

# EU Youth Conference

26. - 30. 9. 2021

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## CONFERENCE REPORT

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# PREFACE

This report presents the background, concept, program and the outcomes of the EU Youth Conference (EUYC) that took place online between 26th and 30th September 2021. The Conference and the report is based on the process of the 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, under the title “Europe for YOUTH – YOUTH for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation” that started in July 2020 with the German presidency, continued with the Portuguese presidency and finished with the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

## **Slovenian Presidency in the Field of Youth**

The Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union took place between July 1st and December 31st 2021 under the slogan “Together. Resilient. Europe.” The priorities of the Presidency in the field of youth were civic spaces for young people and Youth Goal #9: “Space and Participation for All”. The value that guided the Presidency was involvement of young people in all stages. With this in mind, the National Youth Council of Slovenia was involved in all stages of the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue and the EU Youth Conference.

The process of the Presidency in the youth field was led by the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, Ministry of Education, Science and Sports. The Office for Youth champions the interests of young people and the youth sector, acting as the main coordinator of activities in the framework of youth policies and providing comprehensive measures to improve the status of young people in Slovenia.

The leading partner in the process was the National Youth Council of Slovenia. The National Youth Council strives to create an environment in which young people can become autonomous, responsible, empathic and active individuals and members of society.

# THE ROAD TO MARIBOR

## INTRODUCTION TO THE EUYD8 CYCLE AND PROCESS

### About the 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue

The 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue ran from 1st July 2020 to 31st December 2021 under the Trio Presidency of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. The topic of the 8th cycle was Youth Goal #9: “Space and Participation for All” under the title “Europe for YOUth – YOUth for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation”. During this 18-month work cycle, concrete recommendations on how to implement this Youth Goal at the European, national, regional and local levels were developed. The process under the presidencies of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia was looking for concrete ways of implementing this Youth Goal into Youth Actions at different levels.

The cycle aimed at:

- strengthening the EU Youth Dialogue as a space for meaningful participation of young people in decision-making processes, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of youth-related policies;
- contributing to the mainstreaming, multi-level and cross-sectoral implementation of the European Youth Goals, which were developed by young people during the 6th cycle of the Structured Dialogue; increasing the visibility of the Youth Goals;
- fostering multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation from local to European level in order to make the process more inclusive, visible and sustainable so that its outcomes can encapsulate the expectations of all young people living in Europe.

# How did Youth Goals become Youth Actions?

The 8th Cycle ran in two phases. The first phase was the Dialogue phase that started with exploring the theme of the Cycle by the National Working Groups (NWGs) and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs) and preparations for the qualitative consultations.

The NWGs organised activities where young people and decision-makers discussed how the European Youth Goal #9 could be put into practice on a local, regional, national and European levels. Young people also expressed their views on the topic through an online survey that was prepared by the European Steering Group.

The second phase was the implementation phase that started after the second EU Youth Conference in Portugal, which was about turning Youth Goal #9 into Youth Actions. In the implementation phase, NWGs carried out different actions for the implementation of Youth Goal #9 on a local, regional and national level. The Cycle ended with the Conference in Slovenia with the formulation of the recommendations and the evaluation of the Cycle.

At the beginning of the Cycle, the European Steering Group set up 4 expected outcomes, which we managed to achieve:

1. Realizing the European Youth Goals: The Cycle was devoted to finding, testing and implementing solutions, developed in a dialogue between young people and political decision-makers.
2. Inputting the work of the Council of the EU: The outcomes of the 8th cycle of the EUYD have been summarised in the Resolution on the Outcomes of the 8th Cycle, adopted by the Council of the Youth Ministers under the Slovenian Presidency on the 29th November 2021.
3. Political demands and changes: Concrete recommendations were created and presented to decision-makers. The recommendations were included in the Council Resolution.
4. Securing results: An important aspect of the process was communication, making sure that the results and the process were visible.

The important stakeholders in the process were young people, the European Steering Group (ESG), National Working Groups (NWGs), International Non-governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs), researchers, facilitators and harvesters.

More on how the process was designed can be found in the [Explanatory note](#).

# EU Youth Conferences

The integral part of the process were three EU Youth Conferences which, for the first time ever, all took place online.

The first one took place in October 2020 under the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The aim of the conference was to explore Youth Goal #9 and the topics of youth and democracy. This included looking at different aspects of the topics and at issues that are important and currently relevant to young people. At the end of the conference, the participants formulated one political demand for each of the seven Targets of Youth Goal #9.

You can read more about the outcomes of the German EUYC [here](#).

The second EU Youth Conference took place under the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union in March 2021. The Conference aimed to promote debates about several aspects of Youth Goal #9. It also provided a roadmap for decision-makers, youth organisations and young people to work on democracy promotion among young people at local, regional, national and European levels during this Dialogue cycle's Implementation Phase.

You can read more about the outcomes of the Portuguese EUYC [here](#).

The third and final conference of the 8th Cycle took place under the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in September 2021. The conference and its outcomes are thoroughly presented in the following pages.

## About the EU Youth Conference in Slovenia

The EU Youth Conference was organised by the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, under the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, and the National Youth Council of Slovenia. The conference was the last one within the 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, following the theme of the European Youth Goal #9: “Space and participation for all”, under the title “Europe for YOUTH – YOUTH for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation”. The conference was about looking at the whole cycle and evaluating what intermediate results the 8th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue had and, most importantly, what is still missing in order to create “Spaces and Participation for all”. The purpose of the conference in Slovenia was also to evaluate the entire process of the 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue.

Participants at the Conference created recommendations for the implementation of the Youth Goal #9, based on the reporting of the implementation phase and the Central EU Youth Dialogue Survey for the 8th cycle as background documents.

## Research of the 8th Cycle

In order to collect the opinions of young Europeans and in order to gather input by the NWGs and INGYOs, 3 research projects were carried out that were crucial to creating final recommendations. The 8th Cycle aimed at moving away from short encounters with young people and towards meaningful engagement of young people throughout the process, therefore the most important part was the qualitative consultation during which NWGs and INGYOs shared actions and barriers to implementing Youth Goal #9.

## Qualitative Consultation

The EUYD8 qualitative consultation ran from October 2020 to February 2021. During this time, National Working Groups in the member states of the European Union (NWGs) and International Non-governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs) conducted consultations with young people on the theme of the cycle. The ESG encouraged National Working Groups to use a variety of methods, while INGYOs were asked to facilitate a round-table event between policy makers and young people. A particular feature of the 8th cycle was the emphasis on quality participation and the use of digital tools.

Each National Working Group was asked to produce a report of its consultation activities. In total there were 28 National Working Groups Reports received.

The INGYOs provided a recording of their joint round-table event for policy makers and young people. This data was thematically analysed by the researchers supporting EUYD8 to produce the findings reports.

The aim of the findings report was to highlight major topics in discussions, areas of commonality in the discussion and key areas of dispute. They also sought to identify suggestions for measures and actions proposed through the consultation, focusing on identifying the common ideas and broad underlying messages.

The report was the basis for the work at the EU Youth Conference in Portugal.


The Qualitative consultation report can be found [here](#).

## Implementation Phase

The EUYD8 implementation phase took place between February and December 2021. The intention of the implementation phase of EUYD8 was to realise the outcomes and ideas generated towards implementing Youth Goal #9 during the first part of the cycle.

125 follow-up actions were identified, all of which contributed towards implementing Youth Goal #9. 31,5% of actions aimed at enabling young people to engage with decision-makers, 30,6% of actions aimed at delivering educational or informational activities to young people and 25% of actions aimed at improving the way participation activities were carried out (capacity building). The remaining 13% of actions were a mixture of these three.





The most widely reported barrier to implementing actions was Covid-19 and the challenges of successfully running youth participation initiatives in digital formats. There were barriers conducting communication and outreach work to recruit young people. It is said that it was complex communicating what EUYD8 was and what Youth Goal #9 was. This affected communication with other political stakeholders as well as young people. Another barrier was gaining political support and the challenges of building alliances with other actors to support EUYD8. Some working groups also identified challenges such as receiving support from senior decision-makers or fitting in with national political agendas.

You can find the report [here](#).

## Quantitative European Survey

In the framework of the consultation process, an online survey was conducted to understand young people's views on the European Youth Goal #9: "Space and participation for all."

The key outcomes of the survey were:

1. to invest into capacity and competence of young people rather than new digital infrastructures;
2. to improve civic competence of young people but also work on the credibility of political institutions and their transparency;
3. to primarily create and invest into existing physical youth (civic) spaces, including the ones provided by youth work organizations;
4. to invest into digital competence of young people, particularly when it comes to decrypting false and incomplete information and
5. to establish effective mechanisms to enable young people with fewer opportunities to fully engage in the political process.

You can read the full report [here](#).

# Programme

	Sunday, 26th September	Monday, 27th September	Tuesday, 28th September	Wednesday, 29th September	Thursday, 30th September
day	1	2	3	4	5
8:30		<b>Morning activity</b>			
9:00		Introduction of participants	Intro of the day	Intro of the day	Intro of the day
9:30		Official opening	Group work	Debate with decision-makers	Evaluation of the process of 8th cycle
10:00					
10:30		Process presentation			
11:00		Coffee Break			Coffee Break
11:30		Research presentation	Exchange of ideas with other groups		Closing ceremony
12:00		Panel discussion on the Future of Europe and EU Recovery Plan		Work on recommendations	
12:30					
13:00		<b>LUNCH BREAK</b>			
13:30					
14:00		Exchange of experiences of the 8th cycle	Group work	Work on recommendations	Evaluation and Follow up
14:30					
15:00					
15:30		Daily reflection	Daily reflection	Daily reflection	
16:00					
18:00	Non-formal welcome evening	Launch of the OpenPolicy Europe 1.0	Concert	Improvisational Theatre	
18:30					
19:00					
19:30					

# PLENARY SESSIONS

## Official Opening

The official opening started with opening speeches by Miha Zupančič, President of the National Youth Council of Slovenia, prof. dr. Simona Kustec, Slovenian Minister for Education, Science and Sport, and Silja Markkula, President of the European Youth Forum. All the speakers noted the conference's importance in making the voice of young people heard as well as the importance of making the final results of the conference part of a policy that will shape the future of Europe. They all acknowledged the influence of the pandemic on youth spaces and participation.

Slovenian Minister for Education, Science and Sport, prof. dr. Simona Kustec expressed that this conference is a good example of a space for youth participation and that similar spaces need to be offered on a local, regional and national level so that decision-makers can hear the needs of the youth and implement changes.

Silja Markkula, President of the European Youth Forum, noted that the EU Youth Dialogue offers a hands-on approach for meaningful engagement in which youth goals become actions.

Miha Zupančič, President of the National Youth Council of Slovenia, expressed the wish that the recommendations made during the conference would help create a friendlier place for youth.

You can watch the official opening [here](#).

# Process and Research Presentation

Lead facilitators presented the process that led us to the EU Youth Conference in Slovenia. The process is presented in The Road to Maribor chapter.

This was the space to present the outcomes of the European research in the frame of the EU Youth Dialogue. Dr. Dan Moxon presented the outcomes of the National Working Groups reports on the implementation phase. Dr. Tomaž Deželan presented the results of the All European Survey that was collecting input by young people across Europe.

Dan Moxon noted that the pandemic was a big barrier, a challenge was also gaining political support through the creation of local alliances, fitting in with other national political agendas and harmonising EUYD with national agendas. NWGs as well experienced classical organizational barriers such as time, skills and resources.

Tomaž Deželan expressed that young people are not satisfied with the current situation, that they feel they do not have much influence on decision-making and that young people's topics are not entering the public or political debates.

Outcomes of the two research projects propose:

- To focus on addressing young people with fewer opportunities.
- Digitalization should be increased, so all young people could participate in political events and actions, even those with fewer opportunities.
- For all young people to be able to participate in such events and actions, more spaces should also be created (both digital and physical spaces).
- It is important to ask politicians to regularly report on the measures taken to remove the barriers to those participations.

## Panel Discussion

The panel focused on the future of youth participation in Europe in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic. The speakers at the panel were:

- **Mihai Dragos**, Vice-chair, Council of Europe, Advisory Council on Youth;
- **Elsie Gisslegaard**, Youth delegate from Sweden;
- **Christiana Xenofontos**, Board member of the European Youth Forum;
- **Uroš Skrinar**, Director of Erasmus+ and ESC National Agency, Movit;
- **Jasna Marič Krajačič**, Policy Officer at the Youth Unit, European Commission.

The discussion was a dialogue between young people and keynote speakers. The main topic were the challenges from the past concerning youth dialogue and inclusion during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recording of the panel discussion can be found [here](#).

## Exchange of Experiences

In this session, delegates talked about and reviewed different actions taking place in the Implementation phase on a local, regional, national and European level in connection with the specific targets of the Youth Goal #9. With this session, delegates were getting on the same page about different realities, good practices, and room for improvement of the implementation of the goal and its targets. The session could be seen as groundwork before diving into developing the recommendations.

The session also gave the delegates the opportunity to meet other delegates and to exchange implementation actions. Delegates shared actions that took place all across Europe and were taken in order to implement/start implementing targets of Youth Goal #9.

Maps of collected actions based on 7 targets can be found [here](#).

## Evaluation of the EUYD8 Cycle

At this session, delegates evaluated the whole 8th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue. The goals of the session were evaluating the cycle and collecting recommendations for the next cycle. The session started with the explanation of the EU Youth Dialogue, short overview of the process, summary of the cycle and previous EU Youth Conferences.

Delegates liked that the process of the 8th cycle focused more on meaningful engagement of young people and on direct implementation actions. They struggled with the funding. If the funding had reached NWGs earlier, they would have been able to implement the cycle better. Delegates proposed to find a way to connect the conferences better. They would like more time for longer, structured and programmatic debates with policy- and decision-makers.

They prefer conferences that take place over the weekend and they would like more time to talk to each other. Attending conferences in person is more meaningful and delegates can engage better. Participants liked debates with participants, extra activities, the use of writing tools, the facilitation and the option to talk to decision-makers, however, it would be great to have more time for discussion.

For future conferences, delegates suggest to be more involved in the process after the end of the conference. They hope that conferences will no longer take place online.

The most stressed points regarding the EU Youth Conferences were how to make them more accessible and how to involve more vulnerable groups of young people.

Group 2

Group 3

Group 4

## 8th Cycle Evaluation - Question 1

What should we keep from the approach that was taken through Cycle 8 of Youth Dialogue?

Discussions with policy makers was very nice

The process was nicely explained. We knew what to do most of the time

The level of engagement and interaction was very positive for online environment

Online page - it's really clear, all resources are in one place.

Harvesting is really detailed so that new participants can have all the informations.

Working in smaller groups, facilitators were really good.

Padlet use was enjoyable and participants, the debate with decision makers was a good experience, it would be even better if the decision makers would be present on the first stage of building recommendations because the pax had many questions

And the morning dynamics with Yoga and evening concerts and activities and different challenges have been very great!!

## 8th Cycle Evaluation - Question 2

What should be improved in the next cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue?

Group 5

Group 6

Group 7

### debates/panels

It will be nice to have a 'speed date' approach for the time of the panels with the experts of the 3rd day so for all of us to have the chance to meet and ask questions to different people

**Feeling of formulating the same thing all over again through the 3 conferences, the outcomes seem very similar. Maybe 2 conferences would be enough.**

**There could be more focus on implementation, because there was many cycles before, we had a feeling that we took a step back. So that we can look back and see that it was implemented. Stronger links that we are not repeating our work.**

**Introduction and explanation was so long in some groups that we didn't have enough time for actual work.**

**More time is needed to write recommendations. It was really too little time and that should really be different next time.**

**Timing of conference!! There's school/university/work etc!**

**timing - middle of the work week isn't suitable for everyone**



## 8th Cycle Evaluation - Question 3

Share with us some new ideas for the next cycle of the Youth Dialogue? Do not be shy in being creative!

### More involved process of interacting with decision-makers

Not just superficial and abstract, but much longer and more pragmatic.

### Decision makers

Maybe it would be nice to have relevant decision-makers involved in the whole process, and to have more accountability.

### Longer breaks

Especially preparing lunch is problem.

Quicker implementation of the action in order to evaluate what worked better. After the first conference there should be concrete planning of actions.

These conferences should not be just a space for brainstorming. We should also really work on the solutions, not just talk about them and share experience.

If we would have another conference online - we would need more time to talk to each other.. Not to have concerts but to have opportunity to talk to each other.

If we would have more time with policy makers it would make the experience more useful. More discussion with policy makers.

Point out the researches

Time to get to know each other!

To share what happened in different sessions for people who couldn't participate in one or other activity

# Presentation of Recommendations

At the end of the conference, all 22 created recommendations were shared with the delegates. Among them, the delegates have selected 4 most important recommendations using Mentimeter, a digital tool.

The 4 recommendations were presented to guest speakers that gave direct feedback on them.

Guest speakers were:


- **Dolores Kores**, Director of the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth;
- **Miha Zupančič**, President of the National Youth Council of Slovenia;
- **Biliana Sirakova**, EU Youth Coordinator;
- **Silja Markkula**, President of the European Youth Forum.

Lyse Nygaard (Denmark) presented a recommendation on target 1: “We request that both the Member States and the European Commission always give concrete feedback to young people and ensure a mutual evaluation process whenever they involve them in their decision-making processes in order to make sure that the participation is real.”

Miha Zupančič commented on the recommendations, saying that it is of vital importance that decision-makers give concrete feedback and that by giving concrete feedback, decision-making processes are more meaningful.

Max Schoen (Germany) presented a recommendation on target 3: “We encourage Member States to establish an EU wide symbolic voting process for EU parliament elections for age groups not yet allowed to vote, in cooperation with local youth centres and National Youth Councils, in order to encourage young people under the currently legal voting age to take an active part in political decision-making processes and thus strengthen a culture of recognition of young people's opinion in politics.” The recommendation was created with the purpose of showing decision-makers that young people are a competent and involved generation.

Silja Markkula said that it is important that young people learn about voting early on and that this is an important part of becoming an active citizen. There are some countries that already have symbolic elections and there are also countries that have already successfully implemented a voting age of 16 years.



Catarina Dourado (Portugal) presented a recommendation on target 3: “We recommend the Member States to provide quality citizenship education in schools for all young people in every member state and adopt a common EU framework, to make young people confident in their ability for meaningful and representative political participation.”

Dolores Kores replied that educational systems can be changed, however, it is a long process. The research Youth 2020 in Slovenia showed that more young people learn in a non-formal way.

Kristijan Orešković presented a recommendation on target 5: “We encourage the European Commission to allocate specific funds to the youth sector to empower and educate young people in developing digital skills with special emphasis on youth with fewer opportunities.”

Biljana Sirakova said that the future will be driven by technology and a lack of digital skills means that some people might stay behind and member states need to invest in digital skills.

For the final remarks, Miha Zupančič stated that they will be advocating for the implementation of the recommendations on the national level. Dolores Kores said that it is important to safeguard civic spaces and that goals have to be implemented. Silja Markkula hopes that the process of communicating recommendations to the European level will be successful. Biljana Sirakova finished by saying that the European Year of Youth 2022 will be raising awareness about young people and improving participation of young people.

# Official Closing

The conference was officially closed with speeches by:

- **Miha Zupančič**, President, National Youth Council of Slovenia;
- **Damir Orehovec**, State Secretary, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport;
- **Mariya Gabriel**, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth.

“Our message to young people is simple: we want you to participate. And we are ready to invest in your right to shape your future – your right to participate on your own terms.” – Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth

“In addition to the recommendations, which are the result of good cooperation between young people and decision-makers, all the research carried out as a result of your active approach is important for the development of cooperation in youth facilities. This proves that evidence-based policies are also being developed in the field of youth participation.” – Damir Orehovec, State Secretary, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of Slovenia


“Youth will always find a way to fight for a better tomorrow.” – Miha Zupančič, President of the National Youth Council of Slovenia

With the Conference being the last within the 8th Cycle, there was a symbolic handover to the 9th Cycle of the EU Youth Conference.

Marius Schlageter, Vice-President of the German Federal Youth Council, said that Member states and the European Commission are now accountable for the implementation of recommendations. We need consistent communication of the EU Youth Dialogue process, which goes beyond presidencies.

Sarah El Haïry, State Secretary for Youth of France said that recommendations will enable the implementation of Youth Goal #9. The 9th Cycle will focus on youth goal #10: “Sustainable Green Europe” and Youth Goal #3: “Inclusive Societies”. The topics were proposed by young people.

Tanguy Guibert from the French Youth Council, and the upcoming presidency, said that the work of the previous cycles shall be taken into account and continued.



Zuzana Wildová from the Czech Youth Council said that the 9th Cycle wants to follow up on the conclusions and recommendations from the 8th Cycle and that they would like to move youth participation into a real intergenerational dialogue.

Hannah Kroksson from the Swedish Youth Council noted that good ideas are coming out of the 8th Cycle and that they are happy to take on these recommendations since they are very useful and helpful for the cycle to come.

Miha Zupančič, President of the National Youth Council of Slovenia, closed the handover, saying: “The purpose of this process is simply to be heard, sometimes youth only needs the right tools, the right process to express its needs.”

With this, the conference was officially closed. After this session, there was a session on evaluation and the follow-up.

# GROUP WORK BASED ON TARGETS

The core part of the EU Youth Conference was group work, where delegates created 22 recommendations on the 7 targets of the 9th EU Youth Goal. Delegates worked in 7 different groups and 14 subgroups. The basis for the recommendations were the Qualitative Consultation, The Qualitative implementation phase report, Quantitative European survey report and the reports/outcomes of the Portuguese and German EU Youth Conferences.

Delegates worked in smaller groups based on the targets they have chosen in the registration process for more than 8 hours in total.

During the work in groups, they:

- familiarised themselves with the aims and objectives;
- familiarised themselves with the process of formulating the recommendations;
- gotten to know each other;
- familiarised themselves with different online tools;
- recapped the main background documents.

Each group was divided into smaller groups where they – based on the discussion on the content collected during the process of the 8th Cycle – selected one topic they all felt would be most important to discuss further and build a recommendation on. When the topics were selected, groups have chosen up to 4 topics that they then created recommendations on. When the elements of the recommendations were written, groups came back to plenary, presented the framework of their recommendation, checked for overlaps and collected feedback from the delegates. They then returned to groups and started framing the recommendations.

Drafts of recommendations were presented to the local, regional, national and European level decision-makers.



Objectives of the debates with decision-makers were:

- creating space for exchange with policymakers on the recommendations and general state of spaces and participation for all in Europe;
- first reality check in the process of development of the recommendations, ensuring they are developed in a way that policy makers will understand exactly what we want;
- Networking and developing contacts with policymakers on a national and European level.

Debates happened in two parts. The first part was focused on policy development, current needs and trends. The second part was focused on the successful implementation of European policy and standards on the local level.

After collecting the inputs by delegates and decision-makers, groups incorporated all the feedback and formulated final recommendations for all 7 targets of Youth Goal #9.

## Youth Goal #9, Space and Participation for All

**Goal: Strengthen young people's democratic participation and autonomy as well as provide dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society.**

*Young people are underrepresented in decision-making processes, which affects them although their engagement is crucial to democracy. They need access to physical spaces in their communities to support their personal, cultural and political development.*

# Target 1

“Ensure young people can adequately influence all areas of society and all parts of the decision-making processes, from agenda setting to implementation, monitoring and evaluation through youth-friendly and accessible mechanisms and structures, ensuring that policies respond to the needs of young people.”

## What do decision-makers have to say?

Delegates in this group debated with João Paulo Rebelo, Secretary of State for Youth and Sport from Portugal, and with Jelena Drenjanin, Member of a Local Assembly Huddinge Municipality from Sweden.

João Paulo Rebelo agreed that the feedback is important and added that in Portugal decision-makers involve young people throughout the process.

Jelena Drenjanin expressed that it is crucial for younger generations to participate in politics and to express their political desires and goals.

### Recommendation A:

We request that both the Member States and the European Commission always give concrete feedback to young people and ensure a mutual evaluation process whenever they involve them in their decision-making process in order to make sure that the participation is real.

### Explanation

We require that evaluation and feedback is always given to youth in order to show how much they have actually been involved. The feedback needs to include specific references to where youth has affected the result and how their involvement has changed the decision-making process. The evaluation of youth inclusion needs to be a part of the general evaluation of the implementation of the decisions that youth was involved in. Furthermore, the involved youth should have the right to give feedback to decision-makers in order to make them accountable for including voices of youth. If this does not happen, we require that decision-makers do not have the right to argue that they have involved youth. This will also approach the problem of youth losing their trust in democracy and politicians.



## Recommendation B:

We recommend the Member States adopt or further develop the legislation for securing the sustainable youth co-management systems in decision- and policy-making processes at national and local levels, among others, to protect and expand the youth civic spaces.

### Explanation

Establishing or reassessing legislation on how youth is taking part in governing structures as equal stakeholders, inspired by the Advisory Council on Youth from the Council of Europe. It's important that this legislation is crafted in collaboration with a representative organisation of youth, such as (but not limited to) youth councils. The vitality of democracy requires (pro)active engagement of young people in policy- and decision-making processes. Their input and perspectives can be valuable and fresh ways to reflect on how things are done and how systems are structured.

## Target 2


**“Ensure equal access to everyday decision-making for all young people from different backgrounds.”**

### What do decision-makers have to say?

Delegates in this group debated with Biljana Sirakova, EU Youth Coordinator, Tine Radinja, Mayor of Škofja Loka from Slovenia, and with Yoomi Renström, Member of Ovanåker Municipal Council from Sweden.

Ms. Sirakova said that there is no need to make new youth councils but rather to make better access to decision-making of existing structures.

Biljana Sirakova: “We also need to think about and experiment with new, inclusive forms of participation.”



Ms. Renstörn said: “Young people are interested in different kinds of things. If you want to catch young people you have to do things they are interested in and they will involve, discuss.”

Mr. Radinja added: “Lowering the voting age is a solution to focus on the local level, at least for European elections. It is a must to bring more equality within generations.”

Mr. Radinja: “Try to go with Youth Dialogue to local levels, to municipalities and national realities.”

### **Recommendation A:**

**We recommend the Member States and the European Commission increase the diversity in participation structures and tackle the lack of inclusion by providing easily accessible information for minority groups.**

### **Explanation**

Social workers should offer training for teachers\* twice a year so they can better support and include minority youth within the information they give out while working with young people and are better equipped to be more respectful and prevent biases forming in the young people they interact with; increasing the accessibility of information about youth work will lead to a more diverse political representation.

Minority groups should be adequately and reliably informed about their opportunities of political and social participation. The long term effect will be to overcome structural barriers for marginalised youth because they will be informed about where and how to address their needs and demands, increasing the diversity in participation opportunities and leading to a larger representation of traditionally marginalized groups in politics.

\*Teachers: refers in this context to youth/social workers in leadership roles and school teachers who will be interacting with minority youth through formal and informal education.

## Recommendation B:

We encourage all Member States to support local stakeholders in providing extracurricular activities for young people with fewer opportunities.

### Explanation

In order to ensure meaningful activities outside of school, leisure time, member states should offer support and earmarked funding for local stakeholders, such as local authorities and youth organisations, to support frameworks for qualitative extracurricular activities for young people with fewer opportunities, with a specific focus on civic education. Encourage actors to seek funding from the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

Young people with fewer opportunities: Young people, who are facing social, economic and geographical obstacles, people with disabilities, educational difficulties, cultural differences and health problems.

## Target 3

“Increase youth participation and thus equal representation in the electoral process as well as in elected bodies and other decision-making organs at all levels of society.”

### What do decision-makers have to say?

Delegates in this group debated with Matjaž Gruden, Director of Democratic Participation of the Council of Europe. Mr. Gruden said that so far, co-management proves to be a positive experience and it is important to share power with youth.

“We won't be able to make things right if we don't add young people to the decision-making.” - Matjaž Gruden, Director of Democratic Participation of the Council of Europe.

### **Recommendation A:**

We encourage Member States to establish an EU wide symbolic voting process for EU parliament elections for age groups not yet allowed to vote, in cooperation with local youth centres and National Youth Councils, in order to encourage young people under the currently legal voting age to take an active part in political decision-making processes and thus strengthen a culture of recognition of young people's opinion in politics.

### **Explanation**

Currently there is no possibility for young people under the legal voting age (usually 18) to play an active part in the political decision-making processes, even though they want to participate. In Austria, the voting age has been 16 since 2007 and it works quite well, in big part thanks to the efforts of improving citizenship education. For each European election, a symbolic voting process for under 18-year-olds should be established, in cooperation with local youth centres. The ballots could be published before the election day, so that they could be taken into account by older voters. By installing a more formal way of raising their voice, this action could help strengthen a culture of recognition of young people's opinion in politics. It would also make it easier to lower the voting age on a European and national level, which remains our main demand.

### **Recommendation B:**

We recommend the European Commission and Member States develop strategies to support young people who would like to run for an office at local, national and EU level, by developing a common youth-friendly platform at European level for young people who are planning to stand for elections and by providing materials to further develop similar structures for national elections.

## Explanation

According to EUYD8 and qualitative research, when it comes to standing for elections, young people are facing several obstacles that make it prohibitive to run, such as cost of running, the terms of office, the lack of confidence, etc. These barriers make young people feel that it is impossible to make it in elections. To overcome these barriers, we encourage the EU Commission in collaboration with the European Youth Organizations to develop a common platform for young people who are thinking about standing for elections at a European level. At the same time, the member states, in collaboration with the National Youth Councils, provide material to further develop the same structures for the national elections. The platform should provide the space for details about electoral procedures, workshops and tools that will be useful to the candidates and their teams, such as public speaking, campaigning, fundraising etc.

### Recommendation C:

We recommend the Member States provide quality citizenship education in schools for all young people in every member state and adopt a common EU framework, to make young people confident in their ability for meaningful and representative political participation.

## Explanation

According to the EUYD8 Youth survey, almost 75% of the respondents find that it is very important for young people to receive better citizenship education in schools to have more influence on public policy and political decision-making. At the same time, only 36% of young people estimate their current level of citizenship education as “very good” (48% rated it “satisfactory” and 16% “rather poor”). Qualitative citizenship education in every EU educational institution must be ensured in order to increase the competence and skills that will engage youth participation. The common EU framework as well as support for its adoption will play an important role to ensure the quality.

## Recommendation D:

We recommend the European Commission and Member States to strengthen the credibility of political institutions and encourage them to base their actions on scientific facts with the goal of benefiting the whole society in order to avoid youth disillusionment towards decision-making and politics.

### Explanation

The decreasing credibility of political institutions, concluding from strongly deferring actions towards scientific facts (e.g. climate crisis), leads to youth disillusionment. For young people it seems that politicians only focus on what benefits their party and voters rather than what would benefit the whole population. “The Global risk Report 2021” published by the World Economic Forum mentions youth disillusionment as high risk for our society. That is why we urge politicians to realize how many young people feel about their policies and decision-making, thus influencing them to change that.

## Target 4


“Provide youth-led physical facilities and infrastructures called youth spaces defined by being autonomous, open and safe, accessible to all, offering professional support for development and ensuring opportunities for youth participation.”

### What do decision-makers have to say?

Delegates in this group debated with Astrid Aulnette from EC DG for Regional and Urban Policy and with Marko Pritržnik, head of the Office for Social Activities, Municipality of Velenje from Slovenia.

Ms. Aulnette agreed with participants when they expressed the lack of young people's awareness of funds and the lack of accessibility of such funds.

“When we have the chance to have a big network, mobilizing youth councils and using young people from other countries to help others, it's very valuable.” – Astrid Aulnette



Mr. Pritržnik said that youth work is as important as other public goods, it has the same power. These arguments, based on the power of youth work, can provide the arguments for explaining why youth spaces and youth infrastructures are important.

“Every mayor of every municipality should realize that youth work is as important as other goods.” – Marko Pritržnik

### **Recommendation A:**

We recommend the European Commission and Member States raise awareness and promote funding opportunities targeted towards creating and sustaining physical spaces for young people.

### **Explanation**

Rather than working on creating new funds, both on a national and European level, efforts should be made to raise more awareness on the funds that already exist. Many youth organizations may feel like they do not qualify or even aren't aware about these opportunities. Therefore, we are encouraging governments and NGOs to use interactive tools and to increase awareness for funding opportunities, especially concerning creating and sustaining physical youth spaces.

### **Recommendation B:**

We invite the Member States to change national-level educational policies and provide EU-wide monitoring systems to create and promote youth-friendly safe spaces and initiatives.



## Explanation

Youth centres and initiatives need more exposure because as of right now, not all young people are familiar with their actions and the opportunities they provide. The place that all young people spend a big portion of their time is either school or university and that is why these are the places youth organizations should use to reach out to them. In order for that to happen, we need to improve school and university policies on a national level in order to advertise and create more safe spaces. For example, to invite youth-workers to interact with students or take them to youth centres so that they are familiar with them. To ensure these changes will have an actual impact we propose to create an EU-wide monitoring system to ensure countries adapt their policies.

### Recommendation C:

We recommend the European Commission and Member States introduce monitoring of the safeguarding of physical civic spaces for young people in order to ensure young people's rights to keep their physical spaces safe from various threats such as commercialisation and increasing rents.

## Explanation

There are various threats to spaces used by young people. Commercialising facilities and natural environments, expulsion of young people from the places they use by increasing the rents or under the pretext of the Covid-19 pandemic. Young people are entitled to keep their physical spaces safe. In order to ensure that they can, we introduce structural monitoring of counties' performance in regards to safeguarding civic spaces for young people.

### Recommendation D:

We recommend the European Commission and Member States make physical youth spaces comprehensive and accessible by providing more youth-friendly and accessible information about them.





## Explanation

Present information about physical youth spaces in an understandable way by using the native language of young people if possible, or English if it is not, also by adding images, graphs and diagrams to illustrate the information.

## Target 5

“Ensure safe virtual youth spaces are accessible to every young person, which provide access to information and services as well as ensure opportunities for youth participation.”


### What do decision-makers have to say?

Delegates in this group debated with Sabine Verheyen, Member of the European Parliament and Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education, and with Sara Tomšič, Vice-Mayor of Novo mesto, Slovenia.

Ms. Verheyen said that hate speech and racism should be kept away from digital spaces and that we need good education so that everybody has the competences to form their own opinion and recognise fake news and ability to listen to others, especially when they disagree. She also added that we need legislation to prevent hate speech and sometimes even block, when it comes to cyberbullying in virtual spaces.

Ms. Tomšič said that young people need platforms to contribute and talk about what they would like their future to look like. She also added that the local level has to implement the recommendations because it is the place where real changes need to be witnessed.

Ms. Tomšič added that developing digital competences and equal access across Europe is very important. This is the way to increase youth participation.



“Young people are very heterogeneous, we cannot view them in any other way than horizontally. So in every policy field we should involve them specifically.” - Sara Tomšič

“Young people are the priority, since they will feel the changes of tomorrow. So it is important to make their voices heard.” – Sabine Verheyen

### **Recommendation A:**

We encourage Member States to ensure a minimum digital standard throughout Europe concerning infrastructure that includes free Wi-Fi/internet and basic digital tools to be used by young people.

### **Explanation**

In order to be able to start talking about upgrading digital competences and skills of young people, we believe that it is crucial to ensure a minimum digital standard throughout Europe. Although we have already seriously stepped into the digital age in which technology is ubiquitous, we still have areas in Europe where there are no basic settings or infrastructure to work on these competencies. We need to ensure a minimum digital standard that includes free and accessible internet, some basic digital tools (office programs, communication platforms such as Zoom, etc.) so that young people can use them and improve their skills or get the basics.

### **Recommendation B:**

We encourage the European Commission to allocate specific funds to the youth sector to empower and educate young people in developing digital skills with special emphasis on youth with fewer opportunities.

## Explanation

There is a clear difference in the level of knowledge and digital competences of young people across Europe, and it is difficult to draw an unambiguous conclusion about the needs of young people and to harmonize them. Therefore, we believe that it is necessary to allocate specific funds to the youth and youth work sector, which will be focused on the development of education for young people's digital skills and competencies. Due to the closed nature and slowness of changes in the formal education system, we believe that non-governmental organizations could design and implement such training much more efficiently. Today these skills and competencies have become crucial to all aspects of living and developing individuals in the community. In the long run, a plan should be made for the education system to include these skills as key in its curricula, and the previous experiences and practices of the NGO sector will serve as a good example.

### Recommendation C:

We recommend the European Commission develops a framework at a European level that measures the youth friendliness of virtual spaces so that the existing spaces and tools can be given clear and up-to-date guidelines on accessible language usage and centralising information, in order to remove barriers to young people's active engagement in social and political processes.

## Explanation

The importance of virtual spaces was highlighted during the pandemic, however, the need for safe, inclusive and accessible digital spaces will certainly remain post-pandemic. Our recommendation, which we envisage would be implemented at a local and national level, gives youth workers, national youth councils and ministries a framework to assess the digital spaces that they already are providing and measure the following: are our existing and virtual youth spaces to-be youth-friendly? Young people need to be involved in the assessment, so the framework will reflect dialogues with young people about their experiences with virtual spaces. We envisage a framework that will measure the elements that make a virtual space youth-friendly, which will focus on centralised information and accessible language. Centralised information is important to support active, participatory young people; because if information is hard to find, long-winded and technocratic, it can act as an unnecessary barrier to understanding participation. Nowadays, a big part of life revolves around the internet and digitalisation, so we must ensure that digital life is easy to access and understandable for all young people. Youth-friendliness must be key.

### **Recommendation D:**

We recommend that Member States empower educators in formal and non-formal sectors to ensure young people have the competences and tools necessary to protect themselves from misinformation and hate speech in virtual spaces by stimulating their ability to form judgement in an objective way.

### **Explanation**

We are faced with the job to protect our youth in the virtual spaces they frequent. Those can often be filled with prejudice, hate and misinformation, as reported on the Implementation Phase Report. Since this issue presents itself as one of the main barriers to an effective implementation, it is our duty to provide youngsters with the necessary knowledge on how to enable themselves to discern when hate speech or the spreading of misinformation is being used on them or their peers.

The first step towards this would be encouraging teachers and other educators to stimulate critical thinking, by undertaking actions such as evaluating the impact of a young person's judgement on other individuals and groups, pose questions to different actors with different opinions, be a listening ear, be understanding to other opinions and to be critical towards the source of their message. Concerning the source of their message: teachers should be more conscious about being critical vis-à-vis and about the fact that the information young people rely on is important.

## Target 6

“Ensure sustainable funding, common recognition and development of quality youth work in order to strengthen youth organisations and their role in inclusion, participation and non-formal education.”

### What do decision-makers have to say?

Delegates in this group debated with Antje Rothemund, Head of the Youth Department, Council of Europe, and with Romy Karier, Member of Clervaux Municipal Council from Luxembourg.

Antje Rothemund said that national youth policies must also have the youth work policy as one of the important pillars. He also added that the Council of Europe is trying to give more room to young people to make decisions in their spaces and that they are trying to encourage others to do the same.

“When there is a demand from inside the community, there is more likely to be a political realization.” – Antje Rothemund

Romy Karier said that we have to make decision-making at every level, so young people feel more invited and are more involved in many processes, that there are many intermediate levels where young people must be involved and that the politicians have to involve more young people on their levels.

“It is important to understand why young people are underrepresented in politics. In my opinion, social and economic barriers young people face are one of the reasons for that. Young people do not have the same opportunities as adults. Some types of discrimination tend to affect them heavily.” – Romy Karier

### Recommendation A:

We recommend that Member States give more visibility to youth work by increasing its accessibility (notably through incentives for mobile youth work in rural and remote areas and with less accessible youth) and its recognition (through formal recognition of the occupation, active partnerships with formal education and local actors).

## Explanation

Define different national profiles for youth workers and acknowledge ancillary specialisations (either acquired through formal or non-formal education/learning or experiences) in order to give a better visibility to the profession/occupation. Give more visibility and acknowledgment to the societal contribution of youth work through annual non-formal meetings (e.g. events, prizes (e.g. youth worker of the year), competitions), publications, etc. in order to create societal awareness and appreciation of youth work. Accommodate both volunteers and unpaid youth workers status in existing legal frameworks and foresee basic social security benefits as an appreciation of the societal contribution of unpaid youth work/volunteering.

### Recommendation B:

We recommend the Member States consolidate the position and role of youth work in societal matters (partnerships in local initiatives, events, competitions and projects) and secure its societal acknowledgment (valorisation of youth work).

## Explanation

Create non-formal participation opportunities for young people (e.g. youth consultation in public procurements projects), involve youth workers in these non-formal participation mechanisms and work out sustainable relationships between youth workers and local governments (i.e. youth reflex). Increase the accessibility of youth work by supporting the rollout of mobile youth work (e.g. in rural and remote areas, and for less accessible youth) by adopting specific incentives to this effect. Give a more prominent role to youth workers in civic, digital and green education and critical thinking in a formal education setting (= primary, secondary and tertiary education levels) in order to give more visibility to the role of youth workers.

### Recommendation C:

We recommend that Member States and European Commission support and commit to creating a general Youth-Recovery Plan in the EU, with specific actions to be taken at a European, national and local level that focus on youth work and youth participation in order to overcome the issues the pandemic has augmented.

## Explanation

Even though the pandemic has forced the youth work to go digital, thus fulfilling the initial purpose of this target, the transfer to the digital context has left many young people behind, creating an enormous gap between those who are part of vulnerable communities and those who are not. The pandemic has augmented issues such as the crisis of the job environment, the effects on mental health, high rates of school abandonment, loneliness, lack of open and safe youth spaces, therefore the focus should now be on solving/ameliorating these problems through a well-established youth-recovery plan, implemented on all levels.

## Target 7

**“Provide youth-friendly, relevant, comprehensive information, also developed by and with young people, in order to enable youth participation”**


### What do decision-makers have to say?

Delegates in this group debated with Bettina Bundszus, Head of the Department for Youth of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth from Germany, and with Tadej Beočanin, Mayor of Ajdovščina from Slovenia.

Bettina Bundszus said that she supports the idea of mandatory lessons of critical thinking alongside classes on social media and internet because it is important that young people know how to protect themselves online.

Tadej Beočanin said that youth information is a basis for all other youth policies, it is important for the efficiency of these measures and that everything that young people need to know should be gathered on one website, in one place, based on a source that they trust; this is a basis from which everything else can be derived. He also said that funding is necessary for cross-sectional cooperation and that exact cooperation is a way to do this.

“If there wasn't a national and local youth council, I wouldn't be a mayor now, I know that for sure.” – Tadej Beočanin



"You need information to get the whole picture of an issue, to form an opinion and to take part in the decision-making process. For that, it is important to have your own spaces. We want to give you these spaces." – Bettina Bundszus

### **Recommendation A:**

We recommend that Member States introduce regular media and information literacy lessons in primary and secondary education into national curricula, prepared and thoroughly monitored in cooperation with relevant youth organisations at national, regional and local levels as well as with media practitioners, while ensuring regular and nation-wide teachers' training, co-funded by the EU budget.

### **Explanation**

As part of the lesson, the pupils and students will study, discuss and critically analyse news of their choosing together with an expert and consider their sources. Involvement of youth organisations focused on education in information processing, and of media practitioners, and a sufficient budget for the teachers' training. Lessons to be complemented by voluntary non-formal education programs on media analysis. Necessity of a long-term cooperation of the educational institutions with external partners involved in the process, in planning the lessons and their annual evaluation. The Member States must adapt formal education to the current, urgent needs and demands of young people for enhanced media literacy. The lessons introduced in formal education will significantly improve media literacy and critical thinking among all students so that they enhance their ability to recognize disinformation and fake news, to use reliable sources and to feel safer in the digital space.

### **Recommendation B:**

We invite Member States and the European Commission to include the provision of quality youth information and counselling in accordance with the European Youth Information Charter in their youth strategies and to resource a national youth information coordination body so that young people can access relevant information at a European, national, regional and local level.



## Explanation

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### Recommendation B:

We invite Member States and the European Commission to include the provision of quality youth information and counselling in accordance with the European Youth Information Charter in their youth strategies and to resource a national youth information coordination body so that young people can access relevant information at a European, national, regional and local level.

## Explanation

There is a need for youth information coordination at different levels to ensure that young people access quality information no matter where they are. Research (ERYICA, 2020) shows that there is a very diverse youth information landscape across Member States – there are countries that have a highly developed youth information provision and others where there is nothing. There is a need for a more coordinated approach. Consistency across member states regarding the provision of youth information and counselling. The term “youth information and counselling” can encompass a wide range of services and activities, such as informing, counselling, supporting, coaching, training, peer-to-peer learning, networking or referral to specialised services. Generalist youth information and counselling work covers all topics that are of interest and relevant to young people. The essential aim of youth information and counselling is to engage and empower young people by guiding them in their autonomous decision-making by providing personalised support. By “resource” we mean to provide sufficient financial, technical and human resources in order to guarantee the quality of services and support to young people.

### **Recommendation C:**

We recommend that the European Commission establishes an EU Youth Communication Strategy that provides guidance to Member States on co-creating communications with young people regarding youth-relevant policies and publications, ensuring these communications are published on the European Youth Portal, where youth discussion and dialogue can take place.

### **Explanation**

The strategy should be developed by the EU Youth Coordinator in collaboration with other youth organizations such as the European Youth Forum and its members, following the Siscode co-creation framework. National Youth Communication Strategies should be co-created with National Youth Councils. Every Member State should have a Youth Portal for youth communications or a section on the European Youth Portal. All communications should be written together with the EU Communications team and a youth advisory panel consisting of young people.

# NEXT STEPS

The EU ministers responsible for youth, at the Council of Youth Ministers that took place on November 29, adopted the Resolution on the outcomes of the 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue. The resolution outlines the process of the 8th Cycle as well as recommendations on how to lead the process and how to improve it. The recommendations created at the Conferences were in full included in the annex of the Resolution. The Resolution can be found on this [link](#).

The 8th Cycle went beyond consultations with young people and was encouraging implementation actions taken by different stakeholders in the EU Youth Dialogue process. Actions presented showed that it is not only up to the decision-makers to implement these recommendations but also up to youth organisations and young people themselves. With this in mind, we encourage you, young people and youth organisations, to take on actions to jointly, with decision-makers, implement youth goal #9: “Space and Participation for All” and all the recommendations that came out of the process of the 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue.

The 8th Cycle showed that with good collaboration between decision-makers and young people even in uncertain times, great results can be achieved.

The Slovenian Presidency Youth Team would like to thank everyone involved in the process.

Written by: Anja Fortuna

Edited by: Sara Marija Širnik

Published by: Urad RS za mladino (Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth) and the National Youth Council of Slovenia

## Acknowledgements

Lead Facilitators: Maja Drobne, Simona Muršec and Milosh Ristovski

Facilitators: Sandra Modic, Mitja Černko, Katja Štefanec, Nina Beja, Maša Brulc, Tanja Veber, Neva Ihanec, Mateja Morič, Maša Viršček, Tilen Lah, Mia Zupančič, Sabina Belc, Katja Olenik, Stefan Serafimoski

Harvesters: Laura Gril, Jurij Strehar, Nika Poderžan, Julija Kordež, Martina Repnik, Dalija Logar, Katarina Kocbek, Veronika Pucelj, Mojca Galun, Kaja Tržan, Gaj Jordan Cizelj, Maruša Lubej, Tina Fornazarič, Petra Novotna

Design: Teodora Svet

Proofreading: Kaja Tržan

PR: Sara Rožman Atelšek

Disclaimer: The outcomes in this report reflect the views of the participants of the EU Youth Conference and do by no means represent those of the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, the Slovenian Government or the National Youth Council of Slovenia and the partner institutions cooperating with them.