Policy Programme European Youth Forum

european
youth forum

Explanatory note

The policy programme is the top-level policy document that defines the basis of the positions of the European Youth Forum. The aim is to drive our policy creation towards the collaborative development of this cohesive document as the main place of all our top-line stances.

The policy programme is a tool for members to democratically and holistically define, develop and update the key views of the European Youth Forum on what the world should look like. It is a concise public document that will help both the volunteers and staff in the Youth Forum, member organisations, new members and external stakeholders (including policy makers) understand what the European Youth Forum stands for. Various other policy products and outputs can be developed to dive into more detail, to communicate about and advocate for the policies defined in this document.

This document will be the guiding document for the Youth Forum board and secretariat on the stances we will take in our advocacy, and from which more detailed policy products will be derived to support the advocacy work in line with these topline positions. The policy programme will be updated on a regular basis at statutory meetings.

While the policy programme defines the political opinions of the European Youth Forum, the Strategic Plan, adopted by the membership, defines how resources of the platform are used and prioritised. The Strategic Plan is further developed in the Annual Plans adopted by the board. Therefore, this document can also describe and include areas of policies that the Youth Forum does not necessarily actively work on at all times, but can react to if needed. In case of contradictions, the Strategic Plan takes precedence.

Other levels of policy-making in the European Youth Forum:
The policy programme will be supported with other policy products that are developed in collaboration with the membership, board and secretariat. The products are listed in descending order by their position in the hierarchy. A policy product cannot contradict higher ranking products.

- Motions are strong expressions of support by the platform. In addition to developing the policy programme, members can submit motions to be adopted by the statutory meetings, as reactions on matters happening at that point in time or in which the support of the European youth movement brings an important added value for members' advocacy. While draft motions cannot be amended, the sponsoring MO can submit an amended version for adoption after the Policy Commission, if they wish to include any suggestions. Similarly to the policy programme, these do not lead to the reallocation of new resources within the European Youth Forum, which is done through the Strategic Plan and the Annual Plans. Motions automatically expire after two years from their adoption, but the board or Members can call a vote to extend their validity.

- Position papers can come in the form of short papers including the main messages for a certain advocacy target or in the form of a larger publication. They are intended to develop the statements in the Policy Programme further, or to serve as public reactions to events happening in the world in line with the policy programme. Position papers are adopted by the board and are, where possible, developed in collaboration with the member organisations.

- Other policy products can support the implementation of the Strategic Plan and the Annual Plans of the Youth Forum, in line with the policy stances set by members in the Policy Programme. These can take the shape of e.g. research pieces, speeches, press releases or working group conclusions. These are not subject to a formal adoption process as the above, but must be in line with the officially adopted positions.

1. Democracy

1.1. Safeguarding young people's civic space

Civil society organisations, including youth organisations, perform a number of functions that are necessary in promoting and safeguarding basic human rights and democracy. An open civil society is one of the most important safeguards against tyranny, oppression, and other anti-democratic tendencies.

Yet, civil society organisations face serious obstacles in their work, some even experience or fear retribution from their governments when expressing their views. Youth civil society is especially vulnerable to these types of pressure.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Strong support of active youth citizenship by strengthening Youth Work in order to build young people's competence for democratic culture, and provide space for them to actively engage in society from a young age.

- A wider and stronger recognition of the transformative influence of youth organisations and their positive impact on society.

- A strong civic space for young people, in which youth organisations can operate autonomously and free from any government interference and retribution.

- The protection of the rights of young people to engage in youth advocacy and to freely express their political preferences by allowing peaceful gatherings, demonstrations, and other public manifestations, and protecting young people from violence and subsequent detention for political reasons.

- Tackling the effect of disinformation, polarisation and hate crime on the realization of civic and political rights, in a manner which itself does not hinder the exercise of those rights.

- Safeguarding the rule of law, and ensuring the protection and promotion of young people's individual civic and political rights.

- Strengthened monitoring (and research on) anti-democratic actions as well as actions which otherwise shrink or limit civic space from governments and institutions.

- Governments to be held accountable for infringements on civic space

- Governments to support young human rights defenders from all around the globe and to ensure their right to political asylum when needed.

1.2. Funding for youth organisations

Funding youth policies and providing financial support to youth organisations creates opportunities for young people to engage in quality volunteering, non-formal and informal learning, education, youth work, intercultural learning, active citizenship and professional experiences, and increases the capacity of youth organisations to provide these meaningful experiences that benefit the whole society.

Youth organisations are essential actors in democracies and are important enablers in young people's enjoyment of basic rights. Yet, youth organisations lack sustainable funding mechanisms to perform their role in democracy.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Governments, as well as other donors, to ensure sufficient and sustainable funding for youth organisations so they have the financial and structural means to operate freely and conduct their activities autonomously.

- Governments and institutions to grant structural funding, to ensure that youth

organisations do not have to rely solely on short term project funding, but can play an active role in society in the long term.

- The removal of barriers and thresholds imposed on youth organisations to acquire funding, including from foreign sources. Moreover, burdensome administrative procedures faced by funding applicants should be simplified.

- Youth organisations to be supported to perform their role as legitimate representative voices of young people.

- Transparency regarding the management of public funding.

1.3. Youth participation

Young people and youth organisations are underrepresented in all phases of policy-making. Young people lack the spaces and structures to contribute in a meaningful way to the development, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of policies and programmes. This leads to decisions that do not reflect the realities of young people.

Young people are at the heart of most social movements in recent years, leading protests, campaigns, as well as activism on social media worldwide. However, there is a gap between young people and the traditional institutions of democracy.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Policy-making to include co-management and co-creation structures where young people and youth organisations cooperate directly with decision-makers.

- Governments to assess the impact on youth of all policies, during legislative processes.

- Governments and institutions to meaningfully involve young people and youth organisations throughout all policy-making processes that affect them, from design to implementation, and evaluation.

- Governments and institutions

to commit to the outcomes of participatory processes, with concrete feedback and follow-up.

- Youth participation and representation mechanisms to ensure a rights-based approach, democracy and representation, inclusiveness, transparency and accountability, and effective and meaningful participation.

- Governments and institutions to involve groups facing discrimination in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies affecting them.

1.4. Representative democracy and institutions

The democratic world has seen participation in institutional politics decline for more than two decades. The biggest evidence of this is found in the declining youth turnouts in elections and political party memberships.

In a situation where young people are not participating in elections, political parties and candidates are less inclined to include them and the issues they care about in their campaigns and consequently political programmes, leading to a vicious circle as young people are then less and less likely to engage.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- The lowering of the voting age to 16 in all elections.

- The age limits for the right to vote and the right to stand for elections must be aligned in all public elections.

- Active measures to raise the number of young people voting and running in elections, in partnership with youth organisations.

- Increased access to voting in elections, including via e-voting.

- Political parties to ensure the promotion

of youth interests in the party.

- Political parties work with their youth organisations to select, train and promote young candidates to elections at all levels of legislature, and to increase the amount of young candidates in elections.

- Public institutions to inform voters, especially young people, of electoral processes explaining why, when and how to participate in elections.

- Election campaigns include debates that focus on young people and the issues they care about, and provide youth with platforms to challenge and debate all topics with electoral candidates.

- Free and easy access to information and transparent governance in institutions and public authorities.

1.5. Access to quality formal and non-formal education

Education is a human right and all young people are entitled to a quality education. As recognised duty-bearers of all human rights, states are responsible for the fulfilment of the right to education.

Alongside mainstream systems of education and training, youth organisations play a significant role in educating young people in ways that are not found in formal education settings.

Non-formal education is an organised educational process, happening in youth organisations, among other places, and does not necessarily lead to certification. Unlike informal learning, where learning happens less consciously, with non-formal education, the individual is usually aware of the fact that they are learning.

Non-formal education promotes various forms of civic engagement and contributes to openness, understanding and intercultural learning.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Governments to ensure free and equal access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

- Policy makers to ensure young people's access to quality leisure, including activities organised by civil society.

- Education providers empower learners to take an active role in their own learning, becoming agents of change within their own educational process.

- Governments, educational providers, youth work providers, and other stakeholders, to ensure everyone has equal access to quality citizenship education, including items on human rights, digital technology, global citizenship, and sustainable development education.

- Governments and institutions to recognise and support partnerships between youth organisations and formal education providers, as both are essential providers of quality education.

- Governments to recognise digital literacy, including media literacy, the development of critical thinking and other digital skills as key aspects of education.

- Governments and institutions to recognise and support youth organisations as providers of quality education.

- Governments and institutions to recognise and validate the competences and skills gained through youth work, volunteering, non–formal education and informal learning within youth organisations.

- The removal of barriers that limit young people's cross-border mobility.

- Governments and institutions to promote youth mobility and facilitate direct contacts between young Europeans.

2. Youth Rights

2.1. Recognition & access to youth rights

Everyone should fully enjoy their human rights, including all young people.

Youth rights refer to the full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms by young people, which may also entail, where needed, the creation of new rights and freedoms related to their age-specific needs.

Too often policies only address superficial needs, without making sure young people can actually access their rights. A rights-based approach to youth means recognising young people as rights-holders, and holding decision-makers and institutions accountable for their duties and responsibilities to protect and ensure the human rights of young people. It also means supporting young people to claim their rights. Youth rights refer to the full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms by young people. As a concept, the rights-based approach strives towards the meaningful and systematic inclusion and empowerment of the most vulnerable.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Youth rights to be recognized, protected, respected, fulfilled, and mainstreamed across existing and future legal frameworks.

- A rights-based approach to youth, striving for young people to be recognised as rights-holders.

- A rights-based approach to all policies as a key tool to tackle the root causes of inequalities and address structural injustices.

- Recognition of youth as a transition phase between childhood and adulthood, from dependence to autonomy.

- The adoption of a legally binding International Convention on the Rights of Young People with an accompanying monitoring mechanism.

- Youth rights to be mainstreamed in human rights reviews.

- The establishment of a UN Special Procedure on the human rights of young people, such as an Independent Expert or Special Rapporteur.

- For governmental and other data collection bodies to provide more disaggregated and inclusive data on youth, which is easily accessible and transparent.

- Young people's right to equality and non-discrimination to be ensured, and for governments and institutions to develop anti-discrimination policies to better tackle all grounds for discrimination, especially addressing age-based and multiple discrimination suffered by youth and specific groups of young people.

- Measures to be taken to increase young people's awareness of their rights, affirmative action for marginalised groups, as well as redress mechanisms in case of discrimination.

- Young people and youth organisations to be recognised as promoters of peaceful and inclusive societies, including through the implementation of UN resolutions on youth, peace and security across all policy fields.

2.2. Social and economic rights

Human rights frameworks, on both a global and a European level, guarantee that social inclusion in its various aspects, is an inalienable and universal right of all people.

Social inclusion is about society ensuring the realisation of young people's economic and social rights. This includes the right to education and professional training, the right to decent work, the right to social protection, protection of and assistance to the family,

the right to decent housing, to mental and physical health, and an adequate standard of living.

Many of these rights are under threat, with young people disproportionately affected by unemployment, precarious work and poverty. This undermines young people's ability to participate fully in society.

Meanwhile, global megatrends (globalisation, climate change, demographic changes, and technological advancements) are affecting the world of work and bringing new challenges to young people's access to quality employment.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Decision-makers to ensure youth autonomy and inclusion, and that all young people, including those belonging to marginalised and vulnerable groups, have access to all their social and economic rights.

- The implementation of young people's right to stable, meaningful employment with decent working conditions, including fair remuneration, quality training and learning content, access to social security, good work-life balance and protection of physical and psychosocial health, regardless of the type of contract.

- Governments to work towards a progressive reduction of the working week within full-time contracts.

- Governments to ensure young workers have access to fair wages and the removal of any sub-minimum rates targeting young people, to guarantee no young worker lives in poverty or at risk of poverty.

- The EU and European countries to uphold free movement of young workers for them to be able to travel and seek employment in the country of their choice, while implementing protective measures to ensure that free movement is not used by employers to bypass national social protection schemes.

- Governments and institutions to promote education about social and economic rights among young people.

- Implementation of young people's right to access affordable and decent housing.

- Implementation of young people's right to welfare, housing, education and social assistance. Social protection must be fair and allow a life of dignity above the poverty line.

- Guaranteed access to high quality, publicly funded, physical and mental healthcare, prioritising prevention.

- The recognition of the important role of sport, youth work, and youth organisations promoting good mental health and strengthening resilience to prevent mental health issues.

- Governments and institutions to ensure young people's right to quality transitions from education to employment, in particular through schemes to create quality jobs for young people and the implementation of quality standards for internships and apprenticeships.

- Public and private employers to provide quality jobs. This includes ensuring that internships and apprenticeships adhere to quality standards (such as on remuneration, right to training, and access to social protection) and do not lead to the replacement of standard jobs, also through better monitoring by public authorities.

- Decision-makers to ensure the effects of automation on young people in the labour market are mitigated through lifelong learning programmes.

2.3. Inclusion & diversity

Young people are far from being a homogeneous group. Accessing rights can present additional struggles when age is paired with other individual characteristics. This, at times, makes it difficult for young people's rights to be recognised.

Discrimination and inequalities are cultural, systemic and intersectional issues, embedded in a system based on exploitation, patriarchy, colonialism and racism.

Young people who do not conform to the norms and expectations of their society face additional barriers and prejudice based on, for instance, age, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, migrant background, religion, language, disabilities, illness, socio-economic background, physical appearance or political opinion.

In its most extreme forms, negative representation, discrimination and prejudice can fuel and lead to violence and hate crimes against marginalized youth.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

• The rights of all marginalised groups to be protected, respected, and fulfilled and for them to be free to express their own identity.

• Governments and institutions to lead by example and implement strong anti-discrimination measures within the workplace, education, healthcare and justice system.

• Governments and institutions to recognise racism as a structural issue and to take all appropriate measures to combat racism in all its forms.

• Governments and institutions to implement policies and legislation to tackle age-based and multiple discrimination and provide straightforward and accessible mechanisms for reporting discrimination and seeking redress.

• Measures that combat discrimination shifting the approach from making marginalised groups more palatable to the wider population, to reassessing notions of normativity, taking into account privilege and power structures in society.

• The official recognition and adequate representation of minority groups.

• The fostering of positive identities for minority groups.

• Promotion of education and adequate information about minority groups and their history.

• Governments and institutions to commit to taking legal measures to prevent and combat violence against discriminated people, and achieve redress for those who are discriminated against.

• Governments at all levels to analyse new policies from an intersectional perspective, taking into account the individual, systemic, institutional and historical dimensions of inequality.

• Governments and institutions to commit to putting forward policies addressing online discriminations, online hate speech and how to tackle them.

• Recognition and support for youth organisations as promoters of equality and non-discrimination.

• Awareness to be raised among young people against all forms of hate and intolerance and the urgency to fight it online and offline, favouring an inclusive language that represents all subjectivities and identities.

• People of all genders to have access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including education, contraception, and abortion.

• Governments to ensure the enjoyment of equal rights for all genders, including, but not limited to, the equal right to marriage for all consenting adults.

• Governments to ensure that all family structures have equal rights in fields including but not limited to inheritance, adoption and parental leave.

• Governments and institutions to ensure the rights of indigenous people.

2.4. Digitalisation

Digitalisation has been rapidly changing

many aspects of everyday life over the last few decades. The idea of digital rights has taken shape as a natural extension of human rights in the digital era.

As the group most connected to the internet, young people are naturally among the most affected by new risks associated with digitalisation.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Decision-makers to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, place of residence, abilities or other characteristics, have equal access to information and communications technologies (ICT) and to a free, open and neutral internet.

- Decision-makers to establish specific educational programs for youth on digitalisation and the use of digital technology, and to increase awareness of individual rights around personal data.

- An international legally binding framework that would ensure and protect young people's access to their digital rights.

- Governments to implement measures to ensure protection against online discrimination and hate speech as well as to prevent biased algorithms, especially for young people.

- Big Tech companies and public institutions to be more transparent and accountable to their users about the development and use of AI systems and the extraction of and use of people's data.

- Further exploration of the role digital technologies can play in providing more opportunities for young people to participate in democracy, including digital voting opportunities, while also considering the limitations of digital participation.

3. Climate and environmental crises

The environmental crises, especially the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis, are emergencies that require immediate and decisive action to be undertaken by all states, institutions and all sectors of the society, including especially the global economy.

Yet, the efforts to combat the climate and environmental crises are so far significantly insufficient and far too slow. Youth are at the forefront of global social movements demanding climate action.

However, young people are not always meaningfully included or heard in decision making, although they are most affected. This contributes to the short-sighted policies and insufficient ambitions.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- Decision-makers to recognize and prioritize the climate and biodiversity crises as emergencies when developing and implementing policies.

- Decision-makers to acknowledge that the climate crisis and biodiversity loss are cross-cutting challenges and justice issues linked to other policy areas including, but not limited to, health, forced migration, poverty, and security.

- Governments and institutions to implement concrete, binding and immediate plans not only to fulfil their obligations in line with the Paris Agreement, but to set more ambitious targets in line with scientific findings on what is needed to stay below 1.5 degrees warming. The EU must reduce its emissions by at least 65% by 2030 to make this possible and support its Member States in shifting towards climate neutrality.

- The EU and European countries to recognise their responsibility to be frontrunners in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by taking consumption rather

than production as a yardstick to measure our countries' impacts on the planet.

- Governments to immediately stop any form of subsidy to the fossil fuel industry.

- Social justice to be placed at the heart of climate and biodiversity policies, whereby governments and institutions make climate-friendly solutions more accessible and affordable for individuals, with special emphasis on youth.

- Measures to be taken to support workers from sectors that will be impacted by the transition, such as upskilling to ensure a just transition.

- The recognition of formal and non-formal education as an important mechanism to combat the climate crisis, hence supporting the accessibility of education relating to climate change and active citizenship.

- Socially balanced taxes to be levied to internalise negative externalities like CO2 emissions to shift to a green economy, while accounting for their impact on low-income households and others disproportionately affected.

- Climate mainstreaming. Environmental and climate impact must be taken into account in all decisions, as an underlying criterion when passing legislation.

- An accelerated just and sustainable transition to a 100% renewable energy supply, which is clean, affordable and does not lead to energy poverty.

- Going beyond eco-efficiency towards eco-sufficiency. This means that producing more products and services with less environmental impact is not enough. Rather we must fulfill human needs sufficiently while reducing the environmental impact in absolute terms.

- Institutions to make it easier for the public to access and understand information about the environment and the climate crises. Governments should promote sustainable mobility, including soft mobility and affordable, safe and user - friendly public transport systems.

- The EU and European countries to take a leading role in biodiversity actions at the European and global level, by properly and consistently integrating biodiversity protection into key economic sectors and by having stronger standalone biodiversity policies.

- Institutions to reform the fiscal rules obstructing necessary investment in climate-change mitigation and carbon-free transition by providing more flexibility and better democratic accountability.

- Institutions to take relevant measures to facilitate private investments in climate-friendly technologies and in the transition towards carbon neutrality.

4. Sustainable development

Sustainable development is an organising principle for the interrelated domains of society, economy and environment, supporting a vision for society in which the needs and rights of all, including future generations, are met within the limits of the planet.

Sustainable development means that everyone, including future generations, are able to fulfil their needs and realise their rights, while ensuring that this does not overshoot the Earth's natural resources and fundamental life-supporting systems.

Wellbeing, social and environmental indicators are currently overlooked in the framework for policy and investment decisions.

Young people and youth organisations are central actors in the work for sustainable development.

Therefore the European Youth Forum calls for:

- The principle of sustainable development, as defined in the Agenda 2030, to be mainstreamed across all policy making, and for all future policies to fit

the criteria of contributing to a society in which the needs and rights of all, including future generations, are met within the means of the planet.

- Governments to increase development cooperation and achieve the Official Development Assistance target of 0.7% of national GNI.

- Governments to have a broader vision on what constitutes progress, beyond GDP and economic indicators only. For example by ensuring a greater focus on wellbeing, social and environmental indicators when assessing the impact of policies.

- The recognition of the limits of market solutions for environmental problems, as our natural resources have intrinsic value that cannot be substituted once they are gone.

- Governmental and other data collection bodies to work closely with civil society organisations for the collection of more relevant, disaggregated and inclusive data on the progress towards sustainable development goals, especially on youth.

- Leaders to initiate or support projects to raise awareness of sustainability issues especially among young people.

- Governmental bodies to focus more on the impact that food consumption has on sustainability by incentivising sustainable, plant- based foods and short supply chains.

- Governments ensure that everyone can access nature in their own area through e.g. nature conservation, reforestation, parks and green environments in cities and towns.

- Governments to promote durability and repairability of products, and increase reuse and recycling.

- Governments and businesses take responsibility for stopping deforestation.

- Governments and institutions to step up green and sustainable

investments, paying special attention to intergenerational solidarity; as this is fairer and far less costly than postponing those necessary investments to the future in return for less public debt today.

- Governments should do so in a way that ensures intergenerational solidarity in the fiscal policy, by ensuring a sustainable public economy, which does not arbitrarily and unfairly shift the cost of necessary investments onto young people, and does not limit the ability of today's and tomorrow's young people to access their rights.