



EU YOUTH DIALOGUE

EUYD11 EU Youth Conference in Nicosia, Cyprus & Online: Conference Report

18-20th March 2026





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Introduction and Summary

Background to the EUYC

The EU Youth Conference in Cyprus was organised under the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union and took place from 18th to 20th March 2026. Whilst the conference was originally planned as an in-person event in Nicosia, the security situation in the Middle East limited air travel to Cyprus, and the event was converted at short notice to a digital format.

The overall theme of the conference was ‘Making the EU Youth Friendly – Ensuring the youth friendliness of policies at national and EU level’. The aims and objectives of the conference were:

- To address the democratic deficit, transparency issues, and visibility concerns within EU institutions, to rebuild young people's trust in the EU and its ability to represent their interests.
- To explore how the EU can improve its communication and the involvement of young people in decision-making, ensuring they are informed and actively involved in shaping EU decisions that impact their future.
- To explore how the EU can develop youth-friendly policies and ensure that policymaking addresses the needs, rights, and concerns of young people and future generations.
- To explore the role that civic education, youth, mobility and youth work can play in bringing young people closer to Europe.

The 11th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue

The conference was the final conference within the 11th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue, which runs from 1st of January 2025 to 30th of June 2026 under the Trio Presidency of Poland – Denmark – Cyprus. The 11th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue aimed at:

- Further strengthening the EU Youth Dialogue as a youth-led process ensuring meaningful and diverse participation of youth organisations and young people in decision-making processes at European and national level through the consultation and implementation phases, as well as through policy co-creation together with decision-makers at local, regional, national and European level;
- Ensure the meaningful participation of young people and youth organisations in policy co-creation, implementation and the follow-up phase; Increase the youth participation in the EU democratic processes to ensure that the European project reflects the needs and expectations of young people.



- Contribute to the multi-level and cross-sectoral implementation of the European Youth Goals, with a particular focus on European Youth Goal 1# Connecting the EU with Youth.

The thematic framework of the 11th cycle was EU Youth Goal #1 - Connecting EU with Youth. The ambition was to foster a sense of youth belonging to the European project and build a bridge between the EU and young people to regain trust and increase participation.

Conference results

The results of the EU Youth Conference in Cyprus, alongside other results from the cycle, are used to inform the drafting of the *'Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the outcomes of the 11th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue'*.

Specifically, each of the eight working groups at the conference produced a recommendation relating to how to make the EU more youth-friendly and ensure the youth-friendliness of policies at national and EU levels. The recommendations were:

- *To protect young people's access to housing. The European Commission should create an Overcrowded City List initiative to reduce housing pressure, and also provide stronger support for student accommodation in Erasmus+.*
- *To create participation standards for the development of youth-friendly policies. These should ensure mandatory and meaningful inclusion of young people across all policy development stages, clearly state institutional mandates, and promote structured, transparent feedback mechanisms.*
- *To establish a single accessible, inclusive, long-term, digital feedback mechanism across all EU institutions to ensure continuous monitoring of youth recommendations made within participatory mechanisms, transparent communication of results, and active youth involvement in evaluation.*
- *To mainstream youth topics across all Directorates and policy areas, the European Commission should better utilise existing tools such as the EU Youth Dialogue and the European Youth Goals.*
- *To adopt supportive and inclusive communication strategies in policy-making at the European and national levels, ensuring that youth-friendly information is available in both digital and non-digital formats, accessible to all.*
- *To support non-formal learning in formal education settings within Erasmus+, by creating earmarked funding and mandating collaboration between educational institutions and civil society organisations.*
- *To follow up on the EU Youth Conference recommendations, the EU institutions should establish a feedback system outlining the action taken by EU institutions in response to these recommendations, ensuring accountability toward the demands of young people.*



- *To allocate a dedicated budget within Erasmus+ for micro projects with a positive impact on local communities run by small-scale youth organisations or informal groups of young people. This should use a flat-rate mechanism with simple application procedures.*

Further supporting text for each recommendation is shown in the Annex.

Profile of Participants

Conference delegates included youth and ministerial delegations from all EU Member states, representatives of National Youth Councils from EU candidate and potential candidate countries, representatives of International Non-Government Youth Organisations (IYNGOs), and representatives of European Institutions, including The European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee and The European Commission.

The youth delegates were diverse and included:

- 31.6 % who were male, 66.7% who were female and 1.8% who identified as 'other gender',
- 8.9% who identified as part of an ethnic minority group,
- 5.5% who identified as part of a religious minority group,
- 23.2 % who identified as lesbian, bisexual, gay or any sexuality other than heterosexual,
- 1.8% who identified as disabled,
- 14.3% who identified as living with a long-term health condition,
- 25.0% who lived in a rural or remote area,
- 1.8% who were not in education, employment, or training (NEET).



Record of Conference Proceedings

Opening Plenaries

Official Opening: Setting the Stage for the EUYC in Nicosia

Dr Athena Michaelidou, Minister of Education, Sports and Youth of the Republic of Cyprus

Dr Athena Michaelidou welcomed delegates and thanked them for their commitment and flexibility in taking part in a digital event. She highlighted that the concept of youth friendliness is important to the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It is important that policies are designed with young people and are transparent and responsible in meeting young people's needs. Through this, policies and democracy become stronger. Dr Athena Michaelidou argued that strengthening the relationship between young people and the European project is more important than ever. In the current geopolitical uncertainty, it is essential to reinforce trust in democracy. She noted that the recommendations emerging from the conference will feed directly into the Council resolution on the 11th Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue. In this way, delegates' ideas will help shape the future direction of youth policy across the European Union. Dr Athena Michaelidou concluded by stating that youth participation is about shaping tomorrow together. Young people's voices and ideas are essential for building an inclusive, resilient and forward-looking Europe.

Ms Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen, Director General, Directorate-General for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport at the European Commission

Ms Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen thanked the Cyprus Presidency for being willing to move the conference online so quickly in light of the conflict in the Middle East. She highlighted that this situation shows the challenging times we are living in and how global politics is increasingly dominated by the language of hard power. In Europe, we are witnessing threats to democracy from both within and beyond the European Union, and we need robust, resilient policies and democracies to address them. We need young people's creativity, lived experience, skills and voice to achieve this type of democracy.

Ms Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen highlighted that the European Commission wants to ensure young people have the chance to actively shape the policies that affect them. She went on to discuss some of the approaches that are being put in place to enable this. The President of the European Commission's Youth Advisory Board have met for the first time, and their recommendations will feed directly into a new panel within the European Commission that is advising the President on child safety online. There is now a mandatory Youth Test for new EU policies, and as a result, youth civil society and young people have already been consulted on 12 key initiatives, including the Multi-Annual Financial Framework, the Preparedness Strategy, and the Democracy Shield. The EU Youth Dialogue is being strengthened by a new independent secretariat hosted by the European Youth Forum and by upcoming guidelines to support the monitoring and follow-up of the dialogue.

Ms Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen closed by emphasising that the post-2027 EU Youth Strategy has the ambition to be a strategy with an even stronger vision that considers the evolving needs and challenges of young people and reflects new areas of focus like intergenerational



fairness. She stressed that the new strategy will go hand in hand with the revision of the European Youth Goals, addressing new topics from peace and security to cost of living and housing.

Ms Nela Riehl, M.E.P. and Chair of the CULT Committee, European Parliament

Ms Nela Riehl welcomed the timeliness of the conference, highlighting that trust in the European project and in politics in general is being tested at this moment. She noted that many young Europeans are disengaged, not because they don't care, but because they do care about Europe's future. If we want to solve this, our policies must be transparent and assessed for youth-friendliness. The conference's call to institutionalise this is timely. Ms Nela Riehl further highlighted that democracy starts with having skills to understand and shape democratic processes. This means we need to invest in civic education and media literacy. She went on to highlight the Cult Committee's work towards this. Ms Nela Riehl closed by stating that young people don't need to be convinced that democracy matters; they need to see that it works. The results of the conference must lead to real change 'for you with you and for our future'.

Panel Discussion on “Ensuring the Youth Friendliness of Policies at National and EU Level”

Ms Jadranka Vukovic Johnsson, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission

Ms Jadranka Vukovic Johnsson emphasised that youth-oriented policies must be dynamic and adaptable, grounded in the core principles of participation, inclusion, and accessibility. Central to this vision is the direct involvement of young people in the legislative process; initiatives like the EU Youth Dialogue (EUYD), the Youth Test, and the Youth Advisory Board of the President of the European Commission were highlighted as essential tools for ensuring policies remain relevant and youth-friendly. Beyond mere drafting, Ms Jadranka Vukovic Johnsson stressed that success hinges on rigorous implementation and follow-up of policies to maintain their connection to real-world conditions and ensure their ongoing intergenerational fairness. Ultimately, the goal of the EU Youth Strategy is to foster a "colourful world" that works for young people, where clear communication and active engagement bridge the gap between high-level policy and the lived experiences of young people.

Ms Jadranka Vukovic Johnsson also noted that the ultimate measure of success for any policy is the level of trust it garners from young people, capitalising on a collaborative effort across the entire policymaking community, including youth organisations and various other stakeholders. She emphasised that both the EU Youth Conference in Cyprus and the EU Youth Dialogue are instrumental in shaping the next EU Youth Strategy. To ensure the new strategy accurately reflects contemporary needs, Ms Jadranka Vukovic Johnsson highlighted upcoming opportunities for direct engagement, including a public consultation opening in April 2026 and the European Youth Week in 2026. Young people were strongly encouraged to take an active role by sharing their views and connecting with advocacy bodies, such as national youth councils, to ensure their voices remain at the heart of the legislative process.



Ms Laure Verstraete, Board Member, European Youth Forum

Ms Laure Verstraete identified critical policy areas — including housing, climate, employment, mental health, and digitalisation — where youth perspectives are currently underserved, not due to a lack of goodwill, but because of a lack of a systematic obligation to consider young people as one of the key demographics. To rectify this, Ms Laure Verstraete called for the EU Youth Test to be institutionalised and integrated into the Better Regulation Toolkit, in line with other mandatory impact assessment tools. A core requirement for this transition is the systematic collection and publication of age-disaggregated data. Ms Laure Verstraete argued that youth experiences are too often obscured by broader population averages. By committing to systematically collect and publish age-disaggregated data across all major policy domains, youth-sensitive analysis can be firmly anchored into all major policy domains.

Ms Laure Verstraete welcomed the revision of the European Youth Goals. She also emphasised that the future EU Youth Strategy needs sufficient flexibility to address the evolving struggles of young people in an ever-changing, volatile world. Ms Laure Verstraete highlighted that youth-led organisations, and their representatives, are essential for identifying these gaps and also called for the explicit recognition of youth work as a vital support mechanism within the EU Youth Strategy itself.

Ms Constantina Achilleos, President of the Administrative Board of the Youth Board of Cyprus

Ms Constantina Achilleos advocated for a paradigm shift from mere consultation to genuine co-creation, positioning youth as one of the primary stakeholders who shape, as well as oversee the implementation and evaluation of, the future EU Youth Strategy. Ms Constantina Achilleos outlined how the Cyprus National Youth Council systematically supports meaningful participation by being legally recognised as a policy stakeholder, providing training to young people on how to engage in public matters, and conducting outreach activities to ensure young people from all walks of life are given the opportunity to participate. Ms Constantina Achilleos emphasised that transparency and accountability are vital for showing young people the direct impact of their input. Ultimately, co-creation was framed not as an additional step but as a fundamental shift in democracy that requires mutual trust and the courage to share power with young people, calling for this collaborative approach to become the institutional standard rather than the exception.

Ms Maria Diplarou, President, Cyprus Youth Council

Ms Maria Diplarou argued that young people must be treated as essential stakeholders whose human rights are fully respected and who are fully included in democratic processes. Ms Maria Diplarou called for the institutionalisation of youth participation through formal structures, such as by including young people in policy working groups and ensuring they are involved at every stage of the policy cycle: from design through implementation to evaluation. To move from one-time consultation to true co-creation, Ms Maria Diplarou emphasised the need for structural feedback, where governments transparently explain how youth input was utilised or why certain proposals were not adopted. Ultimately, this approach is framed as a matter of fairness, requiring both a long-term commitment from authorities and young people to stand up for what is fair.



Ms Nicoletta Merlo, European Economic and Social Committee Youth Group President

Ms Nicoletta Merlo noted that while the current EU Youth Strategy has been ambitious, it must now evolve to meet a rapidly changing world in which youth face new challenges, such as housing and safety. And when young people struggle, Europe struggles. In that context, it is crucial to make the EU Youth Test a mandatory policymaking tool across the EU institutions. Ms Nicoletta Merlo advocated for updated, aspirational European Youth Goals and a definitive shift away from tokenism toward genuine co-creation of policies with young people. She also shared key elements of the updated EU Youth Strategy, such as formally recognising volunteering as an invaluable opportunity for all young people, securing stable youth funding within the updated Erasmus+, or improved outreach mechanisms. Furthermore, Ms Nicoletta Merlo introduced the concept of intergenerational budgeting, ensuring young people have an earmarked budget and a direct say in how these funds are allocated. Through initiatives like the European Economic and Social Committee Youth Group and "Your Europe, Your Say" youth organisations are increasingly recognised as essential stakeholders whose voices are embedded in official policy opinions.

Plenary Interviews: "What Has Happened In This Cycle of EU Youth Dialogue So Far, and How is it Influencing Policy Across Europe?"

Mr Ondřej Bárta, freelance youth researcher and a senior associate at People, Dialogue and Change, summarised the proceedings and developments of the 11th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue. Mr Ondřej Bárta provided a comprehensive overview of the 11th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, which is currently being steered by the Trio of Presidencies: Poland, Denmark, and Cyprus. Centred on European Youth Goal #1, "Connecting the EU with Youth," the cycle has moved through distinct phases over the past year.

The Polish Presidency (first half of 2025) initiated the cycle by launching the consultation process and hosting the EU Youth Conference in Lublin. Their work culminated in two significant policy documents: Council Conclusions on building a safe European community based on common values and a strategic review of the governance guidelines for the EU Youth Dialogue itself.

Building on this, the Danish Presidency (second half of 2025) focused on wrapping up the consultation phase, publishing a Consultation Report, and holding the EU Youth Conference in Copenhagen. A major outcome of the Danish Presidency was a policy paper dedicated to the future of the Erasmus+ programme (2028–2034), ensuring youth voices directly influenced the next generation of the EU mobility schemes.

Dr Dan Moxon, Director at People, Dialogue and Change, followed Mr Bárta. He highlighted that the Cyprus Presidency is bringing the cycle to a close by overseeing the implementation phase and hosting the present conference. The Presidency has published the Implementation Report, and the outputs of the current conference will be integrated into the current draft of the Council Resolution on the 11th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, as well as informing the development of the post 2027 EU Youth Strategy. All related outputs, from conference reports to official Council Conclusions, will be accessible online through the EU Youth Portal, for further study and accountability.



Mr Sebastian Lindt, European Youth Forum, explained how the European Steering Group (ESG) works in order to improve transparency of the whole EU Youth Dialogue environment. The ESG serves as the central steering body for the political process of the EU Youth Dialogue, overseeing its implementation and making decisions that affect the entire dialogue. The ESG comprises representatives of the current Trio Presidency teams, their counterparts from the National Youth Councils, representatives of the European Commission, and the European Youth Forum, who will now act as the EUYD Secretariat. Holding monthly meetings, the ESG oversees a wide variety of tasks, such as preparing necessary documents, providing guidance on thematic priorities, cooperating with National Working Groups (NWGs) through guidelines, and ensuring consistency across the EU Youth Dialogue cycles. Over the last year, the SG has successfully established the EUYD Secretariat, finalised consultation and implementation toolkits, invited non-EU youth councils to contribute, and facilitated discussions with delegates to continuously evaluate and improve the EUYD, among other achievements.

Ms Kari Gardelin, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission, gave input on how recommendations from the EU Youth Dialogue are used. She noted that within the European Commission, there is a well-established, formal follow-up structure. When recommendations are received, they are first checked to determine whether they are relevant to the EU or the National level. EU-level recommendations are then shared widely across the various Commission departments, with youth organisations and other stakeholders in the youth sector, and through the EU Youth Portal. She highlighted that DG-EAC regularly receives requests from other departments to input into other strategies. When this occurs, they review the results of the EUYD consultation and conferences and share relevant outcomes. Ms Kari Gardelin also noted that they are looking to align the consultation topics in the EUYD with the policy work of the commission, noting that the challenge here was to preserve the space of a 'bottom-up' agenda led by the concerns of young people, whilst still ensuring that the process was well linked to, and able to inform current policy priorities.

Q&A session on Youth Goal #1: Connecting EU with Youth with Ms Sabrina Repp, M.E.P. and European Parliament Rapporteur of EU Youth Strategy.

Ms Sabrina Repp, serving as the rapporteur for the upcoming EU Youth Strategy, emphasised the need for a more inclusive, flexible, and comprehensive approach to European youth policy. Drawing on her working-class background, she highlighted the critical importance of giving voice to marginalised youth, particularly those facing financial hardships or living in rural and remote areas. A central pillar of her approach is youth mainstreaming: advocating for the integration of young people's perspectives across broad policy areas, such as climate change and economic transformation, rather than confining their voices to traditional "youth" topics. Ms Sabrina Repp also noted that recent global crises, including geopolitical conflicts and the pandemic, have left many young people struggling with mental health challenges and profound insecurity about their futures, making it crucial for the new EU Youth Strategy to adapt dynamically to a rapidly changing world.

To effectively implement these goals, Ms Sabrina Repp stressed the necessity of bottom-up processes and robust funding for local civil society initiatives. She pointed out that programs



such as Erasmus+ and the European Social Fund must become more accessible to young people in rural areas. Addressing questions from delegates, she expressed concern that, with the average age of M.E.P.s over 50, policymakers often formulate rules about young people rather than develop them with them. To counter this, she urged the younger generation to demand active participation in the policymaking process, while also proposing the creation of a publicly run European social network to help citizens escape algorithmic filter bubbles and engage safely in democratic discourse.

Results from the Conference Working Groups

Conference participants were divided into eight working groups. Each working group focused on a different theme and was led by a facilitator using non-formal education methods. Groups were tasked with identifying key policy problems related to their theme, brainstorming solutions, and then creating a series of policy recommendations. Each group then selected its priority policy recommendation (shown in the annex) based on the results of its discussion.

Working Group 1: Youth Policy Pitch: Make the EU work for us

This working group discussed recommendations on the policy priorities that need to be addressed to ensure the EU works for young people. They identified key problems as, i) lack of youth participation in decision-making, including inadequate representation of youth interests in legislative bodies, ii) international security, where young people feel like the rules-based world order is fading and the EU needs to take stronger action to preserve peace, and iii) housing and economic security, where it was felt that employment no longer guarantees access to basic rights such as housing.

Their discussion then focused on the third issue, housing, which the group identified as the priority. It was said that young people lack essential conditions to thrive, especially access to affordable housing and that achieving financial independence is increasingly difficult, with economic insecurity limiting many young people's ability to plan for their future. The group found significant regional differences in housing experiences, especially in overcrowded cities, where short-term holiday rentals, such as Airbnb, were widely used. They also raised concerns about the quality and cost of student accommodation, noting that this particularly affects Erasmus+ students seeking placements and learning mobility in major cities.

Considering how these issues could be addressed, the group explored a range of options, including increased taxation on vacant properties, helplines, and grants for people seeking housing and investment in new student housing. Their final recommendation, shown in the annex, addressed both the cost of housing in 'overcrowded' areas and considered the role that Erasmus+ could play in supporting student housing.

Working Group 2: What Makes Policy Youth-Friendly?

This group explored the concept of youth-friendly policy and the steps needed to ensure it was developed in a youth-friendly manner. They identified the following indicators can be used to determine if policy is developed in a youth-friendly manner:



Youth Friendly Policy Indicators

1. Consideration of young people is mainstreamed across policy making, rather than confined to youth policy, and there are policy co-operation mechanisms in place to support this.
2. There is recognition within policymaking that youth intersect with other identities (such as gender and ethnicity).
3. There is an acknowledgement in policy-making that young people can be the target group of a policy and also may be directly affected by it, even if they are not the main target group
4. Policymakers recognise that young people can make meaningful contributions to policy development.
5. Policy development is based directly on inputs from young people obtained through mechanisms of meaningful youth participation, which
 - a. are enshrined and protected by legal and strategic documents,
 - b. include a diverse range of young people (gender, socio-economic background, and marginalised groups),
 - c. provide a clear system for reporting back to young people on how and whether their input was used, including the reasoning if it was not.
6. Policy development takes into consideration qualitative and quantitative data on young people.
7. Monitoring and evaluation of policies takes into consideration youth-related indicators.
8. Policy is communicated in a language young people can understand and read through easily, as well as being easily accessible through digital tools

The group's final recommendation, shown in the annex, emphasised the need to establish binding participation standards to develop youth-friendly policies.

Working Group 3: From Dialogue to Decision Making With Young People

This group explored recommendations for giving young people a stronger voice in institutional policymaking. They identified the core problems to address as weak institutional design of participation spaces, accessibility barriers in participation spaces, lack of linkage to the decision-making process and follow-up, and communication and information failures.

Considering the various policy solutions, the group explored the value of long-term structures for youth involvement in policymaking, which help ensure proper evaluation and follow-up. Rather than creating new mechanisms, they highlighted the need to strengthen existing mechanisms for youth participation in policy-making, such as the EU Youth Dialogue. It was said that this would allow for incremental, achievable improvements within existing structures, as their roles and processes can be directly shaped and strengthened. By gradually enhancing this, engaging with decision-makers through clearer mandates, stronger follow-up, and more consistent involvement, participation can become more effective over time without requiring full systemic change.



The group also highlighted the need to improve communication about the results of participatory mechanisms and their influence on policy. According to the group, there is a clear disconnect between youth participation mechanisms and actual decision-making, with little transparency about how input from these mechanisms is used to inform policy. The absence of feedback and follow-up undermines accountability and discourages continued engagement. Simpler, more youth-friendly communication, including short-form content, should be used to demonstrate the participatory mechanism's impact on policy-making.

Their final recommendation, shown in the annex, called for a single long-term, digital feedback mechanism across all EU institutions to ensure continuous monitoring of youth recommendations made within participatory mechanisms and transparent communication of results

Working Group 4: Building Beyond 2027: The Future EU Youth Strategy

This group discussed a range of topics which are relevant to the next EU Youth Strategy.

On the topic of youth mainstreaming, they identified the need to institutionalise youth participation. Suggestions included making the EU Youth Test and intersectional impact assessments mandatory and systematic. It was said that institutions should assign clear responsibility for considering youth perspectives and institutionalise this via youth advisory boards or a designated youth coordinator in policymaking.

On the topic of youth participation in policymaking, it was noted that policy processes should be accessible to young people from diverse backgrounds. Structural barriers, such as financial problems, must be addressed. Marginalised groups should be specifically targeted to gather their perspectives. The need for transparency was highlighted. Participants suggested various accountability and feedback mechanisms to ensure young people know how their input is used in policy processes. A coordinated, youth-led system was suggested to replace the current fragmented EU youth participatory system.

On the topic of inclusion, the importance of cooperating with and supporting various stakeholders, such as schools, youth organisations, and grassroots movements, was noted. Youth organisations, especially those focused on minority groups, need sufficient funding to operate. It was highlighted that young people with fewer opportunities are not a homogeneous group and require different measures to get involved. Money was identified as the most limiting factor for participation, which can be addressed through funding measures such as covering travel and accommodation costs in youth projects and youth mobility opportunities. Providing accessible and inclusive information about opportunities for youth is also necessary, along with simplifying application and reporting processes within the EU youth programmes. It was said that marginalised groups should be explicitly named as priority groups in the next EU Youth Strategy.

Considering intergenerational fairness, the EU Youth Test was frequently mentioned as a way to embed a long-term perspective in all policies and mainstream youth policy. To strengthen intergenerational dialogue and build intergenerational solidarity, suggestions include organising intergenerational solidarity activities, promoting more young people in EU institutions, and creating an EU intergenerational dialogue programme that focuses on specific themes such as housing. It was said that young people in platforms like the EU



Youth Dialogue should discuss topical issues such as the economy and security, not only "youth-specific" matters.

The group's final recommendations, shown in the annex, called for the next EU Youth Strategy to utilise the EU Youth Goals and the EU Youth Dialogue as a method of mainstreaming youth concerns across all directorates with the European Commission and all policy areas. For instance, by building the EU Youth Goals directly into the work plans of relevant Directorates.

Working Group 5: Speaking with Youth: How Can the EU Communicate Better with Young People?

This group considered recommendations on how the EU can communicate better with young people. They identified the key problems as young people's lack of trust in institutions, disinformation campaigns, the lack of a single direct channel between young people and the EU, and language barriers stemming from the technical language used by the EU in its communications. It was highlighted that there is a 'generational gap' between institutions and young people, and that institutional language is difficult, especially for young people with disabilities. There was a concern that communication from EU institutions is often fragmented.

Considering potential policy solutions, the group explored the role of accessibility standards and a coordinated communication system among the EU, Member States, and citizens. They also discussed the role that citizenship education might play in building young people's competencies to understand EU institutions.

It was said that there is potential to better utilise Member States as a bridge to EU institutions, and to strengthen collaboration between the EU and the national level around communication campaigns. The need for all communication to be accessible and to use simple, everyday language was repeatedly stressed. The importance of using both digital and non-digital formats was emphasised, as it was felt that digital-only approaches could exclude some groups of young people.

The group's final recommendation, shown in the annex, stressed the need to adopt supportive and inclusive communication strategies on policy-making at the European and national levels, ensuring that youth-friendly information is available in both digital and non-digital formats accessible to all.

Working Group 6: Civic Education and EU Awareness: Empowering Youth For Active Citizenship

This group explored developing recommendations on how civic education can be better used to connect young people to the EU. They identified key challenges in these areas, including civic education being a low-priority topic within the formal education system and often of low quality. It was said that media literacy was a key dimension to address. The rise of AI and misinformation is leading to political polarisation, and there is a strong need for the EU to invest in developing young people's media and information literacy competence.



Considering potential policy solutions, a discussion was held over the need for better integration of civic education into curricula, and the need to intensify the outreach efforts of National Agencies for Erasmus+. It was considered that collaboration between civil society organisations (which are thought to be effective in civic education) and schools could improve the quality of civic education, and that Erasmus+ could serve as a vehicle to promote this collaboration.

In developing their final recommendation, the group considered the value of mandating civic education as a standalone course in schools across all EU member states, the potential for a central agency to address digital misinformation, and the role of the Erasmus+ programme. Their final priority, as shown in the annex, focused on utilising Erasmus+ as a tool to promote non-formal civic education within the formal education sector. Their recommendation emphasised the need for an earmarked budget within the Erasmus+ programme to encourage collaboration between civil society organisations and schools.

Working Group 7: Strengthening Trust and Transparency in EU Institutions through Youth Involvement

This group considered recommendations on how to strengthen young people's trust in EU decision-making. They identified the key problems as a lack of transparency within decision-making, a lack of public response and accountability to young voices or demands made by young people, and a lack of opportunity to include young people in EU decision-making.

When exploring potential solutions, the group considered a wide range of possibilities. It was said that to improve transparency, the EU should simplify its communication by removing "Jargon," use local news and social media, and enact new open data laws requiring real-time publication of budgets and decisions. Accountability could be strengthened through monthly European Commission sessions that report on how youth ideas are addressed, as well as public statements. Setting performance indicators for EU institutions linked to youth engagement was discussed, and the potential for new working groups within EU Institutions that include national youth council delegates was also explored.

In selecting their final recommendation, the group prioritised solutions that were said to be both high-impact and easy to implement because they would directly increase transparency, accessibility, and engagement for young people without requiring major structural changes. The group's discussion identified the need to create clear, accountable pathways for youth input to influence decision-making, strengthening trust and visibility in the short term.

In this context, the group's recommendation sought to strengthen the EU Youth Dialogue. The group identified that a major reason for young people's lack of trust towards the EU is the absence of clear responses and accountability regarding their concerns. The EU Youth Dialogue, as a strong existing mechanism for gathering and amplifying young voices, lacks accountability from decision-makers and paths to meaningful implementation. Their recommendation, shown in the annex, focused on mechanisms mandating responses to the outcomes of each EU Youth Conference.



Working Group 8: Bringing the EU Closer to Youth Through Youth Work and Youth Mobility Initiatives

This group considered recommendations on how youth work and youth mobility can be better used to connect young people closer to the EU. The Erasmus+ programme's central importance in developing this agenda was a key focus of the group's discussions. The group identified the key issues as i) the unrecognised potential and value of youth work, ii) lack of staffing capacity in National Agencies for Erasmus+ and Youth Organisations, and iii) not all young people having equal access to participate in programmes at the European level. It was said that if these problems were addressed, EU opportunities such as Erasmus+ would feel more relevant and accessible, encouraging greater engagement and participation, as well as stronger awareness and understanding of the EU.

Based on this, the group explored potential policy solutions to make Erasmus+ more accessible and easier to engage with at the local level. It was believed this would help build stronger connections between a wider range of young people and the EU. Considering potential policy options, it was said that upfront funding and simplified application processes reduce the risk for disadvantaged participants who may not be able to pre-finance their participation. Simplified administrative procedures and proportional reporting could remove bureaucratic obstacles that disproportionately affect smaller organisations, informal groups, and first-time applicants. The need for micro-projects with dedicated budgets for newcomers and informal groups was mentioned as a way to provide low-threshold entry points into programmes. This approach would enable young people and grassroots initiatives to engage in EU youth programmes without requiring extensive capacity, thereby widening participation. It was said that micro-projects with local impact helped demonstrate the tangible value of youth work at the community level. Visible, small-scale successes from EU youth programmes can reinforce trust and showcase real outcomes of the EU's work. The group considered options to strengthen career pathways in youth work and to recognise it as a complement to formal education.

Their final recommendation, shown in the annex, focused on using Erasmus+ as a tool to finance micro-projects at the local level, thereby showing the tangible impact of EU programmes to a wide range of young people, in an easily accessible manner.

Updating the EU Youth Goals

A joint plenary session with Director Generales for Youth and conference delegate was hosted to update participants on the process for updating the EU Youth Goals. Member of the recently convened Youth Goals Task Force outlined the current process of revising the EU Youth Goals, details of which can be found on the European Youth Portal¹.

The Youth Goals Taskforce launched a voting process for conference delegates to select between two differing proposals of the structure of the updated EU Youth Goals. It envisages that once a structure is selected the upcoming EU Youth Conference in Dublin will create the new EU Youth Goals.

¹https://youth.europa.eu/sites/default/files/youth_strategy/library/Revising-the-European-Youth-Goals.pdf



Closing Plenaries

Reflections on the Youth Policy Dialogue on Ocean Matters and Youth

Goal #1: Connecting EU with Youth

Youth Policy Dialogue is part of a range of a broad ecosystem of youth consultation tools currently in place to engage young people in EU policymaking and connect the EU with youth. This plenary session reflected on the recent Youth Dialogue on Ocean Matters: Young Voices for the Ocean, held on March 19, 2026. Organised by the European Commission, Young Voices for the Ocean brought together 30 young people (18–30) to discuss EU ocean governance, blue careers, and fisheries, and to help shape the European Ocean Pact. The Youth Dialogue on Ocean Matters is the 50th Youth Policy Dialogue. The main objectives of Youth Policy Dialogues are to encourage young people to express their views on EU policy initiatives by interacting with Commissioners and to integrate youth views in the EU's political agenda.

Mr Costas Kadis, European Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans,

Mr Costas Kadis focused on the critical role of the younger generation in ensuring the sustainable management of Europe's marine environments, noting that today's policy initiatives will directly impact their future. He highlighted that direct feedback from young people during previous Youth Policy Dialogues was utilised to develop the European Ocean Pact, a holistic preservation strategy containing 90 distinct initiatives. Moving forward, Mr Costas Kadis assured participants that youth perspectives remain indispensable and will be directly reflected in upcoming frameworks, such as the 2040 Vision for the fisheries and aquaculture sector and the Blue Generational Renewal Strategy.

To facilitate this ongoing exchange, Mr Costas Kadis outlined several ocean-specific platforms for youth engagement, most notably the Youth4Ocean Forum, which supports around 500 young advocates who run local projects ranging from coastal cleanups to science communication. To help young people transition into careers within the blue economy, the European Commission is working to enhance mentorship schemes and internship matchmaking. Mr Costas Kadis also praised the Network of European Blue Schools, which brings ocean literacy to roughly 1 000 classrooms, and expressed enthusiasm for new, youth-driven ideas raised during the Youth Policy Dialogues.

Mr Glenn Micallef, Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport.

Mr Glenn Micallef emphasised the European Commission's dedication to empowering youth and ensuring their voices directly shape the EU legislation. Celebrating the recent 50th Youth Policy Dialogue, he described the initiative as a vital "safe space" for young people to translate their voices into concrete contributions on policies like the Ocean Pact and the blue economy. To ensure that EU initiatives remain fair and future-proof, Mr Glenn Micallef outlined a broad ecosystem of youth consultation tools currently in place. These include the EU Youth Dialogue (the largest consultation mechanism of its kind globally) as well as the newly introduced EU Youth Test (sometimes referred to as the EU Youth Test) to assess the impact of upcoming legislation and policies on young people, the Youth Advisory Board of the President of the European Commission, and the EU Stakeholder Group.



Furthermore, Mr Glenn Micallef highlighted the tangible, active engagement of young people through various EU funding programmes. He noted that since 2018, 800 Cypriot young people have travelled via DiscoverEU, 1000 Cypriots have volunteered in various European Solidarity Corps projects, and local Cypriot youth organisations have participated in over 3,500 Erasmus+ projects. He concluded his remarks with a strong message of gratitude, thanking young people across Europe for actively showing up and contributing to a stronger, more resilient society.

Dr Athena Michaelidou, Minister of Education, Sports and Youth of the Republic of Cyprus

Dr Athena Michaelidou focused her remarks on overcoming the structural barriers that prevent meaningful youth engagement in policy design. She highlighted the critical issue of government silos, noting that while ministries often operate in distinct sectors, young people experience challenges across housing, education, and employment in interconnected ways, necessitating better inter-ministerial and cross-sector coordination. She stressed the importance of timing, arguing that young people must be engaged early in the policy initiation and formulation phases, rather than merely consulted after decisions are made. To facilitate this, the government is utilising new technologies and online platforms to gather direct policy suggestions from youth.

To move beyond basic consultation toward true co-design, Dr Athena Michaelidou emphasised that policymakers must build trust and transparency with young people. This involves maintaining a structured, continuous dialogue, fostering a "healthy culture" of honesty, and explicitly showing youth how their feedback has been integrated into final policies. Concluding her remarks, Dr Athena Michaelidou committed to using the outcomes of the conference to feed directly into accessible, youth-friendly national policies and ensuring a successful continuation of the Cyprus Presidency.

Ms Maria Diplarou, President, Cyprus Youth Council

Ms Maria Diplarou emphasised the vital role of National Youth Councils in bridging the gap between European-level priorities and national reforms. She stated that youth councils must establish regular, structured dialogues with public authorities to translate EU recommendations into actionable national policy proposals. As a practical example of such impact, she noted that the Cyprus National Youth Council has successfully contributed to national discussions on banning unpaid internships and addressing youth mental health.

In her closing remarks, Ms Maria Diplarou issued a strong warning against tokenism, or youth washing. She urged policymakers to go beyond superficial representation, such as merely taking pictures with young people, and instead focus on hearing their needs and taking concrete actions. Furthermore, she highlighted that youth must be deeply integrated into the structural evaluation processes of policies to ensure that their voices consistently translate into real-world change.



Closing Speeches

Dr Athena Michaelidou, Minister of Education, Sports and Youth of the Republic of Cyprus

Dr Athena Michaelidou closed the conference by warmly thanking the Commissioner, participants, and especially the young people for their active engagement, ideas, and commitment despite the constraints of a virtual format. She underlined that the conference had once again demonstrated the “strength and vitality” of the European Youth Dialogue, showing that young people are not only willing to participate but ready to contribute meaningfully to shaping Europe’s future.

Dr Athena Michaelidou highlighted that the conference outcomes and recommendations will directly inform the Council resolution concluding the 11th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue and will also contribute to the development of the new EU Youth Strategy, thus translating youth voices into concrete European policy.

She expressed particular thanks to the organising team, in particular the Youth Board of Cyprus and the Cyprus Youth Council, for their professionalism and efforts to engage young people and ensure their voices were heard. Concluding, she affirmed that youth participation is not a one-off event but an ongoing process of dialogue, trust, and cooperation. She called for a Europe that is inclusive, resilient, and forward-looking, one in which young people are not only heard but also actively involved in shaping the decisions that affect their lives.

Mr Glenn Micallef, Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport.

Mr Glenn Micallef began by acknowledging the altered atmosphere of an online conference and linked this to the wider instability facing Europe, notably the impact of war on daily life, anxiety, and uncertainty. Against this backdrop, he stressed the need for the next EU Youth Strategy to advance the active participation of young people in democracy.

Mr Glenn Micallef underlined that youth-friendly policies must not be confined to traditional youth policy. Young people’s realities cut across all areas – climate crisis, cost of living, rapid development of artificial intelligence, peace and security – yet policymaking too often remains fragmented and compartmentalised. He argued that youth perspectives must be systematically integrated across all policy fields at both Union and national levels, moving from making policy for young people to shaping policy with young people.

He highlighted two major policy frameworks guiding this work. First, the recently launched strategy on intergenerational fairness seeks to “govern today with tomorrow in mind” by amplifying youth voices, applying a “youth test” to initiatives, and embedding foresight to assess long-term impacts. Second, the next EU Youth Strategy, which must be firmly anchored in the lived realities, expectations, and aspirations of young people, building on the recommendations emerging from the conference and ongoing consultations.

Mr Glenn Micallef emphasised inclusion, particularly reaching young people with fewer opportunities, as a central benchmark for success. He underscored the vital role of youth workers, youth organisations, and national youth councils in empowering young people and channelling their voices to decision-makers. Finally, he called for deeper democratic engagement, noting that extending electoral participation to younger generations can be a powerful signal of trust and accountability, and urged continued joint efforts to place young people at the centre of Europe’s future policymaking.



Mr Rareș Voicu, President of the European Youth Forum,

Mr Rareș Voicu's intervention offered a reflective and forward-looking closing perspective on the conference, emphasising solidarity, resilience, and the need to strengthen structured youth participation in Europe.

Looking at the broader EU Youth Dialogue cycle, he framed this conference as a “stock-taking moment” on the overarching challenge of “connecting the EU with young people”. He stressed that young people must be involved at all stages of policymaking and called for formal, public, time-bound responses from the Council and the Commission to youth conference recommendations, to expose and address any disconnect between youth proposals and institutional action.

Turning to policy instruments, he argued that the next Erasmus+ programme (from 2028) must include a dedicated youth chapter, enhance the visibility of youth participation across the programme, strengthen data collection and reporting on youth involvement, and secure a minimum of 15% earmarked budget for youth. He further called for a more ambitious EU Youth Strategy with a fourth pillar focused on structural support for youth organisations, greater visibility and continuous renewal of the European Youth Goals, and a more coherent, structured approach to the various youth participation mechanisms. He concluded by urging institutions to honour their commitments with urgency and political courage, and encouraged young people to continue organising, holding decision-makers to account, and actively shaping Europe's future.



Annex: Final Recommendations of the EUYC in Cyprus

Working Group 1: Youth Policy Pitch: Make the EU Work for Us

Recommendation: To protect young people's access to housing. The European Commission should create an Overcrowded City List initiative to reduce housing pressure, and also provide stronger support for student accommodation in Erasmus+.

Supporting text: The EU should protect young people's access to housing with two measures. Firstly, building on Regulation (EU) 2024/1028, the EU should create an Overcrowded City List of areas where short-term rentals intensify housing pressure, using indicators such as short-term rental density, inflation, tourist concentration and the share of entire-home rentals. Listed cities should then be empowered to impose proportionate rent caps, zoning rules, and stricter limits on investor-led short-term rentals, backed by mandatory host registration and monthly data-sharing with authorities. Secondly, Erasmus+ should ensure minimum standards for Erasmus+ accommodation, supply, transparent allocation and pre-arranged options, while adjusting Erasmus+ grants to reflect real housing costs, for instance, through a dedicated chapter on housing. During Erasmus+, young people often struggle to find suitable accommodation because the current system lacks a structured mechanism for housing, causing stress.

Working Group 2: What Makes a Policy Youth-Friendly?

Recommendation: To create participation standards for the development of youth-friendly policies. These should ensure mandatory and meaningful inclusion of young people across all policy development stages, clearly state institutional mandates, and promote structured, transparent feedback mechanisms.

Supporting text: At present, instruments for youth participation often fall short of being meaningful, as they largely remain consultative and lack mechanisms to influence decision-making. European young people do not feel heard, and it is unclear how policy proposals progress after they are delivered to decision-making bodies. Youth-friendliness is ensured through meaningful participation based on clear criteria. Therefore, the EU should focus on strengthening and developing legally binding standards for mandatory youth participation, building on existing instruments (e.g., the EU Youth Dialogue and the EU Youth Test). This should also be part of the next EU Youth Strategy. These standards should include a fixed timeline for addressing proposals, along with an explanation of how they were addressed and implemented, or why they were not. This increases transparency and ensures that bodies respond to youth input on policy proposals.

Working Group 3: From Dialogue to Decision-making with young people

Recommendation: To establish a single accessible, inclusive, long-term, digital feedback mechanism across all EU institutions to ensure continuous monitoring of



youth recommendations made within participatory mechanisms, transparent communication of results, and active youth involvement in evaluation.

Supporting text: Strengthening the feedback loop addresses two key challenges: increasing youth involvement, understanding, and trust, and ensuring decision-makers are held accountable. A continuous monitoring system by EU institutions, supported by a digital feedback tool, should monitor how recommendations are used over time while actively engaging with youth on their development. Participants need clear, regularly updated information on what happens during their engagement and with the results of their deliberations. Institutionalising this process places greater responsibility on decision-makers and ensures transparency and accountability in the integration of young people's recommendations into policy outcomes.

Working Group 4: Building Beyond 2027: The Future EU Youth Strategy

Recommendation: To mainstream youth topics across all Directorates and policy areas, the European Commission should better utilise existing tools such as the EU Youth Dialogue and the European Youth Goals.

Supporting text: This is important because it ensures improved follow-up of the EU Youth Strategy. It allows young people's concerns to be considered widely across all policy areas, rather than focusing on youth-specific policy topics. Possible actions to enable this could include:

- Adding specific indicators and objectives to each Youth Goal, including a mention of the relevant Directorate General to work on this.
- Include the targets within youth goals in the annual work programme of each relevant Directorate General.
- Allow young people to provide policy input on the topics of the Youth Goals and to co-create concrete policy measures on relevant topics within the EU.



Working Group 5: Speaking Youth: How can the EU communicate better with young people?

Recommendation: To adopt supportive and inclusive communication strategies on policy making at the European and national levels, ensuring that youth-friendly information is available in both digital and non-digital formats accessible to all.

Supporting text: Policy institutions should use simpler, less technical and more youth-friendly language to include young people. The emphasis should be placed on in-person communication and interpersonal connection, and not only on digital communication. Inclusive communication with people with disabilities and underrepresented groups should be supported. Barriers in the EU consultation processes should be removed, and more open and large-scale consultations on European youth processes should be promoted. Also, there should be fewer communication channels, and an emphasis should be placed on a more centralised way of communication. The institutions should train people who work on communicating youth policies on inclusive communication approaches. The EU should be more visible in public spaces by using integrated communication systems within the Member States and their national institutions.

Working Group 6: Civic Education and EU Awareness: ‘Empowering Youth for Active Citizenship’

Recommendation: To support non-formal learning in formal education settings within Erasmus+, by creating earmarked funding and mandating collaboration between educational institutions and civil society organisations.

Supporting text: Many young people feel a lack of knowledge about the EU, which clearly highlights a gap in the formal education system, particularly in relation to civic education. The European Commission should ensure that the new Erasmus+ Programme (2028-2034) has earmarked funding for non-formal education activities that foster civic engagement, knowledge about the EU, and soft skills within the formal educational sphere. This should be done by requiring applicants (Educational Institutions) to partner with civil society organisations that provide non-formal education. This will create a space for educational institutions to tap into the knowledge and resources civil society organisations have in domains such as knowledge about the EU or civic education, complementing the strengths of both partners. Introducing this condition would ensure more steady funding and support, resulting in sustainable growth within organisations working in the non-formal education sector.

Working Group 7: Strengthening Trust and Transparency in EU Institutions through Youth Involvement

Recommendation: To follow up on the EU Youth Conference recommendations, the EU institutions should establish a feedback system outlining the action taken by EU institutions in response to these recommendations, ensuring accountability toward the demands of young people.



Supporting text: As shown by the consultation reports, a major reason for young people's lack of trust towards the EU is the absence of clear responses and accountability regarding their concerns. The EU Youth Dialogue, as a strong existing mechanism for gathering and amplifying young people's voices, lacks accountability from decision-makers and paths to meaningful implementation of the collected ideas. We recommend a mechanism mandating responses to the outcomes of each EU Youth Conference in the following way:

- A presentation of the EUYC results at the CULT Committee and a public response to these results.
- A published report on the EU responses and plans for implementation of the youth proposals, including future steps.
- Open and accessible communication concerning the EU Youth Conferences and the responses of the EU institutions to youth demands, done both by the EU institutions and youth organisations, to ensure accountability and transparency for all people.

Working Group 8: Bringing the EU Closer to Youth through Youth Work and Mobility Initiatives

Recommendation: To allocate a dedicated budget within Erasmus+ for micro projects with a positive impact on local communities run by small-scale youth organisations or informal groups of young people. This should use a flat-rate mechanism with simple application procedures.

Supporting text: Micro-projects can make EU youth programmes easier to access, especially for small-scale youth organisations and informal groups of young people. When these projects focus on local communities, young people can really see and feel the impact of the EU in their everyday lives, which helps them feel more connected and motivated to get involved. To make this possible, micro-projects should be supported through simple flat-rate grants with clear application processes, to encourage first-time applicants to participate. The flat-rate grant should be combined with additional funding for local events, where young people can share their experiences and inspire others to take part. These projects should be monitored, for example, by collecting numbers of projects implemented, numbers of newcomer organisations, numbers of applications, the diversity of applicants, or feedback on the application process.