

Report on the Youth Policy Dialogue with Michael McGrath, European Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection

Title of Youth Policy Dialogue: Democratic empowerment

Date: Monday 10 March 2025

Location: Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin, Ireland

Introduction

The Youth Policy Dialogue brought together 30 young people coming from 18 different countries in Europe to discuss democratic empowerment – more specifically young people's participation in democratic processes and structures – with European Commissioner Michael McGrath.

This topic was chosen because of its relevance for young people. While young people list democracy among their core values and consider voting the most effective action for making their voice heard, their participation in elections remains lower than older age categories. There is a risk of young people turning away from established ways of participating in politics and democratic structures. Democratic empowerment will also be an important topic in the context of the upcoming European Democracy Shield.

The participants were selected on the basis of their interest and experience in youth engagement. The group reflected diversity in many forms, with careful attention to gender and geographical balance.

The in-person meeting took place on 10 March in the Irish Architectural Archive in Dublin, a venue chosen for both its accommodating features (which ensured that participants felt comfortable and at ease), and its convenient location (being close to the hotel where participants were staying and the Commission Representation in Ireland). Prior to the in-person meeting, an online preparation meeting took place on 5 March.

The Dialogue was moderated by Jochem Jordaan (founder of De Kiesmannen, an organisation dedicated to increasing civic engagement among young people) and Hajar Yagkoubi (former Dutch Youth Representative to the United Nations).

Summary of the online preparatory meeting(s)

The 90 minute online preparatory meeting took place a couple of days before the event. Its objective was to offer participants an opportunity to get to know each other, to introduce them to the topic, and clarify the logistical arrangements.

After the introductions of moderators and organisers, participants shared where they were from and what sparked their interest in youth participation. The organisers and moderators then introduced the topic to the participants and clarified the main problem statement proposed by the Commissioner for discussion during the Dialogue, inviting participants to already begin preparing their ideas and solutions ahead of the Dialogue. The meeting concluded with an overview of all logistical arrangements. Some additional time was taken after the meeting to speak with those participants who were under 18, and their guardians.

Participants asked questions about how the Commission plans to implement the outcomes of the Youth Policy Dialogue, the role of the influencers participating in the Dialogue, and logistical aspects of the programme, including rules on social media use.

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

Most participants arrived in Dublin the night before the Dialogue, and a communal dinner was organised in the hotel.

Before the official start of the Dialogue, as participants arrived at the venue, they were invited to take part in a 'Democracy Wall' activity, where they could share their replies to questions about what Europe means to them.

The Dialogue itself kicked off with a welcome by the moderators. Following an introduction from Peter Power, Head of the Commission Representation in Ireland, Commissioner McGrath explained his own story of getting involved in politics and democracy.

The Commissioner explained that all types of engagement are important, especially increased participation of young people in democracy. It was underlined that such participation should not be limited to standing for election or joining a political party, but that young people should set the terms of their own engagement. This can take the form of awareness-raising, asking questions, and taking an interest in their own local area or community. The Commissioner shared that his own political engagement starting at grassroots level in his own community, through involvement in sports organisations, community groups with his political interest growing from there.

Following the Commissioner's introductory speech, participants played a short icebreaker game to get to know each other, sharing their names and a superpower they wished for.

Participants were then invited to split into groups of six for a 'policy design sprint', to work on a concrete challenge: "What are some of the concrete measures the European Commission should consider with the aim to increase democratic participation of young people in the next 5 years?". Each group worked on a poster with their main ideas.

The participants then pitched these ideas to the Commissioner, presenting their very creative posters. On this basis, they held an engaged discussion with the Commissioner. Almost all participants got to take the floor. The Commissioner thanked participants for their innovative ideas and assured them that he would take their input into account, including in the development the European Democracy Shield. The participants handed over their posters to the Commissioner, who encouraged them to reach out with further ideas in the future.

After the event, the participants were invited for lunch and a visit to Experience Europe.

Topics of discussion

Participants were asked to focus on the following problem statement: "*Youth participation in the EU should be increased in the coming years. What are some of the concrete measures the European Commission should consider with the aim to increase democratic participation of young people in the next 5 years? What should we do to help you engage and be heard in the public space?*"

This topic was chosen in the context of the forthcoming European Democracy Shield. The Shield will constitute a horizontal strategic framework to better protect and promote democracy in the EU. Several initiatives will be announced under its umbrella. The Shield will focus on different topics, including encouraging active participation in elections, democratic debates and policymaking.

In their policy pitches addressing the problem statement, participants mainly focused on the following themes:

- Education is key to get more young people involved in democratic processes;
- Awareness-raising campaigns are important, but they should be very targeted, reach young people on the channels they use and “speak their language”;
- Democracy-related actions should start at the local level, and rural areas should not be forgotten. An online platform could link all different ways of engaging in society at different levels;
- Young people should get a more formalised seat at the table, for example through quotas, lowering the voting age, more Youth Dialogues, an EU Youth Test, involving youth local councils etc;
- In terms of voting, digital voting should be an option and EU and national level;
- Funding (accompanied by capacity-building to access it) is important to support youth initiatives (e.g. a fund for the young by the young);
- The EU should set concrete goals related to participation of young people to make it more measurable.

The Commissioner committed to bringing these ideas forward for further discussion. He would consider them where relevant in the context of the forthcoming Democracy Shield.

Follow-up debate on the Citizens’ Engagement Platform

The following topics were some of the main recurring themes raised by participants during the Dialogue. They could be further discussed online on the Commission’s Citizens’ Engagement Platform.

- **Young people need a seat at the table:** Young people vote less in elections at different levels, and may be underrepresented in politics. In turn, they may feel like their ideas and concerns are not always taken into account in policymaking. How could the EU ensure that young people have a more formalized seat at the table? Questions and ideas raised by participants included the following: Should digital voting be an option? Should there be quotas for participation or representation in elections? Should the voting age be lowered? Should there be more Youth Dialogues? Can youth local councils play a role? Should an EU Youth Test be introduced?
- **Young people need to feel empowered to participate in democracy:** Young people might not always understand how decisions are taken, or how these decisions can have an impact on their daily life. This can be particularly true in rural areas. There can be a gap between what happens at the local level, and what happens in the EU. Democratic engagement can be ‘contagious’, but then you need to get people involved from a young age. Questions and ideas raised by participants included the following: How can we ensure more democratic education and

ensure that people feel empowered to participate in democracy, especially in more remote areas? Should this happen in schools or outside of schools? Can sports teams, hobbies and youth clubs play a role in this? Is face-to-face engagement more important than digital engagement? Should there be (online) platforms where you can easily find information on the different ways of engaging in society at different levels? How can we ensure that engagement at the local level translates into engagement at EU level?

- **Awareness-raising on democracy should speak young people's language:** Young people might not always feel that awareness-raising campaigns on democratic engagement speak to them. These campaigns can sometimes seem disconnected from their everyday lives. Questions and ideas raised by participants included the following: How can we ensure that campaigns are more targeted? Which channels should the EU use to communicate? Which type of language should the EU use? What type of activities would make young people want to find out more about democracy and EU citizenship?

Follow-up Activities

The Youth Policy Dialogue was promoted through media, influencer engagement and on social media channels.

A. Media engagement

In the media coverage leading up to the event, the Dialogue was featured during 24 broadcasts, reaching a total audience of 4 million.

Examples:

Dublin South FM @ 10-Mar-2025 17:00 - (Michael)

10/Mar/2025 - Dublin South FM

Ireland's EU Commissioner urged young people to speak up and have a say in shaping the future of the EU. Michael McGrath emphasized the importance of young voices in influencing EU policies during a dialogue in Dublin. focus.ruepointmedia.ie

Social media platforms 'must respect EU rules' - McGrath

10/Mar/2025 - rte.ie

EU Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection Michael McGrath said social media platforms must respect EU rules to ensure any risk of disinformation is minimised to limit its impact on democracy and elections. [Social media platforms 'must respect EU rules' - McGrath](#)

B. Influencer marketing

Three influencers were present at the event.

- **Tadgh O' Donovan, Ireland**

Tadgh is an Irish Science Professor, followed by 212,000 young people on Instagram. His content focuses on topics related to science, but also on day-to-day school life. He is from the same area/village as the Commissioner and mentioned having met the Commissioner a couple of years ago. This is the first time he works with the European Commission.

Profile: [Tadgh O'Donovan \(@teachwithtadgh\)](#)

Followers: 212,000 on Instagram

- **Duo Danny Lam and Ina Dowland Herrera, Sweden**

Swedish duo Danny and Ina advocate for marginalized communities, emphasizing equality, anti-racism, and gender rights. Their content empowers their audience with messages of equity and justice.

Profile: [TNKVRT \(tänkvärt\) \(@tnkvrt\)](#)

Followers: 190,000

They have all produced a series of stories from the event, which were shared on both Commissioner's McGrath Instagram account as well as on the channels of the European Commission Representation in Ireland.

In addition, Danny Lam and Ina Dowland produced a reel shared on the European Commission Instagram account in collaboration with the accounts of Commissioner McGrath and EC Representation in Ireland. The reel contains interviews with young people and the ideas they pitched to the Commissioner. You can find it [here](#). The reel collected: 36.1K views, 581 likes, 48 comments, 17 saves, 9 shares.

At his end, Tadgh O'Donovan also created a reel with a focus on rights young people have in the EU. This was shared in collaboration with the accounts of Commissioner McGrath and EC Representation in Ireland. You can find it [here](#).

C. Owned channels

On top of the two reels produced by the influencers present at the event, a series of posts/reels were published on the Commissioner's McGrath account.

A post announcing the Dialogue the week before to be found [here](#).

One reel on the morning of the event to be found [here](#) and also shared on the [account](#) of the EC Representation in Ireland.

One post-event video summarising the Dialogue the day after the event to be found [here](#).

One post with pictures from the event and main conclusions to be found [here](#), also shared by DG JUST on its LinkedIn channel.

In addition, the EC Representation in Ireland also shared a [dedicated post](#) on the Dialogue ahead of the event as well as DG JUST, on both its [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#) channels.



Participants also shared their insights about the event on their social media channels.

Instagram: [Example 1](#) , [Example 2](#), [Example 3](#), [Example 4](#)

TikTok: [Example](#)

LinkedIn: [Example 1](#), [Example 2](#), [Example 3](#), [Example 4](#)

Dedicated articles on the EU Children's Participation Platform by the two participants under 18:

[Youth Policy Dialogue Dublin | EU Child Participation](#)

[Youth Policy Dialogue Ireland | EU Child Participation](#)

Annex

Links to the posts produced by influencers, participants, European Commission channels and example of media mentions can be found in the section above.

In addition to that, a reportage was published on the European Commission AV portal.
<https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/reportage/P-065730>