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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the social dimension of a sustainable Europe for youth

Delegations will find attached the above-mentioned conclusions, approved by the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) at its meeting of 15-16 May 2023.

Conclusions of the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States,
meeting within the Council on the social dimension of a sustainable Europe for youth

THE COUNCIL AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE
MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

RECALLING:

1. That the European Youth Goals #3 and #10 as annexed to the European Union Youth Strategy, entitled 'Inclusive Societies' and 'Sustainable Green Europe', set out to 'enable and ensure the inclusion of all young people in society' and to 'achieve a society in which all young people are environmentally active, educated and able to make a difference in their everyday lives'¹.

¹ Annex 3 of the Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027, OJ C 456, 18.12.2018.

2. That young people are powerful agents² of change and innovation and essential partners in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and other multilateral agreements and instruments, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change³ and the European Green Deal⁴. Furthermore, the principle that no one will be left behind is reiterated in the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development⁵. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting the child⁶. Young people have the right to participate meaningfully in the development, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up of policies that affect them and society at large⁷.
3. The recognition of intergenerational dialogue and responsibility as a cornerstone of sound policymaking⁸, the recognition of the crucial role of young people in environmental action and the importance of highlighting the progress made in fostering meaningful youth engagement⁹.

² Council conclusions on a comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development – Building back better from the COVID-19 crisis (doc. 9850/21).

³ United Nations, The Paris Agreement, 2015.

⁴ European Commission, Communication from the Commission, The European Green Deal, COM(2019) 640 final.

⁵ Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; Publisher, UN General Assembly, A/RES/70/1.

⁶ United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child. General Assembly resolution 44/25.

⁷ Council conclusions on safeguarding and creating civic spaces for young people that facilitate meaningful youth participation (2021/C 501 I/04).

⁸ Council conclusions on promoting the intergenerational dimension in the youth field to foster dialogue and social cohesion (2022/C 495/03).

⁹ Stockholm +50, The Global Youth Policy Paper: Third Official Version, May 2022.

4. The European Year of Youth 2022¹⁰ provided a momentum to empower and support young people, including young people with fewer opportunities, to acquire relevant knowledge and competences in order to become active and engaged citizens and actors of change. In the ‘Claim the Future’ European Year of Youth’s closing conference on 6 December 2022, policy makers and youth stakeholders reiterated their joint commitment to mainstream a youth perspective in policy making and increase their participation in policy making processes. There were also calls for an increased focus on preventative health care, combating mental health problems and loneliness as well as increased participation in organised sports activities.

AWARE THAT:

5. Addressing the social dimension of sustainable development¹¹ is a crucial aspect to empowering vulnerable groups in society. Issues of sustainable development are intersectional. Socioeconomic exclusion and democratic exclusion go hand in hand, affecting the extent to which young people are able to engage in actions for sustainable development. Achieving fair, sustainable and inclusive development through democratic processes needs to take all perspectives and opinions into consideration, via the principles of free speech and press freedom and through inclusive processes at all levels.
6. The group that we define as ‘youth’ consists of a multitude of identities, with different abilities, needs, wills, resources and interests facing diverse challenges and opportunities and comes from various educational, cultural, geographic, economic and social backgrounds. These differences affect their interests, possibilities, and capacity to engage in actions for sustainable development and the environment.

¹⁰ Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on a European Year of Youth (2022), OJ L 462, 28.12.2021, p. 1–9.

¹¹ For a definition of the ‘social dimension of sustainable development’, see Annex II to the annex.

7. Factors such as differences in population density and demographic structure, i.e., between urban, rural and remote, peripheral, less developed areas and outermost regions, also affect the accessibility and availability of sustainable infrastructure for young people.
8. The COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis triggered by the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, and the climate crisis have shed light on inequalities in our societies as the crises have affected groups of young people differently and some groups disproportionately. The unequal access to human rights for young people with fewer opportunities, such as access to education and healthcare, have become even more evident during these crises. Pre-conditions such as mental and physical health, living and housing conditions, access to formal, non-formal and informal learning, job opportunities and leisure time activities are of crucial importance for young people's resilience and opportunities to live sustainably.
9. Democracy and human rights are indivisible in relation to sustainable development as climate change has a disproportionate impact on marginalised groups in vulnerable situations. People with the fewest resources have the most difficulty in adapting to climate related changes¹² and those at risk of poverty are more likely to face a higher risk of exposure to pollution and environmental problems¹³. In addition, young people who are dependent on natural resources in different ways, in order to work, live or engage in their cultural traditions, may be negatively affected by climate change in ways that jeopardise their power to shape their own lives¹⁴.

¹² United Nations, World Youth Report (2020).

¹³ Eurostat, Quality of life indicators - natural and living environment, 2022.

¹⁴ Communication from the Commission on Forging a climate-resilient Europe - the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change COM(2021) 82 final.

CONSIDER THAT:

10. All young people should have good living conditions, employment perspectives, the power to shape their lives and to influence policymaking and the development of society. Young people are one of our societies' strengths, as well as individual' rights-holders and actors of change¹⁵.
11. Young people's knowledge, perspectives and experiences contribute to more purposeful political decisions and are valuable resources in the democratic process. Youth policy should take a dual approach by developing and formulating initiatives directly with, for and by young people through active and meaningful participation by young people, and by mainstreaming youth policy across all policy areas.
12. EU youth policy, including the EU Youth Dialogue, should contribute to the creation of a society for all present and future generations in which the biggest challenges related to social issues such as poverty, involuntary loneliness¹⁶, mental health, sustainable development and climate change are discussed and solved, without deteriorating the global situation.
13. Increasing the social inclusion of all young people is necessary in order to promote understanding of the interconnected global challenges the world faces and to support young people in acquiring the knowledge, skills and competences needed to live more sustainably and to contribute both individually and collectively to a more sustainable society. The EU youth programmes Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, as well as other EU and national volunteering or civic service schemes and activities where they exist, and initiatives for civic participation, can be useful tools to this end.

¹⁵ Council conclusions on fostering engagement among young people as actors of change in order to protect the environment (2022/C 159/07).

¹⁶ For a definition of 'loneliness', see Annex II to the annex.

14. All young people should have access to verified evidence-based information and data, formulated in a youth-friendly accessible manner and in multiple languages to ensure that all young people can assimilate the information and develop sustainable behaviour and their role as agents of change and as informed citizens.

HIGHLIGHT:

15. That the global nature of challenges such as the COVID 19 pandemic, climate change and biodiversity loss call for the widest possible cooperation, at all levels, safeguarding meaningful and effective youth participation.
16. The need for the further involvement of young people in sustainable development policies at all levels in order to harness the potential and creativity of young people, recognising that investing in young people gives a strong leverage for a sustainable future. The need for dialogue on the ethical and social issues surrounding sustainable development, both among young people and between generations in society, through, for example, intergenerational dialogue, is essential to foster hope and to create understanding of and respect for different perspectives and realities.

17. That many young people in Europe are aware and mobilised for their concerns about sustainability and environmental issues. At the same time, there are young people who are not engaged in societal issues. The level of mobilisation and engagement varies from one young person to another, depending on different factors such as, for example, access to information, educational background, socioeconomical status or geographical location. Different groups of young people need different kinds of encouragement and support in order to participate in the development of society. It is therefore necessary to take on a holistic approach and develop inclusive and participatory actions when addressing such issues, as sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, equal opportunities, social justice and climate change.
18. That youth organisations, youth work and other non-formal and informal learning activities are important for providing information and support to young people who are outside formal structures and are often complementary to services provided by public authorities at all levels.

NOTE:

19. The message from the participants of the EU Youth Conference in March 2023 on the importance in providing young people with trustworthy, accessible and user-friendly information and with access to both formal and non-formal education on sustainability and climate change. Also note their message on the importance in using intergenerational and interdisciplinary approaches to empower young people by providing them with the necessary information, knowledge and tools on how to get involved in sustainable and inclusive practices.

INVITE MEMBER STATES, AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO:

20. Provide accessible, sustainable and multilevel governance structures¹⁷ and opportunities for youth organisations and young people, including underrepresented groups of young people, in line with existing best practices, e.g., the Council of Europe Code of good practice for civil participation in the decision-making process¹⁸, to allow for meaningful involvement and facilitate accessible mechanisms in order to provide feedback and carry out evaluation of such processes.
21. Promote educational opportunities for youth workers to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to address issues of social inclusion and sustainable development in their practices, in a non-formal way.
22. Encourage the development of training and professional learning opportunities for educators¹⁹ including youth workers, to better inform, educate and empower all young people in matters of sustainable development, in order for young people to have the opportunity to make informed and sustainable choices in everyday life and involve them in decision-making processes.

¹⁷ Council conclusions on strengthening the multilevel governance when promoting the participation of young people in the decision-making processes, 2021/C 241/03.

¹⁸ Council of Europe, Code of good practice for civil participation in decision-making process, CONF/PLE(2009)CODE1.

¹⁹ For a definition of ‘educator’, see Annex II to the annex.

23. Prioritise mental health and well-being among young people, especially by recognising mental health problems as one of the most significant health concerns for young people²⁰, by strengthening knowledge-based mental health promotion, mental health literacy and prevention efforts in different settings through cross-sectoral approaches and by promoting and developing equitable access to quality health services that are integrated, safe and people-centred, in order to improve young people's health, welfare and quality of life, thus increasing the strength and resilience of society as a whole.
24. Consider applying a rights-based youth perspective²¹ to policies for sustainable infrastructure, especially in relation to affordable and accessible public transportation and housing, in order to provide sustainable and green options for all young people.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, ADHERING TO THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, IN THEIR RESPECTIVE AREAS OF COMPETENCE AND AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO:

25. Consider the results of the 9th cycle in the EU youth dialogue, in the design and implementation of future policies related to social inclusion and sustainable development.
26. Ensure all young people's access to their rights in accordance with international declarations and conventions by including a rights-based youth perspective in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating measures that affect young people at all levels. It is important to enable decision-makers to have the necessary competences and access to the appropriate tools to create inclusive and participatory decision-making processes.

²⁰ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Children and mental health: preventive approaches to anxiety and depression, Publications Office, 2021.

²¹ For a definition of 'rights-based youth perspective', see Annex II to the annex.

27. Further support research and analysis, using existing tools such as Youth Wiki²², and collect disaggregated data on how social exclusion and climate change relates to young people's mental health, well-being and living conditions, bearing in mind the possible need for new indicators and monitoring mechanisms to measure the impact of social exclusion and climate change.
28. Improve the accessibility of different participation mechanisms such as youth councils, youth hearings and participatory conferences, including the EU Youth Dialogue, as well as digital tools for participation, ensuring that they focus on the concerns of different groups of young people in society, including unrepresented and underrepresented groups of young people to participate and take on leading roles in such mechanisms.
29. Make use of the full potential of the Erasmus+ programme, the European Solidarity Corps and the ESF+, including where applicable the ALMA initiative in creating opportunities for more inclusive and sustainable projects and mobility actions, including hybrid mobilities, for all young people. Special emphasis should be placed on the participation of young people with fewer opportunities.

²² The Youth Wiki is an online platform hosted by the European Commission presenting information on European countries' youth policies.

INVITE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

30. Ensure long-term information measures at European level, including through the European Youth Portal and other relevant information tools, in a youth friendly, inclusive, multilingual, and accessible way in relation to the EU's policies and programmes related to sustainable development and climate change, as well as to participatory processes within the European institutions.
31. Facilitate opportunities for peer learning activities on sustainability and inclusion.
32. Further promote and support a cross-sector approach and synergies with other initiatives such as the 'Education for Climate Coalition', the Council recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development²³ and the 'New European Bauhaus'.

²³ OJ C 243, 27.6.2022, p. 1–9.

REFERENCES

In adopting these conclusions, the Council and the representatives of the Governments of Member States meeting within the Council have taken note of the following documents:

- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The European Green Deal, COM(2019) 640 final.
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Forging a climate-resilient Europe - the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change COM(2021) 82 final.
- Council conclusions on a comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development – building back better from the COVID-19 crisis (doc. 9850/21).
- Council conclusions on safeguarding and creating civic spaces for young people that facilitate meaningful youth participation, (2021/C 501 I/04).
- Council conclusions on promoting the intergenerational dimension in the youth field to foster dialogue and social cohesion (2022/C 495/03).
- Council conclusions on fostering engagement among young people as actors of change in order to protect the environment, (2022/C 159/07).

- Council conclusions on strengthening the multilevel governance when promoting the participation of young people in decision-making processes, 2021/C 241/03.
- Council of Europe, Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process, CONF/PLE(2009)CODE1.
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Union of Equality: Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030, COM(2021) 101 final.
- Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on a European Year of Youth (2022), *OJ L 462*, 28.12.2021, p. 1–9.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Children and Mental Health : preventive approaches to anxiety and depression : European platform for investing in children, Publications Office, 2021.
- Eurostat, Quality of life indicators - natural and living environment. September 2022.
- European Parliament, Council and European Commission, Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017/C 428/09).
- Framework for the implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development from 2021 to 2030.
- JRC Science for Policy Report, Baarck, J., Balahur-Dobrescu, A., Cassio, L.G., D`hombres, B., Pasztor, Z. and Tintori, G., Loneliness in the EU. Insights from surveys and online media data, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021.
- OECD, Global Teaching InSights, Teaching for Climate Action – Summary of Insights, 2021.

- Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027. *OJ C 456, 18.12.2018.*
- Stockholm +50, The Global Youth Policy Paper: Third Official, May 2022.
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- United Nations, Paris Agreement, 2015-
- United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Treaty Series 2515, 2006.
- United Nations, Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, Aarhus, 1998.
- United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Treaty no. 27531. United Nations Treaty Series, 1577, art. 12.
- United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.
- United Nations, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, 'Our common future', [Brundtland report], A/42/427, 1987.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of these Council conclusions, the following definitions apply:

Educators: includes teachers (acknowledged as having the status of a teacher or equivalent according to national legislation and practice) and trainers (anyone who fulfils one or more activities linked to the theoretical or practical training function, either in an institution for education or training or at the workplace). This encompasses teachers in general education and higher education, teachers and trainers in initial and continuing VET, as well as early childhood education and care professionals and adult educators and youth workers²⁴.

Loneliness: loneliness has a strong subjective nature. It is the perception of a discrepancy between a person's desired and actual network of relationships. It is lived as a deeply negative experience. It is not only about having too few social contacts per se, but also about the perception that these relationships are not satisfying enough. In other words, loneliness does not mean being alone, but feeling alone. In this respect, loneliness is different from social isolation, which has an objective connotation, defined by an absence of relationships with other people and/or a very small number of meaningful ties²⁵.

²⁴ As defined in the Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on Education and training of youth workers (*OJ C 412, 9.12.2019*) and in the Council Recommendation of on learning for the green transition and sustainable development (*OJ C 243, 27.6.2022*).

²⁵ JRC Science for Policy Report, Baarck, J., Balahur-Dobrescu, A., Cassio, L.G., D`hombres, B., Pasztor, Z. and Tintori, G., Loneliness in the EU. Insights from surveys and online media data, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021.

Rights-based youth perspective²⁶: a rights-based youth perspective links national youth policy objectives with the rights of children and youth such as they are stipulated in international conventions, laws, and regulations. It should be based on research and statistics and aim to create conditions to include young people in the general development of society, both from their own initiatives and from the initiatives of decision-makers. A rights-based youth perspective can function as a method for decision-makers to acquire relevant competences for taking young people's perspectives into consideration in decision-making.

Social dimension of sustainable development: sustainable development is commonly defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs²⁷. It requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations for a better life. Sustainable development includes three dimensions: the economic, social, and environmental. The social dimension of sustainable development rests on the basic values of equity and democracy, including the effective fulfilment of all human rights – political, civil, economic, social and cultural – by all people. In 2021, the Council reaffirmed the importance of strengthening the social dimension of sustainable development to promote human rights, gender equality, inclusion, human development, social cohesion and equality in all its forms, as well as social dialogue, occupational health and safety and decent work²⁸.

²⁶ The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society.

²⁷ United Nations, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, 'Our common future', [Brundtland report], A/42/427, 1987.

²⁸ Council conclusions on A Comprehensive Approach to Accelerate the Implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development – building back better from the COVID-19 crisis (doc. 9850/21).