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**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

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Subject: Ensuring the inclusion of young people in EU societies:  
Focusing on inclusion of young Ukrainians  
- *Policy debate*

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Following consultation of the members of the Youth Working Party, the Presidency has prepared the attached background document, which is submitted as the basis for the policy debate at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting of 15-16 May 2023.

## Ensuring the inclusion of young people in EU societies: Focusing on inclusion of young Ukrainians

One of the thematic priorities of the ninth cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue has been EU Youth Goal #3, ‘Inclusive Societies’. This goal highlights several imperatives of social inclusion, such as the recognition of young people facing multiple forms of discrimination, young people’s equal access to formal and non-formal learning, as well as information outreach to marginalised young people. Youth Goal #3 also emphasises the need to provide more spaces, opportunities, and resources to increase the inclusion of young people and to foster dialogue and social cohesion, while at the same time combating discrimination and segregation. The EU Youth Strategy’s three cornerstones *engage*, *empower*, and *connect* are fundamental focus areas for the effort to enable and ensure the inclusion of all young people in society.

Young people do not currently have equal opportunities in European societies. According to Eurostat data, one quarter (25.3 %) of young people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2021. For people of all ages, the proportion was lower, at just over one fifth (21.7 %).<sup>1</sup> Young people living in difficult economic circumstances, either on their own or with their parents, are more pessimistic about their ability to make a difference in most areas of life. A lack of inclusion leads to a lower sense of belonging and also reduces trust in institutions. Policymaking has a responsibility to create safe environments for participation for young people from all parts of society, and especially for those with fewer opportunities. Mental health issues and loneliness are also factors that may intersect and become obstacles to social inclusion. These issues have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had, and continues to have, huge implications for young Europeans. The unequal access to human and social rights for young people with fewer opportunities, such as reduced access to education and healthcare, became even more evident during the pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Young people in Europe — a statistical summary — 2022 edition

Furthermore, due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, many young Ukrainians are now temporarily displaced in the EU, living in uncertainty about their futures. Ukrainian citizens have suffered the consequences of a full-scale war, trauma, and displacement at a scale and pace that has not been seen since World War II. Almost 4 million people from Ukraine benefit from temporary protection in the European Union, many of whom are children and young people. The Council Implementing Decision activating the Temporary Protection Directive grants young people, among other rights, access to employment, accommodation, social welfare and medical care. In addition, the directive also grants young people under the age of 18 the right to education.

EU funding is also mobilised through Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps to support the Ukrainian people fleeing following Russia's full-scale invasion. The 2023 European Solidarity Corps Work Programme includes relief for persons fleeing armed conflicts and other victims of natural or man-made disasters as a new thematic priority for the programme's centralised action 'volunteering teams in high priority areas'. The European Youth Portal also provides practical information on the rights of and support options for young people coming from Ukraine.

While much is being done in the EU for people fleeing the war, thousands of young people from Ukraine are in a situation where they need to start over in a new country. For many, this is a challenge that they must overcome without the help of family or friends. Supporting these young people with access to education and employment, along with leisure activities and a sense of community, is an urgent matter.

The EU must ensure that young people have access to their rights in accordance with international declarations and conventions. All young Europeans should have good living conditions, employment perspectives and the power to shape their lives. The latter also includes the possibility to influence policymaking and the development of society. In order to formulate the best possible policies, we need to keep in mind, however, that the group we define as ‘youth’ consists of a multitude of identities. Different groups of young people have different abilities, needs, opinions, resources and interests. There are, therefore, diverse challenges and opportunities that must be faced and considered. It is therefore necessary to take a comprehensive approach and to develop inclusive and participatory actions in addressing such issues. Socioeconomic and democratic exclusion go hand in hand, and these are consequences that Europe cannot afford to accept. In order to create a Europe for all young people, all of the above-mentioned aspects must be considered. Inclusion builds trust.

In the light of the above, Ministers are invited to reflect on the following questions (interventions are limited to a maximum of 3 minutes):

1. When we talk about inclusion of all young people across the EU, we must keep in mind the heterogeneity of the group ‘young people’. How should we address this when we formulate policies for all young people in our Member States and at the European level?
2. In your country, what good examples exist of increasing the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in society and in the decision-making process at local, regional, and national level?
3. In your country, what good examples exist of ensuring the social inclusion of temporarily displaced young people from Ukraine?