

Report on the Youth Policy Dialogue with Commissioner Micallef, European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport

Title: Young Voices for Europe

Date: 16/07/2026

Location: Lyon, France

Introduction

The Youth Policy Dialogue brought together 29 young people coming from 24 EU, candidate and neighbouring countries to discuss the post-EU Youth Strategy with European Commissioner Glenn Micallef. Prior to the physical meeting, an online preparation meeting took place on Monday 6 July. The physical meeting took place on 16 July at the Embarcadere in Lyon (France).

The Dialogue covered three aspects of the EU Youth Strategy, with the aim of shaping the next Strategy post 2027. The objective was to contribute to make the next EU Youth Strategy more inclusive, forward-thinking, and aligned with the needs and values of the next generation.

The participants were selected through an open call published for a week on the European Youth Portal website and promoted via the social media accounts of DG EAC. Out of 1998 applications received, the selection ensured geographical representation, gender balance, and diversity of backgrounds.

Summary of the Youth Policy Dialogue (In person-meeting)

The Youth Policy Dialogue took place on 16 July. It began with a short roundtable, during which participants introduced themselves, followed by opening remarks from Commissioner, who set the scene and outlined the three topics for discussion. The participants were then divided into three groups to explore the following sub-themes:

1. How to make youth participation more inclusive for everyone
2. The main challenges of young people today
3. How can the EU better meet young people's needs

The three breakout sessions were facilitated by the Youth and Intergenerational Unit of DG EAC, with Commissioner Micallef rotating and engaging with all groups. The open and inclusive setting encouraged participants to share their views freely.

Two rapporteurs from each of the breakout sessions presented the key points of their discussions back in plenary, highlighting challenges, opportunities and recommendations. Commissioner Micallef concluded the Dialogue by emphasising that their contributions will be considered in the preparation of the next EU Youth Strategy.

After the Youth Policy Dialogue, a post-DIALOGUE debrief was organised with Ingrid Bellander Todino, Head of the Youth and Intergenerational Unit in DG EAC, to gather a first round of feedback to improve the next Dialogues and to hear ideas that the participants did not share previously.

Main takeaways

1) Inclusive Participation

The aim of this breakout session was to gather ideas and possible concrete actions to make sure that all young people, no matter their background, are included in the policies and can participate and benefit from the EU programmes, such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. Participants raised a wide range of concerns, reflections and proposals. The discussion focused in particular on three main themes: **communication, going local, and harmonisation.**

Communication and outreach

Participants stressed that communication about EU youth opportunities often fails to reach those who are currently disengaged or sceptical. Existing campaigns could sometimes “preach to the converted”, rather than connect with young people who are less informed, less engaged, or less trusting of EU institutions.

Suggestions included reaching young people where they already are, such as sports clubs, community spaces and other local organisations, diversifying communication channels and messages so that they appeal to a broader range of young people. Participants also raised that using more direct, relatable and, where appropriate, more provocative messaging would help better engage EU-sceptic audiences. In general, there is a need to better communicating the benefits of participation, including the skills young people gain through these programmes.

Participants also highlighted the importance of communicating programme benefits not only to young people themselves, but also to families and communities. For example, showcasing the practical skills, confidence and civic awareness gained through participation may help address scepticism among parents or carers.

Going Local

A strong message from the discussion was the need to “go local”. Participants emphasised that inclusion cannot rely only on national-level structures or established youth organisations. Young people should be reached through trusted local networks and familiar community settings.

Examples mentioned included: working through local sports clubs and community associations; drawing on specific local structures, such as GAA clubs in Ireland (local sport organisations promoting traditional Irish sports), and identifying equivalent community-based networks across Member States; building a network of trained local volunteers who could act as contact points, provide information, and answer questions about EU opportunities. Participants also noted the value of local knowledge in identifying barriers and tailoring outreach to different contexts.

Harmonisation across the EU

Participants identified a need for greater harmonisation in certain areas that affect inclusion and mobility. In particular, they pointed to differences between Member States in disability diagnoses, medical prescriptions and related support systems. These differences can create additional barriers for young people who wish to take part in EU programmes in another country. Participants therefore called for better alignment and for social security support to cover relevant disability-related costs regardless of where a young person is in the EU.

Other raised concerns and possible actions

Apart from these three main points, participants also raised other key issues and possible solutions:

- The **importance of involving young people who do not usually engage with EU programmes or policy processes**. One suggestion was to document the experience of a young person engaging with an EU opportunity for the first time, in order to better understand where obstacles arise and what changes would make access easier.
- Participants called for **efforts to reduce bureaucracy and make participation mechanisms more open and accessible**. There was also concern that some organisations repeatedly enable the same young people to participate, while others remain excluded. Participants stressed the need for safeguards to ensure wider and fairer access, and to create opportunities for new participants rather than repeatedly relying on the same profiles.

- Participants highlighted the **need for stronger communication and cooperation between youth organisations, the non-formal education sector, and other sectors such as sport**. They also pointed to the fragmentation that often exists between ministries responsible for culture, education and sport.
- Participants stressed that inclusion should not mean reducing young people to a single aspect of their identity. For example, a Sámi young person should not always be expected to participate only as “the Indigenous participant”. **Young people should be able to engage as whole individuals with multiple experiences and perspectives.**
- Participants emphasised that covering direct participation costs is not always enough to make programmes genuinely accessible. Some young people face **indirect costs** (time off, caring responsibilities). To address this, participants suggested additional, case-by-case financial support based on individual circumstances, possibly through a sliding-scale model.

Overall, the discussion highlighted that more inclusive participation requires action on several levels: better and more targeted communication, stronger local outreach, simpler and fairer access mechanisms, improved cross-sectoral cooperation, and more adequate financial and structural support. Participants agreed that if EU programmes are to reach all young people, inclusion must be embedded not only in programme design, but also in the way opportunities are communicated, delivered and supported in practice.

2) Young People's Challenges

The **cost of living & housing, job security in the digital/AI era, political participation (democracy and youth participation), mental health, equal access to social & sports opportunities for all, the climate/environment and peace and security** were agreed to be the biggest challenges of young people during this breakout session. Out of those, the cost of living, the job security in the digital/AI era and the political participation were pinned down as not addressed enough by the EU. The young people of the circle of breakout session brainstormed solutions to all the issues identified.

The solution with greatest impact on the cost of living and housing was identified as public/private subsidies in student accommodation. Such financial support would help students build a solid foundation during their university years. The participants agreed that making sure students are helped to get through their university life is essential to their focus on their studies.

The solution while discussing the technological challenge and aspects of everything going digital, the technological governance and especially AI had to do with prosecuting misinformation that could be related to any sort of hate speech or abuse and moderation of usage especially when it comes to younger age groups.

The solution that wraps up and ties everything together with the other challenges was identified to be education reforms. Young people can learn about the benefits of the EU starting from secondary school subjects or as early as possible. Young people should learn in school about the policy programs of the political parties in their countries and about the methods populist movements use online and offline to convince young people of their agenda. All that would also help to reduce polarization in society. Young people should be taught critical thinking. Young people should be able to identify hate speech online and learn about algorithms and their impact on their social media pages. They should learn how they can escape the so-called online bubbles, how they can prevent polarization as it's a very tangible threat to democracy in Europe.

Establishing children's councils in different cities or municipalities and elect a children's mayor could empower children to learn the benefits of democracy. Participants agreed that one of the most important tools would be the "Erasmus++" programme (an enhanced Erasmus+ programme to more areas, such as schools and organisations in the countryside). That would help people in the countryside learn about the benefits of the EU and connect with other people across the EU.

Participants also came up with the idea of connecting people through sport, for example, through tournaments that take place between different countries.

3) EU support to young people

Participants stressed that the EU should move beyond consultation and show, in practical ways, how young people's input changes policies and support on the ground. **A first priority was making programmes and participation more accessible.** This starts with clearer communication: less jargon, more tailored formats, and accessible information that explains not only how to take part, but also why a consultation matters and what happens afterwards. Concrete suggestions included a youth specific 'Have Your Say' platform with simple language, short videos, safe digital participation spaces, and visible follow-up so that young people can trace how their contributions are used.

Participants also called for stronger pathways that **connect local engagement to EU-level decision-making.** Concrete suggestions included local and regional "feeder conferences" linked to the main Youth Policy Dialogue and to other consultations with young people, as well as stronger roles for schools, local councils, and peer outreach. Support should be channelled to local and grassroots organisations that already have trusted links with young people, including through dedicated funding for work on democracy protection, democratic capacity-building, political literacy, and leadership. Participants also highlighted the need for innovation funding for democratic changemakers, as well as more initiatives that recognise and spread good practice, similar to the Charlemagne Youth Prize.

Accessibility was also discussed in relation to who benefits from EU opportunities. Participants asked for better traceability through disaggregated data on who accesses programmes and participation tools and what happens after mobility or participation experiences, alongside a stronger focus on inclusion and long-term impact. In education, they proposed EU student scholarships and low- or zero-interest loans to make higher education more accessible, including in the arts and creative sectors.

The second priority was intergenerational fairness, with housing, employment, climate and safety identified as urgent areas for action. On housing, participants called for measures to regulate rental and purchase prices, higher taxation on those buying multiple properties, more social housing, and stronger support for first-time young buyers so that young people can achieve stability and independence. On employment, they emphasised economic independence, access to quality jobs, a ban on unpaid internships, stronger EU rules on equality and fairness in the labour market, and better oversight involving trade unions. They also asked for youth-friendly information on banks, loans and pension funds. On climate, participants wanted policies that deliver immediate, visible benefits such as cleaner air, greener cities with parks and trees, and balanced energy strategies including alternative sources. On safety and security, they called for a stronger response to violence in political contexts, including concerns about young people's safety when taking part in demonstrations.

Annex

Annex 1. Media coverage

- European Commission Press Corner: [Daily News 16 / 07 / 2026](#)
- Glenn Micallef Instagram Account (in collaboration with DG EAC Youth Instagram Account): https://www.instagram.com/p/Da5NZHIDfH/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==
- DG EAC European Youth Instagram Account: https://www.instagram.com/reel/Da50wAplUif/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==
- DG EAC European Youth Facebook Account: [European Youth - Young voices for Europe – that's what we... | Facebook](#)

Annex 2. Photos



