allow Member States on a voluntary basis to share their priorities in line with the EU Youth Strategy. The aim of the FNAPs is to increase transparency in the implementation of youth policies at regional, national and EU level. Youth policies in Member States are among the most important instruments for the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy. They are often consolidated in a national youth strategy or an equivalent youth policy planning document, as documented by the Youth Wiki<sup>3</sup>. The content of such national youth strategies can be highly relevant for other Member States in allowing them to establish synergies, facilitate peer learning and help to identify and cluster different interests and specific needs of Member States in youth policy development. The Member States have already been invited twice to submit FNAPs, in 2019 and in 2021, and the main outcomes of these surveys are included in the current document.

➤ **EU Youth Dialogue (EUYD)**

The EU Youth Dialogue is the dialogue with young people and youth organisations involving policy and decision makers, as well as experts, researchers and other relevant civil society actors. It serves as a forum for continuous joint reflection and consultation on the priorities, implementation and follow-up of European cooperation in the field of youth. It builds on the achievements of past dialogue processes (previously called “Structured Dialogue”), and it is organised into 18-month work cycles.

➤ **European Youth Portal (EYP)**

The European Youth Portal is the single multilingual entry point for EU level youth related information and opportunities. Its revamped version launched in November 2020 supports the EU Youth Strategy in providing content and services for young people centred around its 3 keywords of Engage, Connect, Empower as well as through a dedicated section on the EU Youth Strategy targeting youth stakeholders.

➤ **EU Youth Strategy Platform**

The Platform is a collaborative online platform for youth stakeholders which aims to build a basis for a regular civic dialogue, offer opportunities to exchange information on

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<sup>3</sup> The online platform presenting information on European countries' youth policies [National Policies Platform | YouthWiki \(europa.eu\)](#)

activities and results, and facilitate participatory governance and coordination of the implementation of the Strategy.

➤ **Evidence-based tools**

Evidence-based policy making requires continuous research, knowledge development and outreach to young people and youth organisations. The European Commission's data collection sources include among others: the dashboard of EU indicators in the youth field; statistics on youth provided by the European Statistics Office (Eurostat); the Youth Wiki - the online encyclopaedia of national youth policies in Europe; public opinion surveys (Eurobarometers); research activities managed by the Youth Partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe; as well as the European Commission studies and reports on youth policies.

- The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 foresees the establishment of an **EU Youth Coordinator** within the European Commission, with the objective of enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation, as well as knowledge development and exchange on youth issues within the European Commission services. The EU Youth Coordinator took up her functions in 2021.

### **Focus and structure of the report**

In line with the Strategy's reporting requirements, this document reports on the implementation of the first three-year cycle of the current EU Youth Strategy (2019-2021).

The Council resolution provides that the EU Youth Strategy follows triennial working periods which spans two Presidency Trios. The priorities and actions for the respective working periods are presented in the EU Work Plans for Youth.

The report focuses on the priorities of the two Presidency Trios for 2019-2021: "Creating opportunities for youth" and "Europe for YOUth – YOUth for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation" and shows their linkage with the three core areas of the Strategy. This report aims at taking stock on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy for 2019-2021. It evaluates progress towards the objectives and priorities of the strategy, with a particular focus on the EU work plan for youth set up for 2019-2021.

As far as the report's structure is concerned, the reported activities are classified under the three core areas of the Strategy: ENGAGE, CONNECT and EMPOWER and organised in three corresponding sections. A fourth section is devoted to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the youth sector. Section 5 is focused on the international dimension of the EU Youth Strategy, while section 6 provides a first insight on EU spending on youth under the new Multiannual financial Framework 2021-2027.

# Youth Goals: a vision from youth for Europe

-  1. Connecting EU with Youth
-  2. Equality of all genders
-  3. Inclusive societies
-  4. Information and constructive dialogue
-  5. Mental health and wellbeing
-  6. Moving rural youth forward
-  7. Quality employment for all
-  8. Quality learning
-  9. Space and participation for all
-  10. Sustainable green Europe
-  11. Youth organisations and European programmes

# 1. ENGAGE

*In line with the Trio Presidency Germany - Portugal – Slovenia (July 2020 - December 2021) priority: “Europe for YOUth – YOUth for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation”*

## 1.1 EU initiatives and action

### 1.1.1. Youth participation in society

The EU Youth Dialogue (EUYD) is a key tool for youth engagement and participation from the EU Youth Strategy. It strives to bring together young people, youth organisations and decision makers, supported by experts and evidence. It is organised into 18-month work cycles. Each cycle focuses on a different thematic priority set by the Council of Youth Ministers. The dialogue is steered by a core group at EU level involving the Council presidencies, the Youth Forum, National Youth Councils and the European Commission. Inputs are organised by national working groups and processed with the support of a small team of researchers. The EUYD reaches in every cycle more than 50.000 young people and is one of the biggest single participatory process for citizens in the EU thanks to its capacity to mobilise young people via national platforms and youth organisations<sup>4</sup>.

#### ➤ *The seventh Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue*

The cycle under the **Trio Presidency Romania-Finland- Croatia** started on 1 January 2019 and lasted for 18 months until June 2020.

The Romanian Presidency initiated activities to clarify the governance of the dialogue, which led to the Council Resolution establishing guidelines on the governance of the EU Youth Dialogue<sup>5</sup>. The Presidency also developed a methodology with a thematic framework for working groups to design their local, national and European dialogues. As a basis for further national consultations, guiding questions were developed after discussions held by delegates at the EU Youth Conference in Bucharest (March 2019) and finalised by the trio in cooperation with the European Steering Group of the Youth Dialogue. This scheme has generally been adopted by all presidencies since then.

The common theme chosen by the Trio Presidency was “**Creating opportunities for youth**” with a focus on:

- **Quality Employment for All**
- **Quality Youth Work for All**
- **Opportunities for Rural Youth**

The thematic priority was therefore directly or indirectly connected to three [European Youth Goals](#) and their targets: *Quality Employment for All*, *Quality Learning* and *Moving Rural Youth Forward*. The Strategy and related EU Youth Goals were adopted during this cycle.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://europa.eu/youth/get-involved/eu%20youth%20dialogue/previous-eu-youth-dialogue-consultations\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/get-involved/eu%20youth%20dialogue/previous-eu-youth-dialogue-consultations_en)

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 189, 5.6.2019

The **EU Youth conference** is a recurrent event organised by each Presidency, in the framework of the EU Youth Dialogue. Usually around 200 young people from the EU, youth delegates, representatives from Youth ministries, NGOs, researchers alongside other stakeholders and institutions like the Council of Europe take part. The aim of the conference is to create a platform for exchange between young people and those responsible for the implementation of youth policy on EU level.

The [first Youth conference](#) to support the process of the 7<sup>th</sup> EU Youth Dialogue was held in Bucharest in May 2019 with the aim to engage young people and discuss solutions on how to improve access to decent work for young Europeans.

The second [Youth conference](#) was held in Helsinki, Finland in July 2019 and had a focus on the education and training of youth workers.

The third [Youth Conference](#) took place in Zagreb, Croatia in March 2020 and focused on the importance of opportunities for young people living in rural communities across the EU.

An estimated 56 287 young people from all over the European Union took part in the 7<sup>th</sup> Cycle of the Youth Dialogue.

The outcomes of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue were based on several interlinked processes. National and European Youth Dialogue activities took place listening to voices of young people. Participatory approaches supported by researcher analysis to efficiently and reliably capture the opinions of these 56 287 young people were used. Methods included focus groups, survey work, participatory action research, visual methodologies and dialogue events.

The findings from the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities were then elaborated in two reports: '[Creating Opportunities for Youth](#)' and '[Opportunities for Rural Youth](#)', providing detailed findings from the common European surveys conducted within the National Youth Dialogue Activities. These findings from the National and European Youth Dialogue Activities were then summarized in one overview [report](#), titled '[Creating Opportunities for Youth](#)'.

The findings reports were then distributed and presented to the participants of the EU Youth Conference (EUYC) 2020 in Zagreb, Croatia. The EUYC 2020 Zagreb participants had a chance to build on these reports by engaging in workshop groups to further debate and elaborate on the voices of young people. The recommendations and examples of good practices harvested through these working groups as well as through the discussions and presentations of participants to the conference floor were recorded by the facilitators and researchers working on the cycle. These outcomes of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue discussed at the EU Youth Conference in Zagreb in Croatia were published in the report. "[Creating Opportunities for Youth](#)"

The following topics have been outlined during the 7<sup>th</sup> Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue.

#### **Quality Employment for All**

- Improving young workers rights – through better regulation and reducing discrimination such as by ending unpaid internships and traineeships.

- Protecting young people's physical and mental health and wellbeing at work – as a response to the impact of precarious employment and an uncertain future of work.
- Blending work and learning – by creating learning opportunities for young workers, and opportunities for students to experience work-based learning.
- Promoting recognition of non-formal education and volunteering by employers – for instance, through expanding and strengthening Youthpass.
- Extending careers guidance – for instance, by providing support both during and after education.
- Increasing support for youth entrepreneurship – for instance, through mentoring and financial support.
- Involving young people in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee – for instance, through collaboration with Youth Council.

### **Quality Youth Work for All**

- Youth worker training: implementing European frameworks nationally – it was identified that the various standards, definitions and competency frameworks developed at European level, should now be implemented on a national basis, to further standardise youth work across Europe.
- Continuing exchange of youth worker practices across Europe – was identified as useful such as through Erasmus+: Youth in Action programme transnational cooperation activities training.
- Increasing delivery of youth work in schools – was identified as a way of giving more young people access to youth work, and reforming formal education.
- Increasing visibility and publicity of youth work opportunities – so that more young people were aware of them.
- Fostering more inclusive youth work – so that youth work was sensitive to a diverse range of young people's needs.
- Further developing digital youth work – in order to improve the use of digital technologies in the youth sector.
- Improving pay and labour conditions of youth workers

### **Opportunities for Rural Youth**

- Creating employment in rural areas – to ensure rural areas are attractive to young people.
- Linking farming and youth – finding synergies between agricultural and youth policy and investing in farming to better support young farmers.
- Providing vocational education for rural development – to equip young people with the skills to build a rural economy that is desirable to them.
- Improving connectivity and transport – in order to increase young people's access to opportunities outside of their areas.

- Promoting youth participation in rural areas – by investing in existing rural youth organisations and bringing public administration closer to rural areas.
- Investing in the rural youth sector – by investing in rural youth centres and piloting new approaches to delivering youth work in rural areas.
- Improving access to information on youth opportunities – ensuring young people in rural areas are aware of existing schemes such as Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps.

➤ ***The eight Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue***

*In line with the Trio Presidency Germany - Portugal – Slovenia (July 2020 - December 2021) priority: “Europe for YOUth – YOUth for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation*

The 8th Cycle, under the Trio Presidency of Germany - Portugal – Slovenia, started on 1 July 2020 and will last until 31 December 2021. The topic of the 8th Cycle is “Europe for YOUth - YOUth for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation” and is linked to Youth Goal 9 “Space and Participation for All”.

The first EU Youth Conference<sup>6</sup> of this cycle took place under the German Presidency in Berlin in October 2020 in a virtual setting and was organised by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth together with the German Federal Youth Council. 200 participants from about 40 European countries explored, discussed and worked on the topics youth, democracy and participation and developed ideas and demands on how the Youth Goal #9 “Space and Participation for All” could be realised.

The programme of the conference followed a participatory approach, guiding the participants through different phases of open brainstorming, elaboration and discussion, dialogue with political decision-makers and reflection, and finally culminating in the formulation of seven concrete political demands by young people, one for each target of Youth Goal #9.

In the final participatory format of the conference, participants had the opportunity to review and complement the gathered outcomes of the conference. These outcomes were structured and divided according to the seven targets of Youth Goal #9 and were discussed in small groups. Based on these discussions, each group formulated one concrete political demand which can contribute to the implementation of Youth Goal #9 at European level and in the Member States.

In the end a harvesting summary was compiled with the main ideas, demands and solutions brought up by the participants of the EU Youth Conference concerning Youth Goal #9.

The seven Targets of Youth Goal #9 and the respective political demands are as follows:

**Target 1** Ensure young people can adequately influence all areas of society and all parts of the decision-making processes, from agenda setting to implementation, monitoring and evaluation through youth-friendly and accessible mechanisms and structures, ensuring that policies respond to the needs of young people.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dbjr.de/en/topics/eu-jugendkonferenz>

• *Political Demand:* [We] demand co-decision-making processes on all levels with young people and youth organisations, implemented through a rights-based approach.

Target 2 Ensure equal access to everyday decision making for all young people from different backgrounds.

• *Political Demand:* Decision-makers should encourage and invest in dedicated processes which amplify young minority voices and ensure their direct engagement.

Target 3 Increase youth participation and thus equal representation in the electoral process as well as in elected bodies and other decision-making organs at all levels of society.

• *Political Demand:* Ensure young people's access to formal decision making by lowering the age of voting and political candidacy to 16 in all elections, while ensuring all youths have the opportunity to gain sufficient skills and motivation to participate actively and passively in elections, as well as removing all barriers to voting.

Target 4 Provide youth-led physical facilities and infrastructures called youth spaces defined by being autonomous, open and safe, accessible to all, offering professional support for development and ensuring opportunities for youth participation.

• *Political Demand:* We demand a new EU Fund to set up and sustain youth spaces.

Target 5 Ensure safe virtual youth spaces are accessible to every young person which provide access to information and services as well as ensure opportunities for youth participation.

• *Political Demand:* We request that the European Commission puts the creation of safe digital spaces for young people, along with the support and funding of developing digital literacy activities, as one of the top priorities in all programmes along with prioritising it horizontally at European level.

Target 6 Ensure sustainable funding, common recognition and development of quality youth work in order to strengthen youth organisations and their role in inclusion, participation and non-formal education.

• *Political Demand:* We demand funds to be made available for permanent structures of participation.

Target 7 Provide youth-friendly, relevant, comprehensive information, also developed by and with young people, in order to enable youth participation.

• *Political Demand:* We demand critical thinking to become a part of the obligatory private and public school curriculum for at least one hour a week from the ages 10–16 in order to fight fake news and disinformation with media and information literacy and to encourage youth participation/motivation to be a part of the debate.

In the framework of the Portuguese Presidency, the **Portuguese Ministry of Education** and the **National Youth Council** hosted a virtual [Youth conference](#) in March 2021.

In this implementation phase of the 8<sup>th</sup> Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue the conference participants had the task to come up with concrete proposals, and debate and shape these into a **toolbox of actions, measures and political recommendations** to help achieve the European Youth Goal #9 and its seven targets.

The main ideas coming from the Conclusions of the seven working groups were:

*Influence on policy-making* - Taking inspiration from the EU Youth dialogue, Member States should set up similar mechanisms at national/local level.

*Inclusive participation* - Encourage youth from minority backgrounds to become active citizens using peer-to-peer non-formal learning.

*Voting and electoral processes* - Lowering the voting age at 16 at all levels of voting

*Physical youth spaces* - Youth centers should be led by youth

*Digitalised youth spaces* - Providing feedback to young people on their proposals coming from online consultations

*Funding* - Create a platform to assist bottom up, youth led initiatives

*Youth information* - Implementation of non-formal education in critical thinking learning in schools by bringing the NGOs in.

A “**Toolbox for the Implementation Phase**” is elaborated in the [Conference report](#) of the Portuguese Presidency.

Simultaneously with the EU youth conference, a 48-hour [EU Youth Digital Hackathon "SOLVE THE GAP"](#) also took place. Organised by the Portuguese Presidency and the Portuguese National Youth Council, it aimed at promoting and supporting the 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.

The winning project was the ["European Policy Hub"](#) from the NGO European Youth Energy Network (EYEN). This digital tool aims at setting up a One-Stop-Shop to facilitate the understanding of the policy-making processes, help young people discovering the role of the European and national institutions, find volunteering and job opportunities and engage with youth organisations that are already active. The winning team received a prize and technical support to finalise the prototype of their project. The winning project will be presented at the EU Youth Conference in Maribor, Slovenia in September 2021 where the participants will be its first users and multipliers.

The third and last EU Youth Conference of the 8<sup>th</sup> Cycle planned for September 2021 will be looking at the whole cycle and the first results of the implementation phase. What has worked well? Where are changes visible? What influence did the 8<sup>th</sup> Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue have and what is still missing in order to create “Spaces and Participation for all”?

[An online survey of the 8th Cycle EU Youth Dialogue](#) has been conducted between March and June 2021 in order to understand young people’s views on the European Youth Goal No 9: Space and participation for all. The consultation was supervised by the European Steering Group of the EU Youth Dialogue, whose members are representatives from Youth councils, Youth ministries, the European Youth Forum<sup>7</sup> and the European Commission. More than 8 500 young people shared their views on the topic of Space and participation for all. Over

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<sup>7</sup> The European Youth Forum (YFJ) is the biggest youth platform in the world advocating towards European and international decision-makers to strengthen the youth perspective in key political processes. Its network is composed of 44 National Youth Councils and 61 International Youth NGOs.

two thirds of the respondents felt they have no or little influence on public policy and political decision making, and expressed the need for more spaces for participation and for citizenship education. The results of the survey will feed into the Council Conclusions on the Outcomes of the 8<sup>th</sup> Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue put forward by the Slovenian Presidency.

➤ ***Council conclusions on fostering democratic awareness and democratic engagement among young people in Europe***

The [Conclusions](#) have been drafted in the framework of the EU Youth Dialogue topic chosen by the German-Portuguese-Slovenian Trio Presidency “Europe for YOUTH-YOUTH for Europe. Space and Democracy and Participation”, linking it to [Youth Goal number 9 “Space and Participation for All”](#). Its aim is to ensure that consultations are inclusive and cover young participants with diverse backgrounds, interest and abilities. The Council Conclusions reflect on the ideas and opinions gathered at the [EU Youth Conference in Berlin](#) in October 2020 where young people from all over Europe discussed with political leaders and developed the seven concrete demands (as mentioned above) on how the European Youth Goal #9 "Space and Participation for All" can be implemented. The seven demands have found their way into EU policy as they are reflected in the Council Conclusions. The document serves as a strategic framework for political work at the European level and aims to promote awareness of democracy and democratic engagement among young people. It also articulates what EU Member States and the European Commission can do to achieve this goal.

➤ ***Council Conclusions on Strengthening the multilevel governance when promoting the participation of young people in decision-making processes***

The Portuguese Presidency had put youth participation high on its agenda and proposed [Council conclusions](#), which focus on strengthening multilevel governance in the participation of young people in decision-making processes. The Conclusions are inspired by the EU Youth Dialogue topic chosen by the German-Portuguese-Slovenian Trio Presidency on “Europe for YOUTH - YOUTH for Europe. Space and Democracy and Participation”.

The Council Conclusions emphasise the importance of providing young people with quality citizenship education and equal opportunities for participation, involvement and empowerment in relevant decision-making processes at all levels.

The Conclusions **invite Member States** to empower all young people through education and training, youth-oriented information, feedback, non-formal and informal learning, youth work and other practices that contribute to informed and critical participation in multilevel decision-making processes. They also invite **Member States** to support the setting up or improvement of sustainable multilevel governance structures, to facilitate youth participation in decision-making processes.

The Conclusions **invite the Commission** to organise a **peer-learning activity** to promote the effective participation of young people in decision-making processes at all levels and in all policy areas, thus creating a common understanding of the concept of multilevel governance.

The Commission is also invited to **build knowledge and capacity** on youth participation in decision-making processes at multiple levels, including through the [Youth Wiki](#), youth

research networks and cooperation with international organisations such as the Council of Europe, the United Nations and the OECD and other relevant bodies.

➤ ***Eurobarometer findings***

The [Flash Eurobarometer](#)<sup>8</sup> “How do we build a stronger, more united Europe? The views of young people” published in April 2019 surveyed more than 10 000 young people across the EU aged between 15-30 years old on what the EU priorities should be as well as on which areas education and training should focus in the years to come. Additionally, the survey provides an overview on young people’s trends regarding their social and civic participation. Finally, it illustrates the situation regarding youth mobility and helps to identify the main reasons that possibly impede young people from taking part in a learning experience abroad.

The results of this Youth Eurobarometer show that for more than two thirds of young people (67%), priority number one for EU action over the next ten years should be protecting the environment and fighting climate change. The second and third priorities they identified are improving education and training, including free movement of students, apprentices or pupils (56%) and fighting poverty, economic and social inequalities (56%). In addition, 72% of young people interviewed say that, from the moment, they were allowed to participate in elections until today, they voted in local, national, or European elections

The survey also shows that three out of four 15 to 30 year-old Europeans have been actively engaged in some form of organised activities or movements, 58% took part in volunteering activities or local community projects and 35% in campaigns, strikes or street protests.

➤ ***Study on landscape of youth representation in the EU***

The ["Study on the landscape of youth representation in the EU"](#)<sup>9</sup> was commissioned by the European Commission in 2019. It mainly focused on the changing landscape of youth representation to feed into the implementation of the European Youth Strategy 2019-2027, in particular the core area ‘Engage’ which aims to support youth participation in democratic life. This study helped identify the patterns and contemporary trends of youth participation with special focus on gaps between the EU and local/regional youth organisations, as well as outreach towards non-organised or excluded youth.

The study focused on the following four key objectives: to map EU youth NGOs and networks; to assess the contribution and impact of EU funding; to identify the new trends in youth participation; and to make future funding recommendations. In-depth interviews were conducted aimed at understanding the opportunities and challenges for young people to participate in democratic life at EU, regional and local levels. As part of the study, the Commission was also interested in understanding how EU grant funding was used to engage young people, and the impact of the funding.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/99cb705b-fa13-11e9-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

<sup>9</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/57e87ca0-900d-11ea-812f-01aa75ed71a1>

The results display interesting findings on the relation between digital evolutions and youth participation. The digital world has played an increasing role in young people's lives and their engagement with democratic life. But youth is not a homogenous group, and young people of different ages use a combination of different social media and online channels to structure their participation. Thus, successful strategies for facilitating youth participation include a balanced mix of offline and online channels.

The study reports that the EU youth sector is in general growing, and that traditional youth structures such as NGOs and networks continue to play a key role. These structures are increasingly using online methods for sourcing affiliations and outreach. NGOs often combine social media with 'on the ground' engagement with schools, youth work, and recruitment at gatherings.

The study was conducted before the pandemic, therefore the effects of the pandemic on youth representation, limiting physical engagement, still need to be assessed.

➤ *Activities of the EU-CoE Partnership in the field of youth on political participation*

In September 2019 the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth organised a symposium "[The future of young people's political participation: questions, challenges and opportunities](#)". Over 120 participants explored current tensions, questions, challenges and opportunities regarding the political participation of young people in today's changing world and created a space for learning and inspiration among actors involved in this topic.

The symposium aimed to:

- offer space and possibilities for participants to share and explore examples of young people's political participation in a changing world;
- empower participants from different fields and levels to address this theme in their work on supporting young people's democratic values and political engagement;
- connect different actors working on these themes, from within and beyond the youth sector, to continue, develop or innovate in relation to that work;
- produce knowledge relating to the trends of youth political participation, their reasons and implications

The knowledge gathered and produced throughout 2019 and as a follow up to the Symposium include the [literature review](#) on political participation, young people's [Visions of the Future](#), the [Compendium of practices, report](#) from the Symposium, [videos](#) and [animated videos](#), infographics and webinars.

One of the more interesting takeaways from the symposium are the forward-looking broad points about what young people think about the future of political participation:

- DIVERSE: young people engage in politics in a diversity of ways, including through conventional means of participation, such as voting and membership in political parties or youth organisations, voicing their opinions and influencing decision making processes through formal structures. On the other hand, they also participate using alternative channels, digital tools, activism, even civil disobedience. They increasingly engage

through youth movements, take part in campaigns and protests, strongly advocating for issues such as climate emergency.

- **SUBVERSIVE:** many young people are not keen to conduct politics as usual and they seek to critique the hypocrisies that they see in the status quo with humour and irony. This is accelerated by social media and digital technologies, where memes and political satire are the political language of the day. Young people create new things and processes, and are creative in using what exists.
- **INCLUSIVE:** open and pluralistic participation was one of the top priorities for young people at the symposium, who were committed to finding ways to make their organisations and movements more diverse. Participation was also seen as a key method to making our societies more inclusive. We can anticipate more interest from youth-led civil society in initiatives that specifically target seldom-heard young people.
- **EMPOWERING:** the Symposium participants, through the Cubes exercise, have also raised the educational and empowering aspect of political participation. Participating requires a certain level of competences but it is also learned by doing. Sharing the power may empower both sides: young people and other stakeholders, as it gives opportunity to perceive things from a youth perspective, to rethink the ways in which they work and to reinvigorate the decision-making.
- **COLOURFUL:** while artistic activism was only represented among a small group of participants at the symposium, its impact was felt in a big way. A one-man play about civil disobedience. Painted t-shirts with protest slogans for the Fridays for Future march. A song written and performed spontaneously by one of the participants about political participation. Young people are moved in an emotional way by the social issues that matter to them, and their artistic expression in turn moves others in society
- **FLEXIBLE:** there is no one right way to do participation. Whether it is sitting on an advisory council, protesting on the street, or painting a mural with a political message, participants at the symposium treated all forms as equally valid, each with its own potential. There exists opportunities for collaboration and cross-over between the methods, and this may be something to watch out for in the future.
- **UNCOMPROMISING ON KEY VALUES:** while young people showed themselves to be exceedingly flexible about the types of political participation that are valid, they do not compromise on the values that they felt political participation should be based upon: democracy, human rights, diversity, and respect. It can be anticipated that youth-led civil society will take up more initiatives that are explicitly values-based in this direction. There will also be a greater need for strategies on how to engage with youth who are drawn to authoritarian, right-wing extremist and/or xenophobic movements, and how to create spaces for free and critical thinking, while being also promoting human rights and democratic citizenship.

### ➤ *EU Youth programmes and youth engagement*

The EU youth programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, will continue to be important tools to support the involvement of young people in policy

processes. The programmes put strong focus on horizontal priorities – social inclusion, green and digital transitions, and promoting young people’s participation in democratic life.

The new [2021-2027](#) Erasmus+ has a 7-year budget of more than €26 billion complemented by €2.2 billion from the EU external cooperation instrument. The programme will provide even more funding opportunities in the field of youth and an enhanced accent on youth participation. The newly featured youth participation activities will provide more space and possibilities for young people to take an active role in civic and democratic processes, thereby contributing to strengthening their sense of European identity and to building more bridges between young generations and decision-makers on both a European and national level. The programme will also feature new formats of participation for organisations such as the accreditation system that will facilitate long-term involvement.

With a dedicated budget of just over EUR 1 billion for 2021-2027, the new European Solidarity Corps programme will offer opportunities for at least 270 000 young people to help address societal and humanitarian challenges through volunteering or by setting up their own solidarity projects. For the first time, the programme will also allow young people to volunteer in the humanitarian aid field across the world. The European Solidarity Corps offers an opportunity for young people to not only make a meaningful contribution to society, but also gain invaluable experience and develop new skills. 83% of volunteers report that during their European Solidarity Corps volunteering they gained additional skills and knowledge that they think will be useful in their future career. At the same time, the programme promotes European values, enhances intercultural understanding, inclusion and a sense of belonging to a community, the European community.

Cooperation with civil society organisations in the youth field is essential in realising the principles of youth participation in democratic life as laid down in article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the EU Youth Strategy. Youth civil society organisations are targeted within all Key Actions of the Erasmus+ programme.

Under Key Action 3 (KA3), Support to policy development and cooperation, the specific call Civil Society Cooperation in the field of youth provides operating grants to European NGOs and EU-wide networks. In 2021, 70 beneficiaries were funded from a budget of EUR 3,4 M. The European Youth Forum is also foreseen an operating grant for their activities and for the coordination of the Youth Dialogue process. Key Action 3 aims to support the active involvement of civil society networks and non-governmental organisations in policy implementation, and includes also the European Youth Together call with separate lots for grassroots and experienced organisations. Training and cooperation activities (TCAs) are crucial support activities under KA3, targeting potential beneficiaries and potential participants, practitioners and stakeholders in the field of youth. Through TCAs the National Agencies provide trainings, thematic and research activities, support and contact seminars, which are key to ensure quality implementation of the programme and to build closer links with the relevant elements of policy development.

Key Actions 1 and 2 offer possibilities for mobility and cooperation projects for civil society organisations and their staff. A separate call secures as of 2021 a designated budget for cooperation partnerships for Youth European NGOs. The Capacity building in the field of youth supports international, multilateral cooperation projects between organisations active in

the field of youth in Programme and Partner countries to strengthen cooperation and policy dialogue in the youth field and non-formal learning, as a driver of sustainable socio-economic development and well-being of youth organisations and young people.

➤ *Youth participation across all sectors*

**Conference on the future of Europe**

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) is a call for a European democracy that is more vibrant, interactive and relevant to citizens. The central premise behind the idea of the Conference is to help increase legitimacy and trust in our Union by giving Europeans a greater say on what the Union does and how it works for them.

The official opening of the conference was on 9 May 2021 in Strasbourg and it is planned to reach conclusions by spring 2022. Ahead of the opening, an interactive multilingual digital [platform](#) was launched on 19 April 2021. This platform allows citizens and stakeholders to submit ideas online, and help them participate in or organise events. A feedback mechanism will ensure that the ideas expressed during the Conference events result in concrete recommendations for EU action. By reaching out to citizens, empowering them, giving them the space to speak up, and showing them that their views are valued, the EU institutions aim to enhance their participation in political life, which is essential for Europe's democracy.

Citizens are invited to use the multilingual digital platform that is fully interactive and multilingual. People can engage with one another and discuss their proposals with fellow citizens from all Member States, in the EU's 24 official languages. Furthermore, they can access a map of events and sign up to participate or upload information about own events organised by them. In order to structure contributions to the platform, a list of topics has been selected in line with the EU's headline ambitions, as set out in the Commission's Political Priorities and the European Council's Strategic Agenda. These topics provide a sufficiently broad framework to allow citizens to focus on what they consider important.

The field of education, youth and culture is one of the main priorities for the Conference. Other priorities include physical and mental health; climate change and the environment; a stronger economy, social justice and jobs; digital transformation, the EU's role in the world; values and rights; migration and how to strengthen the democratic processes governing the EU. However, citizens are also free to raise any topic of concern to them via an 'open box' on the multilingual digital platform for cross-cutting ideas or topics other than those listed above.

The key ideas and recommendations from the platform will be used as input for the European citizens' panels and the Conference Plenaries and be included in the Conference's conclusions.

In the framework of the Conference, the European Commission wants to give young people a special role in the debates, as the Conference addresses issues that are particularly relevant for their future, such as climate change, a stronger economy and the growing importance of digital technologies. It is young people who will be most affected by any decision taken today on the future direction of the EU. For this reason, it is important for them to have a word on the future pace of the EU and to involve them as much as possible in these debates. The existing structures for youth consultation under the EU Youth Dialogue allows European



## **European Democracy Action plan/Democratic literacy**

The European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP), adopted in December 2020, sets out measures for strengthening the resilience of EU democracies, addressing areas in which our systems and citizens are most vulnerable. The Action Plan sets out a reinforced EU policy framework and specific measures to: promote free and fair elections and strong democratic participation; support free and independent media; and counter disinformation.

The European Democracy Action Plan recognises that a healthy democracy relies on citizen engagement and an active civil society, not only at election time but all the time. Engaged, informed and empowered citizens are the best guarantee for the resilience of our democracies. Initiatives such as the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) are contributing to the overall goal of EDAP to strengthen democratic resilience by fostering citizen engagement. Other relevant initiatives are the EU Youth Dialogue, youth participation activities under Erasmus+ and the European Youth Portal, as well as the new European Solidarity Corps programme, which offers a wide range of opportunities for civic engagement by supporting communities in need in the EU and elsewhere.

The Youth Goal target #9 “Space and Participation for All” aims to provide youth-friendly, relevant, comprehensive information in order to enable youth participation. This was further developed into the political demand to develop critical thinking. The Commission’s pledge for common guidelines for teachers and educational staff has already started to materialise via the [Toolkit for Teachers on How to spot and fight disinformation](#), developed by the Commission’s Disinformation team. Peer-learning activities within the classroom are specifically designed to teach youngsters how to identify and fight disinformation. Namely, the political demand to introduce in the school curriculum the fight of fake news with media and information literacy while encouraging youth participation in the disinformation debate, as expressed in the Youth goal, is completed by such Commission actions towards fostering media and democratic literacy. [The Rights and Values programme](#) will finance curricula promoting young people’s civic, political and democratic engagement in support of civil society organisations’ efforts to encourage and facilitate active participation. Externally, the Development, Education and Awareness Programme contributes to actively engaging the youth in addressing global challenges and raising awareness on universal values.

Under the European Democracy Action Plan, the Commission has pledged to strengthen media literacy from various angles and support national media literacy campaigns, in cooperation with the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) and the Media Literacy Expert Group. Media literacy projects will also be supported across various other programmes involving young people and schools such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, as well as through the new cross-sectoral strand of the Creative Europe programme. For 2021 the theme for the ‘etwinning’ action, which helps schools, teachers and students across the EU to collaborate via new technologies, is ‘media literacy and disinformation’.

Another indicator of citizens' engagement is shown in the [Commission’s report on the 2019 elections to the European Parliament](#) - the last European elections had the highest turnout in over 25 years. Both Europe’s young and first-time voters drove turnout figures up. Their turnout increased strongly and exceeded the increase in turnout of other age groups. According to the [post-election Eurobarometer](#), they were motivated by a strong sense of

voting being a civic duty (over 50%), by a concern about climate change, a desire to promote human rights and democratic values, as well as the economy. As announced in the Commission's report on the 2019 elections to the European Parliament and the [2020 Citizenship Report](#), the Commission will pick up on this momentum, by making young voters one of its key outreach groups for the 2024 European Parliament elections.

### **Better Internet for Kids Youth Pledge**

Involving children and young people in matters that affect them, and giving them a voice, are fundamental rights under both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 12) and the EU Charter of Fundamental Human Rights (article 24). Under the EU Strategy for a better internet for children<sup>12</sup>, in celebration of [Safer Internet Day](#) ('SID') 2020, a group of Better Internet for Kids (BIK) Youth Ambassadors prepared a [Youth Pledge for a better internet](#) ('Youth Pledge') on how to make information on the apps and services they use on the internet more age appropriate for children and young people.

Based on a preliminary mapping exercise of research and youth consultation work within the Commission's co-funded network of [Safer Internet Centres](#), the BIK Youth Ambassadors came up with several concrete ideas and presented them to the [Alliance to better protect minors online](#)<sup>13</sup> ('Alliance'). These included: simplifying the language employed, using infographics, and providing users with an incentive to read the privacy policies.

More detailed work on the Youth Pledge was carried out throughout the year 2020, in partnership with six companies, namely Facebook, Lego, Samsung, Sulake, Super RTL and Twitter, all members of the Alliance. Progress of work was presented at the annual [Safer Internet Forum](#) in November 2020 in a dedicated youth-led event<sup>14</sup>. On SID 2021, the Youth Pledge celebrated its first year of existence presenting the [achievements](#) so far with representatives of industry, civil society and policy makers present.

### **Stimulating pan-European debate around current affairs**

Following an open Call for Proposals in 2020, two new media projects were launched in 2021 with the aim to engage young Europeans with innovative, thought-provoking content around current affairs. The Call required professional media organisations from at least 5 EU Member States to team up and create innovative production and distribution methods. They are required to show multiple viewpoints on topics that are relevant to youngsters, allowing them to compare perspectives and discover how their interests link to interests of youngsters in other countries, and to relevant EU initiatives. Grant recipients need to put in place solid journalistic methods and enjoy full editorial independence. While it will take time for these projects to reach their full potential, the first results are promising.

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<sup>12</sup> [COM/2012/0196 final](#)

<sup>13</sup> The Alliance is a self-regulatory initiative – facilitated by the Commission - of leading ICT, media companies and NGOs designed to improve the online environment for children and young people

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/en/practice/articles/article?id=6767851>

## **Communicating Cohesion Policy towards and with young people**

DG REGIO led communication campaigns towards and with young people in order to make Cohesion policy and European Territorial Cooperation more understandable for young people.

In the context of the Interreg 30 Years celebrations campaign, DG REGIO, in cooperation with the Interreg Volunteer Youth, as well as with young people of Macro Regional Strategies piloted a core group who elaborated the [Manifesto for young people by young people to shape the European cooperation policy](#) with 12 recommendations. Young people consider that Macro Regional Strategies and Interreg programmes can make a difference in the fields of skills development and training opportunities; increasing opportunities for youth employment; communication via digital tools; addressing climate change and boosting citizen's engagement in policymaking and implementation. Some actions in the Manifesto have already been undertaken in 2020 and in the beginning of 2021, such as the organisation of youth dialogues at the EU Macro Regional Strategies Week (in October 2020), the creation of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) about Interreg and Macro Regional Strategies, and the delivery of a communication kit for young people to disseminate the Manifesto and to reach out to other young people.

The [Youth4Regions](#) programme aims to increase awareness of EU regional policy by building a community of journalists that are knowledgeable and engaged with our policy. The programme targets journalism students and journalists in their early careers. In 2020, the programme received 534 applications from EU, accession and neighbouring countries, of which 20 selected applicants came to Brussels in October to attend the 2020 European Week of Regions and Cities. These selected applicants followed trainings about Cohesion policy and communication, gained work experience in the Week's pressroom and visited EU institutions and media organizations. Some of the Youth4Regions alumni are working now for large media organisations in Europe, such as El País, Deutsche Welle and TVP (Poland).

The **Interreg 30 Years Anniversary campaign** run in 2020 highlighted Interreg projects contributing to youth and undertook actions to encourage young people from the Interreg programmes and Macro Regional Strategies to express their opinion on cooperation issues at a time when Interreg 2021-2027 programmes were drafted. The Interreg30Years celebration campaign was the opportunity to communicate with young people, with the support of [Interreg Volunteer Youth](#) and to create a core group of young people who issued a Manifesto and recommendations towards policy makers (see below the dedicated box).

**Green Trip / DingDong Challenge** was launched in October 2020 to promote **sustainable green behaviour challenges** to engage young people in contributing to Europe's climate neutrality target. The initial travelling phase, illustrated in the [campaign video](#), consisted in 15 influencers visiting 70 green visits to (mostly) EU-funded projects in [Belgium](#), [Germany](#), [Greece](#), [Lithuania](#) and [Portugal](#), which has reached a total of 9.7 million young Europeans in their respective countries. As of January 2021 the campaign has embarked on the so-called "empowerment" phase. A [toolkit](#) has been produced to raise awareness about EU funded green projects among secondary school pupils and encourage them to take up green challenges.

### 1.1.2. Youth employment and skills

With the “Engage” core area the EU Youth Strategy also aims towards a meaningful economic and social participation of young people, hence the need to make sure that they can benefit from optimal transitions towards the labour market. In the youth field, the Council conclusions on young people and the future of work adopted in May 2019 highlighted **insecurity**, the **lack of social protection** and **precarious working conditions** as the main problems facing young people in the current and future labour environment.

A number of measures to address these problems were identified in the conclusions: **adaptable and responsive social security and education and training systems**, the promotion of **lifelong learning**, ensuring **smooth school-to-work and work-to-work transition**, as well as **equal access to quality jobs** for all young people.

In the employment and skills field, the EU has developed a whole set of activities going in that direction.

#### ➤ *Youth Employment Support – YES*

The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan of March 2020 sets as sub-target to decrease the rate of NEET aged 15-29 from 12.6% (2019) to 9% by 2030, namely by improving their employment prospects.

The EU supports Member States in **reducing youth unemployment and inactivity**. The aim is to help young people develop their potential to shape the future of the EU and propel the digital and green transitions forward.

During the aftermath of the global 2008 financial crisis, **youth unemployment** went up from 16.0% in 2008 to a peak of 24.4% in 2013. Since then, the figures improved dramatically with record lows of 14.9% just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. However:

- youth unemployment always remained **more than twice as high** as general unemployment
- a stable labour market integration started to take longer, with many **job-to-job transitions** and spells of precarious work
- **vulnerable groups**, such as youth of racial and ethnic minorities or young people with disabilities, continued to be disadvantaged throughout this period
- **youth inactivity** did not decrease nearly as much as youth unemployment.

To build back better from the new economic downturn triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission adopted a [Youth Employment Support](#) (YES) package in July 2020. The [Youth Employment Support – A Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation](#) is built around **four strands** that together provide a bridge to jobs for the next generation:

- A [reinforced Youth Guarantee](#)
- A future-proof approach for [vocational education and training](#)
- A renewed [European Alliance for Apprenticeships](#)
- Additional elements supporting youth employment.

## **The reinforced Youth Guarantee**

The Youth Guarantee, launched in 2013 and reaffirmed by the European Pillar of Social Rights, is a commitment by all Member States to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. It has opened up opportunities to over 31 million young people and has been a driver for structural reforms and innovation in Member States<sup>15</sup>.

The **Youth Guarantee was reinforced in October 2020**. In addition to its broadened target group, it caters for the millions of youth at risk of unemployment unable to enter today's labour market, without losing sight of activating the hardest-to-reach who may face multiple obstacles. The reinforced Youth Guarantee does all this through tailored, individualised approaches; providing young people with the appropriate levels of guidance and helping them find crash courses if upskilling proves to be necessary. The Youth Guarantee approaches take into account local labour market intelligence shaped by COVID-19 ramifications, acknowledging also the opportunities provided by the accelerating digital and green transitions. Partnerships will play a central role in all stages of the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee.

National resources are key in supporting youth employment measures in each Member State. However, the EU supports the implementation of the Youth Guarantee through substantial funding (see following sections below). The Commission's aim is that at least EUR 22 billion will be dedicated to youth employment over the 2021-2027 financing period.

In addition to financial support, the EU provides policy support and mutual learning activities to help Member States strengthen the infrastructure and measures for the reinforced Youth Guarantee, for example through the [Youth Guarantee Knowledge Centre](#)<sup>16</sup>. The EU also monitors progress across Member States in the context of the European Semester, through specific data collection and in cooperation with the Employment Committee.

## **Vocational Education and Training**

Vocational education and training (VET) helps young people get ready for their first job and supports adult career and skill development. During the recovery, VET will be essential for helping young people's entry into the workforce. This is confirmed by the [2020 Council Recommendation on vocational education and training](#), which defines key principles and concrete objectives to ensure that VET supports sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. The Recommendation sets concrete objectives related to VET learners' employability, exposure to work-based learning and international mobility.

In the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) (November 2020), Member States, EU Candidate Countries and EEA countries, the European social partners and the European Commission, together with VET providers' associations and learners' representatives, committed to concrete deliverables

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<sup>15</sup> Draft Joint Employment Report from the Commission and the Council accompanying the Communication from the Commission on the Annual Growth Survey 2018, COM/2017/0674 final.

<sup>16</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1327>

in the period 2021-2025 to fully realise VET's potential as an enabler of the recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies. The European Training Foundation supports the candidate countries with monitoring of progress with VET reforms.

### **Renewed European Alliance for Apprenticeships**

While quality apprenticeships have a vital role to play in preserving and creating youth employment, they have been particularly impacted by the COVID-19 lockdowns. Many SMEs are no longer in a position to accept candidates due to a lack of resources and activity.

Since its launch in 2013, the [European Alliance for Apprenticeships \(EAfA\)](#) has brought together 36 EU, EFTA and candidate countries and over 355 stakeholders (businesses, social partners, chambers, vocational education and training providers, regions, youth representatives or think tanks) who so far pledged 1 034 476 apprenticeship places to strengthen the quality, supply and image of apprenticeships in Europe, and to enhance apprentice mobility. The European Training Foundation facilitates the engagement of the Western Balkan countries in the EAfA.

With the Youth Employment Support Package, the Commission launched a renewed EAfA, which now focusses on six new priorities and targets important horizontal issues such as gender, social inclusion, health and safety, as well as internationalisation of vocational education and training:

- committing to quality and effective apprenticeships, and encouraging Member States and companies to do so, by fostering national apprenticeships coalitions.
- incentivising support to SMEs for providing a stable supply of quality and effective apprenticeships.
- mobilising local and regional authorities as catalysts for apprenticeships within the local business environment.
- strengthening social dialogue through a more active involvement of national social partner organisations.
- engaging European sectoral social dialogue committees in apprenticeships proactively, with a view to agree on joint sectoral pledges.
- supporting the representation of apprentices in the Member States by relaunching the European Apprentices Network.

#### **The European Apprentices Network**

In 2017 the Commission launched the [European Apprentices Network \(EAN\)](#), together with the European Youth Forum (YFJ) and the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU). They agreed on the following tasks for the network:

- To clarify the perception of young people on apprenticeships through exchanging experiences, discussing challenges and sharing information.
- To function as an informal consultative body for the Commission on apprenticeships.

- To promote apprenticeships as a worthwhile career choice (e.g. through ambassadors for apprenticeships).
- To facilitate contacts between youth organisations and other actors in apprenticeships, especially members of the EAfA.

The network includes fifteen members from twelve countries. They collectively identified [seven priorities](#) for the next years, including on quality education and quality assurance.

In 2020 EAN set up a new structure to expand its membership which is currently based on individuals only. The idea is to be a representative voice towards institutions and stakeholders at all levels on issues concerning apprenticeships and to engage national bodies and other organisations in developing the quality of apprenticeships.

A [Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships](#), adopted in March 2018, sets out 14 criteria on learning and working conditions, as well as on framework conditions, that improve the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships, to the benefit of learners, companies and society. The Commission will report on the implementation of the Framework in summer 2021.

### ➤ *The European Skills Agenda*

The [European Skills Agenda](#) adopted by the Commission in July 2020 sets a five-year plan to support the development of more and better skills. The Skills Agenda calls upon Member States and stakeholders to invest major efforts in up- and reskilling, for a sustainable and inclusive recovery in the context of the green and digital transition. This will contribute to achieving the target of 60% of adults – both young and old – participating in learning by 2030 set in the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#), adopted in March 2021, and endorsed by the Porto summit of May 2021. All of the [Skills Agenda's 12 flagship actions](#) are relevant for young people, but certain actions outlined below in particular will help improve prospects for young people to make successful transitions from education to quality and rewarding work and to set the foundations for lifelong learning.

#### **Action 1 – a Pact for Skills**

The [Pact for Skills](#) is a shared engagement model for skills development in Europe: companies, workers, national, regional and local authorities, social partners, cross-industry and sectoral organisations, education and training providers, chambers of commerce and employment services all have a key role to play to up and reskill the workforce. Through the Pact, **public and private organisations join forces and take concrete action to upskill and reskill people in Europe**. The Pact includes individual commitments as well as large-scale partnerships in the industrial ecosystems and regional partnerships. Concrete commitments can be new training opportunities for employees; including tailored training and career development for those at the early stage of their careers.

#### **Action 10 - A European approach to micro-credentials**

Within Europe, a growing number of citizens, including young people, need to update their knowledge, skills and competences in view of the needs of a fast-changing society and labour market. The recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and the green and digital transitions require people to upskill or reskill, to maintain and acquire the competences that enable them to

participate fully in society, ensure their personal, social and professional empowerment. Increasingly, young people and workers are undertaking short and tailored training and need to get recognition for that. Micro-credentials recognise the results of such short courses. They can make learning more adapted to individual needs, thus fostering more innovative and inclusive approaches to lifelong learning and employability through targeted, relevant learning, facilitating access to the labour market and job transitions. To date no European definition or standards exist to support the quality, transparency and take-up of micro-credentials across the EU, limiting their potential. For that reason, the Commission aims to develop a common definition and approach to description of micro-credentials by the end of 2021, so micro-credentials can be used more widely and recognized across Europe. The [report from the Micro-credentials higher education consultation group](#), published on 14 December 2020, provides a strong basis for broader and wider consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including formal and non-formal education and training providers throughout 2021. The Commission launched a [public consultation](#) until 13 July 2021, accompanied by targeted stakeholder consultations.

### **Action 11 – New Europass platform**

Once someone has a certificate proving their skills, they need to be able to communicate them when applying for a job or further learning. New technology opens up possibilities for communicating skills beyond the traditional CV and for linking people up with learning and job opportunities. The new [Europass](#) is an open framework of online tools and information to support people to manage their careers in a fast-changing labour market. Europass helps people to communicate their skills, qualifications and experiences so that they can be understood across Europe. It is available free-of-charge and in 29 languages.

### **Validation: Making skills visible in a changing labour market and society**

The need to promote agile validation approaches to promote more inclusive, more flexible and more individualised learning pathways, also in order to support transitions in the labour market, is more crucial than ever. It is estimated that 85% of learning during our lifetime takes place outside formal learning, mostly during adult years. However, despite EU and national policies promoting validation, validation of skills is not yet always possible, and therefore the full potential of validation as a way to give visibility and value to all learning, regardless of where and how it happens, has not yet been reached. As set out in the Skills Agenda, the Commission will provide a strategic framework for the recognition of transversal skills to support validation practitioners in the European Union and develop resources to support validation of transversal skills by employers and employment services. This will build on the work undertaken in the context of the [Council Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning of 2012](#). The Commission will also, together with CEDEFOP, continue to regularly update the [European Guidelines on validation](#), as a tool to promote a shared understanding of validation in Europe.

The EPSR Action Plan announced that the Commission will: present an initiative to support social dialogue at EU and national level in 2022. The initiative will include the launch of a new award for innovative social dialogue practices; an information and visiting **programme**

**for young future social partner leaders;** the review of sectoral social dialogue at EU level; and a new supporting frame for social partner agreements at EU level.

➤ ***EURES targeted mobility schemes (TMS)***

The overall objective of the [EURES TMS](#) action is to support jobseekers over 18, with a special focus on young people, to find a job, a traineeship or an apprenticeship in another EU/EEA country. Thanks to the direct financial support to jobseekers to contribute to the costs linked to moving to another country, i.e. for language training, interviews, relocation allowances, recognition of qualifications, the EURES TMS action promotes fair mobility, tackles intra-EU mobility challenges and sustains jobseekers who need support in working in another country. The action ensures also customised employment services to jobseekers such as matching of job vacancies and CVs, and information and guidance for jobseekers and employers.

With a view to helping jobseekers to exercise their right of freedom of movement across the EU, and to addressing labour markets' imbalances and skills shortages, EURES TMS is an instrument to enhance young people's employment, to support older and vulnerable people, and to help employers in finding abroad the skills lacking in their national labour markets.

Notably for young people, the EURES TMS action may also contribute to facilitating transitions from education to work. SMEs can receive financial contributions to the costs related to an integration programme for recruited people. The EURES TMS projects can also provide other support measures, i.e. tailor-made and free of charge training, mentoring and assistance to jobseekers. From 2015 to 2020, the Targeted Mobility Schemes helped more than 10.000 young people to find a sustainable job in another EU/EEA country.

➤ ***The European Social Fund (ESF), Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) support to youth employment***

Over the 2014-2020 programming period, the [Youth Employment Initiative](#) (YEI) and the [European Social Fund](#) (ESF) have invested at least €15 billion in youth employment and labour market integration measures, as well as over €26 billion in education and training measures with young people likely being the main beneficiaries of this funding.

In the 2021-2027 period, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) with a budget of over €99 billion will integrate the YEI, making it the **key EU funding instrument to support the implementation of the Youth Employment Support (YES) package**, including the reinforced Youth Guarantee.

The ESF+ will promote sustainable and quality youth employment and mobility by supporting activation measures of unemployed young people and youth not in education, employment or training (NEET), vocational education and training (VET), apprenticeships and traineeships, support for self-employment and entrepreneurship and modernisation of labour market institutions.

### ➤ *European Regional Development Fund investments in labour market integration*

The support to sustainable and quality employment and labour mobility under **ERDF for 2014-2020** amounts to **EUR 3.4 billion**. These investments, which might have also targeted youth, have focused on improving employability and raising activity level amongst disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, supporting competitiveness of the labour force, promoting self-employment and entrepreneurship, and fighting discrimination. Furthermore, supported measures include infrastructure, equipment and fostering access to labour market services and investment support for self-employment, SMEs, business/jobs creation, social innovation and social entrepreneurship<sup>17</sup>.

Examples of projects and initiatives co-funded by ERDF:

The ERDF-co-funded [Coopcity](#) project aims to foster social innovation and social entrepreneurship to support the Brussels Capital Region in its path of becoming a “smart city”. The region faced a series of paradoxical trends such being Belgium’s leading employment area yet 40% of young people were unemployed. To address these, Coopcity has set up a social, cooperative and collaborative entrepreneurship centre, through which it provides guidance, advice, support, and training services in the form of five support programmes that meet the needs of projects throughout all of their development stages. The centre also facilitates coworking space for such projects. As of 2020, Coopcity has supported more than 100 projects, created more than 40 new enterprises, generated 77 employment positions, received over 200 applications, and welcomed almost 3700 participants in its workshops.

As part of the EU Strategy for the [Adriatic and Ionian Region \(EUSAIR\)](#), the [POPRI international competition](#) supported entrepreneurial idea among young people from 9 countries of the Adriatic-Ionian macro region with the support of the European Commission (DG REGIO) and the Interact Interreg programme. The competition started in Slovenia, where 3,494 participants have taken part in it so far, assisted by more than 500 mentors and 300 institutions. Young people who participate are offered new skills, advice on idea and business model development, feedback on their entrepreneurial ideas through the evaluation of a commission of experts, and the opportunity to present in front of an international jury. The [award ceremony](#) took place during the EAUSAIR Forum, attended by leaders from 9 European countries on 11 and 12 may 2021.

In the context of the Bavarian Forest Future Region — Šumava 2020 + project, EUREGIO is particularly important not only to get the opinion and views of politics, public administration and business, but also to give young people a say in the field of regional development. It is funded by the European Union and aims to identify the future regional funding priorities for the new INTERREG programming period starting in 2021 and to provide the necessary guidance for further directing cross-border cooperation. The EUREGIO Youth Fora are part of the project’s work.

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<sup>17</sup> European Union, Analysis of ERDF support for inclusive growth in the 2014-2020 programming period – Final Report, 2018, p.70-71. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/erdf\\_support\\_inclusive\\_growth\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/erdf_support_inclusive_growth_en.pdf)

## 1.2. Policy priorities and cooperation needs at national level

### ➤ *Future National Activity Planners (FNAPS)*

The **Future National Activity Planners (FNAPS)** are an instrument introduced in 2019 allowing Member States to share on a voluntary basis their priorities in line with the EU Youth Strategy. As part of the Future National Activity Planners (FNAPS), the Commission surveyed Member States in 2019 and a lighter version in 2021 to gather information on their youth policy priorities regarding the implementation of the European Youth Goals and cooperation needs in line with the EU Youth Strategy. 21 Member States shared their plans in 2019 and 18 offered updates in 2021.

As part of the Future National Activity Planners exercise in 2019, EU Member States have identified the three main topics where they would like to cooperate with others in a European context under the core area **ENGAGE**:

- Almost one third of them focused on the use of the **EU Youth Dialogue** in order to include diverse voices of young people in **decision-making processes**.
- The need to encourage and promote **inclusive democratic participation** of all young people in society and democratic processes, mentioned by half of the countries; in particular, via development of youth representations at local, regional and national level.
- Another topic that was highly mentioned by the Member States is the promotion of **innovative and alternative forms of democratic participation** e.g. digital democracy tools. In most cases, that was linked with the digital area and the need to find new ways to engage young people based on their needs and interests.

The results of the Future National Activity Planners (FNAPS 2021) also highlight the need to support and convey the EU Youth Dialogue in order to include diverse voices of young people in decision-making processes (mentioned by half of the countries) as the top cooperation priority under the core area ENGAGE. It is followed closely by the need to encourage and promote inclusive democratic participation of all young people in society and democratic processes.

Also, more than a third of the Member States expressed their wish to cooperate in order to support and develop opportunities for 'learning to participate', raising interest in participatory actions and helping young people to prepare for participation.

Responding Member States could choose between various cooperation tools to support implementation of priorities: evidence building/research, expert group at EU level, peer learning focussed on policy development, [Transnational](#) cooperation activities<sup>18</sup> under the programme and peer counselling.

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<sup>18</sup> Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) encompasses a range of events, seminars and workshops, which enable Erasmus+ National Agencies to collaborate and share best practice across Europe. The overall aim of the activities is to improve the quality and impact of the programme at a systemic level.

The most popular tools among Member States under the core area ENGAGE in 2019 have been: Evidence building/research and the Peer learning focussed on policy development followed by the Transnational cooperation activities under the Erasmus+ programme.

With more than a half of the total Member States replies of FNAPS 2021 exercise, Transnational cooperation activities under the programme has been chosen as a favourite cooperation tool, followed by Evidence building/research and Peer learning focused on policy development.

Some more specific proposals arising from the 2021 outcomes:

- Slovenia underlines the importance of the cooperation in the Expert group at EU level on youth work as an important tool of Member States cooperation, followed by the peer learning in terms of exchange of experiences and transnational cooperation in different projects of mental health, local development of youth work, etc. Related to that, collaboration with Germany and Portugal together with the European Commission and the European Youth Forum on the 8<sup>th</sup> Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue as part of the Trio Presidencies is showcased by Slovenia as an example of good practice.
- France is also highlighting the importance of the Expert groups at European level and Peer learning counseling in terms of active engagement of young people, youth organisations and other organisers of youth work in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies affecting the lives of young people on local, regional, national and European level.

### **1.3. Youth-led initiatives and actions**

- *Encouraging and promoting inclusive democratic participation of all young people in society and democratic processes*

By fostering meaningful youth participation within their organisations, democratic processes become something natural for young people involved in these structures. This is also the case for the values of cooperation, compromise and working together to achieve common goals. All this translates into a better understanding of democratic processes and the importance of defending them inside and outside their organisations.

Participants learn the importance of getting engaged and acquire the competences to be able to critically analyse the information they are given and to make independent decisions about the world they live in and their own lives. Moreover, by enabling and encouraging travel and mobility, youth organisations and European Non-Governmental Youth Organisation (ENGYOs) in particular can increase the value young people attach to learning other languages and provide opportunities for young people to learn other languages.

Many youth organisations are fostering a diverse membership and are finding ways to bring young people from different geographical, linguistic, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds working and thinking together, making the promotion of diversity one of their main strengths. Inclusion and representation of young people from underrepresented minorities such as youth from rural and EU ultra-peripheral regions and other remote regions such as the EU Arctic region, young people with disabilities, LGBTIQ youth or migrant youth is also a priority of many youth organisations. The Erasmus+ annual reports show that the youth sector in general

is involving on average more participants with special needs or/and from disadvantaged backgrounds than other parts of the programme.

Youth organisations actively look into promoting this diversity not only through specific activities and projects but also through their organisational structure and values, focusing on enabling members from all socio-economic backgrounds to fully participate in their organisations. Most of them seek to fully cover all expenses related to their statutory meetings and internal structures and have put in place processes to make sure that their governing structures (such as the board or secretariat) are as representative as possible not only in terms of gender but also underrepresented youth.

➤ ***Actively engage in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies affecting the lives of young people on local, regional, national and European level***

Youth organisations play a key role in ensuring that young people are actively engaged in all policies that affect their lives from local to European level.

For example, European Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (ENGYOs) organise 10 to 15 activities per year for the capacity building of their membership on different policy topics. Capacity building of their members is thus a crucial part of the work of ENGYOs, providing it through regular training and working groups for their members. Many ENGYOs also provide these training sessions to non-members and unorganised youth as well.

Many members of ENGYOs are also members of their respective national youth councils or even members of municipal councils, regional and national parliaments and the European Parliament, allowing them to make sure that the voice and ideas of young people are part of the debates on youth policy. They also prepare them to communicate about youth issues to stakeholders outside the youth field, becoming ambassadors for EU youth policy and quality youth work in Europe and beyond.

For example, ENGYOs and their members engage young people throughout the Structured Dialogue process, gathering the input of young people in each cycle but specifically providing European perspective. They also run their own regular consultations on EU relevant topics in order to understand the needs and concerns of young people and bring them to decision makers at EU level through the European Youth Forum.

Here below some contributions from National Youth Councils and youth organisations:

**Contribution from the National Youth Council of Spain**

Young people in general, and Spanish youth in particular, are characterised by their social commitment: they get involved in volunteer projects, they are very aware and sensitive to all the issues that affect our planet and its progressive degradation (climate change, sea pollution, deforestation...), social inequalities; they look for a sustainable alternative to the society of indiscriminate consumption in which we live and care for the most inclusive and supportive values, which revolve around the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in order to make the world a more pleasant, connected and humane place for everyone. Implementation measures carried out during the year:

During the **8<sup>th</sup> Cycle of the European Youth Dialogue Programme**, framed under the theme of the **9<sup>th</sup> Youth Goal “Europe for Youth - Youth for Europe: space for democracy**

**and participation”** the main concern of the different working groups in this programme is the creation of spaces for young people to actively participate in the decision-making process.

At present, **203 young Spanish Ambassadors and Coordinators (161 Ambassadors and 42 Coordinators)** are participating in this Cycle. The Ambassadors are working, at regional and local level, to organise events in their communities and municipalities that can extend this tool of dialogue between young people and decision-makers in order to be more present in the discussions on youth issues that directly influence them.

Although as participatory agents they take the lead in their activities, programming, consultations, events with politicians or other youth decision-makers, their work is coordinated and followed up by the **National Working Group** (hereafter NWG), and the **Spanish Youth Council**, in collaboration with the **Spanish Institute for Youth**. These three active agents monitor the work and **drive the design and implementation of the next events**.

To promote, assist and support this initiative, in **November 2020**, the **first Training of Embassies for Dialogue with Youth of the VIII Cycle of Dialogue took place**. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the training took place through virtual platforms and with the facilitation of the Training Exchange of the Spanish Youth Council. The online format also made it possible to reach more people than in the past.

During the training sessions, the young people enrolled had the opportunity to learn in depth about the programme, the actors involved, as well as the deadlines for the development and implementation of the 8th Cycle of Dialogue. Work was also carried out in groups made up of the NWG, Regional Councils and Embassies, an ideal moment for the members of each one to meet their representatives and to learn about the activities for the coming months aimed at disseminating the youth surveys on the theme of the Cycle.

This training was followed, in **December 2020**, by a **2nd Embassy Training** with the **participation of 50 young people** representing the 19 regions of the national landscape. During the training, carried out by the Spanish Youth Council’s pool of trainers, they were able to work with the questions of the online survey in order to present them to the representatives of the **General Directorates** of each region and to explain the work that the embassies do in the territory.

On 8 and 9 May, **the third Training of Embassies** was held, which focused on tools for political advocacy, public policies and the generation of discourse, issues raised as the needs by the embassies themselves.

### **Contribution from the National Youth Council of Romania**

As a National Youth Council, one of our core priorities is ensuring youth participation at all levels. As a general direction, we monitor youth policies related to the youth sector and come up with concrete measurements.

One example of such position is one of the most complex youth-related document in our country, **the Romanian Youth Resolution 2020-2027**, a strategic document initiated by our NYC and other 27 important organisations from Romania, created on the basis of the

European Youth Objectives, followed by a set of concrete measurements that can be implemented by the Romanian Government. In the Resolution, each EU Youth Goal has a dedicated chapter initiated by different organizations that are experts in the field. To ensure qualitative youth participation in the process, we co-organised the annual Youth Summit during which we had consultations with young people from all over Romania for each EU Youth Goal. This way, young people and youth organisations had the chance to go deep in each subject and shape the objectives together. By this way, we have coagulated the civil society in finding measures for the future of youth with legislative measures, a long-term strategy for which all the civil society will advocate.

### **Contribution from YMCA Europe**

In 2020, YMCA Europe sought to support young people in a moment of great isolation, during the height of COVID-19 crisis. For this reason a platform was created to connect young people, **YMCA Connects**, and to take advantage of the shared space to share best practices on how to volunteer and support communities during the pandemic, digital youth work tools and tips, and mental health support during those challenging times YMCA Europe also started a campaign, together with other 6 organizations, called **Youth Matters**, asking to include young people, youth work, non-formal education and youth organisations in the post COVID Recovery Plans.

YMCA Europe implemented in 2019 and in 2020 its **Leadership Academy**. The project "Leadership Academy" is created to empower young people to take action as active citizens and to equip them with skills so they can promote social change and strengthen their movements as bearers of democratic values and change makers. The participants are leaders of Civil society organizations, 18-35 years old, who take governing or managing positions in their organizations or are developing to apply for them. The aim of the training is to promote European active citizenship, build a common European identity and encourage youth advocacy actions from local to the European level. The aim is to empower young people to become engaged in their organizations and to engage their organizations in becoming advocates for disadvantaged groups. The 2020 session, which took place online, also focused on digital tools for activism and participation. The programme engaged a total of 65 young people from 25 countries, and created a total of 20 cross border mini projects engaging more than 591 young people across Europe, and indirectly benefiting 25.000.

YMCA Europe implemented in 2019 and 2020 its peacebuilding programme *Roots for Peace*. In particular, the activity Be a Voice, not an Echo, was dedicated to raising awareness about the spread of hate speech in online mediums and equip participants with knowledge and skills on how to combat it through value-based positive narrative. This was done in cooperation with Ted-Ex, creating an informal network.

### **Contribution from Network of European Youth Capitals**

During the pandemic, the Network of European Youth Capitals engaged through its local partners over 7 700 young people through the Happy City research. Beyond the content provided through young people's engagement, there was a large-scale willingness in providing answers, reaching young people who are not involved in youth organisations or youth activities on a permanent basis.

Main conclusions of the research were the following:

1. During the pandemic, young people felt less happy and thought the city itself was less happy than the usual. They also felt the city was less proactive. There was an overall 2 point-decrease in the sense of happiness on a 10-point scale.
2. Leaving the house: 4 of 5 youngsters left their home during the pandemic at least once every week (31% 1-2 times / week, 26% at least once per day, 21.8% 3-6 times / week).
3. Main activities that caused leaving the house: 3 of 4 young people used their time out of home for groceries shopping, 1 out of 3 for individual physical activities and 1 out of 4 for job activity.
4. Post-pandemic concerns: 2 out of 5 pointed to the resumption of social and development activities as the top concern, 1 out of 3 pointed to the resumption of physical connections with friends and/or family. 1 out of 4 youngsters listed taking care of own health of the health of a family member, looking for a new job, resuming work or retrieval of courses/information related to studies.
5. City's management of the pandemic crisis: 4 out of 5 youngsters think the situation was managed effectively or rather effectively. In their perception, things like law enforcement, additional measures, provision of "sanitary infrastructure" and ensuring the correctness of law enforcement were aspects that should've been better taken care of.
6. Youth for the city: 2 out of 5 youngsters think they have done something for their city. Regarding what they have done, they named the rules following, support for disadvantaged/elderly/in need people, volunteering activities and donations of money, goods and blood.
7. What do young people think they could do to help the city: compliance with the law, having a job in their city, involvement, new ideas, supporting local businesses and causes and volunteering. The main target-groups mentioned were the environment, the youngsters, the elderly and the disadvantaged people.
8. During the pandemic, youngsters thought their city was cleaner than usually.
9. Per city, these differences can be correlated with the measures taken in order to manage the pandemic crisis.
10. The most satisfied youngsters seem to be part of the below 14 age category, while the least satisfied are part of the over 30 age category.
11. The most satisfied young people by employment status are not employed, while those that are, are the least satisfied at almost all indicators.
12. The most satisfied youngsters by last graduated studies are primary education graduates, while the least satisfied are the PhD ones.

This survey provided a good starting point for cities to plan short and medium-term action for young people for an upcoming post-pandemic time.

Additional work was conducted on local level regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people. As a specific example, the city of Cluj-Napoca decided to use the

opportunity coming from necessity and to apply a holistic approach regarding research on the health, learning, agency and enabling environment for young people. Three complementary research processes were conducted (Profile of Young People, LEAP interdisciplinary research and the local Happy City survey).

Out of this work, several strategic projects emerged on local level. On “Engage”, the municipality developed together with professional partners a new concept called Cluj Youth Rapid Response. Through this idea the city is pursuing the creation of a technology-based, collaborative solution that functions at an urban and metropolitan level as an interface between young people who need help/assistance/support and the corresponding, city-wide stakeholders/service providers who can address/assist/provide support to them in solving their problems. The project concept was built in such a way that it will involve participatory mechanisms through which young people will co-design this solution.

The European Youth Forum has voiced the youth perspective on the “The Future of Work” through a dedicated publication in 2019 emphasising the medium to long-term impacts of the future of work, in terms of social and economic inclusion of young people. Social and economic inclusion work remains also high on the agenda of the European Youth Forum. In 2020, the Youth Forum co-edited the report ‘Youth and COVID-19’<sup>19</sup> based on the ILO-led Global Survey on Youth and COVID-19 and co-organised the global launch event. A workshop, “Not another lost generation: Real solutions to tackle youth unemployment and social exclusion in Europe” was co-hosted at the German Presidency Conference ‘Our Social Europe - Strong Together’ with two Member Organisations, and the outcome recommendations were shared in plenary. Finally, the Youth Forum published the results of a consultation within and beyond the European Youth Forum on Quality Standards for the Youth Guarantee and continued advocacy work on the topic.

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<sup>19</sup> [https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Youth-and-COVID-19-Survey-Report\\_English.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Youth-and-COVID-19-Survey-Report_English.pdf)

## 2. CONNECT

*(In line with the Trio Presidency Romania-Finland-Croatia (January 2019 - June 2020) priority: “Creating opportunities for youth”)*

### 2.1 EU initiatives and action

The new EU Youth Strategy gave a clear impetus to mobility and connecting young people across Europe and beyond and building networks of young people from different regions. To achieve this goal, EU level cooperation focused on:

- Supporting the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps through policy cooperation and community-building, in particular through updating and expanding the 2008 Council Recommendation on the cross-border mobility of volunteers, and further strengthening the potential of the European Youth Portal / European Solidarity Corps portal in reaching out to youth and helping build a community;
- Increasing participation in cross-border learning mobility and solidarity under Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps with an emphasis on young people with fewer opportunities.

During the reporting period 2019-2021, the cross-border youth mobility programmes, including youth exchanges under Erasmus+ and cross-border volunteering under the European Solidarity Corps, continued to be unanimously considered as a great success with a high interest among young people. Even in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, interest for such an experience remained high confirming that solidarity is at the heart of the European values.

#### 2.1.1. Youth mobility

➤ ***EU programmes creating new opportunities by supporting youth mobility and volunteering: Erasmus+ (including the new action ‘DiscoverEU’), the European Solidarity Corps and the European Social Fund Plus***

Under the core area ‘Connect’, the EU Youth Strategy is promoting and facilitating connections, relations and exchange of experiences between young people as a pivotal asset for the future development of the EU.

By supporting the learning mobility of people, and in particular the younger generation, Erasmus+ is providing them with unparalleled opportunities to broaden their perspective on Europe and the world, while developing essential transversal skills, fostering learning and innovation, boosting employability, promoting excellence, and increasing participation in democratic life.

**Higher education student mobility** between Programme Countries (funded under Key Action 1 – Learning Mobility of individuals of the Erasmus+ programme) is the biggest exchange scheme of young people in Europe. In the academic year 2019-2020, 97.4% of the students taking part in stays abroad for study or traineeship purposes were below 30 years old. These young students benefited from a total of 324 000 Erasmus+ student mobility activities. Of those young students, 61% were female and 39% male.

**Youth Exchanges** (funded under Key Action 1 – Learning Mobility of individuals of the Erasmus+ programme) contribute to foster these connections. In the period covered by this report, around 250 000 participants took part in Youth Exchanges and acquired or further developed skills, competences and European values. With a budget allocation of more than EUR 155 million, the action funded more than 6 000 projects, involving participants from Erasmus+ programme and partner countries from all backgrounds, proving the success of this mobility opportunity and the important and stable interest of youth organisations and young people.

**DiscoverEU** started as a citizen’s initiative. As they were travelling across Europe with Interrail, Herr and Speer - two young Europeans - had the idea of providing free travel passes to all 18-year-olds in the European Union. The idea was taken up by the European Parliament, which supported it financially as a Preparatory Action to be implemented by the European Commission. Through the financial support of the European Parliament, the DiscoverEU initiative was born, and it provided 18-year-old young people from all backgrounds with the opportunity to travel around Europe, learn from other cultures, build new friendships with fellow Europeans, and explore their European identity. Organised for the first time in June 2018, young Europeans embraced the opportunity with enthusiasm. Nearly 350 000 young people applied on the [European Youth Portal](#) for the almost 70 000 travel passes available over four application rounds in 2018-2019.

The rounds foreseen to take place in 2020 had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the young people who were eligible in 2020 will be able to apply under the round foreseen in October 2021.

Due to the success of the initiative, the action has been integrated into Erasmus+ (2021-2027)<sup>20</sup>, which will allow 18-year-olds from all Erasmus+ programme countries to explore Europe.

DiscoverEU aims at fostering the sense of belonging to the European Union of the participants and allows them to explore its cultural diversity. It also seeks to equip the young participants with skills and competences of value to their future lives, as well as inspire them to embrace sustainable travel in particular and environmental conscience in general.

Here is what Anna Sophia from Austria says about her experience with DiscoverEU:

*‘I learned how to manage my finances well (I used an app for this), how to organise all train connections and overnight stays and most of all I learned about myself. I have become more spontaneous and confident. In addition, I was also able to improve my English.’*

TRAVELLED TO SLOVENIA, BULGARIA, CROATIA AND GREECE |

Based on lessons learned from the previous programme, the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 is even more inclusive and international. It continues to support lifelong learning and innovative education and training activities in Europe and beyond. It offers reinforced opportunities to take part in learning experiences abroad and cooperation, including new mobility

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<sup>20</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021R0817>

opportunities for school pupils, students, and sport staff. 70% of the Erasmus+ budget supports mobility opportunities in a lifelong learning perspective.

The **European Student Card Initiative** is fundamental in making it as easy as possible for both students and higher education institutions to participate in the Erasmus+ programme. By replacing the paper processes used across Europe to facilitate student mobility with digital and streamlined processes, the initiative constitutes a revolution for the management of student mobility in Europe, making it simpler, more efficient and greener.

As part of continuous commitment to increase outreach to young people and youth organisations, the European Commission has launched in November 2020 a revamped **European Youth Portal**. It aims to be a single multilingual entry point that gives young people and the youth sector an easy access to EU level information and opportunities. The content is adapted to its user needs and based on the new EU Youth Strategy. In a near future, it will also host a space for exchange and networking. The European Youth Portal remains in the top visited websites of the europa.eu domain with an average of more than 400 000 monthly visits since the revamp and peaks of 1 million visits during DiscoverEU rounds.

Major milestones achieved in 2020 included the creation of a **revamped Erasmus+ Mobile App**, the one-stop-shop for students to access all the information and services they need before, during, and after their exchange abroad. The app allows for a user-friendly and inclusive Erasmus+ programme. Some of its new features include access to information and services, the ability to share tips and deals with other students, as well as trace the mobility of the participants abroad. Up to now, the app has been downloaded over 112 000 times.

The **European Solidarity Corps mobile app** also plays a key role in disseminating information about volunteering opportunities and in enhancing the community building around it. With the app, young people can:

- Apply for volunteering opportunities directly;
- Access a chat feature to exchange with other registrants;
- Publish pictures about their volunteering experience;
- Take part in contests.

The number of users is constantly increasing, coming up to more than 8 000 by the end of 2020.

The **Pilot Project ‘A first step towards a European framework for mobility for makers’** aims to boost mobility of makers and exchange of good practices. It strengthens trans-national and cross-sectoral cooperation, tests mobility schemes and facilitates the exchange of good practices between the cultural and creative industries, fab labs<sup>21</sup>, creative hubs and maker-spaces<sup>22</sup>, as well as formal and non-formal learning and skills development systems. Following a call for proposals, the project started in November 2019 with a budget of EUR

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<sup>21</sup> A Fab Lab, or digital fabrication laboratory, is a place to play, to create, to mentor and to invent: a place for learning and innovation.

<sup>22</sup> Maker-spaces are places where people can come together to use, and learn to use materials as well as develop creative projects

500 000 and a duration of 18 months. The project maps mobility schemes for makers, develops a methodology for measuring and evaluating the impact of makers' mobility programmes in value creation, inclusion and skills development. It also runs a European demonstrator of makers mobility scheme, advocating and sharing of good practice, capacity-building and communication. This way, it will make the first steps towards embedding makers' mobility schemes for skills development and inclusion into mainstream Cultural and Creative Industries support programmes, policies and ecosystems across Europe. The project has produced a guide to mobility for makers and an interactive tool for searching mobility schemes for makers. More information at: <http://makersxchange.eu>

The **European Social Fund** has supported the **mobility of disadvantaged youth**, including young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) in 2014-2020. The new European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) will continue this important work in 2021-2027. ESF mobility programmes provide opportunities to groups that are not extensively covered by other programmes and they can be a stepping-stone to returning to education, employment or training. In the 2014-2020 period, the “IdA - Integration through Exchange” social innovation developed in Germany has been scaled via the ESF to 15 Member States through a coordinated call (Transnational Learning Network mobility).<sup>23</sup> With a total budget of €105.3 million (€72 million from the ESF), the programme has allowed 6 820 young people to acquire skills, knowledge and capacity through work-related experiences abroad. Currently, 9 Member States and regions continue the work after the end of the official funding period by the European Commission through national/regional resources. On top of excellent labour market integration results, which are higher than 50%, this approach often triggers profound personal development processes. Young people return from their stay abroad more self-confident, open-minded and with a new sense of purpose.

➤ ***Revision of the 2008 Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU***

By the end of 2021, the Commission will propose a revised **Council recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU**. The revision is the follow-up of a Council invitation from November 2018<sup>24</sup>. It proved to be particularly relevant and timely in the context of the COVID-19 crisis as well as due to new developments and emerging priorities in the field of volunteering. Those include the launch of the European Solidarity Corps and new forms of volunteering including digital or blended volunteering. Finally, responding to the COVID-19 crisis, new priorities are emerging including, particularly, health and safety of volunteers, inter-generational solidarity and digital volunteering.

The 2008 Recommendation aimed to eliminate obstacles to volunteering in the European Union by raising awareness on the mobility of young volunteers, increasing the capacity of

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<sup>23</sup> [Europäischer Sozialfonds für Deutschland - TLN Mobility \(esf.de\)](http://www.esf.de)

<sup>24</sup> In November 2018, the Council invited the Commission to update the 2008 Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU as part of their Resolution endorsing the EU Youth Strategy.

the organisations to offer volunteering opportunities, reducing barriers to participation in the programme especially for disadvantaged groups, and increasing the recognition of skills gained by the participants during the volunteering experience. The Recommendation invited the Commission to support Member States through mutual learning, to provide incentives through mobility programmes and create an online portal to match volunteering demands and supply. The actions were followed up and are now mainstreamed in the EU's youth actions. An evaluation from 2016 noted that, whilst the Recommendation's overall objectives remained valid, implementation by Member States remained modest. The evaluation found the Recommendation to lack a concrete connection to EU funding and strong tools to monitor its implementation. There was only moderate response in Member States and youth organisations to set up opportunities with their own resources (beyond the European Voluntary Service, the EU programme that was replaced by the European Solidarity Corps in 2017). Furthermore, in the years that followed the adoption of the Recommendation, Member States' priorities shifted towards the fight against the high rate of youth unemployment in the aftermath of the financial crisis.

Work on the revision of the Council Recommendation was based on the outcomes of a dedicated study and conclusions of an expert group gathering relevant experts across the EU as well as evidence-based knowledge on the topic. The Commission also launched a public consultation<sup>25</sup> to collect citizens' views and identify new challenges and opportunities in the field of youth volunteering and feed into the revision of the Recommendation.

➤ *Study on removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities*<sup>26</sup>

The study was carried out to support the review of the Council Recommendation by complementing the work of the expert group. The study identified the key obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities that persist at policy and organisational levels across the EU Member States such as diversity of administrative and regulatory frameworks. It also formulated concrete policy recommendations that can be fed directly into the review of the Recommendation. Among the main recommendations of the study:

The study recommends **strengthening collaboration between Member States (1)** to achieve the better alignment of the administrative and legal frameworks that regulate volunteering both at national and at EU level, as well as the clarification of the legal status of volunteers and participants in other solidarity activities. Member States and the Commission have already started to share practices and experience regarding volunteering scheme and further cooperation is foreseen through a **Peer learning activity** (planned in the autumn 2021).

Better **dissemination of information on volunteering opportunities (2)** could be achieved by creating 'one-stop-shop' websites, linking the European Youth Portal to sources of information about volunteering schemes at national level, promoting volunteering activities in formal and secondary education institutions, and involving key stakeholders and employment

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<sup>25</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12774-Mobility-of-young-volunteers-across-the-European-Union-Update-of-the-EU-framework/public-consultation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12774-Mobility-of-young-volunteers-across-the-European-Union-Update-of-the-EU-framework/public-consultation_en)

<sup>26</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1a7042cb-e678-11ea-ad25-01aa75ed71a1>

agencies to popularise volunteering as a career-development opportunity. The revamped European Youth Portal launched in 2020 has already addressed this issue.

The study recommends that the Member States and the Commission further develop tools and long-term strategies to **increase the inclusion and participation in solidarity activities of young people with fewer opportunities (3)**. This could be achieved by improving the outreach of volunteering schemes and supporting capacity building within organisations. The Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy addresses this issues at programme level.

➤ ***Report of expert group on mobility of young volunteers and cross-border solidarity***

Following the results of the expert group on mobility of young volunteers and cross-border solidarity, the Commission prepared a practical toolbox for actors and stakeholders in the field of youth as well as recommendations for policy makers on promoting the mobility of young volunteers and cross-border solidarity.

➤ ***Council conclusions on raising opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas***

The adoption in May 2020 of Council Conclusions on raising opportunities for young people in rural and remote areas<sup>27</sup> provides further incentive and guidance to promote approaches aimed at reducing inequalities between urban and remote/rural areas. It also promotes the development of cross-sectoral measures which reflect the views and perspective of young people in rural and remote areas. The conclusions encourage the exchange of best practices in using the opportunities provided by youth-related programmes and policies such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in order to improve employability, mobility and participation of young people in society. The Council Conclusions provide an incentive to reach out to young people with different geographical and cultural backgrounds and to promote their participation.

➤ ***Young people and sustainable mobility***

**European Mobility Week**<sup>28</sup> is the Commission's flagship awareness-raising campaign on sustainable urban mobility. The main event takes place from 16-22 September each year, culminating in the popular Car-Free Day. It promotes behavioural change in favour of active mobility such as walking or cycling, public transport, and other clean, intelligent transport solutions.

European Mobility Week celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> year in 2021, and this significant anniversary is being used to engage with young people. The social media campaign focuses on young people in the second half of 2021, especially those who, like European Mobility Week, turn 20 this year. A new 'virtual museum' exhibit will include testimonials by people who were 20 years old when European Mobility Week was first launched in 2001. A targeted webinar on engaging young people in urban mobility planning and campaigns was held at the end of July.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44119/st08265-en20.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> <https://mobilityweek.eu/home/>

The aim is to foster a continuous debate among young people on sustainable urban mobility. In line with the European Green Deal priorities and in response to young people's growing concerns on the deteriorating state of climate and environment, the Commission is also implementing and preparing a number of initiatives in these areas. Following the adoption of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Commission is preparing a proposal for a **Council Recommendation on encouraging cooperation in education for environmental sustainability**, announced in the Strategy. A dedicated youth engagement campaign on nature and biodiversity will also be implemented in the run-up to the UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP15).

#### 2.1.2. *Youth and the Digital world*<sup>29</sup>

The use of internet is an essential component in young people's life, 90% use it on a daily basis and 45% of young people were already engaged in e-learning activities in 2019. Digitalisation has opened many opportunities for interaction, learning and participation but also comes with challenges related to digital skills and the digital divide. The adoption of the **Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)** paves the way for the digital transformation of our education and training systems and provides opportunities for young people to sharpen their digital skills and competences.

#### **COVID-19 – Better Internet for Kids mini campaign on online safety**

March 2020 saw the coronavirus pandemic take hold across Europe and beyond. As schools closed and people were confined to their homes, the internet and online services became more important than ever before.

Through the long-established strands of awareness raising and helpline services especially, the Commission's co-funded [Safer Internet Centres](#) were perfectly positioned to provide localised support on staying safe online to children and young people, parents and carers, and teachers and educators in these challenging times.

Through [a COVID-19 mini-campaign](#) hosted on the [Better Internet for Kids portal](#) and shared via social media, Safer Internet Centres quickly rallied to provide a whole host of guidance and resources, providing general advice to families, suggestions for positive content and online resources for family entertainment, and tips on ensuring well-being during lockdown.

To support the educational community, guidance was rapidly developed on safe emergency remote teaching and learning, including how to use the abundance of suddenly popularised video-conferencing tools safely in both online learning and social contexts.

In addition, responding to the heightened online risks to which all citizens were exposed, Safer Internet Centres promoted a range of resources on various topics. Those include managing screen time, disinformation and fact checking, protecting online privacy, being alert to online scams and threats, and dealing with harmful or illegal content.

#### **COVID-19 – Research mapping children and young people's online safety and remote schooling in COVID-19 times**

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<sup>29</sup> See also Section 3. Empower

In parallel, in March 2020, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission started an international study<sup>30</sup> to evaluate the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on the digital lives of children and young people across Europe. The study especially focuses on children and young people's online safety, privacy, education and well-being. Results of the study provided a comparative mapping of remote schooling experiences<sup>31</sup> and online risks and opportunities<sup>32</sup> in eleven countries. The reports informed very quickly policy-makers and stakeholders on the changing context of the digital lives of children and young people, on its risks, opportunities and growing inequalities<sup>33</sup>. They also linked to the **Better Internet for Kids mini campaign on online safety**, informing Safer Internet Centres and the *expert group on safer Internet for children*<sup>34</sup>.

➤ **Artificial Intelligence and Children's Rights.**

Looking ahead, in support of further EU strategies in the area such as the EU strategy for Better Internet for Kids, the JRC has launched a study to explore the impacts of AI technology on Children's rights.

Technological evolution has always been a driving factor for societies. Today, digital transformation and tools empowered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) stand out as a game changer, driving the world towards another technological revolution. AI affects individuals, communities and institutions on multiple, interconnected and interdependent levels. The impact of AI is everywhere, offering both major opportunities and challenges for the lives and futures of billions of people, including children<sup>35</sup>.

The Joint Research Center is coordinating this study on the impacts of AI technology on children's rights, choosing participatory research to collect the voices and the views of children and young people themselves on the subject.

Additionally, the 3P's Model (Protection – Provision – Participation) stated by the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) has been adopted for this research. In a nutshell, Convention rights outlines that children have the right to protection, provision, and participation and offers a framework for taking a broader view on issues of digital literacy and young people's online lives, identifying interlocking responsibilities of different stakeholders.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/science-update/kidicoti-kids-digital-lives-covid-19-times>

<sup>31</sup> Vuorikari, R., Velicu, A., Chaudron, S., Cachia, R. and Di Gioia, R., How families handled emergency remote schooling during the COVID-19 lockdown in spring 2020, EUR 30425 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, ISBN 978-92-76-24519-3, doi:10.2760/31977, JRC122303.

<sup>32</sup> Lobe, B., Velicu, A., Staksrud, E., Chaudron, S. and Di Gioia, R., How children (10-18) experienced online risks during the COVID-19 lockdown - Spring 2020, EUR 30584 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, ISBN 978-92-76-29762-8, doi:10.2760/066196, JRC124034.

<sup>33</sup> "Digital Learning for Every Child: Closing the gaps for an inclusive and prosperous future" (2021) T20 Policy Brief, Digital Transformation Task Force (Forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup> <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/expert-group-safer-internet>

<sup>35</sup> European Commission, Getting the future right – Artificial intelligence and fundamental rights, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 18 November 2020 <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/artificial-intelligence-and-fundamental-rights>

The outcomes of the first Youth Panel Workshop will be published by the end of 2021 as part of a comprehensive report.

➤ ***Raising awareness about the EU Youth Strategy***

In 2019, communication material has been developed in several languages in order to communicate about the Strategy, particularly on the internet and through social media. The [European Youth Portal](#)<sup>36</sup> was revamped in 2020 and now hosts a section on the EU Youth Strategy as well as a specific section on the EU Youth Dialogue. The European Youth Portal is a single entry point for young people and the youth sector to facilitate dissemination of opportunities and provide a space for exchange and networking. With the help of the network of Eurodesk and Eurodesk Brussels Link, it continued to provide young people with information about opportunities for mobility and exchange projects, for democratic participation activities in policy areas such as employment, human rights and peacebuilding, as well as for other forms of cooperation on a European scale.

The EU strategy stakeholder's platform and the communication tools and networks such as Eurodesk, ERYICA (European Youth Information and Counselling Agency) and EYCA (European Youth Card Association) have been mobilised and contributed to raise awareness on activities linked to the Strategy.

The Eurodesk Network offers information services to young people and to those who work with them. The Network supports the Erasmus+ objective to raise young people's awareness of mobility opportunities and encourage them to become active citizens. Eurodesk federates around 1 000 local youth information providers, so-called 'multipliers', that are regional or local organisations working with young people and delivering youth information (e.g. youth centres, youth information centres, associations and municipalities).

ERYICA, the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency is composed of national Youth Information Coordination Bodies and Networks. It represents generalist youth information services.

EYCA, the European Youth Card Association giving young people access to discounts and promoting mobility in Europe.

The three networks are therefore offering different services while sharing the mission of informing, guiding and supporting young people in seizing opportunities that can support them in being active citizens of their societies and in making informed choices for their lives.

## **2.2. Policy priorities and cooperation needs at national level**

Results from the FNAPs in both 2019 and 2021 exercises, show that most of the Member States agree on two main topics for cooperation under the core area **CONNECT**:

- **Enabling access for all young people, as well as for youth workers, to cross-border mobility opportunities**, including volunteering in the civil society sector, by

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<sup>36</sup> [https://europa.eu/youth/home\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/home_en)

eliminating obstacles and implementing support measures with special attention to young people with fewer opportunities;

- **Sharing best practices and further work on effective systems for validation and recognition of skills and competencies gained through non-formal and informal learning activities.**

### **EU Cooperation tools**

In 2019, when asked about the most useful cooperation tools, Member States identified both **Peer learning focussed on policy development** and **Transnational cooperation activities under the programme**.

In the second FNAPS survey in 2021, Member States rank the **Transnational cooperation activities** under the programme as their preferred tool for cooperation and followed by **peer learning focused on policy development** and the **evidence building/research**.

A **Peer learning activity on non-vocational qualification for youth work** organised at the initiative of France gathered representatives and experts from 11 Member States in June 2021. The issue of mobility of youth workers and recognition of qualification was tackled during the discussions. Participants agreed that youth work is a diverse field of practise particularly in its variety of traditions, stakeholders, settings and practices in recognition of non-vocational qualifications of youth work. Best practices in terms of certification and quality assurance of youth work from France, Portugal, Finland, and Germany were presented during the PLA.

### **2.3. Youth-led initiatives and actions**

#### **➤ *Contribution from the National Youth Council of Spain***

In order to be educated and to be able to participate actively for and with their peers, we need to reflect on the public spaces which would allow young people to meet, discuss political views and set up projects that are important for them. We also want to make sure that young people receive clear information about public issues that matter to them help them acquire the necessary skills to understand and critically reflect on the information.

In parallel to the consultations during the development of the 8<sup>th</sup> Cycle of the Dialogue on the 9<sup>th</sup> Youth Goal on youth participation, in February 2021 we had the opportunity to hold a historic online event. For the first time, former participants in the Structured Dialogue programme (5<sup>th</sup> Cycle) had the opportunity to exchange good practices with the current ambassadors of the Youth Dialogue.

During the exchange, the former ambassadors shared their experience with carrying out their projects, contacts with the administrations or fund raising to support their activities.

In addition to the promotion of participatory projects, other topics of interest have been emerging in the context of the pandemic, such as job insecurity and personal autonomy, digital training, as well as the concern for mental health, which has increased since the health crisis. The Spanish Institute of Youth has been raising awareness on the new pathologies, as well as on the need to support and monitor young people in their work, training and study

environments. Further details are outlined in the Youth in Spain 2020 Report<sup>37</sup>, which provides a general overview of the situation of young Spaniards, taking into account their heterogeneity.

➤ ***Contribution from Rural Youth Europe***

Our **podcast 'Rural Voices'**<sup>38</sup> was launched in 2020. The idea was to give rural young people across the European Union a platform to share their experiences, knowledge and thoughts to raise awareness of rural life, tackle stigmas rural youth face and unite young people from all walks of life with a shared passion for all things rural. Topics included LGBTQ+, rural housing, and rural competences to name a few. By openly discussing these topics, the podcasts empower and equip listeners to be active citizens and to bring about positive change. Our first series were very successful and the second series has been launched in May 2021.

➤ ***Contribution from the Network of European Youth Capitals***

While the international work during the pandemic was seriously impacted, the Network of European Capitals decided to continue their cooperation with enhanced digital tools and platforms.

One of their key moments during the pandemic happened in October 2020 when the Network of European Capitals organised their first online international Conference to connect actors from European Youth Capital cities. The event was attended by decision makers such as mayors and high-level executives from municipalities, youth workers involved in local youth ecosystem development, and international experts related to the thematic approach proposed by the conference.

The Happy City Conference addressed how young people can be at the forefront of revitalising our cities during and after the COVID-19 crisis. Participants addressed how this crisis impacted youth participation in the cities of Europe, and how cities and their young people can adapt to a more digitalised environment, what are the prospects for the future and what can be done for developing and improving urban youth ecosystems.

Participants tackled urban happiness through 4 specific topics: Happy City / Towards Digital / Participation in Crisis / Cities.Youth.Future.

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.injuve.es/observatorio/demografia-e-informacion-general/informe-juventud-en-espana-2020>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.ruraleyouthurope.com/podcasts/>

### 3. EMPOWER

*(In line with the Trio Presidency Romania-Finland-Croatia (January 2019 - June 2020) priority “Creating opportunities for youth”)*

#### 3.1. EU initiatives and action

##### 3.1.1. Quality Youth work

###### ***Policy framework and priorities***

The European Youth Strategy gave a clear signal to all EU Member States on the need to invest, recognise and frame youth work. Following the Commission Communication “Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy” as well as the Strategy endorsed by the Council, two documents adopted in 2019 emphasise and support the need to invest on youth work: the Council conclusions on digital youth work<sup>39</sup> as well as the Council conclusions on Education and training of youth workers<sup>40</sup>.

The **Council Conclusions on digital youth work** invite Member States and the Commission to encourage the exchange of best practices, to promote and make use of existing EU funding instruments, peer-learning activities and to carry out research to increase the knowledge in the field as well as to improve digital competences through non-formal learning and training.

The **Council conclusions on education and training of youth workers** focus on the importance of ensuring high quality education and training for youth workers. Together with Member States, the Commission is invited to carry out further research on youth worker education and training systems in the European Union, and to foster the recognition of non-formal learning in youth work. The Commission is furthermore invited to explore, by the end of 2021, options to further develop the education and training of youth workers, including the preparation of a Council Recommendation.

Youth work has an important place in the implementation of **Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth**. Launched 20 years ago, the partnership’s goal is to foster synergies between the priorities and programmes pursued by the two partner institutions in the youth field. The EU focuses on implementing the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy: engage, connect, empower. The Council of Europe supports young people’s access to rights, youth participation and youth work, inclusive and peaceful societies in line with the priorities of the youth sector for 2020-2021, as well as the Council of Europe Youth Strategy 2030. Under that framework the first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on Essentials of Youth Work took place in September and October 2020. The course allowed participants to acquire the “basics” of youth work, learn how youth work is supported, get inspired by examples of youth practices across the European Union and reflect on the future of youth work. A second edition of the MOOC took place in May-June 2021 in order to raise awareness on youth work to a wider audience and draw attention to its social value, provide an overview of youth work practices and policies across the European Union and present current developments in this field.

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<sup>39</sup> Council conclusions on Digital Youth Work ([OJ C 414, 10.12.2019, p. 2](#))

<sup>40</sup> Council conclusions on education and training of youth workers ([OJ C 412, 9.12.2019, p. 12](#))

## European Youth Work Agenda

Building on a proposal made by the Commission in its 2018 Communication on the EU Youth Strategy and on the Council's invitation to 'focus on implementing a Youth Work Agenda for quality, innovation and recognition of youth work.', the **European Youth Work Agenda** Council Resolution<sup>41</sup> is the latest EU document that recognises the value of youth work. The Member States and the European Commission are invited to take a number of measures in order to integrate youth work into existing and future youth policies, recognise the role and the needs of the youth work community and create a number of new training, information and dissemination tools, applications and mechanisms, with the support of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

The Agenda is defined as a 'strategic framework for strengthening and developing quality and innovation in, and recognition of youth work.' The process of implementing the Agenda, called the Bonn Process in the Resolution, aims at covering all levels of competence, not only within the EU but also as far as the Council of Europe's activities are concerned.

Member States and Commission are invited inter alia to:

- Strive to ensure that the Agenda is shaped to the greatest extent possible by the youth work community of practice<sup>42</sup>;
- Foresee a European Youth Work Convention in principle every five years to serve as a forum for the further development of the Agenda;
- Set up an open and consultative 'Network for youth work development in Europe' of relevant structures that contribute to the development of youth work;
- Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Agenda, notably via the EU Youth report.

More specifically, the European Commission was invited to:

- Ensure that the Agenda is enshrined in the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy.
- Reinforce the existing partnership with the Council of Europe. The EU-Council of Europe partnership in the youth field could be assigned a central role in ensuring synergies and in facilitating dialogue for youth workers.
- Consider developing an open and multilingual dedicated European digital platform on youth work to share information, knowledge and good practices, with an expert group representing the youth work community to accompany and advise on the process of creating and implementing the platform.

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<sup>41</sup> Council Resolution on the Framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda (OJ C 415, 1.12.2020, p. 1–8)

<sup>42</sup> The 'youth work community of practice' includes youth workers and youth leaders, youth work managers, project carriers, accredited and independent youth work organisations, trainers, researchers, educators of youth workers, local communities and municipalities, National Agencies for Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, youth representations and young people, and policy-makers for youth.

- Strengthen knowledge-building and evidence-based approaches in youth work in Europe.

### **Bonn Process and reinforced Partnership**

Shortly after the adoption of the 2020 Council Resolution, the principles of a European Youth Work Agenda received further endorsement from stakeholders at the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Youth Work Convention, held on in December 2020 as part of the Germany’s Presidency of the Council of the EU and Chairmanship of the Committee of the Ministers of the Council of Europe. The Declaration<sup>43</sup> adopted at the Convention included detailed proposals for steps and measures to be taken.

The Declaration includes participants’ expectations regarding the roll-out of the European Youth Work Agenda. The most salient of these are found under the headings Quality, Recognition, Validation and Policy.

In the field of Quality, participants called for the Union and Member States to “establish national and international networks for youth work, as well as creating youth work professional alliances, structures and unions.” They would welcome “an open, inclusive, accessible and multilingual European digital platform on youth work as an evolving tool for the community of practice, in synergy and complementarity with existing platforms; promoting such a platform to local youth workers, facilitating their use of it as a place for peer-learning and mutual support, for innovation and piloting, for discussing quality and emerging issues.” Finally, they invited the Union and its Member States to “use a European Youth Work Convention every five years to evaluate progress, revise objectives and set pathways to reaching them.”

In the field of Recognition, very substantial recommendation were made, starting with a call to “develop a set of common terms, existing definition(s) of youth work, that can be agreed upon and used at national level, in user-friendly and the corresponding languages.” This would “build on existing successful initiatives that showcase higher education structures engaging with the non-academic communities, including youth work,” allowing to “enlarge the establishment of collaborative spaces and establish a think tank on education and training of youth workers.” The organisation of “peer-learning activities at all levels with specific education and training related purpose” should be furthered, as should the cooperation with “organisations that have developed tools to support recognition of the learning process and outcomes (e.g. Open Badges).” A result from the **Peer-to-peer learning activity (PLA) on non-vocational qualifications for youth work** which took place online on 7-8 June 2021 was the need to support and organise youth work exchanges between European countries and the formal and non-formal education approaches to provision and recognition of non-vocational qualifications to youth workers.

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<sup>43</sup> Final declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention. Signposts for the future. Bonn, 10 December 2020.  
<https://www.eywc2020.eu/en/news/final-declaration-of-the-3rd-european-youth-work-convention-signposts-for-the-future.29>

This, in turn, makes initiatives in the fields of Validation, certification and accreditation inevitable, in an effort to “clarify the difference between recognising the profession of paid youth workers and the professionalisation of youth work.” Building on work of the Union and its Member States in other areas, it is clear that the large proportion of unpaid work within youth work should not be an obstacle, as skills and competences can be mapped and recognized even when the work they underpin is not commodified. Participants wanted to see “complementing measures to validate learning in youth work in formal education contexts, which can also imply to develop joint curriculum and standard courses at national and European levels” and the development of “a shared vision of qualification for youth workers, to ensure the quality of certification processes both in non-formal education and learning, and formal education.” They also called for “a European Network of Youth Workers Associations, and support similar processes at national level, where they do not yet exist, connecting with current thematic strategies such as the European Training Strategy<sup>44</sup> and the Youthpass strategy,” which would be able to “build on European initiatives such as the Strategic National Agencies Cooperation projects like Europe Goes Local or on Education and Training of Youth Workers.”

Under Policy, finally, a strategic framework for youth work development was called for which would “support for a Joint Action Task Force to monitor the roll-out of the Bonn process.”

### ***Main follow-up activities***

Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes will further support youth work in particular through Transnational Cooperation Activities<sup>45</sup> (Erasmus+ Youth) and Networking Activities (European Solidarity Corps) among National Agencies, contributing to the strategic impact of the programme and supporting youth work quality development at national and European level. Some Member States have also funded or planned to fund youth work under the Structural Funds and the NextGenerationEU<sup>46</sup> temporary recovery instrument.

Through its learning mobility opportunities targeting youth workers, the Erasmus+ programme aims at supporting youth empowerment through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work. Youth Workers Mobility (Key Action 1 – Learning Mobility of individuals of the Erasmus+ programme) projects have been supporting the professional development of the participating youth workers, while contributing to capacity building for quality youth work of their organisation.

In 2019-2020, this action has offered opportunities for close to 94 000 youth workers to develop their key competences through transnational training courses and seminars, contact-making events, study visits and job-shadowing. 3 000 projects have been funded addressing topics of relevance for youth work and youth policy, including active citizenship, democracy

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/trainingstrategy>

<sup>45</sup> Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) encompasses a range of events, seminars and workshops, which enable Erasmus+ National Agencies to collaborate and share best practice across Europe. The overall aim of the activities is to improve the quality and impact of the programme at a systemic level.

<sup>46</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en)

and youth participation, inclusion and equity, new innovative curricula and pedagogical methods. The success of the action is also shown in the very high satisfaction rate of (almost 96%) among participants, with almost 95% declaring an improvement in their competences and high satisfaction in meeting their professional (88.6%) and personal development (95%) needs through their mobility experience.

Erasmus+ Key action 2 supporting strategic partnerships in the field of youth also includes quality, innovation and recognition of youth work among its recurrent priorities.

### **Knowledge and evidence based**

As far as evidence building is concerned, the Commission is supporting European cooperation in the field of youth with data and information. Different actors are already interacting and working in a complementary way, such as the EU-Council of Europe Partnership and the National Agencies resource centres (SALTOs, in particular Salto for Training and Cooperation).

The Commission is also itself developing knowledge, via a new chapter dedicated to youth work in the Youth Wiki (the website informing about national youth policies in the EU and managed by EACEA) and a ‘study on youth work in the EU’. The study provides a snapshot of where youth work in the European Union stands, how youth workers experience their daily realities and where they see needs to act. The study focused on the needs of youth workers at the grassroots level and existing public policies against the background of the pandemic. It indicates that the current pandemic situation has heightened the need for further resources to offset additional costs or to compensate for budget shortfalls, and as well as the need for greater access to digital infrastructure and material.

### **SALTO YOCOMO online tool for youth workers**

A good practice of an EU-level process that attempts to create bridges between communities of youth work practice is the Education Training Strategy (ETS) 2021-2027. The ETS is a strategic framework for the development of quality youth work, prepared and equipped to sense, face, address and respond to occurring challenges and opportunities for change. Its main objective is to support a competence-based approach to education and training of youth workers in Europe. Among the goals of the ETS, we highlight the call for:

1. Recognised modular courses for youth workers working at European and International level
2. A certificate and recognition measures for trainers working at European and International elves
3. Pilot initiatives and innovative approaches for the development of quality, sustainable and future fit youth work

SALTO Training and Cooperation has been monitoring the implementation of the model at EU level since its launch and it showed that it provided increased visibility to the role of youth workers and supported their development as professionals by providing them with a tool for reflection and self-assessment. The ETS competence model also contributed over the years to a more systemic understanding of youth work and its contributions to society. The YOCOMO online tool and the Youthpass for youth workers (Yocomo Self-Assessment Tool

(<https://satoool.salto-youth.net>) also contributed to this increased understanding of which key competences are important for youth work at international level. The competence model will be adjusted by the users and supported by user-friendly tools to be effective in guiding youth workers and SALTO is working in simplifying and expanding the model to new dimensions such as solidarity, digital competences and civic engagement.

**Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCAs)** between National Agencies have also played a crucial role in supporting the quality implementation of the Erasmus+ programme in the field of youth, contributing to the strategic impact of the programme. The National Agencies continued to use intensively the TCAs for training and support activities tailored to the needs of the different youth actions. In the period 2019-2020 almost 600 hosting TCAs were planned, targeting more than 68 000 participants. Moreover, National Agencies set up longer-term thematic cooperation activities supporting the linkages between the programme and the EU Youth Strategy. Such long-term strategic activities will further develop in the new programme (Erasmus+ 2021-2027), where a cluster of activities around the topics of youth work have been launched (digital youth work, education and training of youth workers, European academy on Youth Work, activities supporting the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda, Europe Goes Local, etc). The outcomes of these activities are expected to contribute and feed in ongoing relevant programme and policy processes.

**EUROPE GOES LOCAL** – Supporting Youth Work on Municipal Level, is a strategic partnership in the youth field supported by the Erasmus+ Youth programme through TCA budget. It was initiated in 2016 by 20 National Agencies of the Erasmus+ youth programme in cooperation with the partnership between the EU and the Council of Europe in the field of youth, the European Youth Forum and two networks: POYWE and the InterCity Youth. Each participating country created a National Working Group which involves municipal youth department and youth work providers, local organisations, trainers and researchers who are actively involved municipal level youth work. Europe Goes Local took first steps in 2021 to become a long-term strategic platform for cooperation involving national and European stakeholders connected to municipal level youth work.

#### ***European Charter on Local Youth Work and the Changemakers Kit***

The European Charter on Local Youth Work is a product of the network which was launched in 2019. The aim of the Charter is to contribute to the further development of local youth work. It does this by stating which principles should guide it. It gathers how different aspects of local youth work (its organisation and practice, the youth policy linked to it, the needs of youth workers and its quality development) should be considered to meet its principles.

It is a free-to use methodological tool, functioning as a checklist around which stakeholders can gather and discuss what measures that might be needed for the further development of youth work, making sure that no aspect or perspective is left out and that youth work

provision is carried out in the best and most efficient way. The Charter is translated into twenty different languages and constitutes, altogether, a common European platform for the necessary dialogue on youth work.

The next step was to help youth workers to use the Charter effectively in their daily work. The Changemakers Kit is an on-line toolkit which can guide youth workers in the quality development process, via offering information sources, a self-assessment tool, discussion

points to start a dialogue and good practices from fellow youth workers. The Kit was launched in October 2020. Good practices from local youth work and from the implementation of the Charter were collected.

**Website:** <https://www.europegoeslocal.eu/>

### **InterCity Youth**

InterCity Youth – the European Network of Local Departments for Youth Work (ICY) strives to empower municipalities in developing quality youth work. The development of this network has been supported by an Erasmus+ strategic partnership aimed at developing a common set of quality indicators. In 2019-2020 ICY promoted, trained and encouraged municipalities to use the quality indicators. KEKS, one the main ICY member organisation gathers 72 member municipalities in Sweden, Finland and Slovenia. The main driving force for this is the use of KEKS web based system for documentation and follow up, the Logbook (<http://www.keks.se/the-logbook/>). Through this system, based on common quality indicators, municipalities can gather the information they need to both develop their activities and to enhance the recognition of youth work through knowledge based advocacy.

### **RAY Youth Research Dialogue**

A new initiative from the ‘Research-based Analysis of European Youth Programmes’ (RAY) started in June 2021. The overall aim of the ‘Youth Research Dialogues’ series is not only to make RAY research findings more accessible but also other European youth research studies and create a dialogue between researchers about their findings. The ‘Youth Research Dialogues’ series will promote different topics, e.g. inclusion and diversity, pandemic and youth work, digitalisation, etc.

In addition to researchers from the RAY Network, the ‘Youth Research Dialogues’ series will feature research colleagues from different global and European contexts and networks.

The Youth Research Dialogue series is addressed to the European youth sector and allows participation through a livestream, and the recording can also be watched after the live event from the site and social media of RAY.

#### *3.1.2. Social inclusion*

One of the overall objectives of the EU Youth Strategy is to contribute to the eradication of youth poverty and all forms of discrimination and promote social inclusion of young people.

The new programmes for youth adopted for the 2021-2027 also have a strong inclusion dimension. An Inclusion and Diversity Strategy<sup>47</sup> - inspired from the Strategy previously in force for the Erasmus+ youth chapter has been devised for the all fields of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and the new European Solidarity Corps, to support an easier access to funding for a wider range of organisations, and to better reach out to more participants with fewer

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<sup>47</sup> Implementation guidelines - Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy: [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity_en)

opportunities. It also sets up a framework for those projects, supported through the programme, which intend to work on inclusion and diversity related issues. This Strategy aims to help addressing the barriers different target groups may face in accessing such opportunities within the European Union and beyond.

✓ ***Protecting children and promoting their rights***

**EU Strategy on the rights of the child**

In March 2021, the Commission adopted its first-ever comprehensive EU strategy on the rights of the child<sup>48</sup>. Containing more than 40 concrete actions and initiatives over its 6 thematic priorities, the strategy aims to bring under one coherent policy framework all EU legislative and policy actions to strengthen the protection and promotion of the rights of all children. With a strong focus on participation of children to EU political and democratic life, the strategy was designed based on the views of more than 10 000 children, who participated to a broad consultation ahead of its adoption.

**Child Guarantee**

The Council recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee adopted in June 2021<sup>49</sup> stems from the European Pillar of Social Rights and supports a number of its principles. It is an important and concrete deliverable of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and will contribute to the ambitious target set herein to lift at least 5 million children out of poverty or social exclusion. The initiative follows the 2013 Commission Recommendation ‘Investing in Children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage’ and complements the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2021-2024.

Based on a Commission proposal presented in March 2021, the Member States are invited to:

- (a) guarantee for children in need effective and free access to early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, at least one healthy meal each school day and healthcare;
- (b) guarantee for children in need effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing. The target group of the initiative, the children in need, is defined as persons under the age of 18 years, who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

In line with the proposed recommendation, Member States will nominate national Child Guarantee Coordinators, identify children in need and barriers they face in accessing and taking up key services, prepare action plans for implementing the recommendation (covering the period until 2030), develop effective outreach measures towards children in need and their families, and ensure participation of relevant stakeholders in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the action plan. The recommendation foresees strong monitoring mechanisms, including through the European Semester.

**Challenging gender stereotypes**

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<sup>48</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en)

<sup>49</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>

The Commission has developed two educational toolkits<sup>50</sup> that will help teachers organise discussions in class to effectively address gender stereotypes, based on the example of the transport sector. The main purpose is to make young people understand that occupations are not reserved for a particular gender. One toolkit has been developed for primary school teachers and primary school young learners (6-7 years old), the other one for learners at secondary school (14-15 years old). The latter includes information about the unique importance of the transport sector for the economy and explanations about the less known transport occupations, including the key competences required for such occupations. Both toolkits also allow school leaders and school counsellors to challenge gender stereotypes in schools, where an environment free of stereotypes may lay a firm foundation for children to grow up freely and develop their unique interests and talents.

### ✓ *Young people and children in migration*

#### **The importance of supporting children in the New Pact on Asylum and Migration.**

The New Pact on Asylum and Migration, which was adopted in September 2020, provides for a comprehensive framework for the EU migration policy and the common European framework for migration and asylum management includes a specific section on the necessary support to children. It highlights the fact that the reform of EU rules on asylum and return is an opportunity to strengthen safeguards and protection standards under EU law for migrant children. The action plan insists on another key theme for youth, the access of after school, cultural and sport activities, as an efficient inclusion tool.

#### **The action plan on integration and inclusion**

The **Action Plan on integration and inclusion**, which was adopted in November 2020, includes several priorities and measures that relate directly to young migrants. Its first sectoral priority is education and training, with measures related to training of teachers and youth workers so they can better support young migrants, programmes on the transition to adulthood of unaccompanied minors.

Young people and children (mostly women and girls) are especially vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. The **EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings 2021-2025**<sup>51</sup>, adopted on 14 April 2021, takes into account in particular women and children, as they are the most targeted by traffickers, and trafficking for sexual exploitation. The priorities of the Strategy focus on reducing demand that fosters trafficking; breaking the criminal model to halt victims' exploitation, both offline and online; and protecting, supporting and empowering the victims, especially women and children.

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<sup>50</sup> The toolkits can be found under the following references: European Commission, Educational toolkit to help fight gender stereotypes in primary school: Challenging learners to discover a world of opportunities based on the example of the transport sector, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, DOI:10.2832/27413; European Commission, Educational toolkit to help fight gender stereotypes in secondary school: Challenging learners to discover a world of opportunities based on the example of the transport sector, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, DOI:10.2832/283111.

<sup>51</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/14042021\\_eu\\_strategy\\_on\\_combatting\\_trafficking\\_in\\_human\\_beings\\_2021-2025\\_com-2021-171-1\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/14042021_eu_strategy_on_combatting_trafficking_in_human_beings_2021-2025_com-2021-171-1_en.pdf)

## **Urban partnership on the inclusion of migrants and refugees**

The Partnership formulated concrete recommendations and requests to EU institutions and Member States to support cities in the protection of unaccompanied minors<sup>52</sup>.

The **European Migration Network** published in March 2021 a report on the state of implementation in 2019 of the 2017 Communication on the protection of children in migration<sup>53</sup>.

The **Union actions of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund** had priorities related to youth, such as, in 2020, “migrant children's transition to adulthood”. The Commission’s calls for proposals on assistance, support and integration of third-country national victims of trafficking in human beings, including most recently those published in 2019 and 2020, addressed the gender dimension and child-specific aspects<sup>54</sup>.

## **Joint meetings of the informal expert group on the rights of the child and the informal expert group on the protection of children in migration<sup>55</sup>**

These joint meetings focused for example on alternative care systems, i.e. systems for providing accommodation and assistance/support to the migrant children that constitute alternatives to the traditional “institutional” arrangements and on best interests assessment(s) in asylum, return and other (administrative and/or judicial) proceedings concerning migrant children.

## **European Social Fund Plus investment in social inclusion**

One of the three ESF+ investment areas is social inclusion and breaking the cycle of disadvantage across generations. Member States should allocate **at least 25 % of their ESF+** resources under shared management to foster social inclusion. The fund places a special focus on young people in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations, including young people not in education, employment and training (NEET). In particular, the ESF+ will support:

- equal access to and completion of quality education and training;
- socio-economic integration of third-country nationals and young people from marginalised communities, including young migrants and young Roma;
- equal and timely access to quality and affordable services, including services that promote access to housing;
- social integration of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, including the most deprived young persons and children.

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<sup>52</sup> <https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/en/urban-agenda/inclusion-migrants-and-refugees/library/evaluation-report-urban-partnership-inclusion-migrants-and-refugees>

<sup>53</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/00\\_eu\\_emn\\_2019children\\_in\\_migration\\_synthesis\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/00_eu_emn_2019children_in_migration_synthesis_report_final.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/eu-policy/call-proposals-support-victims-trafficking-human-beings>

<sup>55</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child_en)

## European Regional Development Fund

The allocated EUR 13.8 billion of ERDF for 2014-2020 in EU Member States has been invested towards social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination. As regards thematic areas, ERDF supported transition to family and community-based services ensuring independent living conditions, tackling education and spatial segregation, integration of people with a migrant background, and social housing. All these measures might have also targeted youth.

Examples of projects co-funded by ERDF are:

The [High Five project](#) has increased political awareness among local 15-25-year-olds in the the disadvantaged neighbourhoods of the Moabit district in Berlin. To achieve this goal, the project provided a platform though which young people could recognise opportunities for political participation, discover their own political interests, identify problems and work to solve them. They then had the opportunity to engage directly with politicians to translate their conclusions into actions. This platform consisted of year-round weekly workshops, 14-day summer schools and two annual youth assemblies in autumn, all co-designed by young people themselves. Subjects covered contemporary political situation, issues young people encounter in their daily lives and historical political topics. Socially disadvantaged young people, including those with disabilities and from migrant or refugee backgrounds, were an important target group, as the project looked to help them deal with discrimination and make positive use of their life experience. As a result, High Five contributes to improving the quality of life and increase participation in society for residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Due to its success, the project was recognised as a finalist for the [European Commission 2020 Regiostars Award](#) for the category on “Citizen Engagement”.

The **REGIOSTARS awards 2020** dedicated a category to “**youth empowerment for cooperation across borders**”, to celebrate the 30 years of Interreg. This annual competition organised under the patronage of the regional policy Commissioner since 2008 aims at identifying excellent projects financed by cohesion policy in Europe. In 2020, nearly 40 projects submitted for the category showing that cohesion policy creates long-term relationships between youth across borders and contributes to intercultural exchange by empowering young people to collaborate across borders. The winner [Energy@School project](#) developed a scheme to train school students as “Junior Energy Guardians” in seven European countries.

Since the launch of the ‘[Youth.Shaping.EUSALP](#)’ initiative in 2018, the [EU Strategy for the Alpine Region \(EUSALP\)](#), has developed many activities allowing young people being involved in both governance structures of the Strategy and concrete projects. The European Commission has deployed EUR 1M to support this initiative covering the creation of summer camp and activities in the Alps with young people and members of the EUSALP. The Pitch your Project competition is supporting projects created by young people in the areas of natural resource sustainable management, digitalisation, education, labour market, promotion of heritage and integration of the region, strengthening crisis resilience capabilities, and development of local supply. Furthermore, the initiative has introduced a Youth Council, with

more than 20 young people regularly engaging with members of the EUSALP and participating in decision-making.

### 3.1.3. *Health and well-being*

The EU conducts actions specifically dedicated to the health of young people and children. For instance, more than 700 projects financed on volunteering through the **Solidarity Corps** are dedicated to health and well-being, many of which build on sport as a vehicle for physical and mental health, well-being and inclusion of especially disadvantaged groups.

#### ✓ *Health and sport*

The promotion of **sport and health-enhancing physical activity** is one of the priorities of the EU Work Plan for Sport. In 2021, the Commission will invigorate action in this area through the launch of the HealthyLifestyle4All initiative, a follow-up to the Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle. This will be a 2-years' campaign that aims to link sport and active lifestyles with health, food and other policies. It will showcase the Commission's commitment to promoting healthy lifestyles across generations including children and young people. Activities that will entice getting active will be concentrated in September at the occasion of the European Week of Sport.

The sport actions are supported under the Erasmus+ programme and are an important vector to promote positive values of social inclusion, tolerance and solidarity alongside the benefits of physical activity for health. In the 2014-2020 financing period, about one in three projects focused on '*Encouraging social inclusion and equal opportunities in sport*'. Thanks to the ability of sport to link people, projects in this field are very successful to create valuable occasions for inclusion and social cohesion. Projects in the field of sport also provided young athletes with valuable occasions for developing skills thanks to the *Promotion of the Guidelines on the Dual Career of Athletes* or the promotion of employability in and through sport for a broader public.

#### **[Scoring for the Future- Increasing youth employability through football](#)**

The project promoted education in and through sport focusing on life skills development for increased employability of NEET (not in education, employment or training) young people. It harnessed the potential of sport, and especially football to play an important role to support young individuals in the pursuit of a better future.

**Erasmus+ Projects Results Platform: [Erasmus+ project card](#) | [Erasmus+ \(europa.eu\)](#)**

**Project website: [KidMove](#) | [Athlete-centered coaching practices](#)**

#### ✓ *Health determinants*

#### **Joint Action on Health Equity Europe (JAHEE)**

The Joint Action is currently financed for the period from June 2018 to November 2021 under the 3<sup>rd</sup> Health Programme. It joins efforts of Member States addressing health inequalities including in children and young people, and underlying social determinants of health. It aims to deliver a policy framework with a menu of actions and recommendations for national, regional and local uptake and implementation, develop better policies, improve monitoring, governance, implementation and evaluation; implement good practices and facilitate

exchange and learning; identify factors of success, barriers and challenges and how to overcome them.

The actions focusing on children and young people health are:

- (a) Promotion of personal and oral hygiene among children aged 3-5 and reducing any inequalities among children from different provinces, ethnic groups and socio-economic levels in Cyprus,
- (b) Improving access to oral health services among disadvantaged children in Spain (Andalusia),
- (c) Students in the land of germs (Greece),
- (d) Public health for children (Greece), Improving access of children with special needs to the Programme “Development and health through Sport” for young people from Bucharest.

JAHEE aims to frame all these actions into a bigger picture of integration and sustainability, prepare an evaluation to assess adequacy of all those implementing efforts and their impact, and address the main conclusions in a consensus policy document to the attention of EU and Ministries of Health.

<https://jahee.iss.it/>

### **Healthy lifestyle – Marketing to children of products high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS)**

The lifestyle of the average European has changed dramatically over recent decades and the current sedentary lifestyle is for a great extent responsible for the worrying increases in overweight and obesity seen across age groups and socioeconomic population groups.

Many factors contribute to this lifestyle change. One of the factors is eating patterns. Children in European countries now consume more fast-food and sugar-sweetened beverages, eat outside the home more frequently and spend less time eating family meals than previous generations and are significantly impacted by the aggressive (online) marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages high in fat, sugars and salt.

In order to help Member States to halt and reverse this negative trend and the increased incidence of non-communicable diseases (cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, obesity/overweight), the Commission launched in 2020 the Best ReMaP joint action on implementation of validated best practices in the area of nutrition, which includes initiatives focusing on reducing aggressive (online) marketing to children.

The objective of this practice is to explore, develop and share, within participating countries, the best practices on how to implement effective policies to reduce marketing of unhealthy food products (food and non-alcoholic beverages) to children (up to 18 years) and develop harmonised monitoring and implementation tools thereof in the EU.

This initiative focuses on implementation and monitoring actions that are transferrable across the 17 participating countries including the development of voluntary codes of conduct and designing protocols and tools to monitor unhealthy food marketing to children.

This EU Framework will provide guidance for policy implementation at national level to support the adoption of the best practices across EU Member States, with recommendations for further EU and national measures.

[Best-ReMaP – Healthy Food for a Healthy Future \(bestremap.eu\)](https://bestremap.eu)

### **Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan includes actions on health promotion**

Through the focus on cancer prevention and lifestyles, the Cancer Plan – a priority for the Commission in the field of public health and adopted in February 2021 – will also benefit other major communicable diseases as they share the same **health determinants**: healthy diets, regular physical activity, no tobacco use, and no harmful alcohol consumption.

Adopting a healthy and active lifestyle at a young age will help to reduce non-communicable diseases, including cancer, at a later stage in life. The Cancer Plan aims to create a ‘Tobacco-Free Generation’ - where less than 5% of the population uses tobacco by 2040, compared to around 25% today - and introduces the ‘HealthyLifestyle4All initiative - campaign to be launched in September 2021 promoting sport, physical activity and healthy diets.

The Cancer Plan also aims at **improving health literacy** on cancer risks and determinants through (1) update and boost of the ‘European Code against Cancer’ (Commission initiative to inform people about actions they can take to reduce their risk of cancer); and (2) the development of an ‘EU Mobile App for Cancer Prevention’.

Especially for young people, the Cancer Plan plans the establishment of the ‘**EU Network of Youth Cancer Survivors**’ which will connect young cancer survivors, their families and (in)formal carers, and will help strengthen long-term follow-up in cancer care plans at national and regional level.

With dedicated funds under the EU4Health programme and other funding instruments, the Cancer Plan will support Member States’ efforts to extend routine **vaccination against human papillomaviruses of girls and boys** – in order to eliminate cervical cancer and other cancers caused by human papillomaviruses. The objective is to vaccinate at least 90% of the EU target population of girls and to significantly increase the vaccination of boys by 2030. Member States will play a critical role in meeting this target.

The Commission plans a Council Recommendation on vaccine-preventable cancers to help address cancer risks associated with Hepatitis B and Human papilloma virus infections. [https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/default/files/non\\_communicable\\_diseases/docs/eu\\_cancer-plan\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/default/files/non_communicable_diseases/docs/eu_cancer-plan_en.pdf)

### ✓ ***Mental health***

Under the third Health Programme’s 2020 Annual Work Plan<sup>56</sup>, the Commission supports actions with direct relevance to young people’s mental health. The Joint Action on Mental Health (ImpleMENTAL), expected to kick off in October 2021<sup>57</sup> will implement a multi-level national suicide prevention programme and a system reform to strengthen client-centered

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<sup>56</sup> [Annual work plan 2020 | Public Health \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/default/files/non_communicable_diseases/docs/eu_cancer-plan_en.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> With participation from 21 European countries and an EU fund of EUR 5 million.

community-based services. This new action will include a specific focus on services for children and young people.

On 10 May 2021, the Commission hosted a high-level conference<sup>58</sup> on the mental health impact of the pandemic. The needs of children, young people and their teachers were addressed in a dedicated session that included a contribution from student representatives, and several testimonials highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the daily lives of children and young people.

To support stakeholders' efforts, the Commission set up a group on COVID-19 mental health support' within its EU Health Policy Platform<sup>59</sup>. Organisations working on child well-being are represented among the more than fifty participating stakeholders.

The **EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025<sup>60</sup>**, adopted in December 2020, prioritizes measures relevant to children and young people. As prevention is an important aspect in tackling the drugs situation, the Strategy highlights the necessity to prevent and counter the exploitation by organised crime groups of vulnerable groups, including children and young people. At the same time, one of the objectives of the Strategy is to contribute to the healthy and safe development of children and young people through a variety of interventions. For example, increasing the availability of evidence-based targeted prevention of drug use as well as counselling and treatment for young drug users.

#### *3.1.4. Education and Training*

##### **Disruption of education due to COVID-19 and the effect it has on young people**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected and put unprecedented pressure on education and training systems worldwide and across the Union. The societal restrictions brought major changes to teaching and learning and to communication and collaboration within education communities. They had an impact on learners, their families, teachers, trainers, and institution leaders, as well as community professionals who support education, such as social workers, cultural educators, and vocational trainers.

For learners, the learning process was often slower and less in-depth, sometimes delayed, and generally made more difficult due to the absence of the systematic classroom rhythm and close interaction with educators and fellow pupils. Physical and emotional well-being was also compromised as schools could not offer structured activities or access to facilities: the socialising dimension and of the learning processes were heavily affected and many young people experienced sense of isolation and anxiety. Those from more disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to be exposed to more stressful home environments and

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<sup>58</sup> [Mental health and the pandemic: living, caring, acting! | Public Health \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>59</sup> [EU Health Policy Platform \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>60</sup> OJ C 102I , 24.3.2021, p. 1–14 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021XG0324%2801%29>

overall, an increase in mental health difficulties was observed, particularly amongst those already at risk, with a strong impact on motivation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated already existing socio-economic inequalities in children's learning opportunities at home. Many learners with limited or no access to well-functioning digital devices and good internet connection were at a disadvantage; entire groups of learners, including those from remote areas, migrant and refugee children and other learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, risked being excluded from distance and online teaching and learning. Many families and learners lacked the necessary competence and resources to cope with learning at home; this led to a major concern for those who would normally receive targeted learning support, subsidised meals, or access to a variety of extra-curricular activities.

In short, while closures of educational institutions have affected the learning progress of all learners to some extent, the switch to remote learning had disproportional negative impact on those who were already at a disadvantage, increasing the likelihood for learners at risk to disconnect and drop out. After having steadily decreased in previous years, in the third quarter of 2020 the share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) has returned to the level of 2016 (14.2%). A first evaluation of available evidence also points at a rise in the level of social exclusion over the past year. Young people and children emerge as those most at risk, especially when already disadvantaged.

Member States were able to rapidly mobilise options and support for distance learning, in particular digital solutions and the Commission has taken several actions to support Member States in their efforts. During the first period of school closure, the Commission hosted a Distance Learning Network (April-June 2020) for ministry representatives to exchange approaches to various challenges; in June 2020 the Commission published "Blended learning in school education: guidelines for the start of the academic year". In August 2020, two extraordinary Erasmus+ calls were launched to support "digital education readiness" and "creativity", each providing EUR 100 million to respond to educational COVID-19 challenges through collaborative projects.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a heavy impact on Vocational education and training (VET), especially on its work-based learning element. Many VET schools remained closed, at least temporarily, and some companies reduced the number of apprenticeship placements due to the difficult economic situation<sup>61</sup>. 86% of respondents to the ILO Global survey on the impact of COVID-19 on staff development and training<sup>62</sup> indicated that the training of apprentices had either been suspended completely or been partially interrupted. The challenges most frequently mentioned by enterprises and organisations in continuing apprenticeship training were (i) difficulties in delivering hands-on training, (ii) infrastructure

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<sup>61</sup> See for example: [OECD \(2021\). Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for Vocational Education and Training.](#)

<sup>62</sup> [ILO \(2021\). Skilling, upskilling and reskilling of employees, apprentices and interns during the COVID-19 pandemic: Findings from a global survey of enterprises.](#)

issues (e.g. limited or no digital equipment or internet connection) and (iii) lack of adapted training programmes and resources.

According to an online survey that the European Commission conducted in 2020 on how VET ensured continuity of the learning and teaching through COVID-19<sup>63</sup>, all countries set up online environments to adapt VET provision to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the survey also found that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the digital divide, the inequality and disadvantages this created for households and learners that do not have access to computers and the internet. Respondents to the European Alliance for Apprenticeships Pledge Monitoring Survey<sup>64</sup>, conducted between February and April 2021, reported that the pandemic led to a decrease in the supply of apprenticeships, in particular in those sectors, like hospitality, hit by months of full or partial lockdown. Apprentices who remained in training also faced severed disruptions in the normal provision of education and training, which raised concerns about student motivation and the overall quality of apprenticeships. Mobility of apprentices was also strongly affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Finally, several organisations reported that the crisis also impacted their promotional activities, making it harder for them to connect with students, parents, and other organisations. 37% of the respondents declared that they had moved to only training or supported organisations in moving to online training to respond to the crisis.

Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people has been on the agenda of the Commission since the start of the pandemic and that lessons learned inform new initiatives. For example:

- The Commission will propose a Council Recommendation on blended learning for high quality and inclusive primary and secondary education. The proposed Recommendation is part of the immediate response to lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, with shorter-term measures to address the most pressing gaps evidenced so far, striving to overcome the effects on the younger generation. At the same time, it outlines a way forward for blending learning environments<sup>65</sup> and tools<sup>66</sup> in primary and secondary education that can help building more resilient education systems, to prepare the ground to deliver on the Digital Decade objectives. The aim is to increase the inclusiveness and quality of school education and improve the broad competence development of all learners. The proposed Recommendation will:
  - Facilitate a common approach towards short-term solutions to problems encountered during the pandemic that led to gaps in learning outcomes;

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<sup>63</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/social/vocational-skills-week/fight-against-covid-19\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/social/vocational-skills-week/fight-against-covid-19_en).

<sup>64</sup> [Apprenticeship Support Services \(2021\). European Alliance for Apprenticeship Monitoring Survey 2019-2020.](#)

<sup>65</sup> School site and distance environments. The distance learning environment may include: the home; public libraries, museums and galleries; farms, factories, and other places of work; parks, forests and waterways; hospitals (in the case of sick or injured children), or sports centres and film studios (in the case of children on professional contracts).

<sup>66</sup> Tools can be digital (including online) and non-digital.

- Promote a common European understanding of the opportunities created by blending learning, including improving the inclusiveness of school education, and the broad competence development and well-being of learners;
  - Facilitate the sharing of policy maker, researcher and educator expertise and practices at system and school levels;
  - Support initiatives at EU level to foster competence development of educators and learners in blending learning environments and tools;
  - Encourage investment in this area.
- The new initiative ‘Pathways to School Success’, foreseen by the Commission Communication on achieving a European Education Area by 2025, and addressing underachievement in basic skills and early leaving from education and training, will also take account of the new challenges created by the COVID-19 crisis, in particular as regards more vulnerable pupils. The Commission will put forward a proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success in the first semester 2022. The proposed Recommendation will outline policy guidance for Member States on concrete strategies and actions that the European Union can take to reduce early leaving from education and training, complete upper secondary education and help pupils reach a certain level of proficiency in basic skills. It will incorporate proposals and good practices on how to promote conducive and inclusive learning environments, supported by a strong culture of wellbeing.

Drawing on lessons from the 2011 Council Recommendation on Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving, the Recommendation will propose a framework for action at school and education system level, structured around the four pillars (monitoring, prevention, intervention and compensation). It will encompass recommendations for combining universal and more targeted measures, based on a whole-system and whole-school vision.

### **European Education Area and European Research Area**

In September 2020 the European Commission adopted three Communications –**on achieving the European Education Area by 2025**<sup>67</sup>, **on a New ERA for Research and Innovation**<sup>68</sup>, and **on the Digital Education Action Plan**<sup>69</sup>. These Communications set out a **long-term vision** in the area of education and research and they list concrete **milestones** for the coming years. The achievement and further development of the European Education Area as an overarching objective until 2030 was endorsed in the **Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)**<sup>70</sup> adopted in February.

Through more than 40 concrete actions and initiatives, the European Commission will support **mutual learning** and **cooperation** at all levels, sharing of **good practices** and their

<sup>67</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1601687240311&uri=CELEX:52020DC0625>

<sup>68</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A628%3AFIN>

<sup>69</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1602778451601&uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0624>

<sup>70</sup> [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_.2021.066.01.0001.01.ENG](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2021.066.01.0001.01.ENG)

dissemination, development of **new teaching methods and innovation** in the area of education.

To guide and monitor progress towards the European Education Area the Communication and the Council Resolution identify targets to be reached by 2030. For example the **share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%** and the **share of low-achieving eight-graders in computer and information literacy should be less than 15%**. The time scale provides Member States with the time needed for the introduction and implementation of the necessary policy reforms and investments, and for their impact to become visible.

The **Council Conclusions on the New European Research Area**<sup>71</sup>, adopted in December 2020 are also key milestones for the efforts to build a common research area that is more tangible and impactful for researchers, innovators and citizens throughout Europe. They stress the importance of developing synergies and interactions between the European Research Area and the higher education related elements of the European Education Area, and call for the enhancement of research careers. The latter has been further taken forward by the **Council Conclusions on Deepening the European Research Area: Providing researchers with attractive and sustainable careers and working conditions and making brain circulation a reality**<sup>72</sup>, adopted in May under the Portuguese Presidency. **European Universities initiative**

One of the key actions under the Erasmus+ programme with a complementary support from the Horizon 2020/Europe programmes, implementing the European Education Area and the European Research Area in the field of higher education is the European Universities initiative. European Universities are ambitious transnational alliances of higher education institutions developing long-term structural and strategic cooperation. In 2019 and 2020, in total 41 European Universities alliances were selected.

One of their objectives is to create inter-university campuses where young people - students, staff and researchers - enjoy seamless mobility (physically or blended with virtual mobility) to study, train, teach, do research, work or share services in any of the cooperating partner institutions. The European Universities will also offer student-centred and flexible curricula, which will allow students to customise their choice of where and what to study within the alliance, through for instance more flexible and modular programmes. These new flexibility will be complemented with micro-credentials to allow anyone, including young professionals, to update their skills, including digital skills, when they need it most. Next to flexibility, innovative pedagogies supported by digitisation will be a key component of the European Universities alliances.

Students will also be trained on how to act on climate change and any other big challenges that require students from different disciplines and different countries to work together as well as with academics, researchers, businesses and social society. They will develop an

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<sup>71</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13567-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/49980/st09138-en21.pdf>

entrepreneurial and civic mindset. This will help equipping students with relevant skills to tackle the big societal challenges.

This ambitious European Universities initiative cannot be achieved without the thorough involvement of students at all level of the institutions. This is why European Universities are invited to put in place systems for structured student involvement in their alliance. The Commission encourages European Universities to actively engage and empower their students in the initiative, including in its governance, strategy and assessment. It organises regular consultations and meetings with the students of the alliances, as well as with student organisations such as the European Students' Union and the Erasmus Student Network, in order to take stock of their experiences and vision for the initiative.

Building a more resilient Europe means ensuring that all citizens are enabled and empowered through the digital transition. At political level, this is supported by the EU **Skills Agenda**, that foresees a set of actions to support skills development for all for a fair transition, including digital skills; by the **Digital Compass**, that calls for "universal digital education" by 2030, and by the **Digital Education Action Plan**, that proposes a vision for digital education.

The Plan focuses on two priorities. First, how to support the deployment of the vast and growing array of digital technologies (apps, platforms, software) to improve and extend education and training while properly addressing risks that may come from digital exclusion, inappropriate use, or fast technological developments. Second, how to equip all citizens with digital competences to live, work, learn and thrive in a world increasingly mediated by digital technologies. **The second priority is aligned with the EU Skills Agenda**, which sets the objective of 70% of adults of adults aged 16-74 having at least basic digital skills by 2025<sup>73</sup>. The Digital Education Action Plan is moreover aligned to the **Digital Compass**, that puts forward a target of at least 80% of all adults with basic digital skills by 2030, and 20 million employed ICT specialists in the EU (while increasing the participation of women). The Action Plan and the Digital Compass have moreover commonalities in tackling connectivity.

Digital Education is central for the Future of Europe: it can **support the recovery** to ensure that citizens can seize the benefits of digital transformation while mitigating its risks. The Action Plan can benefit from an array of funding mechanisms (Erasmus programme, the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and smart specialisation policies, the Connecting Europe Facility, the Digital Europe Programme, and Horizon Europe). In addition, the Action Plan forms part of the EU's response to the COVID-19 crisis, to guide the Member States in prioritising funding for digital education in the Recovery and Resilience Facility, where re- and upskilling as well as boosting very high-capacity broadband connectivity are flagship investments.

Throughout the process of preparation of the **Recovery and Resilience Plans**, the Commission strongly encouraged Member States to include investments and reforms in seven flagship areas. One of those flagships, 'Reskill and upskill', promotes the adaptation of education and training systems to enhance digital skills. Furthermore, the Member States have

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<sup>73</sup> The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan in 2021 set a target of 80 % by 2030.

to ensure that 20% of the total allocation of the plans is directed to measures that effectively contribute to the digital transition or to addressing the challenges resulting therefrom.

### **European Social Fund Plus investment in education and training**

In the 2014-2020 period approximately one-third of the ESF's total EU budget is allocated to education and training investments amounting to **over EUR 26 billion** with young people likely being the main beneficiaries of this funding. The ESF+ will continue to support the **entire education and training cycle** from early childhood education to life-long learning, higher education and VET to make sure that people get the right knowledge and skills at all stages of life.

In this, the ESF+ places a particular focus on **equal access to quality education and training** for **disadvantaged groups**. As such, the Fund is a key instrument for the implementation of EU education and training policy, including the European Skills Agenda.

### **European Regional Development Fund investments in education and training**

In the **2014-2020 programming period**, nearly **EUR 7 billion** of **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** investments have been allocated to education, training and lifelong learning. Among other groups, youth also benefitted from these investments. Among others, ERDF invests in education and creating incentives for educational reforms in the Member States. ERDF also aims to address inequalities in accessing education, also taking into account territorial disparities, with a particular focus on deprived areas. When looking at programmes investing in education and training, the following areas have been covered: upgrading infrastructure for quality and inclusive education and training, fighting early school leaving, promoting participation in education and training, enhancing the quality and labour market relevance of education, and alleviating education segregation<sup>74</sup>.

Examples of projects co-funded by ERDF:

The **[e-Schools pilot project](#)**, which provided ICT equipment and digital education tools for 151 primary and secondary schools in **Croatia**, received the **award for “Skills & education for a digital Europe” at the 2020 Regiostars awards**. Through ERDF support, the innovative projects has helped 10% of Croatian schools and around 50,000 teachers and 500,000 students to switch to a new level of education. Teachers, principals and administration staff received tablets or laptop computers, digital content for teaching and learning, and a system to manage their schools' administration. The additional support of the European Social Fund reinforced teacher's professional development to ensure the systemic introduction of ICT in the selected schools. Given the success of the project, a framework was developed to extend the program to 50% of schools in the country by 2022.

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<sup>74</sup> European Union, *Analysis of ERDF support for inclusive growth in the 2014-2020 programming period – Final Report*, 2018, p.79. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/erdf\\_support\\_inclusive\\_growth\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/erdf_support_inclusive_growth_en.pdf)

Along the year 2019-2020, [Interreg Atlantic Area](#) programme deployed the [Atlantic Youth Creative Hub](#) (AYCH) project, which aims to create entrepreneurial work synergies between youth from France, Spain, Portugal and the UK in the cultural and creative industries. Through a network of interconnected and multidisciplinary hubs, the project stimulates idea generation, pre-start-up and early stage business start-ups to unlock the creative entrepreneurial potential of young people. To date, 3 626 young people have received training, 377 young people have been in effective incubation (more than 3 months). Furthermore, the project has helped create and support 184 jobs, 171 business ideas and 108 young companies through the introduction of new services, products and events. The Ambassadors team is composed of 124 young people and 195 Experts are available to support young people.

### **Structural Reform Support Programme - Technical Support Instrument<sup>75</sup>**

Through technical support from the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) and the Technical Support Instrument which replaced the SRSP, the Commission is supporting EU Member States in undertaking reforms aimed at improving recognition of non-formal learning, educational outcomes for young people, their access to the labour market and the friendliness of the justice system for youth.

The European Commission is supporting **Estonia** in designing and preparing the **implementation of a reform to better integrate non-formal and formal learning**. Based on a request from the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, a 2-year project funded by the EU through the SRSP [to be launched in autumn 2021]. The principal aim is to address and overcome the current fragmentation between formal education (general school education, vocational education and training) and the non-formal learning sector, including activities supported through youth work. The project will, in particular, seek to facilitate the recognition of learning achieved in one or the other.

As a result of the technical support it is expected that the Estonian authorities are aware of policy options to achieve better integration of non-formal and formal learning, including on legislation, funding schemes and modes of governance. The project will enable the authorities to co-create and validate a set of guidelines for the integration of formal and non-formal learning together with relevant stakeholders (providers) from formal and non-formal education and local governments.

The technical support will be delivered, inter alia, through an analysis of both the current situation in Estonia and good practice from other countries, an assessment of the impact of changes in legislation, policy and funding models, and the joint work on new guidelines with the stakeholders concerned. The project will aim at recommendations for a comprehensive strategy to implement the reform.

The Commission is also supporting **Spain with the implementation of action plans aiming to tackle youth and long-term unemployment respectively**. Technical support is being provided to the Spanish Public Employment Service (SEPE) on monitoring the policies and programmes on youth activation across all autonomous communities. In addition, the

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<sup>75</sup> Regulation 2021/240 of 10 February 2021 establishing a Technical Support Instrument

Commission is supporting SEPE with organising a ‘community of practice’ among the regional public employment services around the exchange of good practices on tackling youth unemployment in Spain and internationally. Over the long-term, this support is expected to contribute to the design of better, more targeted active labour market policies (ALMPs) and other programmes, thereby boosting labour market participation rates among youth in Spain.

The Commission is working with **Portugal to address the problem of school failure**, leading to high dropout rates in schools located in vulnerable socio-economic areas. This action aims at implementing a comprehensive, innovative and tested approach to learning in a limited number of schools located in Territories of Priority Intervention (TEIP schools), based on activities involving local authorities and students’ parents (known as ‘*Schools as Learning Communities*’ approach). The outcome of such pilots will give the Portuguese authorities elements from which they can draw concrete policy conclusions and upgrade the national strategy to address education gaps linked to social and economic causes.

The Commission is working with **Romania and Cyprus to tackle early drop out from school**, or with **Finland and Slovenia to improve the friendliness of their justice systems**. In **Slovenia**, the Commission has supported the authorities to design the house for Children (Barnahus) to ensure that cases of children victim of crimes are processed in a child-friendly judicial setting. The Commission has also helped set up an inter-ministerial framework to ensure that experts can intervene in a coordinated manner for the benefit of children. The support provided led to the adoption of a law on Barnahus in Spring 2021. Further support is planned to be provided to Slovenia in modernizing the juvenile justice system of Slovenia so that it answers to the challenges of modern society including measures and sanctions especially adjusted to the needs of minors in accordance with the provisions of EU law and international standards. In **Finland**, the Commission supports the authorities to assess and improve the quality of their five existing ‘*Houses for Children*’ (Barnahus). These technical support projects will enable both countries to continue developing their Barnahus model, i.e. a child-friendly, multi-disciplinary and inter-agency model for responding to child violence and witnesses of violence in judicial settings. Over the long-term, the support is expected to improve the quality and child-friendliness of the Slovenian and Finnish judicial systems, thereby enhancing child welfare and protection.

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/overview-funding-programmes/technical-support-instrument-tsi\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/overview-funding-programmes/technical-support-instrument-tsi_en)

### **Horizon 2020 - Framework Programme for Research and Innovation**

**Horizon 2020** (2014-2020) research projects funded under **Societal Challenge 1 (Health)** and **Societal Challenge 6 (Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies)** have been supporting research on youth during the period 2019-2021 in many different areas, such as inequalities, education, migration, inclusion and mental health. Please find below some examples of projects funded under Horizon 2020.

#### **ENLIVEN - Encouraging Lifelong Learning for an Inclusive and Vibrant Europe**

Project Duration: 01/10/2016 - 30/09/2019 - EU funding: € 2,499,788

#### **PROMISE - PROMoting youth Involvement and Social Engagement: Opportunities and challenges for 'conflicted' young people across Europe**

Project Duration: 01/05/2016 - 30/04/2019 - EU funding: € 2,499,107

**EduMAP - Adult Education as a Means for Active Participatory Citizenship**

Project Duration: 01/02/2016 - 31/01/2019 - EU funding: € 2,498,112

**YOUNG ADULLLT - Policies Supporting Young People in their Life Course. A Comparative Perspective of Lifelong Learning and Inclusion in Education and Work in Europe**

Project Duration: 01/03/2016 - 28/02/2019 - EU funding: € 2,499,075

**DigiGen – The impact of technological transformations on the digital generation**

Project Duration: 01/12/2019 - 30/11/2022 - EU funding: € 2,995,805

**SMOOTH - Educational Common Spaces. Passing through enclosures and reversing inequalities**

Project Duration: 01/03/2021 – 29/02/2024 - EU funding: € 2,987,750

**PIONEERED - Pioneering policies and practices tackling educational inequalities in Europe**

Project Duration: 01/03/2021 – 29/02/2024 - EU funding: € 3,500,000

**RefugeesWellSchool - Preventive school-based interventions to promote the mental well-being of refugee and migrant adolescents**

Project Duration: 01/01/2018 - 31/03/2022 - EU funding: € 3,390,575

**NEW ABC - Networking the Educational World: Across Boundaries for Community-building**

Project duration: 01/01/2021 – 31/8/2024 – EU funding: € 3,036,657

**KIDS4ALLL - Key Inclusive Development Strategies for LifeLongLearning**

Project Duration: 01/04/2021 – 31/03/2024 - EU funding: € 3,039,903

**STRENGTHS – Fostering responsive mental health systems in the Syrian refugee crisis**

Project Duration: 01/01/2017 - 31/12/2021 - EU funding: € 6,018,758.50

**Equal-Life - Early Environmental quality and life-course mental health effects**

Project Duration: 01/01/2020 - 31/12/2024 - EU funding: € 11,994,426.25

**ME-WE - Psychosocial Support for Promoting Mental Health and Well-being among Adolescent Young Carers in Europe**

Project Duration: 01/01/2018 - 31/03/2021 - EU funding: € 3,999,885

**UPRIGHT - Universal Preventive Resilience Intervention Globally implemented in schools to improve and promote mental Health for Teenagers**

Project Duration: 01/01/2018 - 31/12/2021 - EU funding: € 3,874,215

**ECoWeB - Assessing and Enhancing Emotional Competence for Well-Being in the Young: A principled, evidence-based, mobile-health approach to prevent mental disorders and promote mental well-being**

Project Duration: 01/01/2018 - 31/12/2021 - EU funding: € 3,999,980

**BOOST - Building social and emotional skills to BOOST mental health resilience in children and young people in Europe**

Project Duration: 01/01/2018 - 31/12/2021 - EU funding: € 3,461,907

**RESPOND – Improving the Preparedness of Health Systems to Reduce Mental Health and Psychosocial Concerns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic**

Project Duration: 01/12/2020 - 30/11/2023 - EU funding: € 6,172,028

### 3.1.5. Culture

Promoting access to cultural opportunities, development of cultural participation and of intercultural competences among young people are among the aims of the EU Youth Strategy.

The objective of the **Creative Europe programme** is to promote cultural and linguistic diversity and to enlarge the audience for European artists and content. Each year, the Creative Europe Programme provided on average over 1 900 grants, co-financing training for over 2 300 professionals and around 90 cultural cooperation projects between 540 organisations across Europe. In addition, it helped to finance the development and/or distribution of approximately 720 films, the operation of 1144 cinemas, and the translation of around 500 books each year. The new Programme has seen its budget increased by 50% to invest in actions that reinforce cultural diversity and respond to the needs and challenges of the cultural and creative sectors.

Many of the projects funded by **Creative Europe** include actions to engage younger audiences and facilitate their participation directly in the development and production of content. For example, BUZZ Network, a 3-year project coordinated by Youth Theatre Arts Scotland, enables five European partners to share and develop best practices in Youth Theatre across Europe, leading to the creation of a new website portal which will increase awareness of cross-border opportunities and solidarity for over 28 500 European Youth Theatre participants and professionals. Furthermore, the PLAYGROUND project aims to improve the quality of music projects with underprivileged children and youngsters. Music workshops will be organized for children and youngsters in underprivileged communities, so they can explore their own creativity, develop broader social and cultural skills, and so they can feel empowered in a society that often has them feeling left out. An international platform will be created where methodological and academic expertise can be gathered, evaluated and shared, and public conferences will be organized to share this expertise and best practice.

In addition, Creative Europe has supported the translation of 267 Children’s Fiction and Youth Literature titles over 2019 and 2020.

### **Culture and gender equality**

Since 2018, the European Union’s [New European Agenda for Culture](#) provides the strategic framework for cooperation at the EU level. In this context, the EU Member States define, in cooperation with the European Commission, the main topics and working methods for policy

cooperation at EU level through multi-annual Work Plans for Culture adopted by the Council of the EU. The EU Member States identified gender equality as a priority for action in the [Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022](#)<sup>76</sup>. In this context, experts from 22 Member States worked between September 2019 and April 2021 to exchange experience and good practices on advancing gender equality in the cultural and creative sectors. Published in June 2021<sup>77</sup>, the report of this Open Method of Coordination Working Group highlights the role of culture and arts for promoting gender equality and positive role models. Some of its recommendations are very relevant for youth policy; several focus on the need to eradicate harmful gender stereotypes, especially through education starting at the early childhood stage. This is particularly important for young people who wish to thrive as artists or cultural professionals in careers traditionally perceived as reserved for a certain gender. The report also identifies over 250 good practices within the EU that aim to promote gender equality and diversity, including by engaging youth.

**The workshop “Harnessing the power of culture and cultural diversity for social cohesion and wellbeing”:** On 26-27 November 2020, the European Commission organised a workshop for experts from the Member States on “Harnessing the power of culture and cultural diversity for social cohesion and wellbeing”. One of the topics discussed focussed on the role of culture in building self-confidence and empowerment in order to (re-)enter the job market, in particular amongst young people.

**The New European Bauhaus (NEB)** initiative connects the European Green Deal to our living spaces. It calls on all Europeans to imagine and build together a sustainable and inclusive future that is beautiful for our eyes, minds, and souls. The **Council conclusions on youth participation** in decision making processes, adopted by the Council in May 2021, invite Member States and Commission to foster the EU Youth Dialogue and “to take advantage of this framework in other consultative processes, such as those related to the Conference on the Future of Europe and the New European Bauhaus initiative.”

**Joint UNESCO/EU project to strengthen the connections between heritage, youth and education in Europe**<sup>78</sup>

2018 was the European Year of Cultural Heritage, a year dedicated to celebrating Europe’s heritage as a rich and diverse mosaic of cultural and creative expressions. Some 12.8 million people took part in more than 23 000 events organised across the European Union and beyond, with the aim of strengthening their connection with European heritage and fostering a sense of belonging to a common European space. To build on the success of the Year and to ensure that its legacy will be long lasting, the Commission’s European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage proposed more than 60 actions to promote and protect cultural heritage.

The European Year focussed on four main pillars: engagement for heritage, sustainability, protection and innovation. These pillars highlighted the positive impact of the Year on the

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<sup>76</sup> Adopted by the Council of the EU in December 2018: EUR-Lex - 52018XG1221(01) - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

<sup>77</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/36e9028b-c73b-11eb-a925-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

<sup>78</sup> <https://ich.unesco.org/en/engaging-youth-for-an-inclusive-and-sustainable-europe-01051>

perception of Europe’s cultural heritage as a fundamental important resource for Europe. The joint UNESCO–EU project “**Engaging Youth for an Inclusive and Sustainable Europe**” represented a significant milestone in this process. It is also the first time that the two organisations came together to address their common priorities in education and culture through a joint project. The project aims to encourage and stimulate young people to explore their cultural heritage and actively participate in its safeguarding and transmission in new and innovative ways. A resource kit was developed and it builds on the knowledge and expertise gained from the bottom-up approach with teachers and learners from the UNESCO ASPnet schools across the EU.

### **3.2. Policy priorities and cooperation needs at national level**

Comparing the results from the first and second FNAPS exercises when it comes to the important topics for cooperation under the core area **EMPOWER**, it seems that the Member States priorities did not change:

From the replies provided by the 21 Member States in 2019, the need to support **quality youth work development on local, regional, national and European level**, including development in the field, training for youth workers, the establishment of legal frameworks and sufficient allocation of resources was ranked as the highest one.

With around two thirds of the total replies from FNAPS exercise in 2021, **quality youth work development** confirmed its status as the most relevant topic for cooperation among responding Member States.

Another topic for cooperation of great concern for the Member States, both in 2019 and 2021, is **the need to develop and implement a European Youth Work Agenda for quality, innovation and recognition of youth work**.

#### **EU Cooperation tools**

The most popular EU cooperation tools under the core area EMPOWER in 2019 were:

- Peer learning focussed on policy development
- Transnational cooperation activities under the programme
- Evidence building/research

A slight change in cooperation tool preferences can be noted **in the second FNAPS exercise** with the following results:

- **Peer learning focused on policy development**, confirming its status as a preferred tool chosen by more than a half of the Member States
- **Expert group at EU level and Transnational cooperation activities under the programme**
- **Evidence building/research.**

Moreover, under this section of FNAPS 2021 exercise, some **examples of good practices for empowerment of young people** provided by Member States arise:

- Organization of **online activities during COVID-19 pandemic for youth workers and debates on quality youth work** in the youth sector (Slovenia);

- Range of measures aiming at the inclusion of youth such as the **National Youth Policy Council**, chaired by the Minister responsible for Youth Affairs, conveying approximately two times per year to discuss and debate youth policy with a cross-sectoral approach (Sweden);
- Youth policy addressing two very **specific target groups, notably children and young people** (Belgium – Flemish-speaking community);
- **Funding of youth information centres** whose role is to support young people by providing them with reliable information (Belgium - French-speaking Community)

### 3.3. Youth-led initiatives and actions

Youth organisations have been over the years at the forefront of the promotion and support of quality non-formal education and youth work across Europe. Besides regularly contributing to the discussions at EU level on youth work and youth work policy, through testimonies, policy papers, expert groups and consultations processes, they play a more direct role in training and innovation in youth work. They also play a pivotal role in facilitating opportunities for non-formal and informal learning and any subsequent validation processes as indicated in the Council Recommendation of December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

#### ✓ *Contribution from World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS)*

Youth Goal 2 Equality of All Genders

- The [Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming toolkit](#)
- Following WAGGGS support with “Stop the Violence” educational programme and as part of their Social Activism Strategic Target, the Hebrew Scouts Movement in Israel participated in the Women Parade about violence against women.

Youth Goal 3 Inclusive Societies

- [In the Shoes of the Migrants](#) – Human Rights and Refugees group
- TIFAKE: project run by the Turkish federation to help Syrian Refugees. Pictures [here](#) and there is an article on WOSM website [here](#).

Youth Goal 5 Mental Health & Wellbeing

- The Slovene Catholic Girl Guides and Boy Scouts Association has developed a [website](#) to understand how their members are coping with the COVID-19 situation.
- Every year, GGUK produces a Girl Attitudes Survey on what girls and young women think on a number of issues.

Youth Goal 8 Quality Learning

- Scouting Nederland built a [website](#) offering fun and challenging programs that can be done from home. The activities are available also to “non-members”.
- The Israel Federation has produced [Virtual Program guidelines](#) for Leaders of Scouts with Special Needs.

### ✓ *Contribution from YMCA Europe*

In the context of our **Roots for Peace Programme**, the Local Capacities for Peace (LCP) concept has also been developed based on the best practices of the previous project phases. It aims at strengthening the local capacities for peace at grassroots level, through structured follow-up of the Roots PWI alumni and continued cross-border and regional cooperation further opening up the capacities built and benefits created by the Roots so far, both human resources and assets considered. The LCP Award projects are estimated to enrol at least 100 participants as direct beneficiaries, with 3 possible cross-border or regional activity scenarios, such as youth peace camps and reunions, summer academies and day schools, exchange and study visits, refugee or IDP rehabilitation initiatives, etc.

<https://rfr.ymcaeurope.com/peace-award/>

### ✓ *Contribution from the Network of European Youth Capitals*

Through our work regarding urban level youth planning, our work continued in the framework of the LAYOUTH (Local Action for Youth) project involving the cities of Braga, Maribor, Thessaloniki, Cluj-Napoca, Varna, Novi Sad, Amiens and Klaipeda. Since the pandemic unfolded, we focus our work on how short-term local action planning can serve the collective action of local actors in serving the needs of youth.

We developed the first guidelines and forms on how to develop local annual action plans. This modular tool aims to provide a simple way for cities to plan their short-term action for the future which became extremely important in the wake of the pandemic as short term urgent solutions needed to be considered in parallel with medium and long-term strategic approaches.

Even if the need for increasing the ability of cities to have in-depth planning was identified before the COVID-19 crisis unfolded, its relevance increased as it became clear that young people are one of the most affected segments of society while attention might avoid them as young people are much less affected physical health-wise and as they are not a key component of economic output.

## 4. IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE YOUTH SECTOR

The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the youth sector. It resulted in discontinuity in learning activities, loss of employment, loss of career opportunities, social isolation and mental health issues<sup>79</sup>. The pandemic has had a range of implications and consequences for the youth sector, youth work and non-formal learning in Europe, presenting significant threats to the standard methodologies of youth work. The fact that youth work organisations were strongly affected is confirmed by the key findings in the Policy brief from the **RAY-COR**<sup>80</sup>, research project on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth work in Europe conducted in 2020. In this context, 47% of all online survey respondents stated that their youth work structure has been affected majorly by the pandemic, while 33% state their structural environment has experienced moderate effects. On 15% of youth work structures, the pandemic has had slight effects and just 5% of respondents state there has been no effects at all so far.

The severity of the impact of the pandemic is also confirmed by the findings of the analysis conducted by the **Knowledge hub of the EU-Council of Europe youth partnership**<sup>81</sup> It highlighted that 70% of the organisations were unable to maintain more than 20% of their activities, almost 60% of them had to rethink how they operated and moved to digitalisation and over 85% of them were forced to cancel one or more events.

**The impact of the lockdown and other measures on the NGO sector can be summarized in four main fields:**

1. **Operative obstacles** leading to the suspension of many activities and projects as well as cancellation of summer camps in many countries. In some cases, youth centres were kept open with certain regulations (small groups, open air activities).
2. **Funding:** Referring to the Knowledge Hub findings, in most countries, state funding for the youth sector appears to have remained consistent during the lockdown with some variation at national, regional and local level. There is also evidence of funding being cut, particularly at local level, or redirected, delayed, cancelled or postponed.

In addition to that, the severe economic effects of the pandemic on the youth organisations are detected in the RAY study results, in terms of:

- **Budget cuts and office closures:** 46% of respondents say that, at the time of conducting the survey (**RAY, June 2020**), two thirds or more of their youth work activities had been delayed or interrupted. For 49% of organisations, this led to a decrease in their budget, while for half of these organisations, the budget shrank by 40% or more. 74% of responding youth workers and youth leaders had to close physical spaces temporarily, while 3% of them were forced to close permanently.

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<sup>79</sup> European Youth Forum. (2020). Youth and Covid-19: impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental wellbeing. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/-/youth-and-covid-19-survey-report>

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.researchyouth.net/events/open-online-panel-youth-and-covid-19/>

<sup>81</sup> <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/covid-19-impact-on-the-youth-sector>

- **Work time and volunteering time reductions:** In many countries, youth workers experienced reduced working hours, changes in working conditions, adoption of new practices, uncertain employment, etc. As stated in the Knowledge hub report, in those countries where youth work is more professionalised, youth workers appeared to have greater job security and conditions of employment during the lockdown.

38% of responding organisations to RAY survey reported a reduction of work time of paid staff members, 25% of them expected that further work time reductions would be necessary, while 11% expected additional job cuts. 65% of respondents said that the overall volunteering time has been reduced as well, 63% of respondents claimed that some volunteers suspended their engagement temporarily, while 26% said that some of their volunteers resigned permanently.

- **Rare crisis beneficiaries:** 2% of RAY survey respondents claimed that the budget of their organisation increased during the pandemic, 8% had new staff hired, while for 20% of them new volunteers joined their team. Although the impact of the pandemic on NGOs was very negative in terms of financial support and planning of future activities, there were positive examples of funding allocation in Estonia, Sweden and Germany.

**3. Alternatives:** Reflecting the Knowledge Hub findings, in many cases there were neither enough digital resources nor digital skills available for youth organisations transferring to alternative work models. Some umbrella organisations developed online support structures for NGOs and youth workers (e.g. training courses on how to use digital tools).

**4. New activities:** Some youth NGOs started new online activities as alternatives to those that were no longer available due to the lockdown. There was a significant increase in the voluntary activities run by youth NGOs (e.g. support for the elderly).

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/-/youth-partnership-launches-knowledge-hub>

COVID-19 impact on the youth sector: Youth Partnership launches Knowledge HUB



- According to the interviews with umbrella youth organisations, the national responses to support the youth sector during the second wave did not improve;
  - While governments were debating recovery plans, youth policies were not key priorities;
  - The digital space for youth work accelerated and expanded during the this period;
  - There was a visible increase in youth organisations at local and national levels managing to find suitable responses to the pandemic and lockdown.
- Based on survey findings with a participation of 90 youth organisations from 48 countries **run by OECD between 7-20 April 2020**<sup>83</sup>, mobilising young volunteers and youth workers was crucial to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Youth organisations swiftly stepped in to contribute to societal resilience in various ways: creating online campaigns to keep young members informed on the measures to protect themselves and others, turning to digital tools to provide practical advice to young people, launching initiatives to support the elderly during the crisis through volunteering campaigns, etc.

## 4.2. Impact on youth work practice

The RAY survey<sup>84</sup> indicates that most youth organisations adapted quickly to the new circumstances imposed by the crisis with 84% of respondents claiming to address the pandemic and its effects in their own youth work, despite the challenging times.

- **Experimenting with new work methods:** 44% of responding youth workers and youth leaders offered online group activities frequently, while another 38% were doing it occasionally. 48% of responding young people said that they are joining digital activities more than before, while 35% said they were suggesting changes to digital youth work and 28% said they were helping to improve digital youth work more than before (RAY, 2020).
- **Outreach to vulnerable groups:** Obstacles for young people with fewer opportunities to reach for youth work across Europe and the lack of support for young people with disabilities have been mentioned frequently as a source of disappointment by the respondents of the RAY survey.
- **Digital opportunities:** Despite huge potential of digital tools, due to non-equal access to digital opportunities, around 70% of responding youth workers claimed that they had lost access to more than one third of the young people they normally work with. For 37%, it is more than two thirds.

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<sup>83</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.researchyouth.net/news/first-findings-corona-research-project/> and [https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RAY-COR\\_Policy-Brief-September\\_20200915.pdf](https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RAY-COR_Policy-Brief-September_20200915.pdf) and <https://www.researchyouth.net/news/first-findings-corona-research-project/> and [https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RAY-COR\\_Policy-Brief-September\\_20200915.pdf](https://www.researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/RAY-COR_Policy-Brief-September_20200915.pdf)

- **A return of face-to face activities:** Preliminary results of the RAY study suggest that young people previously involved in youth work offers are not being reached any more.

### 4.3. Support provided to the youth work sector

Overall, the pandemic revealed that the youth sector lacked support from the public sector and according to the **RAY survey findings**:

- A total of 58 % of youth organisations was not eligible for the programmes set up in their context;
- The EU funding programmes were not always considered helpful by youth workers, especially due to the inflexibility of the EU funding rules;
- There is a very strong wish for a different approach in supporting youth work organisations through European funding, and a strong demand to recognise that quality digital youth work needs to be adequately resourced;
- Lack of professional support systems for youth workers: 17% of the respondents to online survey received all the professional support they need. More than half of them stated that they received only some (38%) or even none (16%) of the professional support that they need.
- Similar calls for support were detected from the findings of **the Preliminary key results of the study on Youth work in EU<sup>85</sup>** conducted by Ecorys in 2020, focused on the six dimensions: **funding, quality, recognition, digitalisation, innovation and social inclusion**.
  - Based on the results of the study, the main needs of the youth workers **before COVID-19** were identified: **Needs for funding** (2/3 of youth workers wanted to have increased structural funding, and **Recognition** – 60% of youth workers expressed their wish to have more recognition for their work.
  - Since the start of the pandemic, the need for funding remained relevant followed by the need of building relationships with stakeholders and other youth workers as well as empowerment of their digital competences.
  - **Perception of policy gaps:** there is a general agreement that national policies do not meet the needs of the youth workers. Main policy options that youth workers would like to see are **structural funding (especially in innovation and digitalisation field) and exchange of best practices with other youth workers**.
  - **Recommendations for future initiatives:** promote vision for Youth work, recognition of Youth work, sustainable and continuous funding, human capital development in terms of the exchange of practices, online platforms development, etc.

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<sup>85</sup> Add link when published

- **The European Federation for Intercultural Learning** reported some common challenges raised by the pandemic such as staff redundancy, reduced capacity of the organisations, a huge loss of the accumulated knowledge and future mobility. The Federation highlights **the need to invest in the European NGOs and ensure structural funding of the organisations** to consolidate their resilience, especially in the recovery phase.
- **Examples of good practice (EP Study on impact on education and youth, 2020):**
  - The European Youth Forum, as the biggest platform of youth organisations in Europe, plays a significant role in continuing to support youth organisations, is prompt to provide information for its member organisations and provides tools and resources to help youth workers operate online.
  - The European Commission and the European Youth Foundation cooperated to offer specific funding opportunities to youth organisations in to the context of the crisis.

### **EU Youth programmes**

Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people has been on the agenda of the Commission since the start of the pandemic. The Commission gave priority to assist organisations and individuals participating in the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes in addressing adverse effects of the pandemic such as serious restrictions to physical mobility<sup>86</sup>. In order to support beneficiary organisations and participants, the Commission has set up mitigating measures, such as the possibility to replace planned physical activities by virtual ones or the possibility to postpone projects, with the safety and protection of participants as key objective. The Commission also launched a dedicated Erasmus+ call to support the youth, education and training sectors impacted by the pandemic.

All youth mobility activities have been impacted in 2020 by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of measures and flexibility rules have been introduced in EU Youth programmes in order to limit the impact of the pandemic on the programmes and their beneficiaries. Youth organisations have been given the possibility to postpone their mobilities by extending the projects, adapting the project activities or replacing them by online versions. Maximum flexibility has been applied both in the implementation and in the eligibility of costs within the applicable legal frameworks in order to support the sector.

In the context of the European Solidarity Corps, participants and activities showed that the Corps adapted and activated to address immediate needs to those hit by the pandemic. Opportunities offered by the programme further energised solidarity between Europeans and helped to prioritise the issues that people face during and after the pandemic. The Corps mobilised young Europeans to support their local communities, fighting the immediate impact of the crisis by bringing relief to one another during isolation or confinement, including on-line volunteering, helping older generations gain digital skills to stay connected, offering care to those hardest hit by the crisis.

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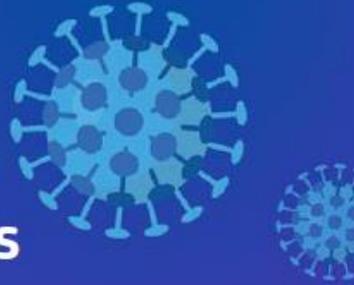
<sup>86</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/coronavirus-impact\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/coronavirus-impact_en)



European Commission

## European Solidarity Corps: tackling the Covid-19 crisis

### STORIES FROM PARTICIPANTS



Small acts of kindness are spreading hope and fostering solidarity across Europe.

19 May 2020  
#Coronavirus #EUSolidarityCorps

Whether doing grocery shopping, sewing masks or creating online educational materials for children, young European Solidarity Corps participants are motivated and determined to take up challenges and support those in need.



### Nataša from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Croatia



Nataša Popović, 2020

Nataša and other volunteers from The Circles – Centre for Education, Counselling and Charitable Work **have been helping elderly people**. Support for vulnerable groups – elderly, disabled, ill – is one of the activities of volunteers in a project.

**Included individual creates satisfied society.**

Despite limitations such as unavailability of public transport, **volunteers are bringing groceries, medicine and other necessary items to the people in need.**

They are following all precautions – keeping the social distance, using masks, gloves and disinfectants.

Volunteers also designed a crowdfunding campaign to collect donations for buying bicycles as faster alternative for home visits.



© Nataša Popović, 2020





## Yasmina from the Netherlands



Yasmina is passionate about sustainability, healthy lifestyles and helping the vulnerable. She and her friends created a solidarity project called **Freshtable**.

The main aim of the project is to **deliver healthy and affordable meals using ecological products and sustainable packaging**. Freshtable also provides work opportunities to refugees (who are hit harder by the crisis)

Freshtable prepared and delivered meals for elderly, affected by current coronavirus situation, for free. They run online deliveries in Breda and Rotterdam when online demand has spiked.



## Yannick from France in Poland



Yannick is a European Solidarity Corps volunteer from France who joined TRATWA Association in Poland, Wroclaw in September 2019.

When Yannick moved to Poland for one year to volunteer in a project to help people and be useful, he couldn't imagine this current Coronavirus situation – unprecedented one which is affecting our lives and our lifestyles worldwide.

When Covid-19 crisis struck Poland, Yannick and other European Solidarity Corps volunteers in TRATWA started to produce **face masks and protective helmets**. They delivered them to Wroclaw hospitals and to homeless shelters.

Yannick has recently joined the team **preparing food packages**. 1000 packages were distributed to those people in Wroclaw who need them the most. Yannick also is giving language classes. **He had to adapt his teaching by moving the activities online.**



© Yannick Dolschard - 2020



## Carolina from Spain in France

Carolina is 22 and she is a volunteer in MJC Flers, in Normandy. During the confinement she is making cooking tutorial videos to help to entertain and distract people from all the negativity around. Together with other volunteers she is preparing the European Week at the end of May that will have to take place online now.

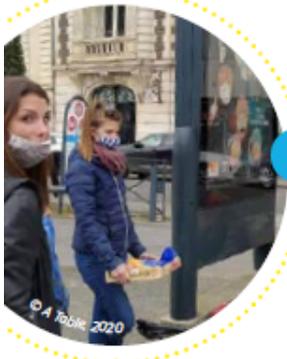


© PAJA LOBOS Carolina - 2020



## Juanjo, Ludvigs and Tomaz in Slovenia

Volunteers in organisations in Slovenia also help with grocery shopping, delivering meals, creating online educational material and running online language classes. But Juanjo, Ludvigs and Tomasz from Familija **took on renovating a room** opposite the volunteers' flat. The boys will turn it into a guest room that they decided to call the Quarantine Room.



## Ten youngsters in Rennes, France

Two Saturdays a month participants of the solidarity project "A Table" prepare a good meal from unsold food for homeless people. The project is not only about providing balanced food for those in need, but also about sharing a smile and having a conversation with those who perhaps has no one to talk to.



## Volunteers in Romania

Among many other project examples in Romania, volunteers at the American International School of Transylvania stand in solidarity with medical staff: while the latter take care of our health during the Covid-19 outbreak, **the volunteers offer non-formal education activities** to their children for free.

Mirco and Sheyla are volunteers in A.C.T.O.R organisation. They and other volunteers have developed online educational activities for 3-12 year old children during pandemic when online learning has become a norm. Mirco and Sheyla are great storytellers and children enjoys lessons with them.



## Mirco from Italy and Sheyla from Spain in Romania



## 5. BEYOND THE EU<sup>87</sup>

Young people are key actors for change and essential partners in the implementation of the Agenda 2030 on sustainable development. The EU engages for and with young people and youth policy stakeholders from non EU countries through multiple policy processes, programmes and initiatives, taking the EU Youth Strategy and other youth related EU policies and initiatives – such as the Youth Guarantee – as inspiration. The June 2020 Council Conclusions on Youth in External Action confirm and specify the EU’s commitment in this field<sup>88</sup>. The Youth Action Plan will ensure a long-term approach to youth inclusion and empowerment across all the relevant policies, instruments and programmes “to ensure that EU’s external action contributes to the meaningful global engagement of youth at all levels in all regions”.

The meaningful involvement of young people in decision-making at global and EU level and in partner countries is one of the Commission’s priorities. Youth participation and empowerment are, in fact, essential to foster democracy and build stable and peaceful societies. Youth is mainstreamed across the EU’s foreign policy and external action: from fostering the creation of education and employment opportunities to promoting sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR), from recognizing and supporting the role of young people in peacebuilding to promoting gender equality and young women and girls’ empowerment.

The Commission has several mechanisms in place to ensure that young people’s voices are taken into account: from the special adviser on youth for International partnerships to the establishment of youth sounding boards for International Partnerships, from strengthening regular dialogue with youth organisations to existing youth programmes such as the European Development Days young leaders, Eastern Partnership Youth Fora and the African Union-EU Youth Cooperation Hub.

**Education** is a major area of EU cooperation with youth globally. The value of education is multifaceted, reducing poverty, advancing job creation, contributing to inclusion and stability and strengthening relations between the EU and partner countries.

The EU has several programmes for young people in partner countries. The **Erasmus+** programme, in particular, has an important international dimension, as it contributes to bringing people closer and internationalizing higher education institutions by supporting cooperation and exchanges. Each year, Europe’s universities exchange some 50 000 students and staff with universities in other parts of the world.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> The following chapter aims to illustrate EU youth engagement around the world with examples from several geographic areas, and does not provide for a comprehensive overview of all international EU cooperation on youth.

<sup>88</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8629-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>89</sup> Today’s 130 Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree programmes provide over 2 500 EU-funded scholarships per year for students worldwide to study an integrated master programme at two or more European universities. At the institutional level, Capacity-Building for Higher Education partnerships develop new teaching, boost skills and improve higher education governance in the EU’s neighbouring countries and in developing or emerging economies further afield. The 150 projects selected each year lever

Through capacity building activities, Erasmus+ also contributes to addressing key challenges of partner countries, including the quality and inclusiveness of all levels of education, the professional development and training of teachers and the governance of education systems. The new Erasmus+ 2021-27 increases inclusiveness of all activities, improves flexibility and better balances geographic and individual support. The European Solidarity Corps Programme remains is also open to third countries associated to the programme.

**Youth employment** and entrepreneurship are other key dimensions of EU engagement with partner countries. For instance, the European Training Foundation (ETF) provides support in all 23 NEAR countries (plus Russia and Central Asia), focusing inter alia on, human capital development and lifelong learning. ETF helps promote employability and skills development through support to partner governments in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes in these areas.

The EU also actively promotes **youth participation** in policymaking globally. Young people have a vital role to play in strengthening democracy. Taking into account the experience from the EU Youth Dialogue, initiatives have been set up to fuel exchange with policy makers and intercultural dialogue between young people in the European Union and partner countries. Through the innovative use of digital technology, Virtual Exchanges allowed to reach more diverse youth segments.

In June 2021 the European Commissioner for International Partnerships appointed Bitania Lulu Berhanu as Special Adviser on Youth to advise on the best ways to promote youth participation and empowerment through international partnerships, with a particular focus on youth in Africa.

Following the June 2020 Council Conclusions on Youth in External Action, a Youth Action Plan will be developed to ensure that EU's external action contributes to the meaningful global engagement of youth at all levels in all regions. It will constitute the external dimension of the [EU Youth Strategy and strengthen links with the rest of the world, reflecting the objectives of the EU Global Strategy](#).

## 5.1. Western Balkans

The **Western Balkans** have one of the youngest populations in Europe, but face comparatively high rates of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET). In 2019, on average 22% of the youth population (age group 15-24) fell in the NEET category, compared to the EU-27 average of 10.1%. While Kosovo\* and Albania still enjoy a window of opportunity with higher proportions of younger cohorts in the working age population, the remaining four economies face potential shrinking of their workforces because of an ageing population. Emigration and brain drain constitute a particular concern. In line with EU accession requirements, youth policies and action plans have been developed, or are in the process of being finalised, and institutions been set up. Implementation and monitoring of the

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higher education as a driver for wider societal and economic development, and dovetail effectively with the EU's development and cooperation policy.

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

youth public policies still needs to be enforced. The main issues tackled are youth unemployment, poverty, job insecurity and, recently, emigration. A priority goal is to involve young people in developing, implementation and monitoring of cross sectoral policy.

In response to these important challenges, which are aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis, the Commission announced an Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans in October 2020 to inter alia promote human capital development in the region. The EIP proposes as flagship initiative #10 that **Youth Guarantee** schemes inspired by the EU Youth Guarantee, which will be implemented by Western Balkan governments during 2021-2027. By implementing Youth Guarantees, partner countries will realize principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and further align with the EU social acquis and policies. The initial steps towards establishing and implementing the scheme in the region were taken in the first semester of 2021. The Western Balkans six committed to establishing Youth Guarantee schemes based on the EU model at the second EU-WB ministerial on employment and social affairs [Second EU – Western Balkans Ministerial Meeting on Employment and Social Affairs - Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2021 \(europa.eu\)](#). This is a flagship of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans of October 2020.

During 2019-2021, the Commission supported a range of programmes and projects supporting the **labour market integration of young people**, for example through funding **VET exchanges in various industry fields**, supporting young entrepreneurs through **access to financing**, strengthening civil society organisations (CSOs) active in promoting **youth entrepreneurship**, investing in **skills development programs**.

In the area of **youth participation**, steps were taken towards strengthening the capacities of National Youth Councils. The ongoing Western Balkan Youth Lab Project, implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council, provides a forum for young people and other stakeholders to participate in the decision-making of youth-relevant policies in the six Western Balkan countries.

The **Young European Ambassadors (YEA)**, a creative network of future young game changers from across the Western Balkans was launched in September 2020. YEAs come from different backgrounds but all of them share an interest in learning about the EU and promoting opportunities that the EU offers to young people from the region. Most importantly, YEAs share ideas and develop their talents – towards inspiring change within their communities and the Western Balkan region. There are currently 60 YEAs and a doubling to 120 is expected in September 2021. Young European Ambassadors will continue to communicate to their peers about the EU, and its main priorities such as the EU green deal and digital transformation, and the various opportunities offered through online and in person events.

Progress was made in associating the Western Balkans to the European Education Area cooperation framework. North Macedonia and Serbia are fully associated to **Erasmus+**, and hence enjoy full participation in all the actions of the programme on equal footing with EU Member States. As for the non-associated partners in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia

and Herzegovina, Kosovo\* and Montenegro), the EU has increased its funding for key actions in the field of youth, such as capacity building and mobility. Altogether, around 17 000 young people and around 50 000 higher education students and staff participated in exchanges between the EU and the region between 2014 and 2020. Around 40 000 individuals participated in youth projects. The Commission has also supported five pilot projects for mobility in vocational education and training with partners from the region.

The **European Training Foundation** is facilitating the engagement of countries from the Western Balkans in the European Alliance for Apprenticeship (EAfA), which is also relevant for the Youth Employment Package at EU level.

At country and at regional levels, EU youth programmes have been complemented by initiatives of UN institutions, including UNICEF. In 2020, an UNICEF ETF study documented the needs and challenges of youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, international donors and financing institutions have invested in youth engagement. A recent example is the initiative of KfW Development Bank together with the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum and the Regional Challenge Fund to increase the employability of vocational education and training students.

### **Examples of EU Youth action in the Western Balkans**

#### **Support to RYCO**

The Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) is a joint inter-governmental initiative of the Western Balkans (6 participants: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) aiming to promote the spirit of **reconciliation and understanding** between the youth in the region through intra-regional youth exchanges and cooperation.

The first action supporting RYCO (EU contribution: EUR 0.5 million) aimed at:

- Increasing the level of youth participation in informing priorities of RYCO's work, increasing awareness of young people about opportunities for youth cooperation across the region, and strengthening capacities of CSOs in the Western Balkans to implement regional youth projects.

The second action supporting RYCO (EU contribution: EUR 4.5 million) is partly implemented by Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and partly by RYCO. The project started in December 2020 and lasts for 36 months. GIZ, in close cooperation with RYCO, will implement the action aiming to contribute to:

- Increasing skills and knowledge of young people in the Western Balkans by enhancing education systems and promoting cooperation in the region through 1) improving the institutional and organisational capacities of RYCO to manage regional cooperation projects, 2) improving the capacity of schools and other formal education structures to actively participate and develop quality projects, and 3) designing and implementing regional School Exchange Schemes.

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\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

<https://www.rycowb.org/>

**Western Balkan Youth Lab** (implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC))

The Western Balkan Youth Lab (WBYL) is a three-year project funded by the EU (EUR 1.5 million) and implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). It kicked off in January 2020 aiming to engage young people in the Western Balkans to participate in decision-making.

The action consists of four components:

1. **Mapping** of the current youth policies, identification of existing support and gaps;
2. WBYL, a forum of **policy dialogue** between governments, parliaments and young people in order to develop and monitor the implementation of youth-relevant policies;
3. Strengthening of **national youth councils** through technical assistance;
4. **Participation** of the Western Balkans youth in regional and international events.

Two thematic regional labs will be organised in the course of the action, in order to stimulate open conversation and active engagement between young people and policy-makers in the Western Balkans. Each lab will consist of three regional events and a series of local activities (e.g. workshops, conferences, field visits). Participants' interaction will be facilitated in a continuous process between and beyond the meetings to create a dynamic of trust.

[https://www.rcc.int/priority\\_areas/48/western-balkans-youth-lab-project](https://www.rcc.int/priority_areas/48/western-balkans-youth-lab-project)

**Bilateral cooperation between Greece and North Macedonia in the youth field**

The "Prespa Agreement" between the governments of Greece and North Macedonia was signed on 17 June 2018. The Agreement creates a new cooperation framework between the two countries and hereby supporting stability, cooperation and European integration, including for the whole Western Balkans area.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 the governments of Greece and North Macedonia signed the "Action Plan on the intensification and enrichment of cooperation between the Hellenic Republic and the Republic of North Macedonia, as provided for in the Prespa Agreement". Article 6 (Cooperation in the fields of education, science, culture, research, technology and innovation, youth health and sports) focuses on youth and provides for cooperation both at the governmental and civil society level.

**High Specialized Technicians in Kets project**

The Interreg IPA Italy-Albania-Montenegro financed the **HISTEK project** (High Specialized Technicians in Kets) which aims to create a new cross border cluster in the field of Education, in order to promote an innovative network able to implement effective **synergies between educational institutions and enterprises**, and train young people on Key Enabling Technologies. The project cluster includes SMEs/Training Institutions/Public Institutions belonging to the three countries, and extends the students' chances to learn new advanced skills and acquire experience in a working environment, before entering the labour market.

## **5.2. The Eastern Partnership**

The **Eastern Partnership**, a joint initiative of the EU, its Member States and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, launched in 2009, has put young people at its heart. The region is confronted by common challenges, including

decreasing youth populations and strong outward migration, particularly of educated youth. In November 2017, the Eastern Partnership endorsed an agenda of “20 deliverables for 2020”, setting jointly agreed goals and with a focus in providing tangible benefits for citizens. These included a youth and education package focused on strengthening investment in young people’s skills, entrepreneurship and employability. Support was also induced for the development of youth engagement roadmaps and youth action plans.

On 18 March 2020, a Joint Communication on the ‘Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 - Reinforcing Resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all’ was published. Under the policy objective “Investing in people”, the EU proposed a **New Deal for Youth** focusing on youth employability, entrepreneurship and participation, and education reform. During the Eastern Partnership Youth Engagement Summit in July 2020, the Commission presented several strategic priorities under the New Deal for Youth. First, the EU will promote more structured **participation of youth in policymaking** at various levels (learning from the EU Youth Dialogue), second, a stronger engagement on **youth employment** issues, including with Public Employment Services and partnership building support with other key stakeholders (learning from the EU Youth Guarantee), and third, continued support to **youth entrepreneurship**, and social entrepreneurship in particular.

**Youth participation** in the region has also been enhanced through the Eastern Partnership Youth Fora, a major event organised every two years. To make young people work together for a better future and raise citizens’ awareness of the EU’s cooperation in the EaP region, around 1000 Young European Ambassadors became active until end 2020 under this successful public diplomacy programme.

Moreover, Eastern partner countries participate in **Erasmus+** youth actions and the European Solidarity Corps which in addition to the EU4Youth programmes aim at improving the quality of formal and non-formal education and supporting youth mobility, participation and skills development. Erasmus+ enables mobility projects and exchanges, youth capacity building and actions supporting the modernization and internationalization of education and training in Eastern partnership countries. Close to 30 000 students and academic staff from the EaP region participated in Erasmus+ academic exchanges or have received a full degree Erasmus Mundus scholarship since 2014. Under the Youth strand of Erasmus+, around 60 000 youth people and youth workers benefited from non-formal learning and exchange activities.

Between 2017 and 2020, under the EU4Youth Erasmus+ capacity building scheme, 101 projects engaging 267 partnership organisations received funding to develop actions supporting youth civic engagement and entrepreneurship including social entrepreneurship. The EU4Youth grants component supported 10 large-scale projects for youth employment, employability and transition to work, benefiting up to 25 000 young people in the region.

## **Example of EU Youth action in the Eastern Partnership**

### **EU4Youth initiative**

Launched in 2017, the EU4Youth initiative aims to increase the **employability and the active participation** of young people in the six partner countries of the Eastern Partnership. It supports youth to become active citizens, entrepreneurs and leaders by developing the skills required on the labour market, by enabling them to participate in policy dialogues and bringing together relevant stakeholders on youth issues. Disadvantaged youth and women receive particular attention. Currently in its third phase (2020-21), the regional EU4Youth initiative has provided a total budget of EUR 42.6 million for the Eastern Partnership so far. Since the launch of the initiative, 18 000 young people have benefited from targeted support enhancing their employment opportunities.

The regional Eastern Partnership EU4Youth initiative consists of three main components:

- Supporting youth associations and youth workers in becoming active policy developers, through **mobility offers**, **working possibilities** in European hosting organizations and **promoting education and social entrepreneurship** (100 projects).
- Improving **employment perspectives of disadvantaged young people**, supporting **entrepreneurial ideas** of young people and encouraging **youth policy dialogue** to promote cross-sectorial approaches (10 projects).
- **Targeted capacity building support** to partner countries to develop and implement policy responses to youth challenges, among other linked to the experience of the EU Youth Guarantee and National Youth Councils inspired on the EU Youth Dialogue.

### **5.3. Southern Neighbourhood**

Countries in the **Southern Neighbourhood** (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine\*, Syria and Tunisia) are overwhelmingly young. More than half of the people living in the region are under 25 years of age. Almost 30% of the population of these countries are between the ages of 15 and 30, and this ratio will be maintained for at least the next two decades. In a context of high youth unemployment, the EU has put investing in young people at the heart of its cooperation with the region.

The Joint Communication of February 2021 on a ‘Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – a new Agenda for the Mediterranean’ stresses the need to support the mainstreaming of youth in national policies. It also calls at helping our partners in the region to improve their education systems governance, and to give priority to addressing structural causes of school dropouts. Overcoming skills mismatches, lack of opportunities, youth unemployment and brain drain are other causes of concern.

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\* This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

In the field of **higher education**, over 50 000 students and staff (roughly 32 000 from the Southern Neighbourhood and 18 000 from Europe) have been able to participate in Erasmus+ exchanges between 2014 and 2020. The programme also supported projects providing skills outside formal education to almost 14 000 young people from the Southern Mediterranean. In addition, 530 participants from the Southern Mediterranean have benefitted from Erasmus Mundus grants for pursuing full Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees in Europe. In addition, the EU has also supported over 200 capacity-building projects in higher education since 2015. A number of these are structural projects, which helped modernise the higher education systems and strengthen relations between universities and the wider socio-economic environment.

The **Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange** project, which ran between 2018 and 2020, allowed young people from Europe and the Southern Neighbourhood to connect in safe, online, facilitated dialogues, discussing current issues that matter to them. This contributed to breaking down cultural barriers, allowing young participants to build meaningful relationships across borders and cultures, and practicing skills that are important for their employability. The project reached over 30,000 participants with an allocation of EUR 2 million. As from 2021, the EU will fund more virtual exchanges projects not just with the Southern Neighbourhood, but also with other priority regions.

Since 2018, regional programmes have allocated a total of EUR 19 million aimed at empowering youth along the Southern shore of the Mediterranean. The first strand of support focused on amplifying **youth participation** and increasing their media literacy with three programmes: Young Mediterranean Voices, Youthroom and Shabab Live (EUR 8.8 million in total). The second strand focused on building resilience and promoting inclusive development of youth through social **entrepreneurship** and culture with the projects Safir and Thaqafa (EUR 10.2 million in total). In this context, the EU kept supporting the Med4Jobs initiative of the Union for the Mediterranean, which aims to increase the employability of youth and women, close the gap between labour demand and supply, and foster a culture of entrepreneurship and private sector development.

### **Examples of EU Youth action in the Southern Neighbourhood**

#### **Young Mediterranean Voices** (implemented by the Anna Lindh Foundation)

Young Mediterranean Voices (YMV) serves to promote **intercultural dialogue** and amplify youth voices across the European and the Southern Mediterranean region. Activities for young men and women include debate training, dialogue on global issues and **developing joint narratives to address issues of common concern**. By connecting civil society, educational institutions and policy makers across the Euro-Med region it promotes **mutual understanding** and fosters **youth engagement and leadership**. More than 6 800 young people have been trained in debate skills and engaged in intercultural dialogue across the two Mediterranean shores. More than 300 debate societies have been set up within universities, youth centres and NGOs through national cascade training. 82 cities across the Euro-Mediterranean offered capacity building and dialogue opportunities to their young residents. The action is supported with a EUR 3.786 million grant.

<https://youngmedvoices.org/>

***Shabab Live*** (implemented by Deutsche Welle)

Active in 6 MENA countries, Shabab Live aims to empower youth by **representing young voices in media** and sparking plural debates. Young people get the opportunity to **develop media skills, produce media content** and to create their own youth formats on both radio and television. A total of 18 projects are supported with a total of EUR 2 million of grant opportunities for NGOs and broadcasters. More than 900 young people gained skills in media literacy and production, leading to more than 1300 youth media productions.

<https://shabablive.com/en/>

***Hiwarouna*** (implemented by Danmission)

The project supports **intercultural and interfaith dialogue** initiatives by young people in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, with EUR 1.5 million between 2018 and 2022. So far, 67 youth-led initiatives have been supported, touching thousands of young people through activities such as storytelling and theatre, music festivals, painting, community dialogues, among others. The project also supported interfaith and intercultural understanding for peacebuilding through the development of an academic module for Iraqi universities.

<https://www.dialoguetoolbox.com/hiwarouna/>

***Youth Employment in Ports of the Mediterranean***

The Youth Employment in Ports of the Mediterranean (YEP MED) is a project launched in August 2019 by the Interreg ENI CBC Mediterranean programme with an EU contribution of EUR 2.6 million. It covers 7 countries (Spain, Italy, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, France, Jordan) and aims at better **matching the labour market skills needs and dual TVET offers** in the Mediterranean port industry in order to contribute to jobs creation, especially for NEETs and women. YEP MED activities will allow upgrading dual TVET curricula oriented to port industry, increasing job placement and employment opportunities with adequate and diverse profiles for NEETs and women. As a result, the project will help increase employment rates of young people and women by offering real possibilities to work through personalised mentoring (training centers) and tutoring programmes (SMEs staff).

<http://www.enicbcmmed.eu/projects/yep-med>

#### **5.4. Sub-Saharan Africa**

By 2050 Africa's population will be 2.1 billion of predominantly young people, while Europe's population will have dropped to an aging 700 million. Demographic projections in Africa leave little doubt about the crucial need for the continent to generate millions of new jobs, invest in education and skills and ensure political and democratic inclusion of its youth.

Despite the many challenges linked, among others, to inequalities, lack of decent employment, globalisation, conflict and instability, young people in Africa are agents of change with an important creative and innovation potential and essential partners to contribute to sustainable and peaceful development of the continent and to bring solutions to global challenges such as climate change and the democratic deficit.

The European Commission, has numerous programmes involving directly young people in Africa.

Several EU-funded actions, for example, contribute to strengthen networks and exchanges programmes of African and European universities and improve the overall quality of and access to higher education in Africa. Under the **DCI Pan African programme** (2018-2020) , an amount of EUR 63 million has been dedicated to support higher education with a view to modernise higher education institutions in Africa and improve the employability of students and their mobility across the continent and with Europe.

The programmes funded under the **EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa** (EUTF for Africa)<sup>91</sup> are another example of EU action with a strong focus on increasing the opportunities for women and youth, taking into account their specific situation and needs. By 30 June 2020, 2 889 90116 young beneficiaries had been supported by the EUTF for Africa. The EUTF implements activities across three regions of Africa (3 windows) – the Sahel and Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa and North Africa, in twenty-six partner countries. Projects range from investment in VET to entrepreneurship, from targeted actions to address youth and vulnerable groups' employability to youth civic engagement.

### **Examples of EU action in Sub-Saharan Africa**

#### **African Students and Alumni Forum (ASAF)**

The African Students and Alumni Forum (ASAF) was created in 2019 following the Structured Dialogue with Students and Alumni in Africa, held in Abidjan in 2017, in the run-up to the 5<sup>th</sup> Summit between the European Union and the African Union.

ASAF brings together the current and former African beneficiaries of different academic mobility programmes (Erasmus+ short-term International Credit Mobility, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees, Intra-ACP Academic Mobility Scheme, Intra Africa Academic Mobility Scheme and the African Union's Nyerere Scholarship and Academic Mobility Programme).

It has around 2900 members and national "Co-Ambassadors" in 16 African countries.

ASAF's aims are promoting young people's insights into educational processes; enhance their participation in such processes, policies and innovative practices; enhance the quality and relevance of African higher education programmes; and promote synergies with other students and alumni networks and activities.

#### **The AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub**

The AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub is a multi-stakeholder platform with 50 Young Experts from Africa, Europe and the Diaspora at its core seeking to test new approaches in the African Union (AU)-European Union partnership.

Within the Hub, Youth, AU and EU, Civil Society Organisations and private sector companies are prototyping ideas in reality; piloting them on a small scale but with maximum impact, visibility and result-evidence. Hundreds of Youth are involved locally in 7 pilot projects, unfolding in 17 countries of Africa and Europe for the benefit of an estimated 150.000 young people. Since most pilot projects have a strong Digital component, in May

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<sup>91</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/index\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/index_en)

2020 the Hub formed the Digital where young developers from both continents working together to bring expertise to the CSOs.

Additionally, in 2020, in the run up to the later postponed AU-EU Summit, the AU-EU Youth Hub organized the virtual event “Youth Meet-Up”. In partnership with the UNICEF U-report, a public Youth Consultation gathered ideas and solutions on key themes and following this, the “Meet-Up” event consisted of thematic debates involving high-level political and celebrity figures. The conclusions were presented to EU and AU leadership.

The AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub was awarded at the 2018 Paris Peace Forum as one of the 10 most innovative approaches. [www.aueuyouthhub.org](http://www.aueuyouthhub.org)

### **#YourVoiceYourFuture**

The #YourVoiceYourFuture campaign is an initiative launched by the African Union, European Union and UNICEF to hear directly from young people about their opinions on key topics affecting their future and relevant to the partnership between the two continents.

About 450,000 children and young people across Africa and Europe aged between 14 and 35 raised their voices on topics ranging from climate change to digitalisation, education, jobs and governance.

Participation in decision-making, quality education, internet access and the climate crisis were among the main concerns for children and young people in Africa and Europe, according to the results.

Almost half of all young people polled feel excluded from political decision-making processes that affect their lives. The main obstacle they cite is lack of access to policymakers.

With the #YourVoiceYourFuture campaign and the four U-Report polls, the European Union and the African Union joined forces to explore new ways to engage with young people, to inform policy making, create interest around youth issues, and bring young people and decision makers closer together on both continents.

### **[Download #YourVoiceYourFuture Report](#)**

#### **About U-Report**

U-Report is a messaging tool that empowers young people around the world to engage with and speak out on issues that matter to them. U-Report is now active in 68 countries, benefiting over 11 million users all over the world. Country U-Reports are run by UNICEF and partners on the ground, including local government, non-governmental organizations and young people themselves. U-Report is available via numerous messaging, social media and SMS channels, and even works on a basic mobile phone. It is free, anonymous and easy to use. EU delegations in partner countries are also using the U-Report to consult young people at national level.

<https://ureport.in/>

#### **The voice of youth in the Sahel**

Since 2017, 1250 representatives from youth organisations, in collaboration with the governments of G5 Sahel countries (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad), have defined priorities and solutions with regard to economic opportunities and worked jointly to

enhance young people's voice in the decision making processes at local, national and regional levels. The dialogues five thematic areas covered education and VET, economic opportunities, citizen participation and peace and security (including prevention of radicalisation). The conclusions and recommendations of these dialogues have served to support the elaboration of the G5 Sahel Youth Strategy. After the implementation of a second phase of the project, youth organisations are better integrated in the local and national decision-making process. Young people, particularly women, have acquired skills to improve associative governance, and to manage and evaluate projects implemented by their respective organisations. Importantly, the knowledge gained about the functioning of decision-making bodies is enabling young people to influence them in their favour.

### **Culture @ Work Africa**

The project Culture @ Work Africa<sup>92</sup> supported youth participation and empowerment through 33 local cultural initiatives in 15 African countries between 2018 and 2021.<sup>93</sup> Its actions aimed at, among others: provide support and opportunities for reintegration of children and young people living in the street through cultural and artistic activities; give voice and boost social participation of young refugees through spoken word practices or through dance and movement; promote the inclusion of young people with disabilities through cultural initiatives; create spaces for expressions of young people living in informal settlements; and empowering young artists to rethink the use of public and urban spaces.

## **5.5. Latin America and the Caribbean**

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are currently faced with the largest proportion of youth in their history, with around 20% of the total population aged between 15 and 24 years. Young people are often marginalised and/or disadvantaged. They are both the primary victims and perpetrators of crime in LAC countries. **Youth unemployment** rates are up to **double those of adults** and youth are more likely than their adult counterpart to work in **informal** employment. The **COVID-19** pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges and **widened inequalities** both among young people and between different age cohorts. This is **fuelling social dissatisfaction and weakening youth trust in democratic institutions** in the region. However, young people also have a transformative potential that could make lasting change happen. Although many young people have distanced themselves from conventional political and electoral systems, they are **opting for new ways of participating in political affairs in which technological tools play a key role**.

### **Examples of EU action in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The EU has developed a number of initiatives with the aim of supporting youth engagement and participation at national or regional levels. For example, the creation of the **National Rural Youth Network in Colombia** as an opportunity to improve livelihoods in rural areas in the country and peer-exchanges in Latin America. In **Uruguay**, the project **“Más conocimiento, más participación, más derechos”** aims to empower children and adolescents

<sup>92</sup> [https://www.cultureatworkafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Culture-at-work-africa\\_en-1.pdf](https://www.cultureatworkafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Culture-at-work-africa_en-1.pdf)

<sup>93</sup> Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

in the knowledge of their rights and their involvement in policy-making. [Horizonte de Libertades](#) is another project in Uruguay contributing to the social, economic, cultural and political integration of youth and promotes their participation as citizens. **“Promoting Accountability and Good Governance of Youth Development Programmes through Civil Society Engagement in Belize (PAGE)”** promotes youth participation and integration into civil society and government programmes and decision-making processes at community level.

**In Central America, “SICA Joven”** is a space where young leaders from the eight SICA member countries can build and coordinate actions at the level of their organisations with a regional focus, in order to link them with the regional vision and the Central American integration process.

The EU’s [Euroclima+ programme](#) has facilitated the **participation of young representatives of the Conference of Youth (COY) Chile** in a number of international climate change fora as part of its support to the Chilean presidency of COP 25. Such fora have included the LAC Climate Week, the Summit on Climate Action, the COP25, and the COY15 (the latter two both held in Madrid). In this regard, the EU’s support has consisted of **strengthening the capacities of COY representatives to take part in the climate negotiations and expanding global networks of engaged youth.**

Culture is an important sector of social and human development in the region. An example of EU-funded initiative involving young people is **Transcultura: Integrating Cuba, the Caribbean and the European Union through Culture and Creativity Programme (2019-2024)**. The programme aims to empower young women and men as agents for sustainable development through capacity building. Regional Cultural Training Hub in Cuba will be a central point for activities that will include 17 countries in the region, with the contribution from the EU of 15 million EUR.

More information: <https://en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/havana/transcultura>

## 5.6. Asia and Pacific region

More than half of the world’s young people live in Asia and the Pacific.

While the region has witnessed enormous progress in recent years, young people continue to face challenges, from the inequitable access to services and employment opportunities, to social and political exclusion, and persistent gaps in gender equality. Growing youth populations, poor labour markets and climate change and increasing urbanization are some of the complex and interconnected challenges that are placing enormous pressure on the youth in the region.

### Examples of EU action in the Asia and Pacific region

In 2020, in partnership with the ASEAN Youth Organization (AYO), the **EU for ASEAN Youth project** ran a social media campaign to commemorate Europe Day. Selected youth representatives from 10 ASEAN countries researched the EU-ASEAN relations and each spoke out on what the EU means for them in the #EU4AY campaign. This project was carried out via the EU Policy and Outreach Partnership.

In **Mongolia** the project **“All for YOUTH, YOUTH for All”** has the objective to increase NGO capacities to empower youth to better integrate them in the society (increase youth

employment and entrepreneurship, promote youth civic participation, promote volunteerism). The project **Youth Sustainability Corps (YSC)** aims to empower young people in Mongolia by educating them about their citizen rights, and by developing their skills to monitor, collaborate, and advocate for the use of best practices in effectively managing and utilising Mongolia's natural and cultural resources.

In **Iraq**, throughout INTPA's consultation processes, youth are comprehensively associated and consulted. "Yanhad: Youth entrepreneurship and civic engagement" strengthens national and local institutional capacity to support essential public-services delivery and economic empowerment for local populations and IDPs. The specific objective is that youth actively participate in stabilisation efforts in Iraq, particularly in Ninewa province, through increased civic engagement in local civil society, stronger capacities of Mosul University's career centers and improved access to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

In **Indonesia**, the "Women-led Advocacy and Social Audit Networks" (SPEAK) project aims at encouraging active citizen participation, including women and youth, to ensure their needs are reflected in the planning and implementation of local budgets.

In **Vietnam**, the project "Empowered CSOs and ethnic minority youth for active participation in decision making in Yen Bai, Vietnam" aims to ensure that target CSOs in Yen Bai province have the capacity to support social and economic empowerment of vulnerable minority youth, their engagement and active participation in decision making and in the promotion of gender equality. The action contributes to redress the limited role that minority youth currently play in decision-making processes at all levels in Vietnam.

## **5.7. The Youth Sounding Board for International Partnerships**

The European Commission is working together with partner countries across the world to achieve sustainable development and reduce poverty, promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law across the world. In 2021, the European Commission launched a call to establish a Youth Sounding Board (YSB) to create a space for meaningful involvement of young people in the EU's international cooperation policy.

The YSB will consist of a group of 25 motivated young people from Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Europe. The selected board members will contribute to make EU action more participatory, relevant and effective for young people in EU partner countries. The YSB will advise the Commissioner for International Partnerships and DG INTPA on youth participation and empowerment as well as on topics such as employment, education, training and entrepreneurship, environment and climate change, human rights and democracy, peace and security, digitalisation and technology, gender social inclusion and health, peace and security, culture, arts, media and journalism.

Several EU Delegations in partner countries are also in the process of establishing national Youth Sounding Boards. Zimbabwe announced its YSB in April 2021.

[https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/youth-sounding-board\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/youth-sounding-board_en)

[https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/97075/%E2%80%9Cmore-participatory-relevant-and-effective%E2%80%9D-eu-launches-team-europe-youth-sounding-board\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/97075/%E2%80%9Cmore-participatory-relevant-and-effective%E2%80%9D-eu-launches-team-europe-youth-sounding-board_en)

## Spotlight initiative

The European Union and the United Nations launched the **Spotlight Initiative**, a multi-year partnership to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in September 2017. An initial investment in the order of EUR 500 million was made, with the EU as the main contributor.

The Initiative is so named as it brings focused attention to this issue, moving it into the spotlight and placing it at the centre of efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In **Africa**, Spotlight aims to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence, including harmful practices. The programme worth €250 million is under implementation across Liberia, Malawi, Mali Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe. It will also include a regional component to scale up existing initiatives on fighting female genital mutilation and child marriage and joint activities with the Africa Union.

In **Asia**, the Spotlight Initiative is focussing on ending female trafficking and labour exploitation. The "Safe and Fair" programme, worth €25 million and implemented through the International Labour Organization and UN Women, aims at ensuring that labour migration is safe and fair for all women in the ASEAN region.

Further, €32 million are devoted to projects addressing gender-based violence in "forgotten crises". The initiative is now rolling out and includes activities in Yemen, Iraq and Palestine\*, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Sudan, Mali and Chad; Ghana, Liberia and Mali.

In **Latin America**, the €50 million initiative focuses on ending femicide, with targeted programmes in Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, and on empowering regional networks.

The **Pacific** regional Spotlight programme with a budget of €50 million focuses on ending domestic violence in the region.

In in the **Caribbean region** an envelope of €50 million supports actions to tackle family violence; the countries selected are Haiti, Jamaica, Grenada, Belize, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago. In **Haiti**, for example, the SASA framework (Start, Awareness, Support, Action) for girls and young women was developed. In **Jamaica**, important efforts are made to engage men and boys and address toxic masculinity.

## Identity Building and Sharing Business Initiative

The project Identity Building and Sharing Business Initiative, implemented by the International Trade Council (ITC)'s **Ethical Fashion Initiative** aims to create jobs, promote sustainable sources of income and secure access to trade for artisans, micro-producers and creatives from developing countries, focusing on fashion, design and lifestyle industries. A

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\* This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

major component of the project is Opportunities Are Here - Project X (OAH-X), an innovative project designed to engage and empower young women and men, opening their eyes to potential economic opportunities in the creative industries. It supports youth entrepreneurship providing exposure, networking and entrepreneurship training, and adopting a fun, “reality TV” approach to reach millions with its inspirational message.

OAH-X uses multiple media platforms, traditional and online, to engage with the young people in their preferred space. Millennials who grew up with shows like X-Factor find the talent competition format particularly engaging and it is followed up with the skill building programmes. The Uganda edition attracted over 800 applications in 2020, while the virtual trainings and masterclasses organized in Cote d’Ivoire edition were viewed by 263,393 people.

More details: <https://ethicalfashioninitiative.org/opportunitiesarehere>

## 6. INSIGHT INTO EU SPENDING ON YOUTH

### 6.1. Revised Dashboard of EU indicators in the field of youth: proposed Policy indicators for EU spending on youth

An Expert Group on 'EU indicators in the field of youth was established in framework of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027<sup>94</sup>. It has provided a review of the existing Dashboard of EU indicators in the field of youth, and proposals for new quantitative and qualitative policy indicators tailored to the needs of Member States and sectors concerned to help monitoring the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy.

The policy indicators are organised around 13 instruments of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, including mobilisation of EU programmes and funds, and monitoring of EU funding.

**Table 1. Policy indicators for EU spending on youth**

<b>Mobilising EU Programmes and Funds</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ How are EU funds mobilised? Are there synergies between EU funding streams in place?</li><li>○ Share of eligible participants (18-30) taking part in the European Solidarity Corps.</li><li>○ Share of eligible participants (13-30) taking part in the Erasmus+ programme.</li><li>○ Accessibility of EU programmes and funds to young people and youth organisations.</li><li>○ The share of projects dedicated to youth work topic in the Erasmus+ programme.</li><li>○ Number of young people participating in youth exchanges under the Erasmus+ programme.</li><li>○ Number of youth workers directly involved in the Erasmus+ programme at national level.</li><li>○ Number of young people and youth workers having received a Youthpass certificate.</li><li>○ How are youth policies funded, also through the use of EU funds?<sup>95</sup></li><li>○ Are EU funds (other than Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps) used for projects that are in line with the EU Youth Strategy?</li><li>○ Are measures put in place to provide synergies between the EU programmes and funds and youth policy developments in Member States in line with the EU Youth Strategy priorities/goals?</li></ul>
<b>Monitoring of EU Funding</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ What funding systems and schemes are in place and how they can be identified (e.g. through monitoring of a single entry point to EU funding opportunities hosted on the</li></ul>

<sup>94</sup> See: [https://europa.eu/youth/strategy\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_en)

<sup>95</sup> Source: Youth Wiki Chapter 1.7.

European Youth Portal)?

- Are there mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate the implementation of measures and actions that target young people at European, national, and local level?
- Are the specific indicators in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes to identify activities exclusively dedicated to young people?
- What is the overall EU spending on youth across multiple EU funds, including structural funds (youth mainstreaming across the EU funding schemes)?
- How many applications targeting youth are there for funding? What is the ratio of supply (available funds) and demand (needs) for the EU funds targeting youth?

## **6.2. EU spending on youth main sources under the new Multiannual financial framework 2021-2027**

In July 2020, the European Council adopted the package consisting of the EU long-term budget for 2021-2027 (the Multiannual Financial Framework, MFF) of €1.074 trillion, combined with the temporary recovery instrument, NextGeneration, of €750 billion, to help repair the economic and social damage caused by the coronavirus pandemic and steer the transition towards a modern and more sustainable Europe<sup>96</sup>. It will be a greener, more digital and more resilient Europe:

- The NextGenerationEU<sup>97</sup> funds are raised to kick-start the recovery in a limited period of time. They are included in (overall allocation for programmes in total **€billion** with MFF with NGEU): Recovery and Resilience Facility (€673.3 **billion**); REACT-EU (€47.5 **billion**); Rural development (€85.4 **billion**); Just Transition Fund (€17.5 **billion**); InvestEU (€9.4 **billion**); rescue (€3 **billion**); Horizon Europe (€84.9 **billion**).
- The expenditure categories ('headings')<sup>98</sup> of the 2021-2027 long-term EU budget reflect the sectoral policy areas in which it intervenes (total **€billion** with NGEU), including: **1. Single Market, Innovation and Digital (€161 billion), 2. Cohesion, Resilience and Values (€1 203.2 billion), 3. Natural Resources and Environment (€419.9 billion), 4. Migration and Border Management (€25.7 billion), 5. Security and Defence (€14.9 billion), 6. Neighbourhood and the World (€110.6 billion), and 7. European Public Administration (€82.5 billion).**

Although the aforementioned expenditure categories more or less directly refer to young people, various programmes and initiatives should be taken into consideration while monitoring the EU spending on youth in the future, as elaborated below.

<sup>96</sup> See: [2021-2027 long-term EU budget & NextGenerationEU | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/2021-2027-long-term-eu-budget-next-generation-eu)

<sup>97</sup> See: [EU's next long-term budget & NextgenerationEU - Key facts and figures | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/eu-next-long-term-budget-next-generation-eu-key-facts-and-figures)

<sup>98</sup> See: [Headings: expenditure categories | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/headings-expenditure-categories)

### 6.2.1. *Single Market, Innovation and Digital*

This heading will aim to step up investment in areas such as research and innovation, digital transformation, strategic infrastructure, and the Single Market. Youth-related spending will be found in particular in the Horizon Europe programme.

#### **Horizon Europe - Framework Programme for Research and Innovation**

**Horizon Europe** (2021-2027) will be supporting research on youth. Thus, topics related to youth have been included in the 2021-2022 Work Programmes of **Cluster 1 (Health)**, and **Cluster 2 (Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society)**. Research related to youth will focus on inclusive education and training, tackling inequalities, social fairness, social inclusion, migration, health, democracy, cultural heritage, etc.

#### **Examples of research topics related to youth**

- The impact of inequalities on democracy
- Education for democracy
- Providing support in a changing world of work and social protection
- Determining key drivers of inequality trends
- Addressing poor learning outcomes in basic skills and early school leaving in Europe
- Integration of emerging new technologies into education and training
- Games and culture shaping our society
- Overcoming discrimination for an inclusive labour market
- Conditions for the successful development of skills matched to needs
- Non-communicable diseases risk reduction in adolescence and youth

### 6.2.2. *Cohesion, Resilience and Values*

The main programmes under this expenditure category aim to strengthen the cohesion among EU Member States, reduce disparities in EU regions, within and across Member States, and promote sustainable territorial development. Through **investment in young people**, health and actions to protect EU's values, the programmes seek to make Europe **more resilient, cohesive, and inclusive** in response to the various challenges that our continent is and will be facing in the future.

The most relevant examples under this heading refer to the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** that will support youth employment, up- and re-skilling of workers, and poverty reduction, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the **new Erasmus+ programme** that will continue to create opportunities for the education, training, and mobility of young people. **The Recovery and Resilience Facility and REACT-EU** (under the ERDF and the ESF+), the two main programmes under NextGenerationEU, are also included in this

heading. Besides, there are other relevant programmes and funding schemes presented below that need to be taken in consideration.

### **The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)<sup>99</sup>**

The ESF+ will be a key financial instrument to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, to support jobs and create a fair and socially inclusive society. It will also provide much needed resources to Member States for the recovery of our societies and economies after the coronavirus pandemic. The ESF+ has a total budget of over EUR 99 billion (in current prices). It will invest in people, creating and protecting job opportunities, promoting social inclusion, fighting poverty, and developing the skills needed for the digital and green transition.

It will also include a more ambitious requirement for **investing in young people** and addressing child poverty, as proposed by the Commission. In short, the ESF+ will invest in young people who have been one of the groups particularly hard hit by the socio-economic crisis following the coronavirus outbreak. Member States which have above the EU average rate of young people not in employment, education or training (the so-called ‘NEETs’, aged between 15-29 years) should devote at least 12.5% of their ESF+ resources to targeted actions and structural reforms to support youth employment, helping these young people find a qualification, or a good quality job in line with the Youth Guarantee. All other Member States must allocate an appropriate amount of their ESF+ resources to this aim. The Commission is urging Member States to use this and other existing funding opportunities to further increase investments in youth employment measures.

### **Youth Guarantee<sup>100</sup>**

Since 2013, the Youth Guarantee ensures that all young people receive a quality offer of employment, continued education, traineeship, or apprenticeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Until 2020, the programme has been mostly funded through the Youth Employment Initiative with €9 billion and additionally supported through the European Social Fund. Since 2020, the reinforced Youth Guarantee has extended its support to 15 to 29 year-olds and will be funded through the NextGenerationEU and the long-term EU budget. The EU supports mutual learning activities and monitors the progress of the implementation of Youth Guarantee annually.

### **EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation<sup>101</sup>**

The EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) aims to promote a high level of quality and sustainable employment, guarantee adequate and decent social protection, combat social exclusion and poverty, and improve working conditions. With a total budget of around €919 million for the 2014-2020 period, EaSI supports a vast range of actions in the employment, social affairs and inclusion policy area. In the field of youth, the programme funded outreach activities to young people about Youth Guarantee offers, cross-border and labour mobility (EURES). In the next financial period 2021–2027 the EaSI programme will

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<sup>99</sup> See: <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en>

<sup>100</sup> See: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=en>

<sup>101</sup> See: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1081>

be included under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). The EaSI Programme has a comprehensive performance monitoring system with biannual performance monitoring reports.

### **Erasmus+: the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport<sup>102</sup>**

The general objective of the 2021-2027 EU programme for education, training, youth and sport (the Programme) is to support, through lifelong learning, the educational, professional and personal development of people in education, training, youth and sport, in the European Union and beyond, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion, to driving innovation, and to strengthening European identity and active citizenship.

The Programme has an overall indicative financial envelope of more than €26 billion of the EU Budget for the seven years (2021-2027)<sup>103</sup>. The threshold of total budget allocation under Erasmus+ 2021-2027 for Youth is 10.3%. According to the 2021 Annual Work programme<sup>104</sup>, the annual Youth budget line includes: KEY ACTION 1: Learning mobility (Sub-total KA1: €9.4 million); KEY ACTION 2: Cooperation among organisations and institutions (Sub-total KA 2 (Heading 2): €147.225.115, and Sub-total KA2 (Heading 6): €16.917.200); KEY ACTION 3: Support to policy development and cooperation (Sub-total KA3: €41.373.659, and Sub-total KA2 (Heading 6): €622.800).

Overview of country allocation helps in tracking EU spending on youth at the Member State level, by e.g. balancing the monitoring of the centralised and decentralised part of the budget and improving ex-post monitoring of Member State expenditure. Total youth allocation for EU30 is €225.149.900, while for EU-33 (TR, MK, RS) is €236.675.115.

### **European Solidarity Corps<sup>105</sup>**

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) initiative was launched in December 2016. In 2018, the first European Solidarity Corps Regulation<sup>106</sup> created a new, coherent framework for solidarity-related activities, with a dedicated budget of €375.6 million for 2018-2020.

The overall indicative financial envelope of the new European Solidarity Corps, is €1.009 billion of the EU Budget for the period 2021-2027 in current prices and activities that include volunteering in the area of humanitarian aid. The activities of the ESC support the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy for 2019-2027 which encourage young people to become active

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<sup>102</sup> See: [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node\\_en#:~:text=Erasmus%2B%20is%20the%20EU's%20programme,youth%20and%20sport%20in%20Europe.&text=Erasmus%2B%20is%20open%20to%20individuals,Commission%2C%20along%20with%20other%20organisations.](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en#:~:text=Erasmus%2B%20is%20the%20EU's%20programme,youth%20and%20sport%20in%20Europe.&text=Erasmus%2B%20is%20open%20to%20individuals,Commission%2C%20along%20with%20other%20organisations.)

<sup>103</sup> Source: Regulation (EU) [2021/817](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of [of 20 May 2021](#) establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation No 1288/2013, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/817/>

<sup>104</sup> Source: ANNEX The 2021 annual work programme for the implementation of "Erasmus+": the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport, Table 8 –Budget line 07 03 02 (Youth), Heading 6: 14 02 01 50, (p. 101), available at [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/default/files/2021-erasmus-annual-work-programme-c2021-1939\\_1.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/default/files/2021-erasmus-annual-work-programme-c2021-1939_1.pdf)

<sup>105</sup> See: [https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity\\_en](https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en)

<sup>106</sup> O J L 250, 4.10.2018, p. 1.

citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change for communities across Europe and beyond with the new humanitarian action, inspired by EU values and a European identity.

The 2021 annual work programme covers the annual budget of the ESC, which amounts to €138.873.000 for 2021<sup>107</sup>. On the basis of the objectives set out in the ESC Regulation, the 2021 work programme is being implemented through various methods (i.e. actions implemented through indirect management; grants; procurements; experts and other actions). The distribution of available appropriations among the ESC actions is presented in Annex of the 2021 work programme. Overview of country allocation helps in tracking EU spending on youth at the Member State level. Country allocation for EU30 is €99.985.080, and for EU32 (+MK, TR) is an additional €4.514.920.

### **Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe package (REACT-EU)<sup>108</sup>**

The Commission welcomed the political agreement between the European Parliament and EU Member States in the Council on the **Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe package (REACT-EU)**. With a dedicated amount of €47.5 billion (€50.5 billion in current prices), REACT-EU will continue and extend the crisis response and crisis repair measures delivered through the two Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII and CRII+)<sup>109</sup> packages, thus ensuring that the economic and social recovery in the context of the coronavirus pandemic will continue smoothly and without interruption. REACT-EU will contribute to a green, digital, and resilient recovery of the economy by adding fresh additional resources to existing cohesion policy programmes and deliver tangible results in the last 3 years of the 2014-2020 programming period.

For the ERDF, the REACT-EU resources shall be used primarily to support investments in products and services for health services or in social infrastructure, to provide support in the form of working capital or investment support to SMEs' investments in sectors with a high job creation potential, to support investments contributing to the transition towards a digital and green economy, to support investments in infrastructure providing basic services to citizens, and to support economic support measures in the regions which are most dependent on sectors most affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

### **Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) for shared management funds<sup>110</sup>**

The **Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) for eight shared management funds, including for the EU cohesion policy funds**, provides the policy framework necessary to ensure that shared management funds continue to fulfil the Treaty objective of promoting convergence and supporting the least developed parts of the EU. As the main legal basis for cohesion policy, the CPR ensures the means to address the emerging economic and social challenges through higher flexibility in terms of transferring resources and extended capacity to address future

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<sup>107</sup> Source: Brussels, 13.4.2021 C(2021) 2390 final COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION of 13.4.2021 on the adoption of the 2021 annual work programme for the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps. [https://europa.eu/youth/sites/default/files/c20212390\\_-\\_13\\_04\\_2021.pdf](https://europa.eu/youth/sites/default/files/c20212390_-_13_04_2021.pdf)

<sup>108</sup> See: [Commission welcomes the political agreement on REACT-EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>109</sup> See: [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative \(CRII and CRII+\)](#)

<sup>110</sup> See: [Common Provisions Regulation for shared management funds \(europa.eu\)](#)

crises. The CPR provides a joint legal framework for eight shared management funds: the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, and, as new elements compared to 2014-2020, the Just Transition Fund, and financial rules for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Border Management and Visa Instrument, and the Internal Security Fund.

### **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF)**

With a budget of close to €234 billion (in 2018 prices), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF) regulation will enable investments in a smarter, greener, more connected, more social Europe that is closer to its citizens. This legislation will allow the EU to respond to current challenges by boosting sustainable and inclusive development and resilience in European regions and communities.

Under the Policy objective 4 of **2021-2027 cohesion policy**, ERDF will be made available for enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through social infrastructure and promoting social economy. ERDF support in the field of education, training and lifelong learning will aim at improving equal access to inclusive and quality mainstream services goal through supporting investments in accessible education and training infrastructure and services and relevant equipment at all education stages. Youth will also benefit from investments in integrated actions including housing and social services that promote the socioeconomic inclusion of marginalised communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups. In the field of health, the Fund will ensure equal access to health care, foster the resilience of health systems and promote the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care. In addition, ERDF investments can contribute to enhance the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion, and social innovation.

### **European Territorial Cooperation programmes ('Interreg')<sup>111</sup>**

The **Commission's proposal for post-2020 European Territorial Cooperation programmes ('Interreg')** is the sixth generation of Interreg, which will support cooperation between regions, citizens and economic stakeholders over their respective land and maritime borders with a budget of EUR 8.05 bn. Interreg is one of the key instruments of the EU supporting cooperation across borders through project funding. Its aim is to jointly tackle common challenges and find shared solutions in fields such as health, environment, research, education, transport, sustainable energy and more. The 2021-2027 period makes the Policy Objective 4 'a more social and inclusive Europe' compulsory for internal cross-border Interreg programmes and therefore, it is offering the possibility to implement projects related to youth along the 7 years. In addition, the Interreg transnational programmes linked geographically to Macro Regional Strategy will give the full support to the implementation of the Strategies where the youth involvement is a priority.

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<sup>111</sup> See: [Political agreement on the Interreg Regulation \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/e300042/1/162222main_en.pdf)

## **Rights and Values programme<sup>112</sup>**

The new €1.55 billion ‘Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values’ (CERV) programme<sup>113</sup> is the biggest-ever EU fund for promoting and protecting fundamental rights inside the EU. Its main objective is to protect and promote the rights and values as enshrined in the Treaties, the Charter and in the applicable international human rights conventions. This will be achieved by supporting civil society organisations and other stakeholders active at local, regional, national and transnational level. The programme will replace the previous Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme and the Europe for Citizens programme. The CERV programme will be based on **4 strands**:

1. **Equality, Rights and Gender Equality** - promote rights, non-discrimination, equality, including gender equality, and advance gender and non-discrimination mainstreaming;
2. **Citizens’ engagement and participation** - promote citizens engagement and participation in the democratic life of the Union and exchanges between citizens of different Member States and to raise awareness of the common European history;
3. **Daphne** - fight violence, including gender-based violence. One of the objectives of Daphne programme refers to young people, among other vulnerable groups, by aiming to prevent and combat all forms of violence against children, young people, as well as violence against other groups at risk, such as LGBTIQ people and people with disabilities<sup>114</sup>;
4. **Union values** - protect and promote Union values.

## **Fund for Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)<sup>115</sup>**

During 2014-2020, around €4.5 billion (EU contribution and national co-financing) have been allocated to combat extreme poverty in the EU, particularly, food deprivation, child poverty and homelessness. Through food and basic material assistance including social inclusion measures, FEAD reached more than 13 million people. For the 2021-2027 MFF, the FEAD is merged with the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) to improve synergies between the funds).<sup>116</sup>

### *6.2.3. Natural Resources and Environment*

The EU budget is and will continue to be a driver of sustainability: investing in sustainable agriculture and maritime sectors, alongside with climate action, environmental protection, food security and rural development. Part of the programmes under this expenditure category support Europe’s farming, agricultural and fisheries sectors and seek to make them more competitive. Other programmes are dedicated exclusively to the EU’s environmental and climate objectives. Although this heading does not make direct reference to young people, the

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<sup>112</sup> See: [JUST - Item \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>113</sup> See: [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>114</sup> Source: [call-fiche\\_cerv-2021-daphne\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>115</sup> See: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1089&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9700>

<sup>116</sup> See: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=22742&langId=en>

following funding schemes could be relevant and included in monitoring the EU spending on youth in the future.

### **Just Transition Fund (JTF)**

To address the social and economic consequences coming from the objective to reach climate neutrality in the EU by 2050, a Just Transition Fund will help the most vulnerable coal- and carbon-intensive regions address the economic and social costs of the climate transition. Rural development and the Just Transition Fund will receive additional funding from NextGenerationEU, respectively €7.5 billion and €10 billion (in 2018 prices). A toolkit for youth participation in the just transition fund<sup>117</sup> has also been developed.

### **Young farmers initiative<sup>118</sup>**

The young farmers initiative provides EU income support measures in the form of the young farmer payment (YFP) and provides grants, loans or guarantees through additional rural development funds. In 2019, the European Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) have launched a EUR 1 billion Euros loan facility to young farmers. It is expected that through the co-financing intermediaries the amount will reach close to €2 billion of long-term financing for the sector.<sup>119</sup>

### **The EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme<sup>120</sup>**

The main aim of the scheme is to distribute vegetables, milk and certain milk products to school age children and to help them in following a healthy diet. The scheme also provides education and information measures which aim to educate children about agriculture and supply chains and communicate about the benefits of the scheme overall. Currently, the total EU budget for the scheme amounts to EUR 220.8 million per school year (for the period of 2017-2023). Annual monitoring reports are available for each participating country.

#### *6.2.4. Migration and Border Management*

Programmes under this heading tackle the challenges linked to migration and the management of borders. Support to strengthen our external borders will be increased to safeguard the asylum system within the EU, and support to Member States will be boosted to step up the management and integration of migrants. For example, a reinforced Asylum and Migration Fund will help national authorities with receiving asylum seekers and migrants in the period immediately after their arrival on EU territory. Moreover, it will help develop a common asylum and migration policy, and ensure effective returns. Youth is directly impacted in migration policies and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund will continue to target

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<sup>117</sup> Youth for a just transition - A toolkit for youth participation in the just transition fund - Regional Policy - European Commission (europa.eu)

<sup>118</sup> See: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/euro1-billion-europes-next-generation-farmers-2019-may-10\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/euro1-billion-europes-next-generation-farmers-2019-may-10_en)

<sup>119</sup> See: [https://www.fi-compass.eu/sites/default/files/publications/Joint\\_initiative\\_for\\_improving\\_access\\_to\\_funding\\_for\\_European\\_Union\\_Young\\_Farmers.pdf](https://www.fi-compass.eu/sites/default/files/publications/Joint_initiative_for_improving_access_to_funding_for_European_Union_Young_Farmers.pdf)

<sup>120</sup> See: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/market-measures/school-fruit-vegetables-and-milk-scheme\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/market-measures/school-fruit-vegetables-and-milk-scheme_en)

young migrants in the diversity of their situation, asylum applicants, refugees, beneficiaries of integration policies, returnees as well as unaccompanied minors.

#### 6.2.5. *Neighbourhood and the World*

Programmes under this heading invest in the EU's external action in its neighbourhood, in developing countries and the rest of the world. The Commission has aimed to make the EU's external action budget simpler and more flexible, to enable the EU to engage more strategically with partner countries throughout the financing period starting in 2021. The new MMF **streamlines and simplifies** EU external action financing instruments for international and development cooperation, crisis response or peace-building actions by **merging several existing external financing instruments** - as well as the **European Development Fund** - into one single financing tool - The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). It will promote multilateralism, strategic priorities and the achievement of key international commitments and objectives, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. NDICI will be granted a total financial envelope of €79. 462 million in current prices (€70. 800 million in 2018 prices) for the period 2021-2027, providing funding through three key pillars: **Geographical, Thematic, and Rapid Response**.

#### **The EU4Youth Programme<sup>121</sup>**

Youth is at the heart of EU cooperation with its Eastern Partners through the EU4YOUTH Programme funded by the European Union. The EU promotes youth skills development and employability, education and training, and supports youth engagement in civic, cultural, academic and professional exchanges. Investing in young people is investing in the future. Greater and better opportunities for young generations must be provided within the EU and outside its borders with a view to supporting effective and responsible citizenship, and prosperous, stable and democratic societies.

#### **DEAR Programme<sup>122</sup>**

The **Development Education and Awareness Raising** (DEAR) Programme supports projects that engage Europeans, especially youth, in global issues of social, economic and environmental development. Through European civil society organisations and local authorities, the aim is to raise awareness and support active engagement, especially of young people, in addressing global challenges, such as climate change and inequalities, and to promote global justice, human rights, sustainable development and democratic participation.

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<sup>121</sup> See: [EU4Youth Days - EU4Youth Days](#)

<sup>122</sup> See: <https://dearprogramme.eu/>

## Annexes

### List of main policy documents adopted in the youth field 2019-2021

- *EU Council Resolutions and Conclusions on youth 2019-2021*
- [Council conclusions on Young People and the Future of Work, 29 April 2019](#)
- [Council Resolution establishing guidelines on the governance of the EU Youth Dialogue, 3 May 2019](#)
- [Council conclusions on digital youth work, 3 October 2019](#)
- [Council conclusion on Education and training of youth workers, 6 November 2019](#)
- [Council conclusions on Raising Opportunities for Young People in Rural and Remote areas, 19 May 2020](#)
- [Council conclusions on fostering democratic awareness and democratic engagement among young people in Europe, 20 November 2020](#)
- [Council resolution on the framework for establishing a European Youth Work Agenda, 20 November 2020](#)
- [Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Strengthening the multilevel governance when promoting the participation of young people in decision-making processes, 17 May 2021](#)

## **List of main mutual learning and knowledge gathering activities 2019-2021**

Expert group on ‘Mobility of young volunteers and cross-border solidarity’

Expert group on ‘EU indicators in the youth field’

Sub group on youth work under the Expert group in the youth policy field (to be launched in October 2021)

Peer-learning activity on non-vocational qualifications for youth work, 7-8 June 2021;

Peer-learning activity on a rights-based approach to youth policies, 22-23 June 2021;

Peer-learning activities supporting Member States to develop a solidarity, volunteering, civic service and mobility scheme for young people at a national, regional or local level (planned for Autumn 2021);

[The 2019 ‘Study on the landscape of youth representation in the EU’](#)

[The 2020 ‘study on removing obstacles to cross-border solidarity activities’](#)

[The 2021 ‘study on youth work in the EU’](#)

[Revised dashboard of EU youth indicators](#)