

Report of the Belgian EU Presidency for Youth
1/1/2024 – 30/6/2024

***WE NEED YOUTH:
Connecting young
minds to empower
Europe***

EU
NEEDS
YOUTH



Colophon

Title: WE NEED YOUTH: Connecting young minds to empower Europe.
Report of the Belgian EU Presidency for Youth 1/1/2024 – 30/6/2024

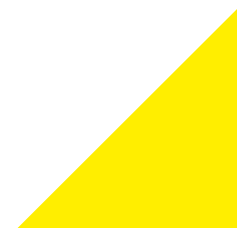
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1. Foreword by minister Dalle: A Prelude

More than ever, children and young people in Europe are demanding to be taken seriously. They want to have an active role in policies and decisions that affect their lives. Comprising over 25% of the population, their voices are significant and impactful.

During their free time, they often take part in youth (work) organisations, youth councils or youth initiatives that help them shape and give substance to their dreams and expectations. Above all, these activities allow them to meet peers and learn a multitude of things that help them in their further development as human beings.

However, the current geopolitical context in which young people grow up is complex and uncertain. From wars close to home to global conflicts, the challenges they face are extraordinary.

Ministers responsible for youth affairs in the EU meet in the Council every six months to listen to young people's voices and worries, together with the European Commission, we seek solutions to questions that matter to young people and make an effort to proposals they put forward.

Europe has a particular asset in youth work and their youth workers (voluntary or paid) are active in so many neighbourhoods, districts and villages. Young people are the driving force here. Often without realising it, young people are participating in 'learning places' that foster a participatory culture and democracy.



The results of the Belgian Presidency in the field of youth are significant: four successful European conferences and events were hosted and four meaningful Council acts adopted by the Council on 13 May 2024.

Over 1,000 young people, youth workers, experts, and others from 39 countries gathered to share insights and solutions. Notably, a delegation from Ukraine participated in three of our conferences.





New themes or challenges were examined, policy recommendations were formulated, networking took place and we learned from each other in a connecting, peaceful and friendly atmosphere (***Connecting young minds to empower Europe***).

Benjamin DALLE

Flemish minister of Brussels, Youth, Media and Poverty Reduction





2. Introduction

The year 2024 is pivotal for the development of youth policy in Europe, with many ongoing processes creating new opportunities. Belgium has played a significant role in this arena, supporting the follow-up of the European Year of Youth, further developing the EU Youth Strategy, and shaping future EU Youth programmes. The Belgian Presidency has also been proactive in stimulating discussions and knowledge exchanges on youth policy, including youth work policy, among EU Member States.

At the beginning of 2024, Minister Dalle presented the Presidency Youth plans for the next six months during [the visit of the College of Commissioners of the European Commission](#) at the Egmont Palace on 5 January 2024. This event was notable for Commissioner Ursula Von Der Leyen emphasising the importance of incorporating an EU youth check in policy-making. Minister Dalle further detailed the programme to the European Parliament's Culture and Education Committee (CULT), chaired by Sabine Verheyen, on 11 January 2024.

The Belgian Presidency Youth took the initiative to play a role in further implementation of these European developments and seized the moment by putting forward three main themes: engaging, empowering and connecting young people, focusing on the following topics:

- Promoting social inclusion of young people and implementing the European Youth Goal of inclusive societies.
- Further developing youth work within Europe with a focus on local youth work and democracy.
- Reviewing European and international policy agendas on children, youth and children's rights.

Related to these priorities and topics, the Belgian Presidency put forth four Council Acts and organised four conferences. New in this approach was the fact that the Council Acts and conferences were connected: input of each conference was taken into the related Council act. This created ownership and active participation in the policy work by both Member States and relevant European players, such as youth NGO's and young people themselves. Throughout the preparations and the conferences, youth participation was a central priority. Young people actively contributed to the policy process by setting priorities, debating with policy makers and formulating recommendations during the conferences.

Participation and social inclusion were important topics for the Belgian EU Youth Presidency. In collaboration with Spain and Hungary, Belgium implemented the 10th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, centered on European Youth Goal #3: Inclusive Societies. This cycle focuses on access to learning environments, educator capacities, and social support for young people with fewer

opportunities. Under the slogan “WE NEED YOUTH”, the second EU Youth Conference of the 10th cycle took place in Ghent, the 2024 European Youth Capital. The recommendations that young people formulated during the conference were taken into the Council Conclusions on Inclusive Societies for Young People, which has a focus on access to rights and services, spaces for all young people and Youth Work as a driver of social inclusion.



Additionally, the Belgian EU Presidency committed to strengthening and developing youth work and youth work policy across Europe, promoting quality youth work at all levels with a special focus on the local level. We developed a resolution on youth work that builds on existing policies and good practices, aiming to bring the EU and Council of Europe efforts closer together. In this framework, we organised the European Conference on Local Youth Work and Democracy. The outcomes of the conference are reflected in the Council Resolution on Youth Work Policy in an Empowering Europe.

Furthermore, during the Presidency, we worked towards a more cohesive policy towards children and young people in terms of youth policy and children's rights policy. Reviewing the 2010 Council Conclusions on this topic, the goal was to create stronger links and synergies between said agendas, not only at the European level but also with other multilateral fora such as the Council of Europe and the United Nations. A European expert seminar was held to allow



exchange between experts in the field and to thus collect input to align efforts and ensure coherent policies and to provide input the council conclusions.

The Directors-General for Youth came together and met with the Directors of the National Agencies of the European Youth programmes (Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps) between 26 and 28 March 2024 to discuss the mid-term review of the European Youth Strategy and reflect on the upcoming evaluation of the European programmes.

Finally, the Presidency drafted Council Conclusions on the legacy of the European Year of Youth 2022, focusing on systematic consideration of the effects of EU policies on youth through an EU youth test. During the Belgian Presidency, the proposal for a Council Recommendation ‘Europe on the move – learning mobility opportunities for everyone’, in which the youth sector is addressed, was also adopted. We wrote an advice to cover non-formal and informal learning as well as Youth Work.

The results of the different discussions, activities and conferences are brought together in this report. It shows how the Belgian EU Presidency Youth addressed the different priorities. All Presidency Youth activities were consciously linked to the EU Council Youth. Therefore, each chapter highlights a focus area, event, and the correlating Council Act, which encapsulates all the input. We hope this report gives an overview of the extend of our activities and a feel of the youthful enthusiasm that was a central element to those six months of Belgian Presidency.



Youth Work Policy: On local youth work and democracy





3. Youth Work Policy: On local youth work and democracy

3.1 Introduction

Since the 3rd European Youth Work Convention in 2020, a multitude of developments have taken place in the field of youth work policy in Europe. To provide an overview of these developments, the Presidency commissioned two background documents to support our work on the topic of local youth work, youth work policy and democracy: 'Taking Stock – Where Are We Now? Youth Work in Contemporary Europe' and 'Mapping Existing European Youth Policy Strategies on Youth Work'. These publications outline the larger historical timeframe of four decades of European youth policies and the current state of play of youth work and youth work policy in the European Union.

To further inform the Youth Presidency on this topic, an opinion from the **European Committee of the Regions' (CoR)** regarding youth and youth work policies in Europe was also requested. As the representative body for regions and cities within the EU, the CoR commissioned a study by Fondazione FORMIT. This study, titled "[Fostering Youth Work in the EU: Implementing the European Youth Work Agenda and Making the Best Use of the Bonn Process at the Local and Regional Level,](#)" was presented during the CoR's Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research, and Culture (SEDEC) meeting on Friday, 26 April 2024. The Belgian EU Presidency attended this SEDEC Commission meeting and highlighted the numerous connections between the study's findings and the Council resolution on youth work policy in an empowering Europe. Additionally, Mayor Tanya Hristova, SEDEC Chair, was invited on 21 June 2024, to present the study during the latest Council Youth Working Party under the Belgian EU Presidency.

3.2 Where are we now? Youth Work in Contemporary Europe

The publication, [Taking Stock – Where are we now? Youth Work in Contemporary Europe](#), by Dr. Howard Williamson informed the Belgian Presidencies initiatives on youth work and youth work policy. It explores the evolution of youth work across Europe over the past four decades, offering critical insights into its development, challenges, and future directions.

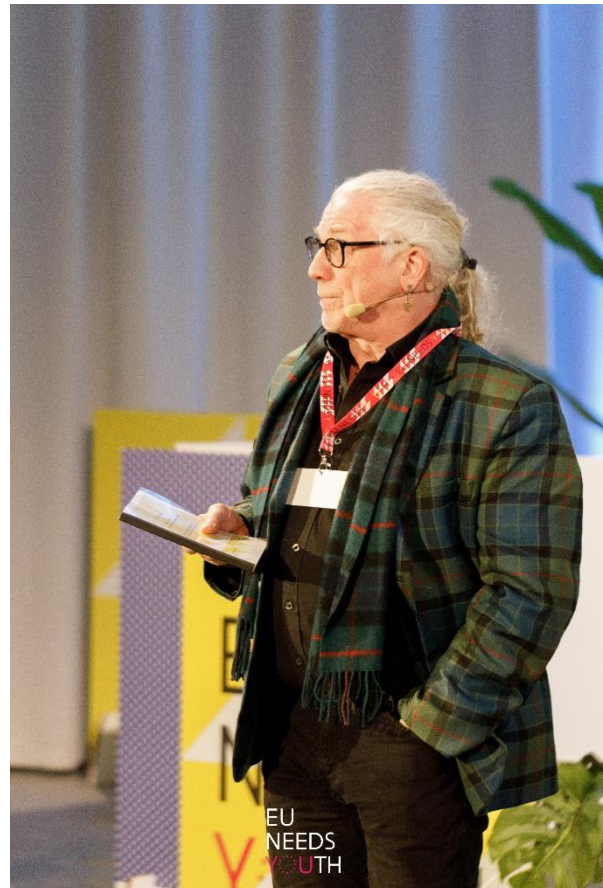
The Evolution of Youth Work in Europe

Dr. Williamson's paper provides a historical perspective on youth work, tracing its roots and highlighting pivotal moments that have shaped its current landscape. It recalls a time when young Europeans actively voiced pressing issues in their lives, such as education, employment, housing, and health. These concerns brought youth needs to the political forefront. The 2008 "History of Youth Work" series led by Dr. Filip Coussée, offers an extensive overview of the historical developments and critical moments. This decade-long project sought to create a detailed understanding of youth work's origins and relevance, resulting in a comprehensive seven-volume series.

Key Developments and Persistent Challenges

Since 2010, numerous initiatives have supported youth work, reflecting an increasing effort to address young people's needs and respond to emerging challenges. However, Dr. Williamson points out the ongoing debates about validating youth work's role in young people's lives. Despite significant improvements, proving youth work's value and overcoming misunderstandings remain ongoing struggles.

Dr. Williamson also delves into the complexities of various strategic frameworks like the Strasbourg process, the Bonn process, and the European Youth Work Agenda. He clarifies the difficulties and confusions surrounding these frameworks, particularly among those less familiar with European-level initiatives. This includes the broader challenge of communicating the importance of youth work and distinguishing it from other youth-focused activities.



Contemporary Issues Facing Young People

The paper underscores the critical issues young people face today, including civic involvement, democratic backsliding, the impacts of COVID-19, health concerns, and climate change. Dr. Williamson emphasizes the interconnected nature of these challenges, stressing the need for a broad and nuanced understanding due to the diverse experiences and needs of young people. He identifies key contemporary issues such as in the field of democracy, climate change, technology, security, energy, identity, mobility, and health, which are complemented by additional challenges identified by Krastev and Leonard (2024), such as conflict, economy, and migration.



A Call to Action: The Five Ps

To address these challenges, Dr. Williamson advocates for a solution-focused approach encapsulated in the "five Ps": Play, Participation, Partnership, Proof, and Proficiency. These elements are reflected in the Council Resolution on Youth Work Policy in an Empowering Europe, guiding future strategies for enhancing youth work and ensuring its continued relevance.

The Role of Youth Workers

Throughout the paper, Dr. Williamson highlights the crucial role of youth workers, drawing an analogy to jazz musicians who must possess adaptability, knowledge, and improvisational skills to engage effectively with young people. He calls for a thoughtful review of youth workers' education and training, emphasizing the need for diverse participation and solid evidence to validate youth work's effectiveness.

Conclusion

Dr. Williamson's background paper serves as a vital resource for the Belgian Presidency and the broader youth work community. It offers a rich historical context, critical analysis of contemporary challenges, and a strategic framework for the future. By reaffirming the importance of youth work and advocating for its recognition, validation, and evolution, Dr. Williamson's work supports the ongoing efforts to empower young people and foster a vibrant, active democracy across Europe.

3.3 Mapping Existing European Youth Policy Strategies on Youth Work

In his publication, [Mapping Existing European Youth Policy Strategies on Youth Work](#), Hanjo Schild provides an overview of key youth policy documents from the past twenty-five years. By examining these documents, Schild identifies key challenges, compares them with current crises and summarizes the strengths, achievements, gaps, and undervalued aspects of youth policy. Based on this analysis recommendations were defined, which focused on setting priorities, enhancing European youth policy cooperation, and better supporting and promoting youth work.

European Youth Policy Cooperation

One of the primary conclusions of Schild's analysis is the necessity of European youth policy cooperation. The main goal of this cooperation should be to create new enthusiasm for youth work and policy-making. The recommendations stress the importance of forming solid partnerships that transcend national borders and different areas of work, extending even beyond the youth sector. The aim is to develop a unified approach to engage young people across Europe, ensuring their active participation in shaping their futures.



Supporting and Promoting Youth Work

Secondly, the recommendations argue for the continued support and promotion of youth work. This should be done by recognizing youth work, including its unique creative and playful methods. An important characteristic and opportunity is also the role of youth work in engaging young people. Local and regional authorities play an important role in supporting youth work to engage young people, particularly regarding social issues and community action. To advocate for young people's needs, youth work should also cooperate with other sectors, such as employment and education. Practical support for underprivileged youth is especially critical in creating a sense of belonging and solidarity.

Reintroducing and Reinforcing Support Instruments

Schild advocates for the revival of instruments like the Youth Guarantee of 2005, which focused on supporting disadvantaged groups through programmes offering 'second chance' education and apprenticeships. The role of the social economy and cooperatives in providing opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities is highlighted as a crucial element in these recommendations. These instruments are essential in offering practical pathways to education and employment for marginalized youth.

Strengthening Solidarity and Community Involvement

The recommendations emphasize the importance of strengthening solidarity and raising awareness of global issues among young people. Supporting their involvement in community and international initiatives is vital. The value of community involvement is underscored not only in urban areas but also in rural ones. Strategic partnerships focusing on community development and environmental care are crucial. Youth work should also strongly support movements like Fridays for Future and promote sustainability goals. This approach fosters a sense of global citizenship and responsibility among young people.

Enhancing Digital Competence and Innovation

Finally, Schild's recommendations highlight the need to improve the use of digital tools in youth work. Encouraging young people to understand and critically evaluate digital content is essential. Innovation in youth work practices, particularly through the effective use of digital tools, is necessary for engaging young people in meaningful ways. This approach ensures that youth work remains relevant and impactful in an increasingly digital world.

In conclusion, Hanjo Schild's publication provides a detailed and insightful analysis of existing European youth policy strategies. His recommendations offer a roadmap for enhancing youth work across Europe, emphasizing the importance of cooperation, recognition, support for disadvantaged groups, community involvement, and digital competence. These strategic



recommendations aim to ensure that youth work continues to play a vital role in the development and empowerment of young people in Europe.

3.4 Taking Stock - European Expert Meeting

Factsheet

- Location: Thon Hotel, Brussels, 19 - 20 February 2024
- Participants: 37 experts from more than 10 countries and international organisations.
- Goal: reflect on the future of youth work and youth work policy
- Exchanges: 5 plenary presentations and 2 group discussion sessions
- Result: 8 key possible strategic and policy responses

Introduction

The Taking Stock Expert Meeting was organised to reflect on the current state of youth work and youth work policies in Europe and on what the next steps should be. The announcement of the 4th European Youth Work Convention created an encouraging perspective for this exercise and gave it a clear focus.

Since the third European Youth Work Convention (EYWC) in 2020, numerous initiatives have emerged, reflecting the evolving landscape of youth work. The declaration from the third EYWC, "Signposts for the Future," highlighted the pressing need for sustainable funding, quality enhancement connected to a research agenda, a broader recognition of youth work, and systematic training and education for youth workers.

Overall the event concluded that the development of youth work (policy) should be approached from a more European perspective. Synergies should be sought between local, national, and European levels. There should be a strategic and proactive approach to working together. The Taking Stock Expert Meeting aimed to explore youth work (policy) as it is now and to examine ways to move forward to support a future European framework for youth work and youth policy development.

Presentations

The input during the meeting consisted of five plenary presentations, most notably an introduction of Dr. Howard Williamson to his publication 'Taking Stock – Where are we now. Youth Work in Contemporary Europe' and an overview and analysis of European Youth Work policy documents by Hanjo Schild, based on his publication 'Mapping Existing European Youth Policy Strategies on Youth Work'.



Other presentations reflected on the Belgian Presidency, on the history and purpose of the European Youth Work Conventions, the European Youth Work Agenda and on the upcoming 4th European Youth Work Convention in May 2025 in Malta.

Discussions on key challenges

Experts in the field of youth work engaged in in-depth discussions and reflections about the future of youth work in Europe as the 4th European Convention on Youth Work draws near. In the discussions, experts addressed key systemic challenges in the field of youth work. As a response, three key approaches were identified for advancing youth work in Europe.

First, the cooperation between the political actors and youth workers, on all levels, is important for better communication, recognition and funding alignment to support quality youth work. Secondly, there is a need for a unified strategy to introduce youth work policies to municipalities so decision-makers are more involved. Lastly, the European youth programmes should be more accessible for the youth work sector, by simplifying the administrative process, offering organizational support, promoting policy experimentation and by establishing a SALTO Youth Work Policy Resource Centre.

Conclusions: Strategic and policy responses

The meeting concluded with several strategic and policy responses to advance youth work in Europe. Key outcomes included the importance of collecting and sharing knowledge, developing a strategic agenda for the future of youth work in Europe, and introducing new programmes to address emerging challenges. Peer learning exercises and the European Academy on Youth Work were highlighted for encouraging collaboration. A review of National Agencies Strategic Cooperation Projects (SNACs) and the proposal for a Master on Youth Work Education were





recommended to improve training opportunities. Additionally, documenting and monitoring youth work was emphasized to ensure accountability and to measure impact. The challenges discussed and the responses presented aim to collectively strengthen youth work across Europe.

3.5 European Conference on Local Youth Work and Democracy

Fact Sheet

- Location: BEL Brussels and the EGG, Brussels, 20 – 23 February 2024
- Participants: 415 attendees including speakers and staff from 39 member states of the EU and Council of Europe
- Goal: Local youth work has an important role in supporting meaningful youth participation and thereby supports democracy. Local authorities provide quality youth work, inclusive decision-making and public space.
- Exchanges: Plenary opening and closing sessions, 30 inspiring good practices and workshops, 18 field visits, 6 thematic panel discussions, 2 reflection sessions, 2 networking evenings and a marketplace of projects
- Result: a collection of good practices for municipal youth work and youth participation and key conclusions for the Council Resolution on Youth Work Policy in an Empowering Europe.

Introduction

The European Conference on Local Youth Work and Democracy, organised by the Belgian Presidency from 20-23 February 2024 in Brussels, highlighted the vibrant and diverse nature of local youth work across Europe. The event emphasized the crucial role of local youth work in engaging young people and fostering democracy. Therefore, attention was paid on the one hand to the need to improve the quality, conditions, and recognition of youth work while on the other hand to the possibilities of local youth work to foster active democratic participation while providing a playful, voluntary space for young people to develop social skills and competencies.

The conference brought together 415 attendees, including 336 participants and 79 support staff. The participants included young people active in local youth work, youth workers and representatives of local and regional authorities as well as national decision-makers. Besides national delegations, the Presidency also invited European institutions and organisations to delegate their representatives. As such the event hosted the representatives of the European Youth Forum; the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture; the Committee of the Regions; the Council of Europe's Youth Department, Advisory Council on Youth and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities; the EU-Council of Europe

Youth Partnership; European umbrella organisations such as ERYICA, EYCA, Eurodesk, ALDA, KEKS and from the child-participation field: UNICEF, Child in the City, EuroChild.

The conference also showcased 30 inspiring good practices and workshops. A collection of good practices for municipal youth work and youth participation was published on the websites of both Europe Goes Local and Democracy Reloading for the benefit of the youth work community of practice. One example of good practices is the Council of Europe quality label for youth centres, with the examples of the youth centres of Destelheide, Hanenbos, and Hoge Rielen from Belgium, and Gordana Berjan, director of the European Youth Centre in Budapest, being present. Through these practical inputs and discussions, the conference emphasized that fostering a participatory attitude among young people needs immediate attention.



The main thematic objective of the conference was to discuss the role of local youth work in enhancing youth engagement and participation in local communities. The event built on synergies from the Strategic National Agency Cooperation projects Europe Goes Local (EGL) and Democracy Reloading (DemRel), coordinated respectively by JINT vzw and BIJ, the National Agencies of Erasmus+ Youth for the Flemish and French communities of Belgium.



The main objectives of the event were:

- Take stock of achievements in local youth work and youth participation.
- Identify links between quality local youth work, meaningful youth participation, and the provision of public space.
- Explore youth work as a continuum, addressing young people from an early age with a focus on the right to play.
- Discuss the role, tasks, and needs of local and regional authorities in providing quality youth work and participation in decision-making, with special attention to including young people with fewer opportunities.

The conference sessions were organized into three thematic pillars: Youth Work, Youth Participation, and the Roles and Needs of Municipalities. These pillars encompassed various topics, including frameworks for local youth work, sustainable structures for youth participation, and the role of youth work in promoting inclusivity and critical thinking.

Local youth work

Local youth work across Europe is very diverse. However, despite these differences, there is an acknowledgment of the existence and importance of youth work. Local youth work is key to empower young people and to foster community engagement. To ensure that it can fulfill this important role, there is a need to improve the quality, conditions, and recognition of youth work.

One of the main challenges is the necessity for good frameworks to support local youth work. These frameworks should ensure local autonomy, secure allocation of resources, and promote lobbying for youth work. Youth participation should also be an integral part of such a framework because youth work plays an important role in preparing young people for participating in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

One of the key strengths of local youth work is thus how participative it can be. Young people are often involved closely: youth work is not only there for young people, but also involves young people in the creation and execution of activities. Because it takes place in the free or leisure time of young people, their engagement is voluntary and even more meaningful. Participation could be taken to the next level, as showcased by some good practices, by making space for cocreation with young people. By doing this, youth work not only engages young people but also empowers them to take ownership of their activities.



Because of its participative approach, local youth work also offers a practice room for active democracy. By involving young people from an early age, it fosters a continuum of democratic engagement, encouraging young people to learn and act in ways that uphold democratic values. It is important that youth work is inclusive and engages as many young people as possible, including young people with fewer opportunities, to ensure that they can participate equally in their local communities, enhance their social skills and strengthen their mental health.



Youth workers play a pivotal role in the success of local youth work. Their unique position, distinct from other educators and social workers, allows them to connect with young people in meaningful ways. However, youth work cannot stand alone. It must connect with related sectors such as education, social welfare, culture, and sports. This comprehensive and transversal approach can ensure that youth work contributes to a broader youth policy that includes mobility, housing, and employment.

Local youth work as an introduction to participation processes and democracy

The conclusions of this conference approach local youth work as linked to the policies of local governments, mostly in the form of municipalities. These local authorities play an important role in shaping the daily lives of young people and can influence and support local youth work to contribute to a local, active democracy.

Key points identified for effective local youth work are as follows:

Firstly, local authorities have an important role because they can create policies that support and enhance local youth work. Therefore, local authorities must take responsibility and accountability.

Secondly, these policies should serve as examples and experimental environments for local democracy. The process, execution, and evaluation of these policies should involve continuous dialogue and intensive communication with the community.

Lastly, to effectively take on this responsibility, local authorities need a comprehensive framework. This framework should consist of ideas and methods that can be tailored to the specific scale and working culture of each municipality. Central governments are tasked with





providing such frameworks, while European institutions, such as the EU and the Council of Europe, and their partners can organise a network to exchange practices. European funding schemes like Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programs can also support such initiatives, as seen with initiatives like Europe Goes Local and Democracy Reloading.

A policy framework for municipalities

Creating an optimal environment for local youth work requires municipalities to provide various forms of "space" that foster the development and engagement of young people. A policy framework should include four key dimensions of space to support local youth work: mental, physical, political, and temporal.

Firstly, mental space. There should be youth-friendly atmosphere that is open to youth initiatives. Youth work should be acknowledged as an important part of children's and young people's free time. Local youth work policy should be created in a participative way: young people should feel heard and empowered to influence the policies that affect them.

Secondly, physical space. Local youth work policy should ensure that young people have access to suitable physical spaces where they can meet, make music, engage in sports, express creativity, share their views and develop their own activities. This involves providing public space that is accessible, safe and designed to meet youth needs and supporting youth work initiatives by providing necessary resources and facilities, such as dedicated youth centres, creative hubs, and sports facilities.

Thirdly, political space. Young people and youth work should receive governmental support from the local and national governments. Municipal policies should reflect the needs of young people and local youth work and provide subsidies, services and coaching. The policies should be created with young people and other stakeholders such as youth organisations. By involving youth in the decision-making process, municipalities can ensure that policies are relevant and effective. This system should be transparent and accessible.

Lastly, municipalities should provide space in time by having long term commitment as well as sustainable policies. Quality youth work needs a long-term perspective. Policy frameworks can support youth work by providing long term policies and consistent funding and resources.

By addressing these four dimensions of space—mental, physical, political, and temporal—municipalities can create a comprehensive policy framework that supports the development and engagement of young people through local youth work. This approach not only enhances the quality and recognition of youth work but also fosters a vibrant, active democracy where young people feel valued and empowered.



Role of Higher Levels of Government in Supporting Local Youth Work

Central governments, including member states and decentralized authorities, play a crucial role in steering and inspiring local governments to engage young people and foster democracy through local youth work. The conference reached a consensus on the need for central governments to provide robust support, enabling local governments to effectively develop and sustain local youth work initiatives. This support should include the creation of a coherent framework developed in active dialogue with local and specialized actors.

Additionally, the conference highlighted the importance of training for all stakeholders involved, including youth workers, civil servants, and local politicians. Central governments should direct the creation of such training opportunities to ensure effective implementation and support for local youth work.

At the European level, institutions like the EU and the Council of Europe have significantly promoted youth, youth work, and democracy as important policy topics. Initiatives such as the partnership on youth and programmes like Europe Goes Local and Democracy Reloading have been instrumental. However, there is still much work to be done. Enhanced support, increased investments, and a stronger emphasis on member state responsibilities are essential to empower municipalities and advance local youth work policies.

Recommendations for the Council Resolution on Youth Work Policy in an Empowering Europe

The Belgian Presidency kept a place holder in the resolution, to integrate the outcomes of the conference. The key findings of the European Conference on Local Youth Work and Democracy, presented on Saturday 24th of February by Dr. Guy Redig (Rapporteur General) and included in the resolution are:

1. Local youth work (1) offers an extraordinary environment to practice democracy and inspire pathways to an active engagement in society – with the strong conviction to give children chances to participate as young as possible and (2) articulates the key characteristic of local youth work as a place where young people enjoy being young together, because play and playfulness are conditional for the development of many other positive effects, like learning and sharpening different competences, engagement in various democratic practices, the ability to take responsibility and accountability and (3) bridges to many other pedagogical interventions like education, social and cultural work.
2. By investing in a robust and long-term local youth work policy, based on intense dialogue and participation, local governments create concrete conditions for the optimal



development of local youth work. Therefore, municipalities need a framework that gives contours and inspiration to create tailor-made sturdy local support systems. Member states should invest to shape this framework together with local actors in a pan-European network. This framework can be inspired by the notion “creating space” to be conceived as mental, physical, political space in a long-term perspective, and should include efforts to optimise the qualities of both volunteer and professional youth workers.

3. The European Union and the Council of Europe, already active and stimulating local youth work (policy), can expand and intensify their efforts by further investing in networking, exchanging practices, stimulating surveys (among others by their Partnership on Youth) and so contribute to a common ground on the framework for local youth work policy.
4. There is a pressing need to sustain investments in more effective and efficient practices on difficult but priority goals like inclusion, equality, participation, democracy, and diversity. Local youth work and local youth work policy offer unique places to translate all these human values in concrete, hands-on practices, and in this way transforming slogans into good practices.

3.6 The Council Resolution on Youth Work Policy in an Empowering Europe

The Council Resolution on Youth Work Policy in an Empowering Europe has been officially adopted, reflecting the collaborative efforts and recommendations. The resolution aims to empower youth work to adapt so as to support young people as they navigate their pathways to autonomy within new realities. Below, the main elements of the resolution are presented, the entire document is provided in the link.

The text calls on the Member States and the Commission to support the development of quality youth work and of youth work policy at all levels:

- by ensuring equal access to youth work for all young people,
- by facilitating and supporting new forms of voluntary and civic engagement
- and by fostering societal appreciation and recognition of youth work, and creating enabling environments for youth work.

The aim is to address the role of youth work policy in an empowering Europe by:

- Building further on existing policy measures, setting the parameters to enable youth work to position itself and adapt so as to support young people in their efforts to

navigate their pathways to autonomy within new realities. This is to be achieved through the exercise of agency, participation and inclusion, and in a context of optimum well-being, political and civic engagement and a sense of self-determination.

- Supporting the development of quality youth work and of youth work policy at all levels, paying due attention to the local level, which is closest to young people.
- Making possible the creation of enabling environments, in particular by co-creating these environments together with youth workers and young people, so as to ensure that youth work activities can be organised in public spaces in ways most suited to the needs of young people.
- Ensuring equal access to youth work for all young people, including through outreaching youth work, for example by supporting networks between youth work and social work, as well as relevant stakeholders of other fields working with young people with fewer opportunities and the organisations representing them, where relevant.
- Providing youth workers with the education, training and learning, competencies (i.e., knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and critical thinking) and resources needed to support young people's agency, judgment and navigational capacities in changing realities.
- Facilitating and supporting new forms of voluntary and civic engagement, both physical and online.
- Fostering societal appreciation and recognition of youth work in changing European societies.

[Read the complete Council Resolution on Youth Work Policy in an Empowering Europe \(C/2024/3526\) here.](#)





EU Youth Dialogue on Inclusive Societies





4. EU Youth Dialogue on Inclusive Societies

4.1. Introduction

The EU Youth Dialogue is an important mechanism for youth participation in decision-making processes within the European Union. The dialogue serves as a platform for ongoing joint reflection and consultation on the priorities, implementation, and follow-up of European cooperation in the field of youth.

Organized in 18-month work cycles, the dialogue involves national consultations of young people and youth organisations throughout Europe on a specific topic. Moreover, it is an ongoing process that builds on the results of previous cycles to ensure a permanent line of communication with European youth. In addition to these consultations, every six months, each Council Presidency organises an EU youth conference in which EU youth representatives participate.

As one of the largest participatory mechanisms in the EU, the EU Youth Dialogue involves young people from all member states. It facilitates dialogue between young people, youth organisations, policymakers, experts, researchers, and other relevant social actors. This forum enables reflection and helps identify priorities for European youth cooperation.

The specific objectives of the EU Youth Dialogue are to:

- Encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe in line with Article 165 TFEU;
- Promote equal participation between young women and men;
- Include diverse voices and to ensure openness to all young people to contribute to policy-shaping;
- Bring about positive change in youth policy at local, regional, national and European level;
- Strengthen young people's' citizenship competencies and sense of belonging to the society and the European Union.

The Trio Presidency has a lead role in steering the implementation of the dialogue process in close cooperation with the European Commission, the National Agencies and National Youth Councils of the Trio, the European Youth Forum, researchers (e.g. the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR) and the Partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth) and youth civil society representatives. The Trio should facilitate the



participation of youth civil society representatives and ensure that the voice of all young people is included. Additionally, it is responsible for seeking political commitment from Member States and following-up on the proposals put forward. The Trio should also keep the Youth Working Party and National Working Groups informed about the organisation and the functioning of the European Steering Group.

A rotating Presidency

The Presidency of the Council rotates among the EU member states every six months. During this six-month period, the Presidency chairs meetings at every level in the Council, helping to ensure the continuity of the EU's work in the Council.

Three presidencies working together

Member states holding the Presidency work together closely in groups of three, called 'Trios'. This system was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. The trio sets long-term goals and prepares a common agenda determining the topics and major issues that will be addressed by the Council over an 18-month period. On the basis of this programme, each of the three countries prepares its own more detailed six-month programme.

The European Steering Group (ESG) consists of the teams of the Trio Presidencies (including representatives of the Ministries of Youth Affairs and National Youth Councils), the European Commission and the European Youth Forum. Additionally, the ESG may involve other actors, such as the Erasmus+ National Agencies of the Trio, researchers, youth organisations, experts and other relevant actors, to better address the specific needs of each cycle. The ESG steers and facilitates the process at EU-level, and elaborates clear working and governance procedures and implementation plans.

In parallel, the National Working Groups facilitate the process at national level. They ensure the connection between the national and European level and coordinate the activities implemented at national, regional and local levels. Additionally, they secure the participatory process in the Member States.

4.2. 10th cycle of the EUYD: time to celebrate!

The 10th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue led by the Trio Presidency Spain, Belgium and Hungary, focused on **European Youth Goal #3 on inclusive societies** under the motto **'WE NEED YOUTH'**. This cycle spanned from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2024.

Preparations

In preparation for the 10th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, Belgium's three communities responsible for youth affairs collaborated through National Working Group meetings. These meetings included representatives from the Administrations, National Agencies, and Youth Councils of each community. Additionally, several informal meetings were held among the Trio Presidencies – Spain, Hungary and Belgium – along with other relevant actors to determine the focus of and align preparations of the 10th cycle.

The Trio Presidencies, along with the National Working Groups of the three communities of Belgium, agreed to focus on European Youth Goal #3 - Inclusive Societies. This goal aims to enable and ensure the inclusion of all young people in society. Youth Goal #3 is further elaborated upon in seven sub-targets. To make the 10th cycle as concrete as possible, the focus was placed on sub-targets 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7. Content-wise, the emphasis was on subgoals 3 on access to learning environments, 4 on capacities of educators, and 6 on social support. To maintain coherence, this cycle builds on the efforts of the third, fifth, and ninth cycles of the EU Youth Dialogue regarding inclusive societies. Methodologically, subgoals 2 on information outreach and 7 on participation in decision-making processes were foundational, leveraging previous work to avoid redundancy in implementation.

One priority has been to encourage the involvement of young people by including them in the construction, design, implementation and evaluation of the cycle. Moreover, it is important that young people with fewer opportunities are included in the process. The partners wanted to ensure to not only involve 'the usual suspects' in the dialogue but also to reach out to young people from minorities, in rural areas, with a handicap, from a socially vulnerable background...



Celebration products

With the EU Youth Dialogue being initiated in 2010 by the trio Spain, Belgium and Hungary, the EUYD marked its 10th cycle in 2023-2024 with the same Presidency countries involved – a reason to celebrate! The trio partners chose to gift the EUYD birthday presents that contribute to the improvement of its quality. These gifts included knowledge about the past cycles and youth-



friendly tools for and information on the EUYD to better consult young people and prepare participants.

Belgium commissioned two studies: one on the impact of the first nine cycles of the EU Youth Dialogue and another study assessing participant diversity. The National Youth Councils developed a toolkit on inclusive consultation methodology, supporting and enabling National Working Groups to increase the inclusiveness of their outreach and consultation methodologies on national and local level.

Furthermore, the Trio produced accessible information on the EU Youth Dialogue and EU Youth Conferences. Short videos were created explaining the principles and background of the EUYD, the roles of various participants and how to make impact through the Dialogue. These videos, aimed at young people and policy makers, are intended to support their preparation and manage expectations. An accompanying manual will provide additional, more comprehensive information.

Last but not least, the Presidency also invited Member States and the European Commission to adopt a monitoring and follow-up mechanism for the EU Youth Dialogue outcomes to ensure that young people's ideas and opinions are appropriately addressed. The Belgian Presidency also provided input to the opinion of **the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**, which represents organised civil society in Europe, titled [SOC/795 Strengthening the EU Youth dialogue follow-up via monitoring and transparency guidelines](#).

4.3. EU Youth Conference

Factsheet:

- Location: VIERNULVIER, Ghent, 2 – 5 March 2024
- Participants: 411 participants, including 120 youth representatives from 39 countries. More than 28.000 young people were consulted on how to achieve inclusive societies
- Goal: Develop strong and clear recommendations for political action on EU Youth Goal #3 Inclusive Societies
- Exchanges: 5 working group sessions, a dialogue session with policymakers, plenary presentations and 30 social inclusion practices
- Result: 6 recommendations and 34 possible implementing measures to be included in the Council conclusion on inclusive societies for young people



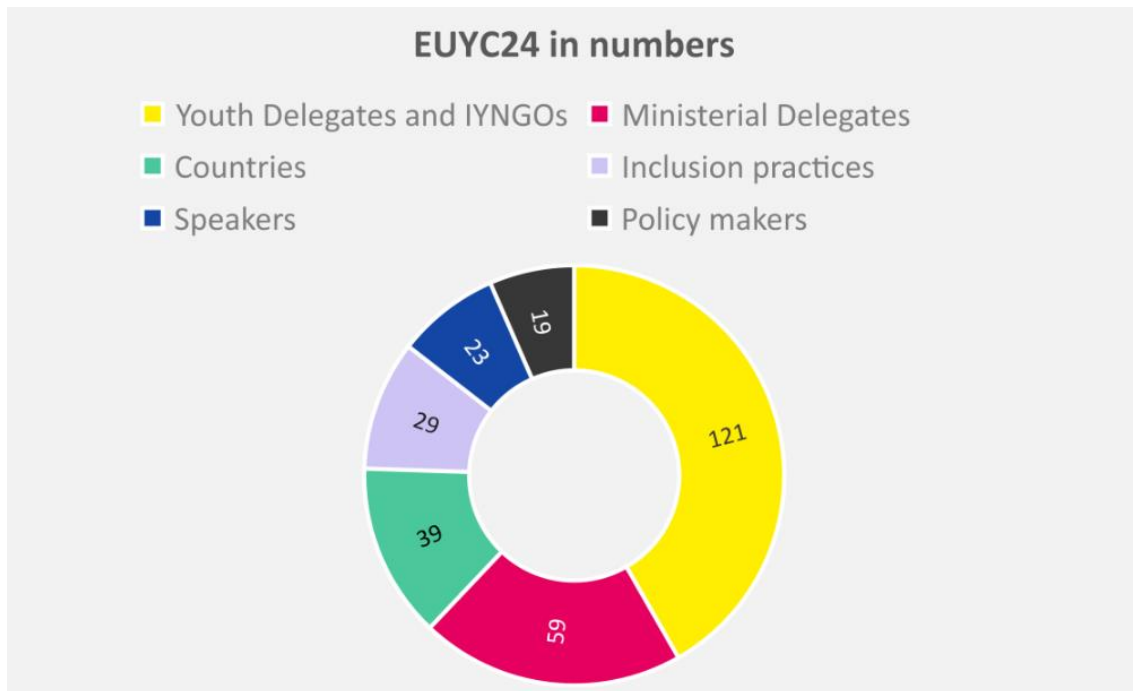
Introduction

The second EU Youth Conference (EUYC) of the trio Spain-Belgium-Hungary took place in Ghent, Belgium, from 2 - 5 March 2024. It aimed to:

- become a successful, memorable, and inclusive event,
- explore the results of the EUYD consultations, find common ground and formulate main recommendations linked to the European Youth Goal #3 “Inclusive Societies”, and
- celebrate the 10th Cycle of the EUYD, increasing its visibility and political awareness.

The EUYC Ghent hosted a total of 411 participants, including representatives from EU institutions, ministerial and youth delegates, and various stakeholders such as crew members, facilitators, policymakers, and artists. This diverse group contributed to meaningful participation and in-depth debates on the topic of inclusive societies.





Prior to the conference, over 28,000 young people were consulted during the consultation phase on ways to foster inclusive societies. During the conference in Ghent, the voices of these young people were translated into recommendations and tangible actions by 120 youth representatives from 39 countries. Subsequently, these youth ideas were integrated in the Council conclusions on inclusive societies for young people by the Belgian EU Presidency.

In line with the priorities of the Trio Presidency and insights from national consultations, the EU Youth Conference participants engaged in ten working groups to discuss six themes crucial for inclusive societies: (1) structural barriers, (2) the role of information, (3) health and mental wellbeing, (4) formal, (5) non-formal and informal inclusive learning environments and (6) challenging discriminatory attitudes and cultures.

With the goal of establishing a solid foundation for political action, the conference resulted in six recommendations and 34 possible implementing measures. An editing team facilitated this process by gathering ideas, drafting the six recommendations, and refining them based on participant reflections. The 34 possible implementing measures, drafted by young participants in the working groups, aim to translate these recommendations into concrete actions. These outcomes will guide further policy development for inclusive societies in Europe. They are detailed in paragraph 26 and 46 and annex III of the Council conclusions on inclusive societies for young people, prepared by the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU.





4.4. Outcomes of the EUYC

The six recommendations on the future of inclusion in Europe, created during the Conference and directed towards the Member States and the European Commission, are:

- R1. Better support young people experiencing poverty and financial exclusion to transition to financial independence and security by taking steps to promote affordable housing, increasing access to quality work and employment, addressing mobility barriers, and ensuring young people's financial literacy.
- R2. Ensure young people's access to affordable, youth-friendly and personalised quality health care and mental health support systems. Additionally, create safe and open environments for young people to speak freely and learn about health and mental well-being.
- R3. Promote and invest in education and youth work in order to: make learning environments more accessible and inclusive for young people with fewer opportunities; tailor to young people needs; increase collaborations between formal education, non-formal education and informal learning and across other sectors.
- R4. Increase funding, capacity building and other support for educators to be engaged in lifelong learning on: inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities; capitalising on diversity of young people; creating safe spaces for sharing and learning with and by young people from different backgrounds; and youth-centred personalised teaching and learning approaches.
- R5. Improve the capacity of people working with and for youth to effectively disseminate youth friendly information in order to make information accessible about rights and opportunities. Additionally, strengthen media and information literacy of youth to recognise trustworthy information and safe information navigation.
- R6. Put in place policies to dismantle systematic discrimination, unconscious bias, hostile attitudes and to encourage continuous learning about all kinds of diversities as well as unlearning prejudices. Such policies should be codeveloped with young people with relevant lived experiences in all fields.

Furthermore, the working groups prepared **34 possible implementing measures** to provide concrete examples of initiatives that could support making the abovementioned recommendations a reality.

The implementing measures in the domain of **structural barriers** included: conducting research to enhance mobility for young people in border regions; providing subsidies for youth housing through the independent Youth programme; empowering European youth in rural and outermost areas digitally; offering free public transport to all youth; utilising Vacancy Tax as



financial incentives for social youth housing; and establishing high-quality financial literacy standards for all youth in the EU.

The implementing measures in the domain of **health and mental wellbeing** included: ensuring access to a psychologist in every school; incorporating diverse research groups in the criteria for health research funds; supporting education and initiatives for youth mental wellbeing; including health as a ground of discrimination within legislation; and implementing a mental well-being training programme for educators and youth workers.

The implementing measures in the domain of **formal education and schools** included: integrating non-formal education led by NGOs into formal civic education; establishing legal frameworks for nationwide and inclusive regional student representative bodies; enhancing anti-discrimination practices in vocational education and training (VET); initiating joint educational initiatives with school students of diverse backgrounds; providing streamlined funding for young people facing fewer opportunities in education; and implementing lifelong teacher training on inclusion.

The implementing measures in the domain of **non-formal and informal education and youth work** included: promoting professionalized youth work across Europe through structural investments and trainings; ensuring capacity building and continuous dialogue between youth workers and stakeholders; increasing access to funding opportunities at the local level; implementing youth-centered participatory budgeting; establishing mobile youth work initiatives; and formalizing recognition of volunteer youth work.

The implementing measures in the domain of **information** included: conducting youth information and critical thinking workshops in schools; exploring reliable news sources and promoting verifiable information; launching campaigns for quality information and media literacy to empower youth; establishing inclusive youth spaces serving as information hubs; and systematically ensuring that EU information is made accessible and inclusive for all.

The implementing measures in the domain of **discriminatory attitudes and cultures** included: incorporating inclusive language in EU policy documents; promoting continuous learning to foster acceptance and awareness of diversities; adopting an intersectional and representative approach across all strategies; ensuring equal rights by implementing the Youth Test at all levels; allocating EU funding for intergenerational spaces within European municipalities; and preventing prejudice through acceptance of minority groups and promoting self-reflection through education.



Green and ethical choices by the Belgian Presidency

Following [the Council Conclusions on fostering engagement among young people as actors of change in order to protect the environment also promote the use of European opportunities for mobility and initiatives in the environmental sector in the context of Erasmus+](#), the Presidency prioritised thoughtful choices regarding sustainability and inclusivity, and established a [Green and Ethical framework](#) against which each event was assessed. This framework guided our decisions regarding venues, printed materials, meals, transportation and inclusivity, among other aspects relevant to 'inclusive societies'. Our goal was always to balance between visibility, comfort, and efficiency with sustainability. That is why we chose to **plant trees** instead of distributing goodies or printed materials at our events. We partnered up with [Go Forest](#) and planted 2,100 trees across two impactful projects: Le Roeulx in Belgium and Ingung Kapia in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These trees are set to absorb an impressive 362.25 tonnes of CO2 over their lifetimes.

We also encouraged participants and staff to use public transportation or other sustainable means of transport whenever possible. Lastly, in line with our commitment to organise sustainable and ethical events, we primarily served delicious vegetarian meals by default, while thoughtfully catering to everyone's dietary preferences and requirements.

The EUYC Ghent operated within the [Green and Ethical Framework](#) and Inclusion Measures, such as providing extra support for participants with special needs before and during the event, using pronouns on the name badges, establishing clear guiding principles for participation, provision of earplugs, provision of translation, selection of a diverse team of facilitators and harvesters, access to silent and prayer rooms, or presence of dedicated trust persons. This framework was developed during the European Year of Youth together with young people. At the end of the Presidency, the conference won the award of the most sustainable event with a score of 92%.





4.5. Council Conclusions on Inclusive Societies for Young People

The Belgian Presidency introduced **Council conclusions on inclusive societies for young people**, which underscore the commitment to ensuring that no young person is left behind in our society, in particular those with fewer opportunities.

In these conclusions, Member States and the Commission are called upon to strive for **social cohesion, equity and inclusion**, and to ensure the **participation of young people in democratic life**. This can be done by inclusive measures facilitating the meaningful participation of all young people in decision-making and spaces that concern them, especially through youth work.

The aims of the conclusions are to:

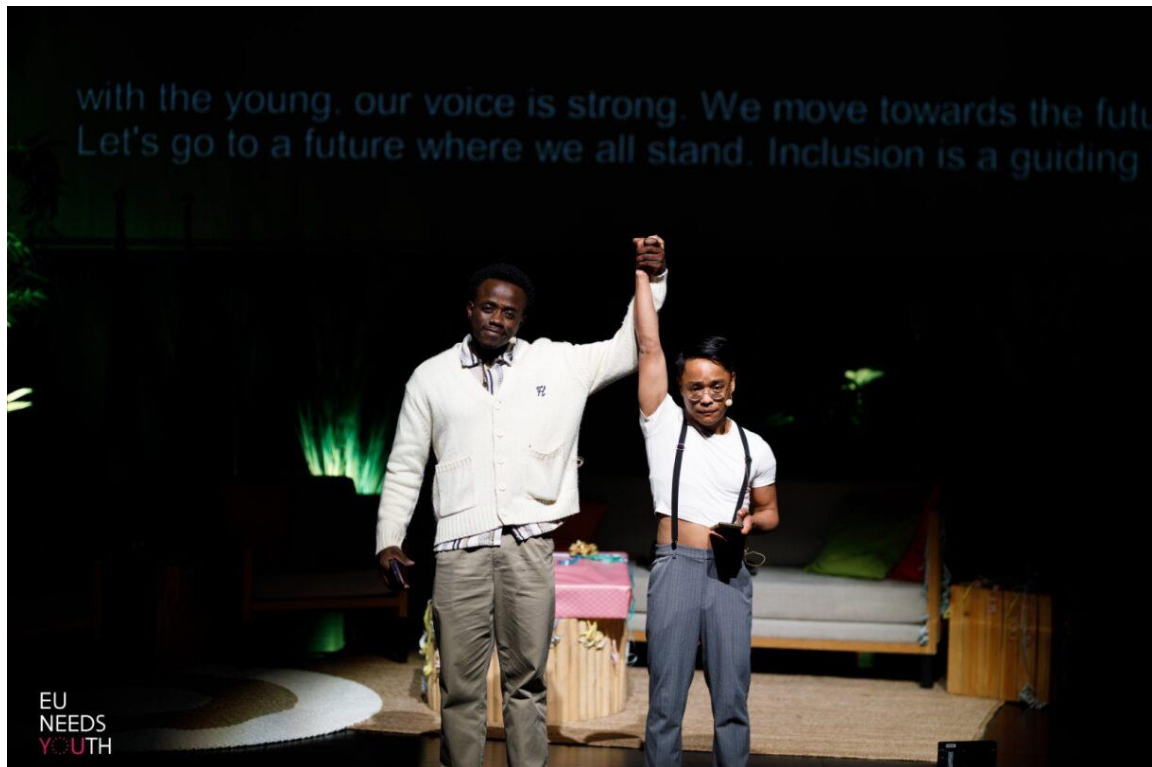
- Ensure targeted measures to promote equity, inclusion and support for young people in defining and taking up their place in society, in particular through youth work and by developing a transversal, inclusive youth perspective in all relevant policy areas, which can contribute to this. In addition, mechanisms for the meaningful and inclusive participation of young people from diverse backgrounds in decision-making, for example youth councils and youth organisations, can be created while also promoting the participation of young people outside these organisations.
- Ensure young people's active, meaningful, equitable and equal participation and give them a shaping role in spaces that concern them and, where relevant, create, further develop, adapt and safeguard emancipatory spaces for young people and their needs in order to empower them in their development irrespective of their background and to acknowledge, recognise and give effect to their voices and input.
- Further connect young people with each other, ensure and facilitate their experiences and interactions with diversity of all kinds, for example through learning mobility or cross-border solidarity actions.
- Reinforce the leverage for youth work and other relevant structures and services in support of young people's development, mental health and well-being, learning and experimenting in order to overcome the barriers young people face on different levels, especially for those young people at risk of exclusion.

The outcomes of the EU Youth Conference in Ghent have been included in the Council conclusion on inclusive societies for young people. The six recommendations are included in paragraph 26 and the thirty-four possible implementing measures are outlined in annex III of the Council conclusions.

A final outcome of the Youth Conference is included in paragraph 47, in which the Member States and the Commission are invited to introduce means to monitor the follow-up of the outcomes of the EU Youth Dialogue and to give feedback on this follow-up to young people.



[Read the complete Council Conclusions on inclusive societies for young people \(C/2024/3808\) here.](#)





European and international policy agendas on children, youth and children's rights





5. European and international policy agendas on children, youth and children's rights

5.1. Introduction

Since the last Belgian Presidency in 2010, there have been significant advances and developments of policy initiatives dealing with children, youth and children's rights. The Belgian Presidency wanted to take stock of progress in linking child and youth policy agendas at an EU level, whilst contributing to strengthening synergies in the future. Therefore, the Presidency updated the document "State of the Art - The European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth and Children's Rights", organised an expert seminar and wrote council conclusions on this topic.

Better alignment and cross-fertilisation between child and youth policies is important for several reasons:

- It acknowledges that children & young people are not distinct groups. Age-groups overlap and there is a growing consensus around the importance of taking a life-cycle approach to human development.
- Children and youth face similar challenges in accessing services or realising their right to participate – particularly among more disadvantaged groups. Coordinated policies are more likely to close the gap in service provision and participatory rights.
- Despite the overlap, policies and practices targeting children and youth have evolved separately in parallel communities of stakeholders, with different understanding, approaches and monitoring frameworks. The exchange of knowledge and experience helps feed innovation and mutual learning.

However, it's important to clarify that advocating for greater alignment and policy coherence doesn't mean advocating for the merging of child and youth policies into a single entity. Each age group warrants distinct policy attention, visibility and recognition.

5.2. State of the Art - 2023 update

Various policy agendas on children, youth and children's rights have been adopted at the European and international level. The [State of the Art](#) - The European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth and Children's Rights update of 2023, is a study that offers an inventory of the main policies of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations in which children and youth are the focus and that are aimed at influencing government policies. The text updates the note 'The European and International Policy Agendas on Children,

‘Youth and Children’s Rights’, issued by the Belgian EU Presidency in 2010 and which has been updated in 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2021.

This comparative analysis of child and youth policies at EU, Council of Europe and UN levels was first written after youth and children’s rights were first mentioned in the ‘Treaty on the EU’ and the ‘Charter on the Fundamental Rights of the EU’ and after all EU member states ratified the ‘UN Convention on the Rights of the Child’. Since then, many new policies have been advancing youth and children’s rights.

It is important that EU Member States and all relevant actors are aware of these key developments on the level of not only the EU, but also the Council of Europe and the United Nations. Key documents that are detailed in the State of the Art update include, on EU level: the current ‘**EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child**’, published on 24 March 2021 and complimented by the **European Child Guarantee** focusing on its key action on socio-economic inclusion, **European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027** and the **European Year of Youth 2022**, aiming to mainstream youth policy across all relevant EU policy fields.

The Council of Europe has a fourth **Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)**, entitled “Children's Rights in Action: from continuous implementation to joint innovation”. Recently, in May 2023, a **summit was held in Reykjavík** with a declaration stating, among other things, that “As we work to promote the rights of the child, we underline the importance of education to give children and young people the necessary references to grow up embracing our democratic values in culturally diverse societies and take an active part in the protection of our cultural heritage.” A declaration on the situation of the children of Ukraine was annexed to the Reykjavík declaration.

Given the evolving policy landscape, an update and evaluation of the ‘State of the Art’ was necessary to explore possibilities for creating greater coherence and

synergies between various policy areas. Consequently, the Belgian EU Presidency has placed this issue on the agenda of the EU Council Youth.





International Day of Play

A resolution on the International Day of Play was adopted on 25 March 2024 by the general assembly of the United Nations, designating 11 June as the International Day of Play. This resolution notably addresses both children and youth: “Recognizing the role of play in building essential and transferable physical, social, cognitive, communication and emotional life skills at all ages, and its positive impact on promoting tolerance and resilience and facilitating social inclusion, conflict prevention and peacebuilding”, and, “Recognizing also the importance of access to play and recreational activities and their contributions to the physical and psychosocial well-being and development of children and youth, regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status”.

5.3. *Expert Seminar on European and International policy agendas on Children, Youth and Children’s rights*

Fact Sheet

- Location: The Irish College and the Faculty Club, Leuven, 21 – 23 January 2024
- Participants: more than 150 attendees including experts, policy makers, speakers and staff from over 23 countries
- Goal: Contributing to a better alignment of the European and international policy agendas on children, youth, and children's rights and promoting stronger ties between youth and children's rights policy at the EU level, as well as with the Council of Europe and the UN.
- Exchanges: 10 speeches and keynotes, 2 panel discussions and 16 breakout sessions with good practices and workshop discussions, including a speech by Olena Chernykh addressing the audience regarding the situation of children and young people in Ukraine.
- Result: input for the revision of the Council Conclusions on European and international policy agendas on children, youth, and children’s rights (2010/C 326/01) and for the evaluation the document ‘State of the art – the European and international policy agendas on children, youth, and children's rights’.





Introduction

The Presidency held an expert seminar on European and International policy agendas on Children, Youth and Children's rights, which took place on 21 - 23 January 2024 in the historic city of Leuven, Belgium. The aim was to contribute to the alignment of the European and international policy agendas on children, youth, and children's rights in the EU, the Council of Europe and the United Nations, by gathering input for the Council Conclusions, evaluating the state-of-the-art update and positioning these documents as key tools for enhancing policy coherence.

Experts and policymakers in the field of children, youth affairs and children's rights gathered to discuss the European and international policy agendas on youth affairs and children's rights, with a focus on policy coherence. The aim was to discuss institutional, procedural and substantive tools and instruments to improve this coherence. In the plenary opening of the seminar, Minister Benjamin Dalle stressed his desire for a more coherent policy regarding children and young people that promoted Youth and Children Rights, in order to deliver on our common ambition to create a Europe fit for all children and young people.

The Presidency arranged sessions and workshops aimed at fostering meaningful dialogue among policymakers and experts at both national and European levels. Within these sessions, the EU Youth Coordinator, Biliana Sirakova, and the European Commission Coordinator for the Rights of the Child, Marie-Cécile Rouillon, outlined their respective priorities and approaches. Ms. Rouillon noted for example, that although both groups have different strategies and programmes there is a need to work collaboratively, whilst still ensuring the protection rights of those under 18. Furthermore, noteworthy examples of exemplary policy-making at national level have been showcased, as well as good practices from several international and local organisations.





The case for more coherence: a seamless transition

More coherence between the policy agendas on Youth and Children's Rights, at both international and national levels, can create a more seamless transition from childhood to adulthood. By sharing information, exchange, coordination and cooperations, policies could be more effective and supporting to young people. However, coherence does not mean full integration, which could risk one field dominating the other.

There are two main arguments for more coherence: Firstly, both fields share several common goals and thematic concerns, allowing for common learning and collaborative action, despite each having unique goals. Secondly, there is an age overlap between the two fields, with children's rights policies applying to those under 18 and youth policies often addressing individuals from 13 up to 30 or even 35 years old, creating value in enhanced coordination for those within the overlapping age range.

At the EU level, coherence is best achieved through dedicated policies and mechanisms for both Children's Rights and Youth, connected by strong bridges, leveraging the EU's competences to support, coordinate, and supplement Member States' actions. The biggest opportunities for synergy exist at the key thematic overlaps within these policies, where coordinated action at the EU level can be most effective.

Policy Coherence

Firstly, there is process-oriented policy coherence. An example of this is, is the importance of participation: the involvement of children and young people in public decision-making should be improved. The two fields share common goals relating:

- Effective, ethical, and meaningful implementation of participation mechanisms,
- Increasing the policy impact occurring in response to children and young people's voices,
- Increasing the recognition of children and young people as political actors,
- Mainstreaming their rights and voices across all fields of policy and levels of governance.

The existing EU tools for child and youth participation were presented to inform policymakers about the means to co-create policy with children and young people.

Secondly, there is thematic policy coherence. Cross-sectoral policy should be developed in response to the voices and concerns of children and young people. There are many common concerns raised by children and young people through the EU Youth Dialogue, the EU Children's participation platform and other participatory mechanisms. This includes topics such as

- Mental health,



- Impact of digitalisation,
- Education reform,
- Climate and sustainability issues,

Many of these topics often exist outside of the traditional spheres of Children, Youth and Children's Rights policy and therefore require coordinated actions and shared learning among various sectors.

Lastly, there should be enhanced support for transitions from dependence to independence, especially for the most vulnerable children and young people. Due to the significant overlap in age groups between the two fields, numerous opportunities exist for more coordinated policies concerning transition and adolescence. These coordinated policies should address the complex and extended transition period for young people, emphasising a rights-based approach that improves their lives for their own sake, not merely to facilitate better transitions to adulthood.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions and findings from the seminar, the rapporteur of the expert seminar, Dan Moxon, formulated the following recommendations for the Council Conclusions and presented them to the attendees:

- Establish an ongoing mechanism at EU level to facilitate coordination, cooperation, information sharing and exchange between the fields of youth policy and children's rights within Member States and at EU level. Such a mechanism should seek to better enable policy coherence between the two fields and foster coherence on the major thematic areas of synergy.
- Continue a coordinated approach between The EU Youth Coordinator and the Coordinator on Children's Rights to ensure that children's rights, the rights of young people, and child and youth perspectives are integrated across all relevant policy areas at EU level. As part of this, the two coordinators should routinely monitor and identify the concerns that are common to children and young people as raised through the EU Youth Dialogue, EU Children's participation platform and other participatory mechanisms. Joint action to stimulate cross-sectoral policy responses to these should then be taken.
- Consider how the rights and voices of children can be addressed through the using full potential of the Better Regulation framework, and particularly if a 'child youth check' can be developed as a complementary or integrated mechanism alongside the new EU youth check.



- Continue the biennial update of the ‘State-of-the-Art’ document “The European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth and Children’s Rights,” and further building upon this with mapping of policy coherence between Children, Youth and Children’s Rights policy at national level.
- Undertake systematic analysis and research into concrete opportunities for policy coherence within the major areas of synergy. This analysis should identify examples of best practice, replicable tools, and potential for common implementation and/or monitoring initiatives between the two fields.
- Better utilise existing platforms for information sharing, such as the EU Youth Wiki, to map and share information on existing national level collaboration or coordination activities across Children, Youth and Children’s Rights policy within Member states.

These recommendations have been integrated into the Council Conclusions on the European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth, and Children’s Rights, adopted at the Education, Youth, Culture & Sports Council meeting in May 2024. This integration underscores the importance of aligning policies across different levels and sectors to better support children and youth.

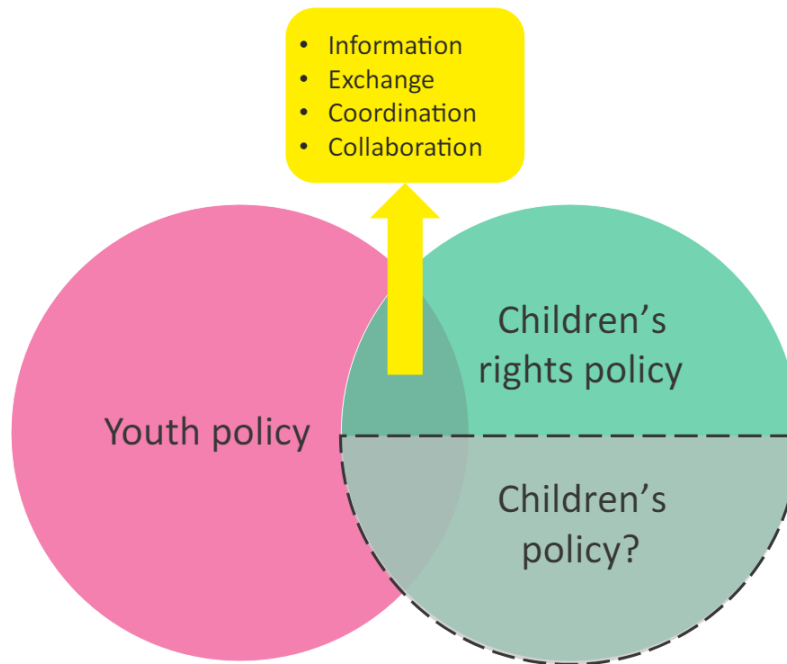
5.4. Council Conclusions on the European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth and Children’s Rights

During the Belgian Presidency, it was the ambition to update the Council Conclusions of 19 November 2010 on the European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth and Children’s Rights [2010/C 326/01](#). To realise this, a working group was established consisting of experts in children’s rights and/or youth affairs.

The Council conclusions on the European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth, and Children’s Rights aim to establish strong links and synergies between these agendas and align European youth policy efforts with both existing and future children’s rights agendas. The conclusions set out the initiatives that have taken place at EU level to safeguard children’s rights and protect them from discrimination, including the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child, the EU Youth strategy 2019-2027, and the Council’s 2021 recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee.

These conclusions contribute to creating a seamless transition from childhood to adulthood, especially for those young people in vulnerable situations, through informed policies and better coordination between the policies concerned. As such, they aim to raise awareness and propose avenues for achieving better **cooperation, coordination, information and exchange** on European level regarding the policy fields within the scope of these conclusions.

Model of policy coherence between Children, Youth and Children’s Rights:



The diagram illustrates the interplay and coherence needed between EU policies on Children, Youth, and Children's Rights. It highlights that while the EU has specific competences in Youth and Children's Rights, it lacks a dedicated competence for broader children's policy, which remains a national matter. The model shows that strong bridges between policies on Children's Rights and Youth are essential for achieving coherence. The areas where these policies overlap represent the greatest need for coordination and the major opportunities for synergy at the EU level.

The Council conclusions are taking into account that:

- The life and future prospects of young people are marked by the opportunities, support and protection received during childhood.
- A seamless transition from childhood to adulthood, especially for those young people in vulnerable situations, must be facilitated through informed policies and better coordination between the policies concerned.
- In the age range addressed by EU Youth Policy cooperation, there is an intersection between children and young people, notably up until the age of 18 years old.

[Read the complete Conclusions on the European and international policy agendas on children, youth and children’s rights \(C/2024/3528\) here.](#)



An Unprecedented Meeting on the Future of the EU Youth Policy after 2027





6. Meeting of Directors-general youth and National Agency directors: An Unprecedented Meeting on the Future of the EU Youth Policy after 2027

6.1. Fact Sheet

- Location: The Egmont Palace and Capital, Brussels, 26 – 28 March 2024
- Participants: 150 participants from 33 countries and international institutions and organisations, including the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership, the RAY research network, SALTO Inclusion & Diversity
- Goal: the Directors-general for Youth gather semi-annually, in a meeting hosted by the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU. Its purpose is to exchange information on the key initiatives undertaken in the 27 Member States and by the European Commission in the youth sector.
- Exchanges: 4 key notes, a round table discussion and field visits to youth organisations and European youth programmes in practice.
- Result: a report that reflects the opinions of Member State representatives, which will support the development of national and European youth policies, inform the European Commission's policy proposals, and contribute to the midterm evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

6.2. Introduction

The meeting of the Directors-general Youth and a high-level exchange with the Directors of National Agencies of the EU Youth programmes took place from 26 – 28 March 2024, at the Egmont Palace in Brussels. The 27 Member States of the European Union and six non-EU countries, engage in two EU programmes that offer European activities for young people: The Erasmus+ programme, which includes a specific chapter on Youth for non-formal learning activities in an out-of-school context, and the European Solidarity Corps, which provides volunteering opportunities.

The Directors-general (DG) are the highest representatives of the National Authorities the EU youth programmes, making them key stakeholders in youth policy making. Traditionally, the DG-meetings focus on a specific, current topic that can impact the further shaping of the EU Youth programmes and policy. National Agencies (NAs) are responsible for implementing the EU Youth Programmes in their respective countries. They promote the programmes and to manage the funding of granted European youth projects. National Agencies organise a 'Business Meeting' twice a year to discuss the implementation of the programmes in relation to policy developments.

This gathering marked a significant milestone. While each Presidency hosts a Directors-general Youth meeting and a Business meeting of the National Agencies, this was the very first time that Directors-general and NA-directors came together to discuss equally and contribute from their perspectives. One day of the DG meeting, 27 March, was dedicated to this common meeting, contributing to a stronger link between youth policy development and the practical implementation of the EU Youth Programmes. All EU Member States were represented during the DG meeting.

The Belgian Presidency and thus the DG Youth meeting coincided with significant milestones during the current Programme period of 2019-2027. Both programmes require a mid-term evaluation in 2024, along with a final evaluation of the programmes from the previous period of 2014-2020. Additionally, a mid-term evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy is scheduled for 2024. The timing of these evaluations provides a valuable opportunity to focus discussions and to share initial reflections on the future of the EU Youth Programmes and the EU Youth Strategy beyond 2028.

6.3. Directors-general meeting

6.2.1 Peek into youth work practice - visits of organisations

On the first day of this meeting, Directors-general visited various youth projects in Brussels, nominated by each of the three communities in Belgium and showcasing grassroots youth work. This input from a youth work practice perspective, combined with the insights from invited speakers during the plenary sessions in the following days, enriched the subsequent discussions. The following organisations invited the participants for insight to their practice: Caméra Quartier, De Ambrassade, Habbekrats, JES, Urban Foxes, Young Thinkers, Dynamo International and Zentrum für Förderpädagogik.





6.2.2 Linking policy and programmes

Directors-General (DGs) and National Agencies (NAs) had common discussions and shared reflections focused on the EU Youth Programmes. Insightful presentations provided food for thought and reflection:

- Andreas Karsten & Carmen Teubl-Kiviniemi of the RAY network: Research-based Analysis and Monitoring of European Youth Programmes - transnational analysis 2014-2020 and midterm evaluation 2021-2023
- Pieter-Jan De Graeve of [SALTO Inclusion and Diversity](#): Inclusion in the EU Youth Programmes
- Hilde Lauwers of the Department of Culture, Youth and Media: Transnational learning mobility for young people and youth workers in the Flemish Community. A quantitative analysis of the EU Programmes Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, 2007-2024



Common reflections

Equipped with the input from the visits and the presentations, mixed discussion groups in the afternoon included Directors-general of Youth, National Agencies, and representatives from the European Commission, RAY research network, SALTO Inclusion & Diversity, the Council of Europe, the EU-CoE youth partnership and the European Youth Forum.

In three discussion rounds of forward-looking exchanges, they reflected on three clusters of guiding questions, and suggested next steps for future Programme generations. The questions focused on: the role of the EU Youth programmes in respecting and safeguarding democracy and European values; on how the programmes can contribute to quality and development of youth work and on the needs regarding operational and financial improvements and challenges.

Recommendations for the European Youth Programmes

Based on the responses, opinions and suggestions from the various stakeholders on the afternoon of 27 March, each of these areas received comments from at least 40% of participants, providing a critical mass to the issues. These recommendations are not in priority order.



REINFORCE A VALUES-BASED APPROACH

- ✓ Retain values as the core of the Programmes
- ✓ Explore and discuss the values more, using accessible and understandable language
- ✓ Keep community impact as a core element of the Programmes
- ✓ Prioritise inclusion

SUPPORT QUALITY

most popular topic - received the most comments and suggestions from most tables

- ✓ Define the criteria of quality projects, measuring and monitoring it (putting pressure on the local level for quality youth work)
- ✓ Support the rollout of the Youth Test or Check, on European and National levels, for the needs and voices of young people to be heard in different policy areas
- ✓ Improve harvesting and disseminate of good practice from projects, especially outputs from Key Action 2 - Cooperation Partnerships
- ✓ Continue to ensure training, professional development and international practice sharing between youth workers through the Training and Cooperation Activities budget

ENABLE NAS TO INCREASE OUTREACH

include more young people with fewer opportunities and newcomers

- ✓ Build in response mechanisms beforehand, to deal with changing situations and unforeseen crises
- ✓ Listen to the needs of the field when adapting;
- ✓ Offer tailor-made project actions around the diverse needs of the field;

INCREASE FLEXIBILITY OF PROGRAMMES

- ✓ Increase the management fee for National Agencies
- ✓ Promotion of opportunities through third parties and alumni
- ✓ Support newcomers in their journey to become beneficiaries

FOCUS ON COMMUNITY / STRUCTURAL IMPACT

- ✓ Improve recognition of youth work and international youth work through the Programmes on policy level and foster stronger connection with other education sectors
- ✓ Provide funding for project formats to link projects and their outcomes more sustainably to a wider stakeholder group on community/regional level

INCREASE THE BUDGET

- ✓ Recognise that the Programmes work (see RAY for evidence base). There should be more funding, more projects, more people positively impacted
- ✓ Ensure equality with other education sectors for the grant funding
- ✓ Respond to the need and existing demand of the youth sector: increase the national success rates for project approvals
- ✓ Support more quality projects that impact individuals and communities

MAKE IT EASIER TO APPLY

- ✓ Reduce complexity of the Youth Programme offer
- ✓ Consider micro-grants as a new format, for a low-threshold entry point
- ✓ Ensure proportionality of administration to grant size
- ✓ Consider applications not only text based (consider video etc)

IMPROVE THE IT ARCHITECTURE

- ✓ Reduce complexity
- ✓ Have better synergy between systems which are more stable and easier to use
- ✓ Have data more readily available to enable quicker evidence-based decisions



6.2.3 All eyes on the EU Youth Strategy

On the last day, the meeting was conducted in a smaller setting with only the DGs in attendance. During this tour de table session, they focussed on two guiding questions concerning the EU Youth Strategy:

- What is missing in the current strategy?
- What should be included in the future strategy?

These national inputs from the Tour de Table discussion on 28 March highlighted several key points regarding the **current** EU Youth Strategy:

VALUABLE FRAMEWORK

The current strategy is seen as a valuable framework for youth policy and coordination, elevating the needs of young people in the agenda at different policy levels. Improvement is needed for those needs to be heard in different policy sectors. The strategy serves as a guiding framework, providing common understanding and cooperation in the youth field in different Member States.

FLEXIBILITY AND RESILIENCE

The current strategy has demonstrated resilience amid crises and is considered "future-proof" due to its flexibility, allowing adaptation to changing circumstances. This is highly valued.

THE 3 PILLARS REMAIN RELEVANT

The three pillars of engage, empower, and connect are seen as valuable and relevant, but there's room for further expansion, especially around youth mainstreaming.

FOCAL POINTS FOR THE FUTURE

Youth participation and inclusion are top priorities at national levels, and there's a need for these to continue as focal points in the future strategy. Other important elements exist in the current strategy, such as mental health & well-being, digital literacy and environmental sustainability but need emphasising. Currently the Youth Goals are only included in the EU Youth Strategy as an annex, whereas these issues are priorities of young people in many countries.

COLLABORATION WITH YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

Young people and youth organisations were integral to creating this current EU Youth Strategy. It's important to have youth participation at every stage of creation, adaptation and management of a strategy, working closely with Member States and EU institutions.



The following recommendations emerged from the discussions on the **future** EU Youth Strategy:

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION

Prioritise active involvement of young people in all stages of Youth Strategy development, implementation, and evaluation through inclusive processes like the EU Youth Dialogue. Reflect on and refresh the existing Youth Goals to ensure their relevance for the future, adding new priorities where necessary. Emphasise inclusion of all young people in the Strategy and in the European Youth Programmes, prioritising those with fewer opportunities.

MAINSTREAMING AND EMPOWERMENT

Develop a flexible EU Youth Strategy that can adapt to evolving challenges. Apply an EU Youth Test or Check when developing it to ensure its appropriacy and that it is as future-proof as possible. Add a dedicated fourth pillar for mainstreaming youth perspectives across all policy areas, accompanied by related instruments, engaging multiple sectors and stakeholders in the priority themes for which young people have needs (mental health, digital literacy, housing, transport etc). Empower diverse youth voices to shape policies that affect them directly, with youth-led design and management of the process.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SUPPORT

Enhance mental health services and promote well-being initiatives for young people. Combat stigma associated with mental health issues and ensure accessible support mechanisms. Emphasise this existing Youth Goal as a priority for the future EU Youth Strategy.

DIGITAL LITERACY

Address digital literacy gaps and prepare young people for the digital age, including quality digital education and training to tackle mis-/disinformation, digital security, the use of AI and promoting online safety.

EU YOUTH COORDINATOR ROLE

Clarify and strengthen the role in alignment with the EU Youth Strategy and Programmes. Make their achievements more visible and impactful.

EUROPEAN YOUTH PROGRAMMES

Ensure that EU Youth Programmes are value-based and closely align with the objectives and priorities outlined in the EU Youth Strategy; the two mechanisms should have synergies.

The meeting was concluded by inputs from the following invited guests:

- **Zsófia Nagy-Vargha**, Deputy State Secretary for Youth, Ministry of Culture – Presenting the priorities of the incoming Presidency Hungary.
- **Tobias Flessenkemper**, Head of Department, Directorate of Democratic Participation - Council of Europe – Reflecting on 75 years of the Council of Europe, the Reykjavik



Declaration, the Democracy Principles and the Youth Perspective and presenting the Council of Europe 2024-2027 work programme.

- **Nicholas Kujala**, Board Member, European Youth Forum – Presenting the European Youth Forum priorities and plans.
- **Tanya Basarab**, Research & Youth Policy Officer, EU - Council of Europe Youth Partnership – Presenting flagship events and research and youth policy initiatives.
- **Sophia Eriksson Waterschoot**, European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+ - Outlining the ongoing work of the Commission.

6.4. Meeting of National Agencies

The NA-Meeting (or 'Business Meeting') took place from 25 – 28 March 2024 at the Youth Centre Capital in Brussels. During one day, the NA Directors joined the Directors-general at the Egmont Palace. NA representatives from all EU Member States were present, as well as those from the six Programme Countries that fully participate in EU Youth Programmes, but are not EU members, namely Iceland, Norway, North Macedonia, Serbia Switzerland and Turkey.

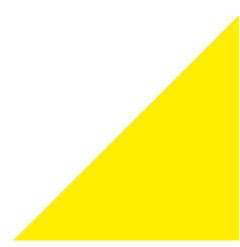
As the implementing bodies for the programmes in each country, the NA directors discussed their contributions to the mid-term and final evaluations of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. Their discussion led to common observations and recommendations which will inform the overall evaluation and further development of the programmes till 2027. The insights should also help shape the new programmes beyond 2027. By connecting with the Directors-general for the first time during their Business Meeting, NA Directors could directly share their practical implementation experiences, thereby strengthening the links between policy and practice.

The outcomes of the meeting will be presented and discussed with the relevant units of the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission (DG EAC), responsible for the implementation and coordination of both programmes. These outcomes will also be utilised in discussions within the Youth Consultation Group, established by Youth Unit of DG EAC. Additionally, each National Agency can share the main outcomes with its National Authority.





All Roads Lead to the Council





7. All roads lead to the Council

7.1. The Council of the European Union: a single body in different configurations

The governments of the 27 member states of the European Union are represented in the 'Council of the European Union', also called 'Council of Ministers' or simply 'the Council'. The Council is responsible for decision making and coordination. The Council, together with the European Parliament, carries out legislative and budgetary tasks. This concretely means that the Council has to negotiate and approve all legislation proposed by the European Commission and has to give the green light to each proposed EU budget. It is through the Council that the national governments can influence the European Union.

The Council is a single body, but for reasons relating to the organisation of its work, it meets – according to the subject being discussed – in different 'configurations', which are attended by the Ministers from the Member States and the European Commissioners responsible for the areas concerned. All conclusions are filed as 'Conclusions of the Council of the European Union'.

In practice, there are ten different Councils according to their composition. The Council on Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS) is one of them. In this configuration, in principle, a formal Council meeting will take place twice a year in Brussels during two consecutive working days. These meetings consist of four parts or sessions, in accordance with the policy areas Education, Youth, Culture and Sports. The Youth session takes up half a day. The Council Secretariat is an important player to support the Presidency to adhere to the foreseen Council format and to reach the best possible results.

Besides the Councils on the ten different policy domains, there is also the 'European Council' composed of heads of state and government. This European Council does not have a legislative task, but sets out the general policy directions of the European Union.

The Member States take turns holding the Presidency of the Council, each for a six-month term. To maintain continuity, the three Member States consecutively holding the Presidency, work closely together in collaborative arrangements, also known as Trios. The current Trio Presidency consists of Spain, Belgium and Hungary. Spain held the EU Presidency from 1 July till 31 December 2023, Belgium from 1 January till 30 June 2024 and Hungary takes over the EU Presidency from 1 July till 31 December 2024.

7.2. Presidency preparations

In November 2021, the [EU Youth Strategy Work Plan 2022-2024](#) was approved by Youth Ministers at the EYCS Council. This Work Plan serves as a compass and guides Member States, the Commission and all stakeholders in achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. This work plan included the priorities and directions of the Belgian EU Presidency in 2024 regarding to Youth Affairs. According to this work plan, the Belgian Presidency intended to prepare several



Council acts with a view to approval by the EYCS Council of Ministers on 13 May 2024. In addition, events were planned, the outcomes of which would be included in these acts.

In Belgium, Youth Affairs are a decentralised competence, devolved to the Communities. According to the rotation arrangement between the Belgian federated states, it was the Flemish community, and more specific, the Flemish Department of Culture, Youth and Media (CJM) who was assigned to take the leading role in the preparations of the Youth part of the Belgian EU Presidency in 2024. The German Speaking Community was assigned spokesperson for Belgium during the Presidency.

A project team was set up to coordinate the preparation of the events and Council acts related to Youth Affairs. This project team consisted of staff from the Flemish Department Culture, Youth & Media, the National Agency JINT and a coordinator for the three National Youth Councils of Belgium.

The preparations already started in 2019, in close cooperation with competent authorities on all levels, with the youth sector and with representatives from Flemish, intra-Belgian, and European authorities and governments. The Belgian Presidency was honoured and privileged to cooperate with such a wide range of partners and supporters from the youth field.

On the other hand, intensive efforts were made to ensure youth participation and involvement from the youth sector during the preparations. This included setting up writing groups, working groups, informal steering group meetings for the EU Youth Dialogue, and resonance group meetings related to youth work. These groups included youth sector representatives, youth organisations, national youth councils, the European Youth Forum, National Agencies, and other (European) experts to support the preparations for the events and Council acts.

As an important part of the Belgian EU Presidency, the 10th cycle of EU Youth Dialogue continued and was prepared in cooperation with Trio Presidency partners Spain and Hungary with a focus on European Youth Goal #3 on inclusive societies.

7.3. Council preparatory bodies

Before a dossier is approved by the Council, it has already travelled a long way. On the basis of the preparations, the Belgian EU Presidency drew up draft proposals for a resolution and conclusions. These are [“soft” legislation](#) at European level in which the 27 member states reach a consensus about a text and declare their commitment and are therefore not binding. However, they do draft a framework of a shared position of the Member States, and invite both the Commission and the Member States to take action.

During the Belgian Presidency, the draft proposals were discussed in different meetings of the Youth Working Party. This is a [Council Preparatory body](#) in which officials of the 27 Member

States prepare work for the Council. On 26 April 2024, [COREPER I](#) (Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States to the European Union) discussed the draft proposals on Youth Affairs. The deputy permanent representatives of the 27 Member States of the European Union are their country's ambassadors to the EU and express the position of their government on the proposals. COREPER I approved the documents without any modifications¹. Therefore, they could appear on the agenda of the Council of the European Union.



¹ In COREPER I, Hungary and Bulgaria added statements to the Council acts. Bulgaria stated that they interpret 'gender' and 'gender identity' in the Council conclusions on European and international policy agendas on children, youth and children's rights according to their national law. Hungary stated that they interpret 'gender' in both the Council conclusions on European and international policy agendas on children, youth and children's rights, and the conclusions on inclusive societies for young people, in accordance with their national law. Additionally, Hungary emphasized that references to the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (COM(2020) 152 final) and the LGBTQI Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (COM(2020) 698 final) should be interpreted in line with national law and the specific circumstances of Member States. Hungary also highlighted the importance of Member States having sufficient flexibility regarding financial issues and considering the feasibility of measures to avoid unnecessary administrative burdens.



7.4. The youth session of the EYCS Council on 13 May 2024

7.4.1. Factsheet

- **Location:** Europe Building, Brussels
- **Participants:** 27 Youth Ministers (or deputy representatives) from the EU Member States, 1 chair (Flemish Minister Benjamin Dalle) and 1 European Commissioner (Commissioner Iliana Ivanova)
- **Purpose:** Approval of Council acts and exchange between Youth Ministers
- **Exchanges:** There was an intervention from Ukraine, a presentation by the upcoming Hungarian Presidency, a debrief of the Informal Breakfast Meeting by two youth representatives and a plenary policy debate.
- **Result:** Four Council acts on Youth Affairs were approved

7.4.2. The Informal Breakfast Meeting

Prior to the youth session of the Education, Youth, Culture, and Sport (EYCS) Council, an informal breakfast meeting was held, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, including ministers, representatives of EU institutions and representatives of the 9th, 10th and 11th cycles of the EU Youth Dialogue.

The meeting aimed to foster a meaningful exchange of ideas on current topics such as the upcoming European elections and voting rights for 16- and 17-year-olds. Participants also explored ways to improve the EU Youth Dialogue, ensuring that young voices are effectively integrated into policymaking.

To promote meaningful and in-depth discussions, an interactive setting was chosen with roundtable discussions focusing on one of the two themes, "Vote at 16" and the "EU Youth Dialogue". A good balance was ensured among participants at every table, ensuring a well-rounded mix among youth representatives, institutional representatives, youth ministers and ambassadors.

With the impending European elections and the increasing importance of youth participation, this Informal Breakfast Meeting provided a platform to explore actionable strategies to enhance youth involvement in European decision-making processes.

The participants formulated the following key elements to increase the visibility of the EU Youth Dialogue as well as to reach more young people:

- **Training** is key for ministerial and youth delegates participating in the EU Youth Dialogue.

- A coherent and inclusive **communication strategy** focusing on the EU Youth Dialogue as a whole is important to improve follow-up and visibility.
- It is important to **mainstream** (the outcomes of) the EU Youth Dialogue.
- **Monitoring** the mainstreaming of the outcomes of the EUYD and the communication strategy is necessary to assure good follow-up.
- It is **important to involve National Youth Councils and INGYOs**.

In regards to “Vote at 16”, it was argued that lowering the voting age can strengthen democracy. However, political and civil education, both formal and non-formal, is crucial for effective youth participation. It is essential to use the momentum of the elections to foster this discussion in EU countries and to support the youth organisations that are informing and engaging young people.

Overall, the outcomes of the discussions highlighted the importance of collaboration between youth representatives and policymakers, underscoring the commitment to empowering young people and encouraging their active participation in shaping the future of Europe.

EU youth representative Laure Verstraete, seen on the right, had the opportunity to present the outcomes to the press at the Council.



7.4.3. Agenda of the EYCS Council – Youth Affairs

After the breakfast meeting, the Youth Ministers of the 27 EU member states met for **the Youth session of the EYCS Council**. Flemish Minister Benjamin Dalle chaired this Youth session of the Council of Ministers and represented the Belgian Presidency. The Belgian spokesperson was Minister Isabelle Weykmans, Youth Minister of the German-speaking Community.

During this meeting, Youth Ministers **approved four Council acts**:

- Conclusions on the legacy of the European Year of Youth 2022,
- Conclusions on the European and international policy agendas on children, youth and children's rights,
- Resolution on youth work policy in an empowering Europe,

- Conclusions on inclusive societies for young people.

Following this approval, Minister Dalle gave the floor to the coordinator of the three National Youth Councils of Belgium, Laure Verstraete and the president of the European Youth Forum, María Rodríguez Alcázar to present the results of the informal breakfast meeting.

Youth Ministers also held a policy debate on the importance of monitoring and feedback processes regarding to the outcomes of the EU Youth Dialogue to better meet young people's needs and expectations. Additionally, and in an unprecedented short timespan after the EU Youth Conference in Ghent, its outcomes as proposed by young people were discussed by the Youth ministers: the six recommendations and 34 possible implementation measures to promote inclusive societies for young people.



The Presidency furthermore invited Ukraine's acting Minister of youth and sports, Matvii Bidnyi, to make a statement on the situation in Ukraine in light of the Russian war of aggression and its impact on young people. Minister Bidnyi stressed the importance of support programmes for Ukrainian youth and the role of young people in post-war recovery. The Council ended with a presentation by Hungarian Minister Hornung on the youth priorities of their upcoming Presidency.



7.4.4. An exchange of views on the importance of monitoring and feedback processes of the EU Youth Dialogue

Based on a background paper of the Belgian Presidency and the six recommendations and the 34 possible implementation measures, which were proposed by young people during the EU Youth Conference in Ghent, the Youth Ministers held a policy debate during the Council. The debate focused on the importance of monitoring and feedback processes regarding the outcomes of the EU Youth Dialogue to better meet young people's needs and expectations.

Ministers were kindly invited to reflect on either of the two following questions:

Based on the cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary, and cross-ministerial nature of the recommendations and implementing measures and on the holistic view of young people's lives and considering the dual approach of the EU Youth Strategy of mainstreaming youth issues across policy areas alongside specific youth initiatives:

- Monitoring Mechanisms – How can the monitoring and feedback process regarding the outcomes of the EU Youth Dialogue at the political level be enhanced at EU, national, regional and local level to better cater to young people's needs and expectations for the EU Youth Dialogue?
- Possible Implementing Measures – Which of the possible implementing measures could be implemented in your country at national, regional and local level to foster inclusive societies for young people?

During the policy debate, Youth Ministers also specifically discussed which proposed possible implementing measures could be suitable for their member state.

Overall, the ministers emphasized:

- The importance of strengthening **youth perspectives in policy development** at local, regional, national and EU level;
- The importance of **youth mainstreaming** in all (policy) areas that affect them;
- The importance of addressing the **challenges** young people face;
- that **information** is key to participation: fake news and disinformation should be countered;
- a strong willingness of member states and COM to work together on a **feedback and monitoring system** of the EUYD;
- the importance of including the **outcomes of the EUYC** in Council conclusions;
- the need for **peer learning activities** on mainstreaming and youth test/checks;
- the importance of **youth councils**;

- the need for youth-friendly communication as well as a **communication strategy** of the EUYD.
- the importance of **alignment** of EU policy agendas with the EU Youth Dialogue.

Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Iliana Ivanova stressed the importance of timely feedback from the EU Youth Dialogue in the policy cycle and the need for closer cooperation with young people. She stressed that active involvement of Member States is essential for an inclusive dialogue so that young people's recommendations are addressed at the right levels: local, national and European.

In short, the ministers collectively highlighted the importance of integrating youth perspectives into policy development at all levels and fostering youth mainstreaming across various policy areas. The discussion emphasized the necessity for Member States and the European Commission to collaborate closely on a feedback and monitoring system for the EU Youth Dialogue, to incorporate the outcomes of the EU Youth Dialogue and to create an inclusive dialogue that genuinely reflects young people's voices in policy-making processes.





7.4.5. Press conference

After the Council meeting, the most important results were presented by Minister Dalle and Commissioner Ivanova [during a press conference](#).

7.4.6. Result: Official Journal of the European Union

The approved Council acts were published in the Official Journal of the European Union:

The Council conclusions on the European and international policy agendas for children, youth, and children's rights

These conclusions aim to establish strong synergies between these agendas and align European youth policy efforts with both existing and future children's rights agendas. Please see chapter 5.4 for more information or [follow this link to read the complete Council Conclusions \(C/2024/3528\)](#).

The Council resolution on Youth Work Policy in an empowering Europe

Addressing the role of youth work policy in an empowering Europe, this Council resolution calls on Member States, the Commission, and relevant stakeholders to support the development and practice of youth work at EU, national, and local levels, including through comprehensive youth work policies, bottom-up approaches, and training of youth workers. Please see chapter 3.4 for more information or [follow this link to read the complete Council recommendation \(C/2024/3526\)](#).

The Council conclusion on inclusive societies for young people

These Council conclusions outline targeted measures to promote equity, inclusion and support for young people in Europe. Please see chapter 4.5 for more information or [follow this link to read the complete Council Conclusions](#).

Conclusions on the legacy of the European Year of Youth 2022

The Council approved the conclusions on the legacy of the European Year of Youth, recognizing the significant achievements made during the year-long initiative, which ran from 1 January to 31 December 2022. These conclusions highlight the success of anchoring a strong youth perspective and promoting youth mainstreaming across all relevant EU policies. The Council calls on the Commission to build on this momentum, including by strengthening key mechanisms such as the EU Youth Dialogue, national youth councils, and the proposed youth stakeholders' platform.



Furthermore, the Commission, in cooperation with Member States, is also called upon to work with and for youth to work with and for youth by continuing co-creation and mutual learning activities, strengthening the EU Youth Dialogue, and communicating opportunities in a youth-friendly manner. Also to involve National Youth Councils in key actions, enhance the inclusivity of programs like Erasmus+ through micro-grants, and incorporate past initiatives into the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. Additionally, the Commission is called upon to use the EU Youth Work Plans to address common areas of work and follow-up implementation of these measures in the EU Youth report.

These Council Conclusions aim to ensure that the positive impacts and progress made during the European Year of Youth continue to benefit young people across Europe. For more information, [please follow this link to read the complete Council Conclusions \(C/2024/3543\)](#).

Council Recommendation Europe on the Move

On 15 November 2023, the European Commission released the Skills and Talent Mobility package, which included a proposal for a Council Recommendation titled 'Europe on the Move' – learning mobility opportunities for everyone.

During the Belgian EU Presidency, negotiations on this proposal primarily took place within the Education Committee. The Youth Working Party contributed by writing an opinion that suggested to better consider and reflect the specificities and realities of non-formal and informal learning as well as of young people and the youth work sector in the proposed recommendation. These suggestions were incorporated during the drafting process in the Education Committee, thereby ensuring the impact of the youth field.

Finally, the Council Recommendation was approved by Education Ministers during the Education part of the EYCS Council. To read the complete Council Recommendation, [follow this link \(9804/24\)](#).



8. More Youth in Europe

During our Presidency, there were many collaborations to promote youth involvement across Europe. These partnerships have been pivotal in advancing youth work and policy, and the Presidency is proud to highlight a few key initiatives.

8.1. *European Youth Week*

The European Youth Week (EYW) 2024, organised by the European Commission, along with the National Agencies for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, and supported by the Eurodesk network, is a biennial event. It's a vibrant celebration aimed at fostering and amplifying youth engagement, participation, and active citizenship across Europe and beyond.

This year, the EYW took place from 12 – 19 April 2024, strategically scheduled two months ahead of the European elections in June. This timing placed both democracy and European elections at the forefront of discussions, marking a pivotal moment that calls for heightened youth involvement in societal affairs and the practical exercise of democracy.

The opening of the European Youth week took place on 12 April in the European Parliament. A panel discussion was held to explore crucial themes surrounding youth participation, engagement, and empowerment, with a focus on fostering democracy and values in the context of European elections. Through this dynamic panel, featuring prominent representatives from EU institutions as well as young representatives, the session aimed to spark thought, inspire action, and encourage active citizenship among the younger generation. The panel, moderated by Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen, Director-General of DG EAC, consisted of the following speakers:

- **Marcos Ros Sempere**, Member of the European Parliament
- **Benjamin Dalle**, Flemish Minister for Brussels Affairs, Youth, Media and Poverty Reduction
- **Tanya Hristova**, Committee of the Regions, Chair of the CoR Commission for Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC)
- **Katrīna Leitāne**, President of the European Economic and Social Committee's Youth Group
- **María Rodríguez Alcázar**, President of the European Youth Forum
- **Anna Fratsyvir**, Young representative from Ukraine

The theme of the EYW was: Unlocking Your Potential: **“Voice your Vision”**. All organisations were encouraged to share activities, such as workshops, engaging discussions, and cultural events that were organised in this theme and to upload it on the [EYW website](#).



8.2. Ghent European Youth Capital – We are the city

In 2024, Ghent proudly won the esteemed title of Youth Capital for a year, coinciding with Belgium's Presidency of the EU. This dual honour empowered the city's youth to play a leading role in shaping its future within Europe. Awarded annually by the European Youth Forum, the European Youth Capital title serves as a platform for showcasing innovative projects and initiatives aimed at enhancing youth participation in cultural, educational, and democratic endeavours.

Ghent captured the attention of the Youth Capital Jury with its unwavering dedication to placing young people at the forefront of democratic engagement and civic life. This commitment resonated particularly well with Belgium's decision to lower the voting age to 16 for European elections. The winning proposal, '*We Are The City*,' underscored the pivotal role of Ghent's Youth Council as an official advisory body, working in tandem with regional and European youth partnerships and networks.

Among the notable initiatives was the "Exclusief Inclusief" (Exclusively Inclusive) congress, held as part of the broader action plan by the Flemish community "Mee(r) naar buiten?!" (Come outside (more)?!) in conjunction with Ghent's European Youth Capital designation. This congress, organized collaboratively by the Department of Culture, Youth & Media Flanders, the Youth Service of the City of Ghent, and Broei vzw, delved into the theme of "The Right to be Young in the City."

Over the course of two days, from 7 to 8 May 2024, the congress brought together experts from the design and youth sectors to craft policies aimed at improving spaces frequented by young people. Attendees included designers, architects, policymakers, students, and representatives from youth organisations. Beyond speeches and debates, participants had the opportunity to engage in various activities such as walks, bike rides, workshops, and documentaries, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas and experiences.

Another significant event in the Youth Capital programme was the "Groot Debat 2024" (Great Debate 2024) project, which engaged 16-18-year-olds voting for the first time. With several important elections held in Belgium at various levels in 2024, including the first opportunity for 16-year-olds to vote in the European elections, this project provided a timely opportunity to educate young people about elections, democracy, and citizenship. It aimed to teach debate skills and facilitate discussions where young people could share their current topics and concerns with policymakers. The initiative involved organisations such as LARF!, KOPERGIETERY, VIERNULVIER, and the Youth Service and Youth Council of Ghent. It featured classroom programs where students explored themes, debated, and created personal statements, culminating in a

large debate event on 25 April with 750 young people and political leaders, including King Filip of Belgium.



Project leader Céline De Coninck (seen above) welcomed the European Youth Conference, which was hosted in Ghent because of its title as European Youth Capital 2024.

8.3. European Conference on Social Work

On 25 and 26 April 2024, the European Social Work Conference invited social workers, youth workers, academics, and policy makers from across Europe to the city of Bruges. Hosted by the Department of Care of the Government of Flanders and the Flemish Platform 'Strong Social Work', the event offered a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences.

The conference focused on three urgent issues: climate change, migration, and digitalisation and on the essential role of social work, including youth work, in making sure no-one is left behind in these challenges.



This event was developed with the help of [numerous social work organisations and networks, including youth organisations](#) from all over Europe and was hosted by the Flemish Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Family, with the support of the Flemish Minister responsible for Poverty Reduction and the Flemish Department for Culture, Youth and Media.

8.4. European Conference on the Child Guarantee

On 3 and 4 May 2024, the Public Planning Service (PPS) Social Integration organised the event: “European Child Guarantee: from engagement to reality”, at the Egmont Palace in Brussels. Queen Mathilde attended the conference, highlighting the royal commitment to combatting child poverty.

The European Child Guarantee is a European Recommendation aimed at creating more equal opportunities for vulnerable children. In order to implement the Recommendation, the Member States nominated coordinators and prepared national action plans, covering the period until 2030.

Four key working areas have been defined to achieve this goal:

- Obtaining effective and free access to quality education, including setting up early childhood care, educational and school activities and guaranteeing a healthy meal each school day;
- Obtaining effective and free access to quality healthcare;
- Guaranteeing access to sufficient and healthy nutrition, particularly through the European school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme;
- Guaranteeing effective access to adequate housing.

The event had a dual objective: firstly, to allow key players to analyse the work already completed and identify what remains to be done to achieve the objectives, and secondly, to provide coordinators with a platform to share their knowledge in implementing the European Child Guarantee.

The first day focused on reviewing of the current situation, while the second day featured discussions between the coordinators of the European Child Guarantee, the European Commission, and key players on the ground. Technical working sessions were led by the Office of Birth and Childhood (ONE - Wallonia Brussels Federation) and Flanders.



9. What's next?

We believe that significant steps have been taken towards shaping impactful future youth policies and programmes. That progress is evident in the formulation of key documents such as:

- [The Council Resolution on Youth Work Policy in an Empowering Europe](#)
- [The Council Conclusions on Inclusive Societies for Young People](#)
- [The Council Conclusions on the European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth and Children's Rights](#)
- [The Conclusions on the legacy of the European Year of Youth 2022](#)
- [The Council Recommendation Europe on the Move](#)

The participatory approach of the Belgian EU Presidency, which included linking the Council Acts with the conference inputs, was key in achieving consensus and fostering significant support among stakeholders. This strategy ensured active participation and ownership from Member States, youth NGOs, and young people. Youth participation was central throughout the process, with young people actively setting priorities, debating with policymakers, and formulating recommendations during conferences.

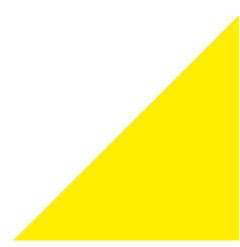
The Council Acts encourage the Commission and EU Member States to advance youth policy development, to take necessary steps, share best practices, and assess feasible initiatives. This collaborative approach should enhance the quality of youth policy across Europe.

We hope that the participative and interactive settings, such as the Informal Breakfast Meeting, become a new standard. Additionally, the practice of youth ministers discussing the outcomes of the EU Youth Conference during Council Meetings should be maintained. These approaches will strengthen the connection between the EU Youth Dialogue and the Council, ensuring a more direct follow-up on the recommendations of EU youth representatives.

The progress achieved thus far holds great potential for impacting future youth policies and programmes. However, the realisation of this potential hinges on maintaining and strengthening the youth reflex in all our endeavours. We hope all stakeholders can put the recommendations into practice.



A driving force behind these exchanges and a staunch supporter of a participative and collaborative approach is Jan Vanhee. At the EU Youth Conference, Jan was recognized for his outstanding contributions to youth policy in the EU. In his role as Chair of the Belgian EU Presidency for Youth, and with the experience of three presidencies behind him, Jan simply stated, "I just did my job with passion." His team, however, dares to disagree, appreciating his exceptional commitment and impact on the European Youth field.



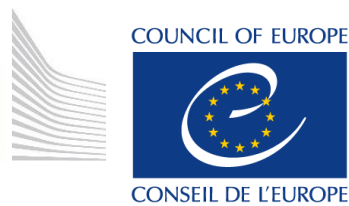


10. Thank you all

To all the people we had the pleasure and honour of working with: without you the BE EU Youth Presidency would never have been such a success!

The Belgian EU Presidency programme in the field of youth has been the result of close and longstanding cooperation with many colleagues and organisations and that is why we would like to thank:

The European institutions and organisations: European Commission (EC), Council Secretariat, Council of Europe (CoE), EU-CoE Partnership in the field of youth, European Youth Forum, Advisory Council on Youth of the CoE and the European youth researchers.

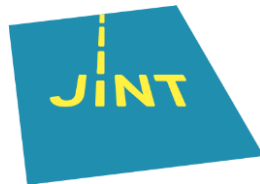


The colleagues from the Trio Presidency Spain-Belgium-Hungary, the Youth Working Party and the Permanent Presentation of Belgium to the EU and the Representation of Flanders to the EU.



The cooperation partners of the three Belgian Communities: the ministries for Youth of the Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities, the National Agencies JINT vzw, BIJ and Jugendbüro and the National Youth Councils of the three Belgian Communities.





Last but not least, **many thanks** to everyone who helped in front of and behind the scenes, by participating at our events and conferences as youth representative, youth worker or official, by participating in the writing and working groups as expert or researcher, by supporting the presidency as a volunteer, rapporteur, facilitator, speaker, moderator, communication officer, photographer, coordinator and so much more. And a special thanks to all the helping hands from the partners above!

A special thanks as well to all our colleagues from the three administrations and the three youth councils and in particular thanks to our colleagues from our department, including Bart Temmerman, Leander Price, Kim Vanderpoorten and Nadine Raes! While we aimed to acknowledge everyone, we apologize if we accidentally overlooked anyone.

Thanks to you, we achieved all our objectives. We look forward to continuing to work on them together in the future! Many thanks for your presence, enthusiasm and contributions!

And a massive thanks to the BE EU Youth team, too: Koen Lambert, Carmen D'eer, Dorien Paridaens, Helen Stans, Judit Balogh, Kamal El Hajjouti, Lien Van der Steen, Marianne Criel, Pieter-Jan De Graeve, Simon Van Laar, Sofie Van Zeebroeck, Tony Geudens, Yannick De Schaepmeester, Laure Verstraete, Milan Calloens and Sophie Verbrugghe. **And last but not least the Presidency Youth dream team:** Dr. Amoury Groenen, Aline Brantegem, Ann Vandenbussche, Bart De Boiserie, Deirdre Perquy, Hilde Lauwers, Melanie Jacobs, Pauline Coenen and Sophia Dolhain!

Jan Vanhee

Chair of the Youth Working Party and coordinator of the BE EU Presidency for Youth Affairs



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