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## COVER NOTE

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Delegations will find attached document COM(2024) 1 final.

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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**on the European Year of Youth 2022**

{SWD(2024) 1 final}

# 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2024, young Europeans are the most educated, tech-savvy, mobile, and connected generation to date. Young EU citizens report on average rather high levels of subjective wellbeing<sup>1</sup>. They are active in the societies they live in<sup>2</sup> and the age group which is the most satisfied with how democracy works in the EU<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, they are marked by the global financial crisis of 2008, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. Volatility, uncertainty and unprecedented change are customary for the 73 million young people<sup>4</sup> in the European Union, influencing their life opportunities and mental health. Despite the multiple crises today's young people have developed a high level of resilience.

This context has shaped the viewpoints, needs and behaviours of today's youth.

While young people are heterogeneous, expressing different and sometimes conflicting visions, one thing is clear: they offer a **unique generational perspective**. Including this diverse youth perspective in the process of making decisions about the present and the future is not only fair, but necessary.

The magnitude of the challenges we face today require the engagement of all. To sustain democracy, secure peace, stand firm on European values and make the most of the green and digital transitions, we need the **creativity, energy and diverse talents** of all citizens, especially young people.

That is why, in her State of the European Union address on 15 September 2021<sup>5</sup>, President von der Leyen proposed to designate 2022 as the European Year of Youth, as a tribute to the resilience that young people demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic and to empower them to shape Europe's future in a post-pandemic world. Support for a strong youth dimension in EU priorities and policies was echoed in the European Parliament and the Council, as well as through key stakeholder organisations such as the European Youth Forum.

'Voice your Vision' was the slogan of the European Year of Youth, a year that aimed to give young people **positive prospects**, to boost their **participation in democratic life**, in line with the Treaty of Lisbon and to give them a **stronger voice in EU policymaking**.

The upcoming **European elections** in June 2024 further amplify the importance of engaging young people in the democratic process. The next European Parliament will have a deciding voice in areas of concern to young people – health and wellbeing, environment and climate, education and training, international cooperation and European values, employment and inclusion. It is therefore crucial that young citizens take the opportunity to express their choice for Europe and ensure their preferred representation in the EU's directly elected assembly.

The European Commission is committed to further delivering on young people's expectations to give them a better future. This commitment will be solidified with the introduction of a **youth check** to ensure that the effects of EU policies on youth are systematically taken into account when designing policies, **by using the full potential of the Better Regulation framework**. It aims to ensure that the needs and voices of young people are considered across policy domains.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2022 young people 16 to 29 rated their satisfaction with life on average at 7.3 points on a scale from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied) (Eurostat, [Quality of life indicators - overall experience of life](#))

<sup>2</sup> Flash Eurobarometer survey 502 - 'Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth', May 2022.

<sup>3</sup> European Parliament's Spring 2023 Survey: Democracy in action - One year before the European elections

<sup>4</sup> Latest available Eurostat statistics on the total number of young people (aged 15-29 years). See: [EU Dashboard - Youth - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> [2021 State of the European Union address \(europa.eu\)](#).

Pursuant to Article 7 of the Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on the European Year of Youth (2022)<sup>6</sup>, this Communication outlines key achievements of the Year and **priority actions**, sustaining the legacy of the Year of Youth. The Commission proposes these measures in accordance with Article 6(e) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, where, in the field of youth, the EU has the mandate to carry out action to **support, coordinate or supplement action by Member States**. In particular, the Staff Working Document accompanying this Communication contains the full report on the implementation, results, and overall assessment of the Year.

This Communication and Staff Working Document, together with the upcoming Commission evaluation report on the 2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy<sup>7</sup> (expected in 2024), will help **shape the future of EU youth policy and strengthen the input of young people into EU policymaking**.<sup>8</sup>

## 2 EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH – KEY ACHIEVEMENTS<sup>9</sup>

The success of the Year was the result of a **multi-stakeholder and multi-level co-creation effort** involving EU institutions, Member States, youth stakeholders and young people. As requested by the European Year of Youth Decision<sup>10</sup> and to ensure optimal coordination, the Commission created a group of 29 national coordinators for the Year, nominated by EU Member States<sup>11</sup>, 6 national contact points in Erasmus+ associated countries and more than 120 European-level youth stakeholders.

The European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions were active contributors to the group. This wide mobilisation of diverse actors in preparing and implementing the Year resulted in new partnerships at all levels, which will positively affect youth cooperation for years to come.

The Year successfully triggered large-scale mobilisation and engagement at all levels. **More than 2,700 stakeholders**<sup>12</sup> across the EU and beyond registered activities on the European Youth Portal map, contributing to the Year's four objectives.<sup>13</sup>

The activities as part of the Year were **for** young people and were implemented **with** and **by them**. Some 92% of the national coordinators and the non-EU national contact points collaborated with national youth councils comprised of young people. Of the 18 steering groups/networks set up at national level, 16 included national youth councils and 12 included other youth organisations.

**The Year brought the European, national, regional, and local institutions closer to young people.** Thanks to the Year, a larger number of young Europeans experienced first-hand how the EU adds value to their lives, supports their personal development and equips them with key resources and skills to become active citizens and agents of solidarity and positive change. Some 83% of

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<sup>6</sup> Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on the European Year of Youth (2022), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Resolution of the Council of the European Union on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

<sup>8</sup> Actions related to EU youth policy proposed in this Communication will be developed in synergy with actions under the EU Strategy on the rights of the child, COM(2021) 142 final.

<sup>9</sup> A full report of achievements of the European Year of Youth is set out in the accompanying Staff Working Document.

<sup>10</sup> Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on a European Year of Youth (2022).

<sup>11</sup> As youth policy is the responsibility of the three language Communities in Belgium, three coordinators were appointed.

<sup>12</sup> Number of stakeholders who submitted activities on the map on the European Youth Portal.

<sup>13</sup> Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on a European Year of Youth (2022).

activities during the Year took place face-to-face. This outreach effort was important in informing young people, including those with fewer opportunities, about numerous opportunities.

Impact of Year of Youth outreach	Youth Policy Dialogues
Over <b>13,000 activities</b> organised by <b>2,700 stakeholders</b> across <b>67 countries</b> registered on the European Youth Portal	Some <b>300</b> young people took part in <b>youth policy dialogues with European Commissioners</b> .
<b>92%</b> of national coordinators and contact points worked with youth councils of young people.	They shared their <b>ideas and insights</b> and learned <b>how the EU functions</b> .
Over <b>1 million page views</b> on the European Youth Portal.	They <b>networked with their peers</b> and <b>developed expertise</b> in various policy areas.
On EU Youth social media channels:	Their <b>voices were amplified</b> through online <b>communication campaigns</b> around the dialogues. <b>95%</b> of participants rated the dialogues as <b>excellent / very good</b> .
- <b>210 million impressions</b>	
- <b>10 million engagements</b>	
- <b>91,4 million people reached</b> .	

Young people's biggest expectation of the Year was that society and decision-makers would listen more to their demands and would act on them.<sup>14</sup> In the context of the Year, young people were at the centre of the political agenda and had plenty of **opportunities to voice their vision and ideas** on issues of importance to them. Close to 90% of stakeholders in the youth sector and 66% of young people who provided feedback confirmed that the Year had given them these opportunities to make their voice heard.

Mainstreaming the youth perspective across EU policy fields<sup>15</sup> was a key objective of the European Year of Youth, achieved through a vast inter-departmental mobilisation across the Commission. More than 30 departments contributed, with over **130 policy initiatives for young people, many of which were developed in cooperation with them**. An **estimated EUR 140 million** was identified in relevant EU programmes and instruments for implementing the Year's objectives, including via campaigns, events and calls for proposals. At national level, **81%** of national coordinators and national contact points reported that they had collaborated with ministries or public bodies other than those responsible for youth policy. And **69%** set up steering groups/networks for the Year (of which non-youth-specialised ministries/public bodies formed **61%**).

The Year's core objectives of greater youth participation and incorporating the youth perspective across the policy spectrum were clearly achieved and must be sustained. The European Year of Youth was a success story of European cooperation, and its legacy must live on.

<sup>14</sup> Flash Eurobarometer survey 502 - 'Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth', May 2022.

<sup>15</sup> The Year was structured around nine policy areas of special interest to young people: European learning mobility, employment and inclusion, policy dialogues and participation, green, digital, culture, health, wellbeing and sports, youth and the world and solidarity with Ukraine.

### 3 THE WAY FORWARD

As a legacy of the Year and in line with the 2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy, the Commission will take forward action **in two key areas**:

- giving young people a stronger voice in EU policymaking and
- addressing youth concerns across policy areas.

These efforts will build on the **Commission's Better Regulation framework**, which offers a clear structure for the consultation of stakeholders and assessment of impacts. The Commission will ensure a strengthened internal capacity to work with young people and will put in place strong and continuous dialogue with stakeholders throughout the policymaking cycle.

The Commission's reflections have been informed by a variety of proposals to take forward efforts to deepen the youth dimension of EU policies<sup>16</sup>. The **European Youth Forum** set out suggestions for an EU Youth Test<sup>17</sup>. The **European Parliament** in its resolution on the legacy of the Year<sup>18</sup> called on the Commission to adopt an EU Youth Test to ensure the engagement and commitment of young people in the preparation of EU policies. In its conclusions on youth mainstreaming<sup>19</sup>, the **Council** invited the Commission to use its Better Regulation framework to factor in the impact of new policies on young people.

#### 3.1 GIVING YOUNG PEOPLE A STRONGER VOICE IN EU POLICYMAKING

Every action that the EU takes should be inspired by solidarity between generations. The Commission commits to upholding intergenerational justice in its decisions to 'leave the world a better place for the next generation'<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, many EU policy initiatives and decisions have a direct impact on the lives of the current generation of young people, as also shown in the European youth goals<sup>21</sup>, which are an integral part of the EU Youth Strategy. Therefore, youth 'mainstreaming' – factoring in the youth dimension into all relevant policy areas – is a priority for EU youth policy cooperation.

To integrate the youth perspective across policy areas when designing or changing policies, **the Commission will therefore ensure a 'youth check'** by making full use of Better Regulation and consultation tools. This youth check does not start from scratch, as the Commission already has a set of relevant **Better Regulation**<sup>22</sup> tools, that will be complemented with several **youth-specific instruments** under the 2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> The European Economic and Social Committee has adopted an own-initiative opinion on the EU Youth Test ([SOC/728 EU Youth Test](#)); the Committee of the Regions refers to the 'youth test' in the [Charter on Youth and Democracy](#) launched with the European Youth Forum.

<sup>17</sup> [European Youth Forum - EU Youth Test](#).

<sup>18</sup> [European Parliament resolution of 24 November 2022 on the European Year of Youth 2022 legacy \(2022/2953\(RSP\)\)](#).

<sup>19</sup> [Conclusions of the Council of the European Union on promoting youth mainstreaming in policy decision-making processes in the European Union, \(C/2023/1342\)](#).

<sup>20</sup> [State of the Union 2022 \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>21</sup> [European Youth Goals | European Youth Portal \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>22</sup> The European Commission's Better Regulation agenda ensures evidence-based, transparent EU law-making based on the views of those impacted. See: [Better regulation \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>23</sup> [Resolution of the Council of the European Union on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#).



### 3.1.1 YOUTH CHECK: MAKING FULL USE OF BETTER REGULATION AND CONSULTATION TOOLS

The Commission will ensure that the existing **Better Regulation tools are used to their maximum potential**. The Better Regulation toolbox identifies key questions to establish the significance of impacts for young people:

- **Tool#31** on Education and Training, Culture and Youth, provides guidance, references and background on how to assess impacts on youth (democratic life, civil engagement, education and learning, labour market, health and wellbeing, inclusion and fight against poverty).
- **Tool#29** on Fundamental rights, including the promotion of equality, includes explicit reference to the age dimension and children's rights in assessing impacts as well as mitigating potential negative impacts when policy decisions that appear neutral may have a differential impact on specific groups, even when such impact was neither intended nor envisaged.
- **Tool#20** on Strategic foresight supports assessment of how related megatrends of e.g. demographic change, access to limited raw materials, rapidly transforming technological and socio-economic reality, may affect young people.

The full implementation of the Better Regulation tools will result in a **youth check**. The youth perspective will be embedded in policymaking in **four key phases**:

1. **Assessment of youth relevance** – the Commission, with the support of its youth correspondents (see further below), and involving the Youth Network when needed, assesses if a planned initiative included in the priority initiatives set out in Annex I of the Commission work programme will have significant relevance for young people. A consistent process will be used to identify these key priority initiatives.
2. **Youth consultations** – when an initiative has been flagged as particularly relevant for youth, the Commission will consider a dedicated youth consultation (targeted surveys, discussions with young people, representative youth organisations or the Youth Stakeholders' platform). In addition, in such cases, a mandatory set of questions targeting youth will be included in the public consultations, with the possibility to identify the age group of respondents. This will help further stimulate youth contributions and outline them in impact assessments. The new national/regional youth coordinators (see further below) could be mobilised to facilitate consultations at national level.
3. **Impact assessment** – the Commission, with the support of youth correspondents, conducts the impact assessment, drawing on all Better Regulation tools considered as particularly relevant for youth and making sure that impacts on young people are properly analysed whenever they have been identified as being relevant.
4. **Scrutiny** – the **Regulatory Scrutiny Board** verifies whether all impacts have been properly analysed including the youth impacts and consultations whenever they have been flagged as particularly relevant for the initiative.

To keep the political momentum of youth mainstreaming for new initiatives and build up experience and knowledge, at EU, national and regional levels of decision-making, the Commission will launch a series of **dedicated youth mainstreaming roundtables** between relevant stakeholders, in particular youth organisations, Member States and other EU institutions. The roundtables will take place in connection with the publication of the Commission's work programme, and ensure monitoring of

lessons learnt from the Commission's youth check and youth mainstreaming under the EU Youth Strategy.

To deepen youth mainstreaming in policymaking, the Commission will also:

- **engage in dialogue with relevant youth partners and stakeholders**, involving them further in preparing relevant policy proposals. For this purpose, the Commission will further encourage young people to actively participate and make their voices heard in public and targeted consultations, dialogues with policymakers and citizens' panels.
- pursue the successful **policy dialogues with Commissioners**, which were a flagship of the Year. Young people from across Europe and beyond will have a regular opportunity to exchange with Commissioners on key topics and initiatives, focused on the Commission work programme.
- further strengthen its **internal capacity to work with young people**. Building on the experience of the Year, the Commission will continue the internal **Commission Youth Network** where **youth correspondents** would be the primary contact points on youth issues in their respective policy areas and would help strengthen cross-sector cooperation and youth mainstreaming. This network, animated by the **EU youth coordinator**, will exchange information on policies in preparation that could have a potential impact on young people and liaise with the Youth Stakeholders' platform group.
- As a follow up to the Conference on the Future of Europe – an unprecedented exercise in pan-European democracy – the Commission decided to give young citizens a stronger voice in EU policymaking by regularly convening randomly selected **citizens' panels** – one-third of whom are young people to deliberate on certain key policy initiatives.<sup>24</sup> Three panels have been organised since the conclusion of the Conference to deliberate on food waste, virtual worlds and learning mobility. The strong youth dimension should be maintained for citizens panels that will take place in the future.

**Key actions:**

1. Use the full potential of youth mainstreaming as part of the Commission's Better Regulation framework and toolbox, resulting in a youth check
2. Continue youth policy dialogues with Commissioners
3. Continue ensuring a strong youth participation in citizens' panels
4. Mobilise further the internal Commission Youth Network of youth correspondents
5. Launch a series of dedicated youth mainstreaming roundtables

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<sup>24</sup> Communication from the Commission on the Conference on the Future of Europe - Putting Vision into Concrete Action, COM(2022) 404 final.



### 3.1.2 MOBILISING DIALOGUE AND MAINSTREAMING INSTRUMENTS UNDER THE 2019-2027 EU YOUTH STRATEGY

Meaningful youth participation<sup>25</sup> is a cornerstone of any well-functioning democracy, contributing to a more inclusive and cohesive society, and in this sense, is also particularly relevant for the 2024 European elections. As part of the ‘**Defence of Democracy**’ package a Recommendation promoting high democratic standards on European and national elections and referenda supports broad participation of different groups, including youth participation in elections<sup>26</sup>. It also includes a Recommendation on promoting the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policy-making processes<sup>27</sup>, which among others promote children’s and young people’s meaningful, inclusive and safe participation, without discrimination of any kind. In line with the Recommendation, Member States should undertake specific efforts to strengthen the participation of children and young people in political and democratic life at local, regional and national level including in rural and remote areas.

Active participation in society and democracy is a means to increase young people’s key skills, prospects, sense of belonging and positive outlook. The 2022 Eurobarometer survey on Youth and Democracy showed growing youth engagement, as 58% of the young respondents declared they were active in the societies they live in.<sup>28</sup>

The Year resulted in a strong push for more and better opportunities for young people to develop as active citizens and participate in democratic life and decision-making. Youth participation therefore emerged as the top theme of the Year, with the largest number of activities (43%) on the European Youth Portal’s activity map<sup>29</sup>. ‘More opportunities to make young people’s voices heard at all levels’ was also the top follow-up action, preferred by 61% of young people, 72% of stakeholders and 73% of national coordinators and national contact points in the surveys. Youth participation needs to take place in all policy areas relevant for young people. It is therefore key to boost the EU Youth Strategy instruments. To maintain and build on the Year’s momentum for dialogue and mainstreaming, the Commission will:

- **strengthen the EU Youth Dialogue**, the main youth participation instrument in Europe, by increasing its visibility and outreach, involving more and diverse youth organisations and improving the dissemination, uptake and follow-up on the outcomes of the dialogue at all levels, and stepping up efforts to involve young people with fewer opportunities. The EU Youth Dialogue is an ongoing conversation with young people and youth organisations involving policy and decision makers, as well as experts, researchers and other relevant civil society bodies. To help reach the grassroots level in youth consultations, this dialogue could be better linked to key upcoming Commission initiatives. For this purpose, the Commission will **align the dialogue’s focus more closely with the Commission work programme**. To support the enlargement process, the Commission will explore how to engage further with youth from candidate countries and potential candidates.
- facilitate exchanges and youth consultations on forthcoming policy initiatives, with a new **Youth Stakeholders’ platform group**, building on the Year’s stakeholders’ group, with the

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<sup>25</sup> During the Year of Youth the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership published the study ‘Meaningful youth political participation in Europe: concepts, patterns and policy implications’.

<sup>26</sup> Commission Recommendation on inclusive and resilient elections, C(2023)8626 final.

<sup>27</sup> Commission Recommendation on promoting the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policy-making processes, C(2023)8627 final.

<sup>28</sup> Flash Eurobarometer survey 502 - ‘Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth’, May 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Organisers, whether stakeholders or young individuals from around Europe and beyond, were welcomed to showcase their European Year of Youth initiatives on the European Youth Portal’s activities map.

participation of youth organisations, youth researchers, Member State representatives and other EU institutions. The work of the platform **will closely follow upcoming EU initiatives**.

- develop further the **European Youth Portal** as a one-stop-shop for EU opportunities for young people supporting outreach, awareness raising and communication with young people. Information and awareness are prerequisites for meaningful youth participation, and they also enhance the sense of European belonging and outlook for young people.
- explore the feasibility of providing **micro-grants** in the future Erasmus+ programme. These **low-threshold and low-value grants** were successfully tested by some national coordinators during the Year. They provide **easy access to funding** for young people to work on common projects, develop their skills, capacity for action and their confidence, to make a positive difference in their communities. Moreover, micro-grants are an efficient mechanism for raising young people's awareness of and interest in EU opportunities for young people.
- bring the EU closer to young people and raise awareness about EU opportunities during the **European Youth Week**, 12-19 April 2024, with the theme of democratic participation. The Week is highly relevant in advance of the 2024 European elections. As part of the Week, a **second** edition of the **LevelUp!** event will be organised, as tested under the European Year of Youth, by the European Youth Forum in cooperation with the Commission and the Parliament. The aim is to improve the advocacy, communication and organisation skills of youth activists and to increase the participation of young people in elections, including the 2024 European elections.
- further **support youth engagement in EU external action**, through **youth advisory structures in EU Delegations**, and specific global initiatives such as the Women and Youth (WYDE)<sup>30</sup> in Democracy Initiative. The Commission will further reinforce this youth institutional engagement, by connecting youth from Europe and over the world and bringing members of its global youth networks, such as the Youth sounding boards together in 2024.
- create synergies between youth participation and child participation actions<sup>31</sup> responding to children's right to be heard. Continue the implementation of the new **EU Children's Participation Platform**<sup>32</sup> which involves children in EU decision-making and supports the active participation in democratic life from an early age.
- encourage Member States to establish **national or regional youth coordinators**, following the example of the EU youth coordinator. These coordinators would increase cross-sector cooperation on youth issues, both at national and regional level, and between Member States and the Commission. They would be invited to contribute to the Youth Stakeholders' platform and liaise with the EU youth coordinator. In line with the enhanced priorities for enlargement announced by President von der Leyen, the participation of candidate countries and potential candidates will also be encouraged.

As youth mainstreaming is still a relatively new concept, the introduction of concrete mainstreaming instruments at EU and national levels (including youth checks, youth tests or similar) needs to be gradual and **accompanied by a set of capacity-building measures**, including peer learning, evidence

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<sup>30</sup> The WYDE initiative includes 5 components: (i) youth participation in public affairs, (ii) youth for freedoms of association and assembly, (iii) youth and women in parliaments, (iv) youth and women in political parties and (v) advancing young women's political participation in decision-making

<sup>31</sup> Communication from the Commission on the EU strategy on the rights of the child, COM(2021) 142 final.

<sup>32</sup> EU Children's Participation Platform.

gathering, training and resources, to build knowledge of what works. This is key to designing the most effective way to achieve the objective of youth mainstreaming, **without introducing an unnecessary administrative burden**. For this purpose, the Commission will:

- present in 2024 an **analytical report**, based on input from Member States, with an overview of national experiences with youth mainstreaming approaches.
- facilitate **exchanges of good practices and organise peer-learning activities** for interested Member States. These activities could develop toolkits, guidelines and training resources.
- cooperate with international organisations, like the **Council of Europe and the OECD**, to further enrich the evidence base and lessons learnt from mainstreaming youth policy.

The findings can also feed into the discussions at the dedicated youth mainstreaming roundtables.

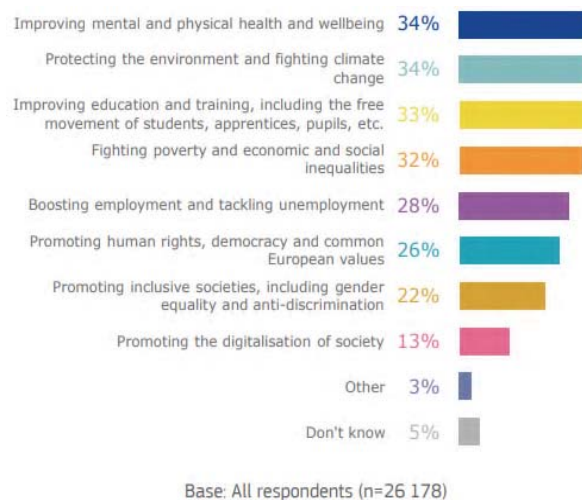
#### **Key actions:**

1. Strengthen the EU Youth Dialogue
2. Set up a Youth Stakeholders' platform group
3. Develop further the European Youth Portal as a one-stop shop for EU opportunities
4. Explore the feasibility of micro-grants under future Erasmus+
5. 2024 European Youth Week on democratic participation and LevelUp! event for youth activists
6. Support youth engagement in EU external action
7. Create synergies between youth and children participation actions
8. Encourage Member States to establish national or regional youth coordinators
9. Build knowledge and capacity on youth mainstreaming through peer learning, evidence gathering, training and resources

### **3.2 ADDRESSING YOUTH CONCERNS ACROSS POLICY AREAS**

The youth mainstreaming actions outlined above are potentially relevant for all policy areas. Young people should be able to express their views in all areas that concern them, and their needs should be considered in all decisions affecting them.

*What key themes did young people think the European Year of Youth should focus on?<sup>33</sup>*



Source: Flash Eurobarometer survey 502 'Youth and democracy in the European Year of Youth', May 2022

Therefore, in following up on the Year and reflecting young people's main concerns, the Commission will take forward actions in the following **five key policy fields of relevance to young people: health and wellbeing, environment and climate, education and training, international cooperation and European values, employment and inclusion.**

### 3.2.1 HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The COVID-19 pandemic was a serious challenge to mental health, especially among young people. In addition, they face numerous challenges from digital tools including social media and this puts increasing pressure on many young people's mental health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, increased loneliness and reduced social interaction, lost opportunities, uncertainty about the future and anxiety caused by fear and loss all generated stress.<sup>34 35 36</sup>

Improving mental and physical health and wellbeing is the fastest growing priority for young people in the EU<sup>37</sup>. The Commission's Communication on **a comprehensive approach to mental health**<sup>38</sup> from June 2023 was a first and major step to ensure a new cross-sectoral approach to mental health. In its preparation, specific contributions on the mental health of youth have been collected. The Communication on mental health identifies 20 flagship initiatives and EUR 1.23 billion financial support from several EU funding instruments. The Commission will:

<sup>33</sup> Respondents could select up to three answers.

<sup>34</sup> [Report from the Commission on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2021, COM/2021/636 final.](#)

<sup>35</sup> According to a [UNICEF report](#) from 2021, suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people (15-19 years of age) after road accidents, and in the EU, the annual value of lost mental health, in children and young people is estimated at EUR 50 billion.

<sup>36</sup> According to the [Health at a Glance report 2022](#) one in two young Europeans reported unmet needs for mental health, and depression among young people more than doubled.

<sup>37</sup> [Flash Eurobarometer survey 502 - 'Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth', May 2022.](#)

<sup>38</sup> [Communication from the Commission on a comprehensive approach to mental health, COM\(2023\) 298 final.](#)

- help the Member States implement the November 2022 **Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success**,<sup>39</sup> which highlights the emotional wellbeing of children and young people as a key factor for improving their chances of succeeding in education and life in general;
- prepare **guidelines on wellbeing in schools**, to be published in 2024 through the Commission Expert Group on supportive learning environments;
- as a priority in 2024<sup>40</sup>, and as announced in the EU strategy on the rights of the child<sup>41</sup>, present a **Commission Recommendation on the development and strengthening of integrated child protection systems** in the Member States. This will be centred on children's needs and will ensure better use of existing EU tools (legislation, policy measures and funding);
- implement flagship initiatives under the new **Commission Communication on mental health**, such as support the creation of a children and young people's mental health network in 2024, to exchange information, mutual support and perform outreach via Youth Ambassadors, and develop a **prevention toolkit**, addressing the interlinks between mental and physical health and key health determinants;
- through the '**Healthy Screens, Healthy Youth**' action, young people in the digital sphere, online and on social media, will be better protected;
- support the Member States in the **monitoring of the impact of the digital transformation on children's well-being** through the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) portal;
- support Member States to enhance young people's **well-being and mental health under the Technical Support Instrument 2024** flagship on Mental health: Fostering well-being and mental health<sup>42</sup> and continue the support under the Youth FIRST Flagship to strengthen the mental health and care of vulnerable children and young people;
- **ensure safer and healthier digital space for young people** through the enforcement of the Digital Services Act, requiring online platforms accessible to minors to ensure a high level of privacy, safety and security for them;
- present a **Prevention Package** under the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, including:
  - a draft **Council Recommendation on vaccine-preventable cancers**, boosting the uptake of vaccination against Human papillomaviruses among preadolescent and adolescent girls and boys, and  
  
an update of the 2009 **Council Recommendation on smoke-free environments**, protecting people from exposure to second-hand smoke and aerosols and contributing to the achievement of a Tobacco-free Generation;
- **support youth in the outermost regions** to improve quality of life tailored to their regions through the EUR 1 million grant scheme Youth4Outermostregions<sup>43</sup>;

<sup>39</sup> Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on Pathways to School Success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving.

<sup>40</sup> As part of the 2024 Commission work programme.

<sup>41</sup> Communication from the Commission on the EU strategy on the rights of the child, COM(2021) 142 final.

<sup>42</sup> TSI 2024 Flagship - Mental health: Fostering well-being and mental health (europa.eu).

<sup>43</sup> Call relaunched – Youth for Outermost Regions: €1 million to support youth in the outermost regions (europa.eu).



### 3.2.2 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE

The success of the EU Green Deal relies on active citizen participation. The European Year of Youth created opportunities to be involved in and help shape the green transition. Young people should be equipped with relevant skills and knowledge to act on environmental and climate change challenges with creative and innovative solutions. To build on these efforts the Commission will:

- support a community of **young EU Climate Pact Ambassadors** to promote climate action among young people on the ground and support their local activities;
- support the contribution of young people to the achievement of the Union disaster resilience goals as essential tool for strengthening resilience to future disasters;
- increase **volunteering opportunities for young people** to address the green transition, by **topping-up the 2024 European Solidarity Corps call from Horizon Europe**;
- encourage **networks of green cities and regions** (such as the Green City Accord initiative), to engage young trainees and volunteers in local green projects;
- further promote youth-led climate projects in the **EUTeens4Green project** under the Just Transition Fund;
- support Member States as they implement the **Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development**<sup>44</sup>;
- promote the new **Youth Learning Lab** as part of the **Education for Climate Coalition**;
- reach out to young people through the Commission's upcoming **campaign on climate and democracy** ahead of the 2024 European elections;
- promote the involvement of young people from the Western Balkans in the green transition via a dedicated **Western Balkans Youth Lab**;
- expand the reach of the **Girls Go Circular action**, by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology and Knowledge and Innovation Communities, to boost digital and entrepreneurial skills for girls in the field of circular economy.
- highlight the need to support generational renewal in agriculture, as young people are a source of new ideas and energy, with innovative initiatives, and are committed towards sustainable practices and transition.

### 3.2.3 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The theme of education and training was an important topic during the Year, a year that coincided with the celebration of the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Erasmus+ programme and the resumption of learning abroad after the pandemic. The need to further facilitate this, was highlighted in a **Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers**<sup>45</sup>, the recent '**Europe on the Move**'

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<sup>44</sup> Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development.

<sup>45</sup> Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union.



**Council Recommendation**<sup>46</sup> and in the recommendations of the 2022 Conference on the Future of Europe<sup>47</sup>. The Commission will:

- take forward the work towards a **joint European degree** in 2024, in line with the European Strategy for Universities, helping to build a stronger sense of European belonging among higher education students and academic staff involved in transnational academic programmes. The joint European Degree label would be a complementary certificate, based on European common criteria, to the qualifications gained by students graduating from joint programmes;
- promote a stronger role for young people in the **Digital Education Hub**, in the 2024 review of the **Digital Education Action Plan** and in other initiatives linked to making digital education in Europe high-quality, inclusive and accessible to all including in rural and remote territories;
- consolidate the **Jean Monnet for schools** action under Erasmus+ to further promote learning about EU integration and values from an early age;
- encourage Member States to increase education, training, sport, volunteering and employment opportunities for **young people in rural and remote areas**, as foreseen in the EU Rural Action plan<sup>48</sup>;
- continue in 2024 the **EU TalentOn** initiative for talented young researchers and the **EU Contest for Young Scientists** initiative, as part of the Katowice European City of Science 2024;
- address the **underrepresentation of girls and women in STEM** education and training, including through the STEAM<sup>49</sup> approach, in line with the Digital Education Action Plan and the European Strategy for Universities;
- support Member States to design and implement reforms aimed to develop young people's skills, under the **Technical Support Instrument** 2024 flagship on Skills: fostering skills development systems better adapted to the labour market<sup>50</sup>. The support will address persistent skills mismatches, labour shortages and upskilling of the workforce for the green and digital transition, as well as adapting education systems.
- promote the participation of **Western Balkans universities** under the European Universities Initiative;
- promote the uptake of the joint EU/OECD-INFE **financial competence framework for children and youth** in the EU<sup>51</sup> among Member States and stakeholders.

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<sup>46</sup> Europe on the Move - a proposal on the future of learning mobility | European Education Area (europa.eu)

<sup>47</sup> Conference on the Future of Europe (europa.eu).

<sup>48</sup> Communication from the Commission - A long-term vision for the EU's rural areas - towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040, COM(2021) 345 final.

<sup>49</sup> The STEAM approach refers to the inclusion of arts, social sciences and the humanities in STEM education, as a transdisciplinary, inclusive and future-oriented approach to learning, to make STEM studies and careers more appealing to a diverse group of learners.

<sup>50</sup> TSI 2024 Flagship - Flagship on Skills: Fostering skills development systems better adapted to the labour market (europa.eu).

<sup>51</sup> European Union/OECD, Financial competence framework for children and youth in the European Union.

### 3.2.4 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND EUROPEAN VALUES

As the key deliverable of the global dimension of the European Year of Youth, the EU presented its first-ever Youth Action Plan in EU external action<sup>52</sup>, designed together with youth organisations and young people. The Action Plan aims to engage, empower and connect youth from the EU and partner countries from all regions through specific initiatives, enabling them to bring their perspective and participate as partners in EU external action. The Commission will:

- to increase EU engagement with young people globally, through the implementation and strengthening of initiatives such as the **EU Youth Sounding Board** for International Partnerships and the increasing setting up of youth advisory structures of EU Delegations.
- support the contribution of young people to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals with essential tools, resources and skills including through initiatives such as the Youth Empowerment Fund<sup>53</sup> and the Africa-Europe Youth Academy.
- set up a platform for regular dialogue and consultations with youth organisations worldwide through the **Youth Dialogue Platform in EU external action**<sup>54</sup>, and ensure youth inclusion in various consultation processes including as part of the roll-out of the Global Gateway Strategy<sup>55</sup>.
- provide space and support capacities for the active participation of youth in peace building, security sector reform and mediation processes, to ensure young people's specific needs and priorities are taken into account and their role in reconstruction is recognised and supported, in line with the EU's commitment to the UN Peace and Security Agenda.
- open **Erasmus+ youth and sport capacity building actions** in the 2024 call (through funds from NDICI-Global Europe) to participation by youth and sport organisations from Ukraine and other countries from the Eastern Partnership region, to build their capacity. These actions are already open to all Western Balkans partners. Explore the potential of Erasmus+ in other regions, especially in the areas of virtual exchanges and youth capacity building;
- further support the recently created **Network of European Affairs student societies across UK universities**. A youth advisory structure will be launched in the EU Delegation to the UK as part of the Youth Action Plan in EU external action.
- with a view to the UN Summit of the Future, continue working together with the EEAS and EU Member States towards an ambitious and action oriented Pact for the Future, including on its Chapter specifically focused on youth and future generations, and ensure its follow up.

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<sup>52</sup> Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU external action 2022 – 2027 Promoting meaningful youth participation and empowerment in EU external action for sustainable development, equality and peace, JOIN(2022) 53 final.

<sup>53</sup> The Youth Empowerment Fund was launched on 4 October 2022 and will be implemented in partnership with the world's largest youth organisations through the Global Youth Mobilization.

<sup>54</sup> The call for expression of interests to be a member of the Youth Dialogue Platform in EU external action was launched on 6 October 2023.

<sup>55</sup> The Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Dialogue Platform was launched on 24 October 2023 and includes youth organisations.

### 3.2.5 EMPLOYMENT AND INCLUSION

The EU helps Member States reduce youth unemployment and inactivity, including through focusing on youth in a situation of vulnerability, such as young persons with disabilities and indirectly by investing in the economic development of all EU regions. Addressing social, economic and territorial disparities is relevant to young people as it improves equal access to employment, education, social inclusion services and opportunities. The aim is to help young people access opportunities regardless of their socioeconomic background or place of residence and propel the digital and green transitions and inclusive growth forward. The reinforced Youth Guarantee will continue to be an essential tool to help young people enter the labour market. Under NextGenerationEU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility is promoting investments and reforms in the Member States, with a focus on the green and digital transitions and other policies for children and young people, such as education and skills.

Traineeships are an important steppingstone for young people into the labour market. Given the distinct benefits of traineeships, young people have asked for better conditions for training in the EU and petitioned for a ban to unpaid traineeships as a legacy of the European Year of Youth<sup>56</sup>. In its resolution of 14 June 2023 with recommendations to the Commission on quality traineeships, the European Parliament called on the Commission to ensure minimum quality standards for traineeships, including remuneration<sup>57</sup>. For this purpose, the Commission will:

- **update its quality framework for traineeships** in 2024 to address issues including fair remuneration and access to social protection. In particular, the Commission intends to follow up the Parliament's resolution with a proposal for a legislative act, in full respect of proportionality, subsidiarity and better law-making principles;
- further implement the **ALMA initiative** (aim, learn, master, achieve) to help disadvantaged young people aged 18-29 years to integrate into the society and labour market in other countries. Following an EU-level call for project proposals under ALMA, it is expected that more than 800 young people who are not in education, employment or training will participate in 29 projects across the EU<sup>58</sup>.
- **work with groups whose untapped entrepreneurial potential remains high**, including young people, through awareness, mentoring and coaching campaigns<sup>59</sup>;
- continue supporting EU Member States and regions in the **implementation of 2021-27 Cohesion Policy programmes**<sup>60</sup>, including the European Regional Development Fund support in the areas of employment, education and training, social inclusion, social and healthcare, sustainable tourism and culture, from which young people as identified target groups will benefit according to the identified needs in the targeted territories;
- support EU regions affected by demographic challenges, including from the departure of their young population, with the **Talent Booster Mechanism**. The Mechanism supports EU

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<sup>56</sup> [No more unpaid internships! | European Youth Forum](#).

<sup>57</sup> The [resolution](#) calls for the Commission to submit a proposal for a directive on open labour market traineeships, traineeships in the context of active labour market policies (ALMPs) and traineeships that are a mandatory part of professional training.

<sup>58</sup> 15 Member States have so far committed to include ALMA in their national or regional ESF+ programmes (2021-27)

<sup>59</sup> [Action 17 of the SME Relief Package](#).

<sup>60</sup> [Cohesion policy - The EU's main investment policy](#).

regions to train, retain and attract the people, skills and competences needed to address the impact of the demographic transition;

- continue support the **Western Balkan governments in the implementation of the Youth Guarantee** mirroring the EU model and promote similar approaches in neighbourhood countries to address the difficulties faced by young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- continue supporting EU Member States in the implementation of the **European Child Guarantee** with the objective to prevent and combat discrimination and social exclusion.
- as one of the initiatives of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>61</sup>, the Commission together with its stakeholders will develop the Disability Employment Package, set of guidance and practices aimed at facilitating employment of persons with disabilities. Amongst others, the guidance focuses on career guidance and hiring practices, relevant for young persons with disabilities.
- encourage the development of prosperous, stronger, connected and resilient rural areas, which will support the employment of young people in line with the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas.

#### 4 SUSTAINING OUR COMMITMENT TO EUROPE'S YOUNG PEOPLE

EU institutions and Member States strengthened their existing commitment to young people during the European Year of Youth, in line with the 2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy objectives of promoting youth participation and embedding the youth perspective into policymaking. It is critical to sustain and build on this. Support for children and young people is essential to ensure that the next generation of Europeans is equipped to tackle the challenges of our rapidly changing world and face the future with confidence.

The European Commission will support young people further with concrete follow-up actions as set out in this Communication. Central to this approach is the collaborative spirit embodied in the Year itself. It solidified a shared understanding that projects targeting youth are more efficient and effective when created and implemented in collaboration with young people and youth stakeholders. Results are amplified when EU institutions, national, regional and local authorities are open and dedicated to cooperation and continuous dialogue.

This dialogue and cooperation will be especially important in efforts to engage young people in the 2024 European elections. But youth participation does not start and end with voting only. It grows from a small step taken – be it volunteering for a community theatre project or taking part in a national beach clean-up campaign. Other forms of youth participation include running for a student council, launching a petition or taking part in a consultation in the EU Youth Dialogue, joining an international youth NGO, attending the European Youth Event or European Youth Week, or taking part in a project run by the EU youth programmes. All of these represent youth participation in action.

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<sup>61</sup> [Communication from the Commission on Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, COM\(2021\)101 final.](#)

The opportunities given to young people shape them as citizens and impact the choices they make and paths they will take in life. This can ultimately define the direction Europe will take. This is why the European Union will give young people a stronger role in the formulation and development of EU policies.

**2022 was their year; the future should be theirs too.**