

YOUTH IDEAS REPORT

2023



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A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We've come a long way together in 2023. Europe continues to face unprecedented challenges, with the ongoing consequences of climate change and the war in Ukraine taking a toll worldwide.

We've also been grappling with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic: economic downturns, mental health issues and social justice concerns. A lot has been done on a European level to overcome these challenges.

As we look towards the European elections next year, it is essential that we highlight the changes young people in Europe want to see for the coming term, while also recognising the progress made over the past years.

The Youth Ideas Report is the culmination of a journey that began earlier this year. We have included ideas that emerged both from youthideas.eu and EYE2023 (European Youth Event) in Strasbourg, where 8 500 young people met on 9 and 10 June to share and shape their own respective views on the future of Europe.



Editors of the Youth Ideas Report 2023: Elena Manso Palao, Lukas O. Rastovic and Alessia Melchiorre.

We believe that the Youth Ideas Report is a powerful tool to inspire political debate and shape future policy proposals, especially ahead of the European elections in spring 2024.

This fifth edition was particularly intense and full of exchanges. Some 325 activities took place in the European Parliament and the EYE Village, all of which contributed to making every participant feel at home in the house of European democracy.

In our role as EYE Editors, working on the Youth Ideas Report, we made a decision. Not only did we want to highlight the most popular and influential ideas on youthideas.eu, we also wanted to showcase some ideas that are already being put into action by youth organisations across Europe.

We hope this report will inspire young people from all over Europe and lead current and future MEPs, other institutions and youth organisations to reflect and to act. The ideas presented in this report cover a wide variety of topics, ranging from sustainability initiatives and new educational opportunities to the digital transformation.

We are grateful to all the young people who contributed with their incredible proposals and visions for a better Europe, and we hope their voices will shine through in this report.

LOOKING AHEAD AT THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2024

EYE2023 took place just one year ahead of the European elections, which will be held from 6 to 9 June 2024. We also have some good news to share! Both interest and willingness to vote in the elections have increased when compared with 2018.

According to the European Parliament's [Spring 2023 Eurobarometer](#), interest in the elections has risen by 6 %, and 67 % of respondents say they are likely to vote, which is nine points higher than five years ago.

67 %
of respondents say
they are likely to vote

The age group that experienced
the largest increase in its electoral
participation in 2019 was those under
the age of

25

The last [European Youth Survey](#) showed that almost 90 % of respondents had engaged in at least one political or civic activity in 2021. Young European citizens are more engaged than anyone could imagine. One example of this are the volunteers from [together.eu](#).

Speaking of young people, they used to be one of the age groups with the highest abstention rates. Only 28 % of those under the age of 25 who were eligible to vote cast their ballots in the 2014 elections. However, the 2019 elections showed that the number of young people going to the polls is on the rise. The overall turnout was the highest in 25 years, and the age group that experienced the largest increase in its electoral participation was those under the age of 25. It was thanks to them that the voter turnout reached levels not seen since the 20th century. Engaging young people in politics and the decision-making process is vital for our democracy. While it is immensely difficult to illustrate what European young people as a whole want for the EU's future, this report nevertheless serves as an important platform to share their contributions and political goals.

Almost
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activity in 2021

together.eu

for democracy



During the EYE, nearly 300 most active together.eu volunteers took part in a bootcamp, where experts taught them valuable skills that will one day help them organise their own election campaigns. We interviewed Doroteja, Julian and Micaela.

Doroteja Horvat

Croatia
Law student at University
of Zagreb

'We figured out that young people do want to vote, but also that European elections are very unknown to them. You need to show people what is in it for them and let them find what interests them.'

As a together.eu volunteer, I have delivered several workshops at high schools to show potential first-time voters the basic functioning of the EU institutions.'

Julian Waldbauer

Austria
High school student and
EU Junior Ambassador

'I don't think that young people are represented enough in the European Parliament. I became a volunteer because I felt we were not truly listened to.'

In fact, I do not think young people are not interested or motivated. It can be quite the opposite: my grandparents have been supporting the same party for years, no matter what happened.'

Micaela Pezzini

Spain
Intern at the Spanish
Ministry of Agriculture

'I had never been especially interested in the EU. But soon I realised that the Canary Islands, where I come from, owe a lot to the EU and its funds.'

Since then, I have delivered several workshops at schools and done my best to inform my inner circle as well: if people do not know what the EU is, what it does, and how it works, how can you expect them to wake up on a Sunday and cast a ballot?'

Together.eu is a community of people who believe in democracy and who want to give it real meaning as the next European elections approach. It connects people from across Europe to meet, share knowledge and learn new skills, all while encouraging others to vote in 2024. There are plenty of different ways to participate. You can attend events and training sessions to get informed, or spread the message of how important it is to vote. You can even organise your own activities. The question is, do you want to stand up and take action?

The more people vote, the stronger our democracy becomes.

JOIN TOGETHER.EU!

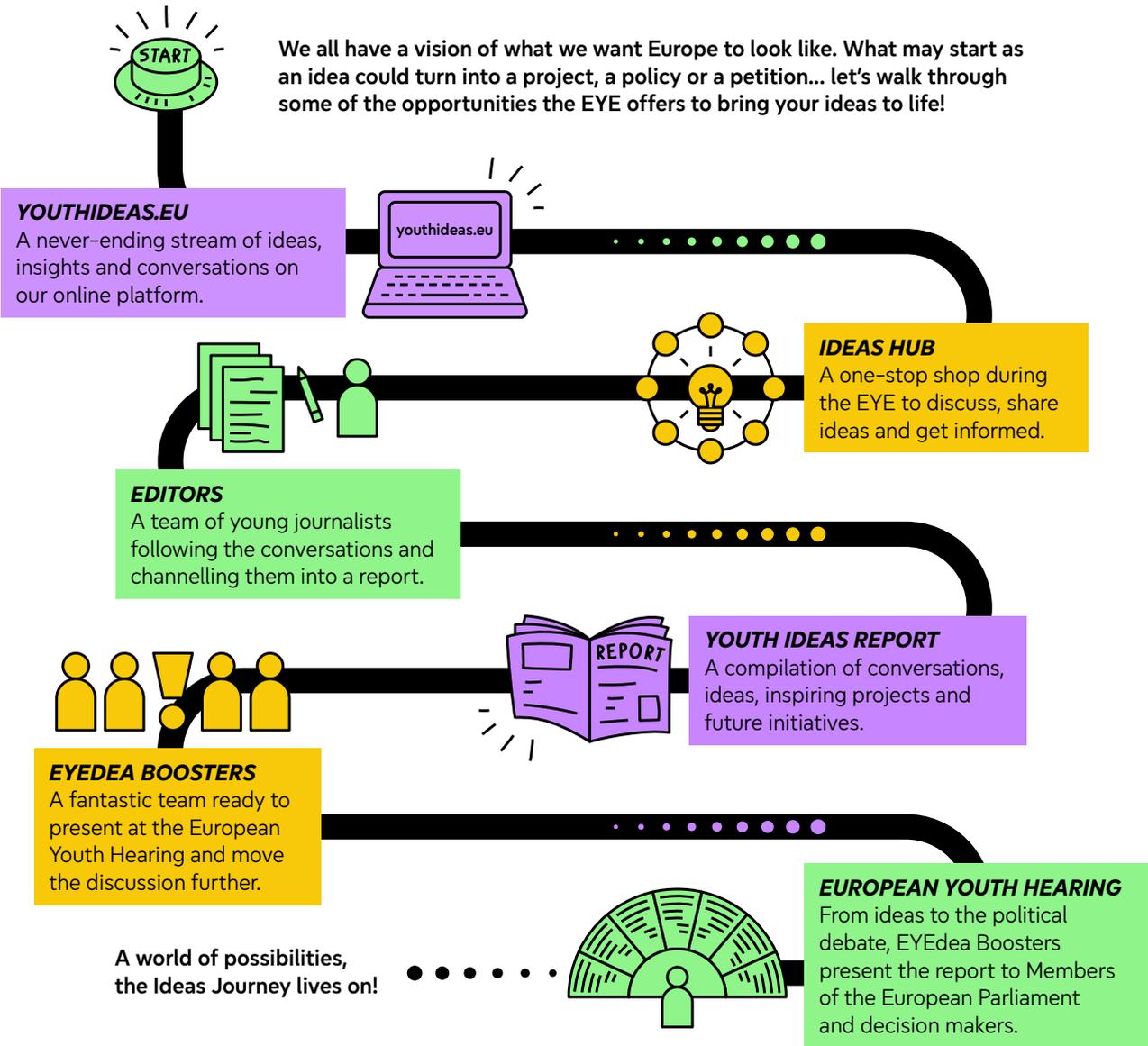
THE YOUTH IDEAS JOURNEY

How exactly did we choose which ideas to include in the Youth Ideas Report? Leading up to EYE2023, we monitored youthideas.eu, where young people submit their proposals for new policies and projects for a better Europe.

Since March 2023, we have been collecting, approving and editing these ideas, organising them into a framework of 11 crucial topics: Climate change and environment, Culture and media, Democracy, Education, EU in the world, Health and sports, Human rights, Jobs, economy and digital transformation, Migration, Security, and Social justice.

At EYE2023, the Ideas Hub, located right beside the Hemicycle, provided a dedicated space for participants to share their ideas on the future of Europe, both in person and on youthideas.eu. Furthermore, experts from EU institutions and experienced project managers from youth organisations were also there to discuss ideas and offer guidance.

In the end, over 600 ideas and more than 400 comments have been shared on the platform. Some definitely stand out and represent the most urgent and popular demands of young Europeans. In this report, we will share the 15 most popular ideas with you, based on their respective topics.



15 MOST POPULAR IDEAS





ADD DISINFORMATION WARNINGS BY DEFAULT ON ALL NEWS SITES UNLESS THEY DISCLOSE ALL OF THEIR INFORMATION SOURCES

Whenever someone accesses a news site, there should be a warning, alerting the reader to take what they read on this website with a pinch of salt.

This should apply to all news sites that do not explicitly state all their sources of information. If a news site does not provide all of their sources, it would automatically be considered 'unreliable'.

This would incentivise news sites to share all of their information sources, and increase transparency for readers. If implemented by the EU, a regulation like this could combat disinformation at a European level.

Freedom of speech is very important, but news sites and media conglomerates with thousands or even millions of followers need to be more accountable for what they publish. They need to avoid spreading disinformation, be it intentionally or unintentionally.

Where do we stand on this issue?

Currently, there is no legislation at EU level proposing a similar initiative. That said, there are some EU initiatives underway, and others already in place, which reflect this idea to some extent.

The proposed Media Freedom Act, which may be approved in 2023, aims to safeguard media outlets against political interference in editorial decisions. The act aims to address transparency in media ownership and the subsidisation of media outlets providing government-friendly views. The Digital Services Act (DSA) came into force in November 2022. It created

certain obligations for social media platforms and focal points for news media content to fight disinformation and election manipulation, and delete any content in Member State(s) where it is illegal. However, the legislation set out in these two Acts does not go as far as to stipulate that disinformation warnings should be visible on the media outlets' news sites.

The European Parliament's anti-disinformation team (SPOX) is also of note. It cooperates with institutions and civil society to analyse disinformation and organise activities to raise awareness.

Who is the villain?

How a Czech organisation is combating disinformation one class at a time



Tereza Kráčmarová
Co-founder of Fakescape

Who is the 'villain' that wants to cancel your summer holidays? While this might seem like an innocent question, it's actually how a Czech organisation called **Fakescape** introduces students to a series of detective-like tasks, which teach them how to fact-check statements made by politicians during an election campaign and how to identify that a photo on Instagram has been altered.

This was also Fakescape's contribution to EYE2023, where combating disinformation was one of the young participants' key concerns. Having toured more than 500 schools in the Czech Republic teaching young people how to spot fake news with their game-based activities, they've taken a massive step towards teaching media literacy to EU citizens – one of the European Parliament's main priorities today.

At the moment, we don't have to promote ourselves in the Czech Republic, because the schools are already reaching out to us.

'We hope we can make students aware, not only about the source of information online, but also of their own emotions, because it's usually the emotions that are being targeted by disinformation and misinformation', says Tereza Kráčmarová, who founded Fakescape in 2018 with a couple of friends back when she was studying journalism and political science.

Since its foundation, the organisation has grown by leaps and bounds. Furthermore, in 2021 Fakescape won the European Charlemagne Youth Prize for their efforts to teach media literacy and critical thinking to young people.

'At the moment, we don't have to promote ourselves in the Czech Republic, because the schools are already reaching out to us', Kráčmarová says. Moreover, Fakescape is currently building its network up in Slovakia, and the organisation's next goal is to expand into neighbouring Poland, where it is already cooperating with a local organisation.

But how do you start an organisation yourself, if there's something you want to change? Three pieces of advice from the Fakescape founder:

- 1. 'Just get started, and find a few people who want to make a change as well, because one person cannot do everything.'**
- 2. 'When we first started, we had no idea what we were doing. But even with a small amount of money, you can still do a good job. And once you prove that you're capable, you can find more people that will trust you and fund you.'**
- 3. 'Acknowledge that it's a learning process, and stay open to criticism, because it will only improve the way your organisation works and make it more impactful.'**



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SUPPORT FOR INNOVATIVE PROJECTS IN THE FIELD OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

More research on artificial intelligence can help us with sustainable development.

The European Union should implement more programmes to promote the development of artificial intelligence by providing grants and other forms of support to universities and other research institutions operating in Member States. This would nurture sustainable development and global prosperity.

An example of one such project is [AI4Media](#). Funded under the EU's Horizon 2020 programme, it aims to become a Centre of Excellence, engaging researchers from across Europe and beyond. The project aims to advance AI and provide training for the media sector, with a strong emphasis on ethical and trustworthy AI.

Where do we stand on this issue?

In June 2023, the European Parliament adopted its [negotiating position on the Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Act](#), aiming to promote human-centric and trustworthy AI while protecting fundamental rights and democracy.

The rules would ensure that any AI developed and used in Europe is consistent with EU values, including human oversight, safety, privacy, transparency, and non-discrimination. The regulations follow a risk-based approach, and prohibit AI practices that pose an unacceptable level of risk. These include social scoring, 'real-time' and 'post' biometric identification systems in public spaces, biometric categorisation based on sensitive characteristics, predictive policing systems, emotion recognition systems in various contexts,

and untargeted scraping of facial images for facial recognition databases. High-risk AI applications, such as systems used to influence voters and recommender systems on large social media platforms, are also included.

The Act introduces obligations for providers of foundation models, transparency requirements for generative AI systems, exemptions for research activities and open-source components, and mechanisms for the public to file complaints and receive explanations regarding high-risk AI systems. The EU AI Office will be responsible for monitoring the Act's implementation. It's the first-ever legislation for safe and transparent AI.



FREE INTERRAIL PASSES FOR ALL YOUNG EUROPEANS

More young Europeans should be granted a free Interrail pass when they turn 18, especially the disadvantaged who cannot afford to travel abroad. Ideally, this would apply to every EU citizen when they turn 18.

This would give young people in the EU the possibility of exploring Europe on their own and meeting others their own age. An initiative like this could strengthen the curiosity and interconnectedness of a whole generation, and give them the chance to learn more about Europe.

To make it easier for more people to travel by rail in Europe, the EU could fund the development of a single app where people could buy tickets for all train companies in the EU. And to further encourage travel on Europe's rail lines, the EU should adopt legislation requiring all train companies to provide immediate financial compensation when delays or cancellations occur.

Where do we stand on this issue?

It is currently possible for those aged 18 to apply for a travel pass allowing rail travel for up to 30 days through [DiscoverEU](#), an initiative by the Erasmus+ programme funded by the EU. Applicants must be citizens or legal residents of an EU Member State or a few other selected countries, and participate in a quiz.

However, only selected applicants will receive one of the passes, which are granted twice a year. Full implementation of this idea would mean an unlimited extension of DiscoverEU. If DiscoverEU were changed

to prioritise those who cannot afford a travel pass themselves, the application system would need to be changed, requiring applicants to submit documentation demonstrating their own or their family's financial situation. That said, it would be important to keep the process simple to make it as accessible as possible.

At present there are several businesses offering train tickets from different European rail companies on their websites and apps.



WE NEED REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION

A significant number of scientific and social research studies stress the importance of sex education in secondary schools. Young teenagers need practical and factual information.

In some communities, issues around sexuality are taboo and people do not discuss them at home, at school or in health centres. As a result, teenagers can be at risk of sexually transmitted infections, mental health issues, chronic health problems and anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination and bullying.

Evidence shows that young people who are provided with effective reproductive and sexual health education are:

- more likely to recognise and report sexual abuse;
- more likely to delay first sexual encounters until they feel ready and comfortable;
- more likely to engage in consensual first sex;
- more likely to understand the need for contraception, and use it effectively;

- less likely to experience a crisis pregnancy;
- less likely to become infected with an STI.

One key challenge in this regard is the lack of teachers with the necessary knowledge and training to provide appropriate and accurate information about sex and reproductive health. Additional barriers include opposition from cultural and religious leaders, as well as the general lack of sexual and reproductive health education, both at a local and EU level.

As a first step, let's come together and provide teachers with the right information, backed by scientists and health specialists!

Where do we stand on this issue?

The Member States are the ones responsible for implementing sexual education, but the EU also plays a role in promoting health according to Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

In a resolution passed in June 2021, the European Parliament called on the Member States to ensure universal access to comprehensive sexuality education and information for all children and young people. The education should be scientifically accurate, evidence-based, age-appropriate, non-judgemental, and cover a wide range of topics. Parliament also urged the

Member States to combat the spread of discriminatory and unsafe misinformation on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 further commits the European Commission to facilitating exchanges around good practices when it comes to sexual and reproductive health and rights among Member States and stakeholders. The strategy also highlights the importance of educating both boys and girls about gender equality and non-violent relationships.

5 tips on how to talk about sex in schools

Talking about sex has been taboo for a long time, but we now know that it's a necessary life skill. Where do we start?



Deirdre Betson
Sexual Health Educator at SHAREIreland

The educational service Sexual Health and Relationships Education Ireland ([SHAREIreland](#)) has some tips.

The goal of SHAREIreland workshops is to help students make healthy decisions, as they move from adolescence into adulthood.

SHAREIreland works with secondary schools to deliver the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme as set out by the Irish Department of Education.

The goal of SHAREIreland workshops is to help students make healthy decisions, as they move from adolescence into adulthood. Here are their suggestions:

- **Talk about the difference between consent and permission.** Consent is enthusiastic and is driven by both partners. Permission is a one-way street, and can trample on the boundaries of young people who are afraid or unable to say no.

- **Have that one safe adult you trust.** Who is yours? It could be a family member, a teacher, a coach or someone else.

- **Normalise bodily functions.** No more hiding the tampon or pad up your sleeve when going to the toilet. Menstruation is a normal bodily function that prepares the uterus for a possible pregnancy. By ridiculing people about these everyday bodily functions, we send a signal that anything to do with bodies is a source of shame and to be kept secret. Shame-free sex education really resonates with young adults. This includes learning the correct anatomical terms for both healthcare and child safety purposes.

- **Discuss healthy relationships.** It is so important that we discuss what kind of relationships we enjoy. Mutually respectful relationships that understand our boundaries benefit our mental and physical health. Talking about feelings and not bottling things up in a relationship is definitely a positive, healthy sign.

- **Promote the positive health outcomes of sexual education.** Having diverse and inclusive sexual education will promote positive health outcomes for young people. Knowing what kind of sexual activity might expose you to an STI means being aware of the risks and making informed choices about prevention and risk reduction. Lastly, knowing where to access evidence-based, factual, non-judgemental information about sexual health is crucial for all young people.



DON'T EXCLUDE ANY COUNTRY FROM ERASMUS+

Since 1987, the Erasmus+ programme has provided opportunities for mobility and cooperation to more than 12 million young participants.

The programme stands as a resounding success story for the European Commission, and it is crucial that its reputation remains untarnished.

To nurture the growth and potential of young people across Europe and beyond, we must advocate for the expansion of Erasmus+ programmes. By increasing the number of opportunities available, we can empower more students and contribute to a more interconnected and prosperous society. If we are to unlock the full potential of our future leaders and bridge the gaps that divide us, we must meet this goal.

The European Commission should not let young people fall victim to any political disagreements between the European Union and the government of any particular Member State. Furthermore, their political leaders should protect students from harm.

The Hungarian case is a cautionary tale. As a Member State of the European Union, Hungary is eligible to participate in Erasmus+ mobility programmes, allowing Hungarian young people and educators to gain valuable experiences and professional expertise abroad, while also enabling thousands of students from all over the world to visit Hungary, get to know the country and study there.

Where do we stand on this issue?

The Erasmus+ programme proved highly beneficial for 95 % of participants from 2014 to 2020, who recognised the significant benefits they drew from the experience. Looking to the 2021 to 2027 period, the Commission has allocated over EUR 28 billion to the programme. It is imperative that the new projects align with the programme's updated priorities, with particular focus on areas such as inclusion and democratic participation.

In 2020, 22 622 Hungarians participated in Erasmus+ foreign exchange programmes, supported by EUR 40.45 million in EU funding. However, on 15 December 2022, due to corruption concerns, EU finance ministers froze a significant portion of catch-up subsidies which had been destined for Hungary for the 2021 to 2027 period.

They also prohibited the EU from entering into new financial agreements with the public interest trust foundations established under Hungarian law in 2021. The EU targeted educational and cultural institutions which did not manage community funds with transparency. In addition, despite amendments to relevant laws, high-ranking political officials from Fidesz, the governing party, still held power in the management boards of foundations. The EU does not allow political leaders to allocate public funds to organisations in which they have the authority to make decisions. Consequently, support has been temporarily withdrawn from universities which had been outsourced to public-sector trusts.



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TEACH MORE ABOUT THE EU IN SCHOOLS

European citizens should have a better understanding of how the EU works, and the benefits of EU citizenship. The first step should be adding lessons on democracy and European values to school curricula across the EU.

For example, students should be taught about the rule of law, one of the key pillars of our democracy. This will make them more aware of the importance of the EU in their own lives and the many opportunities that the EU offers them.

Young Europeans should learn this from an early age, and it is particularly important that the message also reaches students in schools outside the bigger cities.

Furthermore, the extended curricula teaching students about the EU should remind them that voting is not only

their right, but also their duty, hopefully increasing voter turnouts in future. European history and the various cultures in the EU should be part of school curricula across the EU. This will strengthen the sense of a common European identity, and it will make the EU more self-reliant in the long term.

Finally, more trips should be organised for young people to visit EU institutions, so that they can get a first-hand insight into how the EU works. This has the added benefit of bringing young people together.

Where do we stand on this issue?

Currently, there is no law in place requiring schools in Member States to teach about the EU. However, the EU institutions are already trying to increase the European Union's visibility in school education.

The European Commission's Learning Corner is a programme offering teaching materials and various games to help primary and secondary school students discover the EU in a fun way. The European Parliament Ambassador School Programme (EPAS) provides schools in its network with educational content from the European Parliament, and the programme aims to

increase students' awareness of European values and European parliamentary democracy. Currently, around 1 500 schools across the Member States are in the EPAS network, teaching approximately 23 000 students in total. However, this constitutes only a very small proportion of the approximately 81 million people under 18 years of age living in the EU.

If this idea were adopted, it would mean further expanding these already existing programmes or developing new ones.



INTRODUCE SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Sustainability can be learned, and we should teach it in schools to ensure that all EU citizens know how to protect the environment.

The knowledge we acquire in nursery and at school influences us for our entire lives. That is why it is so important to emphasise environmental protection, climate change and sustainable development in school curricula.

That way, we can make sure everyone has the information they need to help protect the environment and sustain the planet that sustains us.

Where do we stand on this issue?

At the Conference on the Future of Europe in 2022, there were panels composed of a mix of EU citizens from a variety of age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. One of their key recommendations was that students should be taught more about sustainability in schools.

Currently, there is no EU legislation in place requiring schools to teach sustainability. In general, the responsibility to organise education systems and the content of curricula lies with the national governments of Member States.

However, in June 2022, the Council adopted a recommendation for Member States to support policies and programmes on learning for the green transition and sustainable development. This has been discussed in several Member States, but the issue still requires legislation to address it. Furthermore, educators across the EU still need to be trained on how to teach sustainability.

Teaching children to plant trees and collect air pollution data?

Brainstorming green education at the EYE



Anna Kowalczyk
Liaison Officer for Environmental Sustainability
at [ESN](#)

It's June 2023, and you are in Strasbourg. Standing in the summer heat, just a stone's throw from the European Parliament, you find yourself in the centre of the EYE Village. It's a bustling space where young people from all across Europe and the rest of the world gather. They discuss their political ambitions and wishes for a better Europe, listen to live music while tasting the local delicacy, tarte flambée, and participate in workshops, hoping this could be the first step towards change.

In a white tent, aptly named Future Space, a group of engaged young people have gathered in a circle to take turns naming what they think are the key challenges related to the lack of education on sustainability in schools today.

'Teachers need the proper tools to teach us sustainability,' says one attendee.

'We should be taught how to take action ourselves' says another.

Listening to one difficulty after another, a slight atmosphere of hopelessness sets in. But now it's time to put the solutions down on paper! And after just 20 minutes of discussions and brainstorming, the attendees have put together plenty of possible solutions, such as:

'Field practice to make students realise what they can do in nature.'

'Take students to the forest, and teach them how to plant trees!'

'Establish partnerships between schools and NGOs and climate organisations.'

'Take school children out into the open to collect air pollution data.'

There are many youth spaces such as conferences where people only talk about the challenges. But here, they have already developed solutions that can be worked on.

The workshop was facilitated by Anna Kowalczyk from Erasmus Student Network. She hopes that workshops like this can be one small step to start a ripple effect of initiatives on the topic of sustainability education in schools:

'There are many youth spaces such as conferences where people only talk about the challenges. But here, they have already developed solutions that can be worked on. I hope they bring them to their friends and organisations where they volunteer, and that this makes them realise that they are actually capable of doing something themselves', says Anna Kowalczyk.



Photo by Mark in Spisik - pexels.com

CLIMATE CHANGE IS WREAKING HAVOC ON OUR HEALTH – MAKE IT A PRIORITY TO CHANGE THAT

When climate change affects our quality of life, we should be concerned for our health.

According to the World Health Organization, quality of life can be defined as ‘an individual’s perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns’. Environment is among the standard indicators to measure it, so we should be increasingly concerned about the effect climate change has on our bodies.

The climate crisis has resulted in catastrophic floods, heatwaves and droughts across Europe. It has also extended pollen seasons. Evidence shows that these climate hazards lead to worsening symptoms of disease, mobility issues, and higher medicine intake.

Quality of life is a crucial health topic and must be considered in climate discussions at EU level.

This idea was already proposed in the Youth Ideas Report for the Conference on the Future of Europe (2021)! The report suggested that companies be held accountable on this issue. It discussed sanctions and facilitating sustainable transport.

Where do we stand on this issue?

While the European Commission has never expressly legislated with the specific lens of ‘poor quality of life caused by environmental degradation’, with the European Green Deal it has acknowledged the existential threat climate change poses to Europe.

There are several proposals, including the update of the Industrial Emissions Directive, which aim to prevent and control pollution while reducing the cost and decreasing the number of premature deaths due to asthma, bronchitis and cancer each year.

The updated rules are part of Europe’s transformation towards a zero-pollution, competitive, climate-neutral economy by 2050. The focus is on reducing emissions, spurring innovation, and levelling the playing field in the EU market. It will also expand coverage to large-scale intensive livestock farms, which contribute significantly to ammonia and methane emissions.

The economic benefits these changes will produce in terms of healthcare are estimated at over EUR 5.5 billion per year. Despite previous emission reductions, further action is needed as industrial installations still contribute to a significant portion of greenhouse gas emissions and harmful substances produced.

What's the future of healthcare?



Panagiotis Chaslaridis
Senior Policy Officer at EFA

The European Allergy and Asthma Youth Parliament, in partnership with the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA), bring together young allergy and asthma patients and medical professionals aged between 16 and 26 from across Europe. They represent those who now suffer from diseases caused by climate change and environmental degradation (such as air pollution), and work to find solutions to the challenges faced by healthcare systems after COVID-19. We talked to them shortly after their Digital Healthcare workshop at the EYE.

Can you tell us more about what came out of the workshop at the EYE? What's the most striking story that you heard during the workshop, and also what were the most interesting ideas from the participants?

The idea of the workshop was, first of all, to take stock of the experience of young patients, but also external participants, and to identify what the most popular application of digital health is. Secondly, we wanted to understand what the main solutions are, including policies that we should put forward in order to address those challenges from the youth perspective.

I think these have been two days of very successful workshops, because we saw a lot of engagement, both by the members of the Youth Parliament, and by the

other participants. It was organised as a game of Jenga. We all know Jenga, where everyone should provide their input by removing one block and putting it on top. So we wanted to develop this idea of building together digital health as a whole, that is, composed of many different aspects, the many different pieces.

What's the most popular digital application they use?

From the perspective of our patient community, I would say that young people – because they have this familiarity with technology compared to other age groups – appreciate the applications that allow them to monitor the progression of their disease and keep a precise log of their symptoms.

They can also offer these data to the healthcare provider in order to make better assessments, in terms of treatment later on. So I think that's quite important because, especially for some asthma patients, it allows them to record their exacerbations and the peak periods of their asthma.

During your workshop at the EYE, AI was mentioned and also the challenges of AI. What's your opinion on potential future EU legislation on the use of AI in healthcare systems?

We need to see AI, I feel, as a tool that depends on how you use it. It'll turn in favour or against you. I fully appreciate the potential of AI. Even in our disease areas of allergy, asthma and COPD, I do appreciate its power in terms of providing faster data, faster information, faster access to treatments and innovation. For our patient community, obviously AI also needs to be regulated, person-centred, patient-centred, and human in general.

The European Union is working on the AI Act that currently is looking more broadly into the different applications of artificial intelligence. So we really are in a mode of 'wait and see' and we will assess the proposals of the European Commission as soon as we have them.

Does your association have any other projects dealing with the implementation of digital healthcare?

We are also in the process of developing the circle of European Health Data Space: a space that provides the infrastructure for the safe exchange of health data across Europe.

We are obviously in favour of such a development as long as it really takes the patient's needs and consent into account.



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BAN CARCINOGENIC CHEMICALS

Ban the use of glyphosate, a herbicide used to control weeds, in the European Union which is likely to be carcinogenic and harmful to our health.

Glyphosate is one of the world's most common herbicides. Many farmers use it on fruit and vegetable crops, canola, corn, cotton, soybeans, sugar beets and wheat. It is also used on aquatic plants and in forestry.

Its widespread use in farming is also a source of controversy. Some studies suggest this chemical may be linked to cancer, while others say there is no connection.

Where do we stand on this issue?

In a 2017 [resolution](#), Parliament supported a complete ban on glyphosate-based herbicides by December 2022 and immediate restrictions on their use. MEPs rejected the European Commission's proposal to renew the controversial herbicide's licence for 10 years. Instead, they called for glyphosate to be phased out, starting with a ban on household use and agricultural use when effective biological alternatives are available to control weeds.

MEPs stated that glyphosate should be completely banned in the EU by 15 December 2022, with necessary intermediate steps, such as risk assessments based only on published, peer-reviewed and independent studies.

However, in the same month, the Commission extended the EU authorisation for the use of herbicide glyphosate until the end of 2023, after the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) announced that it would not be able to complete a risk-assessment process until July 2023 at the earliest.



MAKE VEGETARIAN OPTIONS A REAL ALTERNATIVE FOR EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE

Each year, more and more people decide to adopt a vegetarian diet. Motivated either by the health benefits or ethical concerns, it has become common for people to reduce their consumption of products such as meat or fish.

In fact, the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) states that over 40 % of EU consumers have either reduced or halted their meat consumption.

Given that reducing our consumption of meat is an increasingly common practice and that it is highly beneficial for the environment, vegetarian menu options should be provided at school, hospital and company canteens. For the sake of the population's health as well as

that of our environment, it's worth exploring whether this measure should be backed by legislation.

The European institutions should draft a law requiring canteens in schools, hospitals and businesses to include a vegetarian option on their menu, supporting vegetarianism as a real alternative, not only for the sake of health, but also for the sake of the environment.

Where do we stand on this issue?

This exact idea of reducing meat consumption by promoting vegetarian menus in canteens in schools and offices is among the solutions put forward by the European Parliament Research Service to address the weaknesses of the current European Union Food System.

In February 2022, the European Parliament adopted a resolution stressing the role of a healthy diet in preventing and limiting the incidence of cancer. It highlighted the need to combat the over-consumption

of meat. In this sense, the legal obligation to include vegetarian options in menus would help reduce not only our ecological footprint, but also the risk of cancer.

Currently, the EU is implementing the 'EU school scheme', which supports the distribution of milk, fruit and vegetables to millions of children from nursery to secondary school, across the EU. The scheme is currently under review, in order to increase its impact on sustainable food consumption.



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SUBSTITUTE VENDING MACHINES WITH WATER DISPENSERS

If we make it easier for people to refill their water bottles instead of buying several single-use ones, we can reduce the use of plastic.

One way this could be achieved would be installing aluminium water dispensers across the Member States. These would sell purified water for the same price as an ordinary plastic bottle.

By storing water in plastic-free aluminium water dispensers instead of plastic bottles, we could avoid producing tonnes of plastic waste.

Where do we stand on this issue?

The EU has implemented different measures to combat marine litter and plastic pollution with the Directive on single-use plastics, which prohibits single-use plastic products from being placed on the market in Member States if sustainable alternatives are easily available and affordable.

As requested by the European Parliament in negotiations with the Council, the agreed text extended the scope of market restriction to more types of plastic products (oxo-degradable and polystyrene), some of which were used in containers for drinks. Members of the European Parliament also defended setting a

binding target, to be met by 2025, for drink bottles to be made of at least 35 % recycled content. This was finally set at 25 % in negotiations with the Council.

The Directive addresses items such as plastic bags and cups for beverages. However, the EU set an additional target in 2021 for the calculation, verification and reporting of data on the separate collection of plastic bottles: 77 % by 2025, increasing to 90 % by 2029 and incorporating 25% of recycled plastic in PET beverage bottles from 2025, and 30% in all plastic beverage bottles from 2030.



STOP FOOD WASTE IN THE EU

AND HELP THE MOST VULNERABLE

Currently, 33 % of all food produced is lost or wasted. At the same time, more than 20 % of the EU's population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

This means that at least one in five people finds it hard to meet their most basic needs every month, including the most essential need of all: a balanced diet. This primary need lies at the very foundation of the human right to life.

Everyone should play their part in solving this issue in their own way. Therefore, shops, restaurants and businesses should be legally obliged to donate all food which is wasted every day to the hungry and poor, before it passes its expiration date. In this way, food which would otherwise go to waste could help to reduce social inequality.

Where do we stand on this issue?

According to the European Parliament's Research Service, in one out of three EU countries, more than 10 % of the population is unable to afford a meal with meat, fish, chicken or a vegetarian equivalent every second day. This issue is exacerbated by the problem of food waste. In accordance with the commitments it has made as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the European Parliament has requested twice (in 2020 and 2022) for the EU's food waste to be halved by 2030.

In a 2022 resolution, the European Parliament emphasised that 88 million tonnes of food are wasted every year in the EU. In this report, they recommended avoiding food loss by 'facilitating the donation of food through the coherent implementation of liability law'.

Moreover, the European Commission will propose legally binding targets to reduce food waste across the EU, by the end of 2023. Among other things, this builds upon the EU food donation guidelines adopted in 2017. These guidelines proposed hygiene standards, information requirements for pre-packed food, fiscal incentives for entities donating food and highlighted the usefulness of freezing surplus food to allow it to be redistributed.

In this vein, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) supports EU Member States' actions to provide food and basic material assistance to the most deprived.



ALL TRAINEESHIPS SHOULD BE PAID OR FUNDED

Many young people see themselves forced to work for free in their first professional experiences. Sometimes, unpaid traineeships are the first opportunities we embark on to start gaining experience.

While traineeships are a useful opportunity for many young people to gain experience and take a first step into the job market, being an unpaid trainee should be banned throughout the EU.

There should be financing available for all traineeships, whether they take place in the trainee's home country or abroad. The available instruments of funding (such as Erasmus+) should cover the costs of accommodation and travel. And where these mechanisms are not enough,

more measures should be implemented to cover the costs incurred by the trainee.

Only those who can afford to work for free, due to family support or greater economic capacity, can access such professional opportunities. This promotes inequality and social injustice. Therefore, in order to guarantee equality of opportunity and protect youth rights, all unpaid traineeships should be banned.

This idea was already proposed in the Youth Ideas Report for the Conference on the Future of Europe (2021)! The report suggested that specific funds should be established in order to end unpaid internships, regardless of education or social status.

Where do we stand on this issue?

Since 2010, the European Parliament has advocated for stronger legal protection of trainees through multiple resolutions and reports. The current Quality Framework for Traineeships defines different quality criteria such as transparency on working conditions and hiring practices, reasonable duration and a written traineeship agreement. However, it does not address trainees' remuneration or stipends.

In January 2022, the European Parliament Research Service recommended in its study, 'The Quality of traineeships in the EU', that a minimum wage be guaranteed for traineeships tailored towards work experience. Only one month later, the European Parliament passed a resolution

condemning the practice of unpaid internships, defining them as a 'form of exploitation of young workers and a violation of their rights'.

In 2023, the European Commission included the 'reinforced quality framework for traineeships' in its yearly Work Programme. This June, the European Parliament passed a legislative own-initiative report, calling for the revised Quality Framework for Traineeships to be made into a directive to be implemented across the EU. The report tackled the compensation of traineeships, suggesting it should cover 'at minimum, the cost of basic living necessities such as food, housing and transportation, taking into account the cost of living in each Member State'.

Can you afford to work for free?

The organisation working to ban unpaid internships



Mark McNulty

Board Member at YFJ

Responsible for the Social and Economic Inclusion Portfolio

In the fight against unpaid internships, civil society has done a great deal to make it easier for young people to enter the job market. Among the youth organisations that have stood up against this practice, the story of the European Youth Forum stands out.

Unpaid internships not only have direct socio-economic consequences on those who undertake them, they also take a toll on young people's mental health.

Most recently, the European Youth Forum (YFJ) successfully logged a [joint complaint](#) before the Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights. This body determined that unpaid internships in Belgium 'allow for young people to be exploited as free labour'. Although the final decision was only published in 2022, the complaint was filed back in 2017.

In addition to the complaint, the YFJ has been working on a campaign calling for unpaid internships to be banned. Mark McNulty, YFJ Board Member jointly responsible for the Youth Forum's social and economic inclusion portfolio, explains the origin of this campaign:

'As the revision of the Quality Framework for Traineeships started, we decided that we would start a campaign. We decided on a really simple title: "Can You Afford to Work for Free?" It's really unfair that anyone has to work for free, but really, only some people can afford it.'

The YFJ published a [discussion paper](#) in January 2023 showing that doing an unpaid internship costs a young person an average of EUR 1 000 a month.

'If young people do two six-month internships before their first job, that's EUR 12 000 that each intern is losing out on. That could be the start of someone's deposit for their house, which could be what they could have saved. But instead, they're having to throw the money essentially down the drain to do an unpaid internship before they even start their career.'

Mark has experienced this situation himself:

'I've been an intern in Ireland. I've been an intern in the United States. People who do unpaid internships tend to come from quite a privileged background, but I personally don't. I did one a couple of years ago while I was in university, and I had to work alongside it. I was somewhat lucky enough to be able to do that, right? But there's a lot of people who can't balance their job around it. I've seen some interns really struggle, where people are trying to decide between paying their rent or their health insurance.'

Unpaid internships not only have direct socio-economic consequences on those who undertake them, they also take a toll on young people's mental health:

'I think the stress of it almost ages you, right? When you're trying to keep everything moving because you have to. Just getting a job is stressful, but having to balance a job, an internship and potentially university is like juggling blindfolded.'



EUROPE SHOULD BE SELF-SUFFICIENT WITH RAW MATERIALS

In view of the downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Europe needs to reduce its reliance on other countries for raw materials and start producing on its own.

The EU seems to rely solely on imports of raw materials and products from countries like China and the United States. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this dependence and left Europe facing the following challenge: how could the EU cut reliance on other countries for these materials?

For these reasons, the EU should provide funding to establish European companies, whose products and software would be used in electronic devices, including smartphones and computers. Finland and Hungary, for instance, would be good examples of countries where the European production of mobile phones could start.

Where do we stand on this issue?

In September 2022, during her state of the Union speech, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the Critical Raw Materials Act. The legislative proposal from March 2023 aims to ensure the EU's access to a secure and sustainable supply of Critical Raw Materials (CRMs) and establish a list of Strategic Raw Materials (SRMs). Parliament still has to take a stance and decide its negotiating position on the subject. The legislative Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), is scheduled to vote on the draft report on 9 September 2023. After that, Parliament will start negotiations with the Council in different sessions named 'trilogues' and reach a final agreement on the text.

The European Parliament had already addressed its strategy for CRMs in a resolution it adopted in 2021. It proposed an integrated approach throughout the CRM value chain, as well as an active industrial policy.

More recently, in a resolution from February 2023, the European Parliament highlighted the importance of having access to CRMs for both the green and digital transitions. The main measures proposed were building up recycling and stable secondary markets, exploiting domestic resources with faster permitting, and creating a new European Sovereignty Fund.



STRONGER TOGETHER:

ESTABLISH A COMMON FOREIGN POLICY

A common foreign policy for the European Union is desperately needed. This would allow the EU to show strength through its unity on the world stage, cut administrative costs and become a full political union.

As global events unfolded in 2022, it became ever clearer that the European Union must stand together. It is important to be prepared for future threats and retain independence from non-EU nations. This could be achieved by establishing a common foreign policy that would help maintain peace in Europe. It could be seen as a key step towards becoming a full political union.

As mentioned during the panel at the EYE, Josep Borrell, the current High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), declared, 'the EU's reaction to Russian full scale invasion of Ukraine represents the birth of geopolitical Europe'.

A common foreign policy would allow the EU to show strength and determination when meeting nations on diplomatic missions. It would also help to improve external and internal efficiency. The administrative costs for consulates or embassies could be slashed and decisions could be made in a more timely and effective manner.

Furthermore, a common foreign policy would help safeguard the interests of the EU and its citizens globally, all the while promoting peace and freedom.

Where do we stand on this issue?

Established in 1999, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is the EU's main framework for defence and crisis management.

The current High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), Josep Borrell, is responsible for coordinating the CSDP and he also chairs the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Defence Agency (EDA). While the European Council sets the overall direction of the CSDP, the European Parliament plays a role in reviewing and budgeting. The HR/VP must therefore regularly consult Parliament and take its views into consideration.

Progress has been made in EU defence cooperation through initiatives like Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF), and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD).

The European Commission has a Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS), signalling greater focus on defence. The year 2022 was dubbed the 'year of European defence'.

FINAL REMARKS

Where do we go from here? On youthideas.eu, there are hundreds of ideas just as relevant and valuable as the ones we included in this report.

The onus is now on all of us to breathe life into these ideas by various means. As you read above, many youth organisations are already setting change in motion through inspiring projects and initiatives. Their impact on society is as important as any exercise of democracy: just like going to the polling station, picking up a pencil and marking your preferred candidates.

The next European elections come at a pivotal moment in history, where each decision made will directly shape the lives of European citizens in an increasingly globalised world full of challenges.

Therefore, voting is not only a duty – it is an absolute necessity. If we want our voice to be heard, we need to participate in the process. Start conversations with your

The next European elections come at a pivotal moment in history, where each decision made will directly shape the lives of European citizens in an increasingly globalised world full of challenges.

friends and family, share your concerns, lend an ear to theirs, think of solutions, consider pursuing causes that resonate deeply with you, or cast your vote for those who champion them.

Above all, hold on to hope, and never let it wither.



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