Europe for YOUth – YOUth for Europe
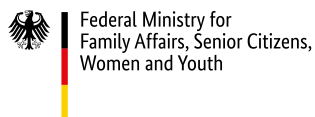**EU Youth Conference:**
Space for Democracy and Participation

Main Outcomes

Content

About the EU Youth Conference

Whether it be on effective climate protection, higher investment in education or high-speed internet – many decisions made by politicians have an immediate impact on the lives and the future of the younger generation. This is why young people across Europe want to be heard and have their say. The topic "youth and democracy" is therefore one of the priorities of Germany's Presidency of the Council of the EU.

To this end, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in close cooperation with the German Federal Youth Council, organised an EU Youth Conference held as a digital event from 2 to 5 October 2020 with 200 participants from about 40 European countries.

The EU Youth Conferences form an integral part of the EU Youth Dialogue. The subject of the current (8th) Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue organised within the framework of the Trio Presidency of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia is "Europe for YOUth – YOUth for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation", focussing on the European Youth Goal #9 "Space and Participation for All".

The EU Youth Conference during the German Presidency was a moment of participation and dialogue at European level. Young people and policy-makers explored, discussed and worked on the topics youth, democracy and participation and developed ideas and demands on how the Youth Goal #9 could be realised, in particular at European level.

The programme of the conference followed a participatory approach, guiding the partici-pants 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.

European Youth Goals

The 11 European Youth Goals are the outcome of a participatory process in 2017/2018, which involved several tens of thousands of young people from all over Europe. They reflect the views of European youth and serve – with due respect for the principle of subsidiarity, national competences and the freedom of association – as inspiration and provide an orientation for the EU, its Member States and their relevant stakeholders and authorities.

The **Youth Goal #9 "Space and Participation for All"** aims to strengthen young people's democratic participation and autonomy as well as provide dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society.

Main Outcomes

This publication focusses on the outcomes and the political demands resulting from the seven Working Groups on Targets, which took place at the end of the conference and can therefore be considered as part of the main outcomes of the EU Youth Conference. They are structured according to the seven targets of Youth Goal #9.

The EU Youth Conference led to a large number of outcomes that have been summarised in a comprehensive Harvesting Report (https://go.dbjr.de/euyc-harvesting).

Disclaimer: Please note that the outcomes presented on the upcoming pages reflect the views of the participants of the EU Youth Conference and by no means represent positions of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth or the German Federal Government.

Political Demands at a Glance

- We demand co-decision-making processes on all levels with young people and youth organisations, implemented through a rights-based approach.

- Decision-makers should encourage and invest in dedicated processes which amplify young minority voices and ensures their direct engagement.

- 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.

- We demand a new EU fund to set up and sustain youth spaces.

- 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.

- We demand funds to be made available for permanent structures of participation.

- 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.

Target 1: Influence Decision-Making Processes

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.

Guiding question:
What measures/actions can be implemented to ensure young people influence policy and decision-making at all levels?

Main outcomes from discussions:
- Young people need to be involved all the way from agenda setting to evaluation as co-decision-makers and advisors.

- At the stage of agenda setting (and before informing and educating), topics that are at the heart of youth concerns need to be addressed.

- Young people must not only be encouraged, but enabled to participate effectively, by being provided necessary structures and equal access.

- Structurally involving young people must lead to co-decision or self-management on all levels, implemented through a rights-based approach (best practises: governing bodies with equal distribution of seats, independent national youth councils, strong national youth laws).

- Youth organisations need to be recognised as representing and advocating on behalf of the youth, while not forgetting non-organised youth.

- Decision-makers need to listen and give feedback as a follow-up to consultation processes by revisiting the youth goals, outcomes and implementation of demands from the EU Youth Dialogue regularly through National Working Groups.

- The "Conference on the Future of Europe" should include a Youth Agora.

- Conditions for entering participation processes need to be rethought, such as lowering voting-age restrictions.

- The formats of the participatory processes need to be tailored and low-threshold yet qualitative, in order to ensure space for all young people of different backgrounds (best practises: local structures, digital adaptions)

- Youth organisations are the safeguards and integral elements for supporting, providing and empowering the processes alongside the institutions.

- The demands and requests should not only be reflected, but tangibly visible and evident in the policy-making on all levels in a measurable way.

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: Equal Access

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

Guiding question:
What actions/measures should be implemented to ensure young people from different backgrounds have access to decision-making processes?

Main outcomes from discussions:
- Give all young people the access to information about opportunities on how to take part in politics and how to participate (e.g. as part of political education in school).

- More connection between youth association work, youth social work and non-formal education to enable and motivate young people to participate.

- Ensure quality education for all, so that everyone is empowered to participate.

- Creating low barrier/open access to education/information e.g. using non-formal formats provided by youth organisations.

- Provide information, also in simple and/or youth-friendly language.

- Use formats which provide the opportunity for a larger number of young people to participate, with the goal to reach people of all backgrounds.

- Quotas in different spaces/areas may lead to more inclusiveness.

- Create safe spaces to allow and empower minorities to raise their voice and provide dedicated EU funding for local organisations working with minorities.

- Support youth organisations of minorities specifically.

- Ensure that there are participatory events dedicated to minorities/people with disabilities.

- Ensure that events are accessible to all, especially to young people with disabilities.

- Call on the European Commission to further identify targeting opportunities for the digitalisation of EU Youth Dialogue initiatives and to facilitate the access of SMEs and organisations to digital skills and infrastructure.

- The EU, the member states and local decision-making bodies should encourage the creation and empowerment of existing dedicated structures/processes/spaces that support and focus on promoting the voices of minority groups into decision-making processes.

- Improve digital infrastructure for rural youth.

Political demand:
Decision-makers should encourage and invest in dedicated processes that amplify young minority voices and ensure their direct engagement.

Target 3: Representation

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
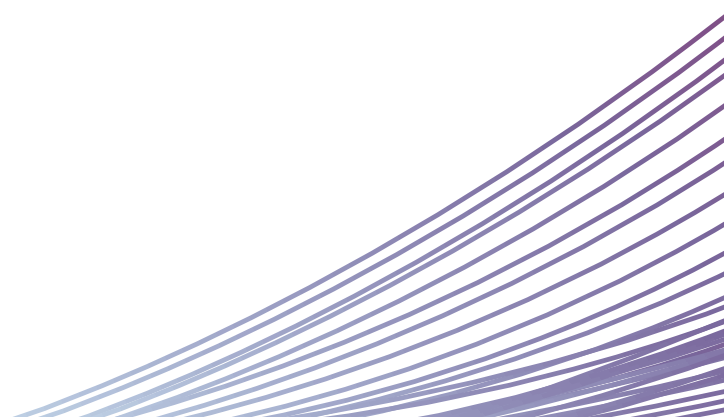
Guiding question:
What measures/actions can be implemented to increase young people's representation in electoral bodies?

Main outcomes from discussions:
- Lowering the voting age to 16 as well as lowering the age for political candidacy and therefore enabling young people to actively participate in decision-making as well as a stronger physical representation in political bodies.

- Bringing voting closer to young people: Making sure the voting venues are close to young people, e.g. having voting places in schools.

- Ensure young people's access to adequate civic education in school curricula.

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: Youth Spaces

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.

Guiding question:
What kind of physical facilities and infrastructures should be available to young people and what actions/measures should be taken to ensure that they are autonomous, open, safe and accessible?

Main outcomes from discussions:

- Physical spaces are more important than digital spaces. Due to the pandemic, physical spaces have moved into the digital space. It is easier to create digital spaces, however, not everyone has access to Wi-Fi or a laptop/phone. Furthermore, physical youth spaces are by young people for young people.

- "Youth spaces" provide spaces and infrastructures in which young people are responsible. These spaces are independent, grant access to everyone, are safe spaces and also offer professional support for personal development and further opportunities of participation.

- Young people were hit specifically hard by the pandemic, since their spaces such as schools, kindergartens and youth centres were closed.

- Youth programmes could not take place; shutdowns destabilise social environments and shrink participation spaces.

- It is crucial to make young people's voices count equally in comparison to other age groups that have more access to networks, financial resources etc. as this phenomenon has worsened during the pandemic.

- Deterioration of rights during the crisis.

- Spaces are missing for young people to participate in political decision-making. Young people feel they are far away from those spaces. But why?

- Need for safe spaces.

- Need for funding for participation tools.

- Should youth centres be youth-led spaces or do you also see the benefit of older people, municipalities, structures being involved? Distinction between youth-led and youth-run, professional staff supporting and running youth clubs is a very important thing, BUT must still involve young participants in setting the direction of what the youth club does, agreeing on the programmes etc., by working in a participative way, so that it can still be youth-led, but also to have the day to day activities run and managed by youth workers.

- Greece has in the last 15 years seen funding go down for youth centres. Recently young people, grass roots initiatives and universities created their own spaces, are running them, sometimes funded by Erasmus+, for example. These centres are very close to the needs of young people.

- Spaces have to be accessible for people with disabilities.

- Spaces are co-managed between young people and professionals: support is provided on how to run a place for young people (e.g. business management courses to self-sustain spaces funded by the government).

- Co-leading the spaces seems like a good solution.

Political demand:
We demand a new EU fund to set up and sustain youth spaces.

Target 5: Virtual Youth Spaces

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.

Guiding question:
How can virtual spaces and tools be used to increase young people's participation?

Main outcomes from discussions:

- Strengthening possibilities of digital youth parliaments.

- Spreading awareness of available educational, networking and supporting platforms.

- Ensuring barrier-free access to information about the process of policy-making.

- Using the internet and online ways to enable the participation of young people and get feedback regarding conferences and politics. Foster regular meetings, dialogue and interactions between politicians and young people.

- Developing new and different educational formats for young people in difficult situations (unemployment, financial problems, searching for job or studies). Support young people's awareness and empowerment by training.

- Providing youth organisations with support, funding and the infrastructure to host digital events and projects.

- Working on meaningful formal and informal ways for young people to get engaged on national and European level.

- Providing equal opportunities for young people with different backgrounds.

- Youth-friendly website that has all EU info in one place (with language appropriate for young people and papers in all official languages).

- Talk about inclusivity and equal opportunities: How to be more inclusive?

- Organising the European Youth Portal in a youth-friendly way: provide information about discussions and outcomes from the three main EU bodies.

- Building infrastructure to speak with politicians digitally.

- Developing safe digital spaces (at all levels) and making existing tools more interactive.

- Fostering digital literacy and access to technology and building up digital capacity for youth workers.

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: Youth Organisations

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

Guiding question:
What measures/actions should be taken to smart youth work, so it suitably supports young people's participation?

Main outcomes from discussions:
- Bypassing governments that limit the space for youth organisations - both through access to funds or with legal barriers.

- More recognition for youth workers.

- Tailored funding is needed for the needs of every country.

- Protecting youth organisations through strong national youth laws, acknowledging them as legally recognised, establishing independent national youth councils.

- Investments in (political) (non-)formal education and youth spaces as a solution to financial barriers.

- Sometimes the processes for getting funds and for being recognised are too complicated.

- Especially small organisations don't have the capacity or the administration to apply for funds – the access should be more fair.

- National youth organisations should receive sufficient funding to provide space and facilities for multiple "smaller" youth organisations, so it can be shared and managed efficiently.

- Creating a solidarity fund for youth organisations (e.g. within the Erasmus+ programme) in order to support youth organisations that are experiencing retribution from national governments and to secure their continued existence and independence from the governments.

- Youth organisations being politically independent enough to be able to support young people in forming their own opinion over political topics.

- Provide member states with sufficient funding to support national youth councils in taking their central role in sharing and managing facilities (such as office space or training tools) with smaller youth organisations.

- (Financially) encourage non-youth organisations or corporations to "adopt" a youth organisation that complements their goals/theme, in order to A) share facilities and space and to B) improve direct knowledge exchange and participation from youth in "mature" organisations.

- Ask for a stronger role of youth organisations in the "Conference on the Future of Europe", giving young people the opportunity to raise their voice and to participate in the discussions.

Political demand:
We demand funds to be made available for permanent structures of participation.
Increasing the access to operation grants for youth organisations (and especially the ones who are curently too small to obtain funding) and expanding the scope of Key Action 3 (Erasmus+ Youth in Action) to also include permanent structures of participation – e.g. for local youth councils or bodies of cooperation between youth organisations. This part should be administered centrally, to create a possibility for the recipients to be independent from their national governments.

Target 7: Youth-Friendly Information

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

Guiding question:
What actions/measures can be implemented to ensure young people have access to youth-friendly, relevant and comprehensive information to participate in decision-making processes and society at large?

Main outcomes from discussions:
- Sometimes there is a lack of infrastructure for non-formal education (e.g. no NGOs in rural areas). This means the easiest way to distribute information is through the formal education system, as it the only place where every young person will be at some point.

- Distribute information about possibilities of youth participation to young people through means that can address all young people (e.g. schools).

- Create one specific webpage/social media page where young people can find all available information about NGOs, events, etc. in one place. This page needs to be promoted by governments.

- Reinforce the support of information networks. They inform young people about all the services that are tailored to them so that they can grasp related opportunities.

- Foster media and information literacy skills of young people. The best way of "fighting" against disinformation is having the skills to recognise it.

- Enforce the implementation of quality standards in providing information, e.g. by using the professional principles and guidelines of the European Youth Information Charter.

- Maintain and develop youth information providers. Make a call/programme under Erasmus+ in which youth organisations can get funding to facilitate youth-friendly information about EU policies, processes etc.

- "Knowledge clips" (film clips focussing on knowledge transfer) make it easier for young people to understand what is going on.

- Recognise the right to information as a prerequisite to exercising other rights, including civic participation.

Political demand:
We demand critical thinking 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 encorage youth participation/ motivation to be a part of the debate.

*   For general questions to all government offices and agencies, the general public service number 115 is
also available. In the participating regions, the 115 is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. between Monday and Friday.
Calls to the 115 from a German landline and many mobile networks are charged at local rate and are
therefore toll-free for flat rate holders. Deaf persons can access information by dialing the SIP address
115@gebaerdentelefon.d115.de. To find out if the 115 is available in your region and for more information
on the general public service number please visit http://www.d115.de.