

Young People Shape the Future of Europe

Our ideas on the future of Europe



Young people's recommendations by:



Young People Shape the Future of Europe



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Introduction

The 25 Percent was created to engage and excite young people about the future of Europe on a local and national level. Over six months in 2021, the project collected over 4,000 ideas and engaged 2,000 young people in active conversations about the Future of Europe.

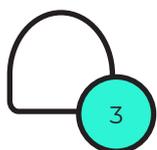
We have teamed up with both international NGOs and National Youth Councils to reach as many young people as possible. Our National Youth Council partners in Spain, Ireland, Austria, Bulgaria and Cyprus have been busy reaching out to young people in their networks and beyond to ensure our project is geographically diverse. In parallel, our partners at the European Disability Forum (EDF), Federation of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO), Phiren Amenca, Rural Youth Europe (RYE) and the Erasmus Students Network (ESN) have been engaging young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, minority communities and those with fewer opportunities, while Eurodesk has helped us to reach young people in all European countries, to also envision the future of Europe they want to see. The key to the success of the 25 Percent is the commitment and effort of these partners to engage those often left out of the discussion.

After months of training, engagement and ideation, this work was collated into the report “Change Starts with Us”. On 24th February 2022, we brought together over 100 young people from across Europe to discuss the findings of the report at our online event – Young People Shape the Future of Europe. This event enabled young activists previously engaged in local and national events to collectively discuss the ideas generated by young Europeans and come up with ways to share and promote them among members of the Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe. In order to turn those 4,000 ideas into solid proposals that the Plenary can take forward, the event participants identified 4 categories:

- Climate change and sustainability
- Jobs, labour market, employment and social rights
- Education and digital transition
- European democracy and values, migration and EU in the world

The group of young activists that the online event brought together were an embodiment of the scope and variety of the ideas collected, able to channel the input from young people at the national level into a collective vision for Europe's future. We will encourage these young activists to continue their engagement with the European project and inspire others to get involved at a local, national, EU and international level.

The recommendations found within this report are based on the work of those individuals. For further insight into the process, we also invite you to read the full scope of the ideas we collected in the Change Starts with Us report.



Policy Recommendations by the Working Group on Climate Change and Sustainability

Green infrastructure and transportation systems

Our vision is to create sustainable, affordable, reliable and accessible transportation networks and infrastructure for urban areas, rural areas and between Member States. When creating and implementing all these policies, time is needed for the evaluation of accountability and transparency.

To achieve this

- Transport needs to be reliable and punctual, accessible within and beyond cities, and affordable. It is recommended to consider creating a travel card that is recognised across Europe.
- Discourage individual means of transportation, and expand and improve other infrastructures and services like bike lanes, car-sharing and more attractive public transport.
- Make better use of green areas, and expand initiatives like community gardens and tree planting in cities.
- Improve energy efficiency by implementing smart grids and renovating buildings
- Improve water management in cities to prevent flooding; for instance, by using more permeable materials in the design of city spaces.
- Priority should be given to finding better solutions for waste management in all Member States to enable more people to reduce, reuse and recycle their waste.



Renewable energy

In confronting the climate crisis, one of the biggest challenges we face is how to transition to 100% renewable energy whilst ensuring energy security and continuous supply, particularly in developing Member States. Our vision is to ensure access to sustainable energy sources for everyone.

To achieve this

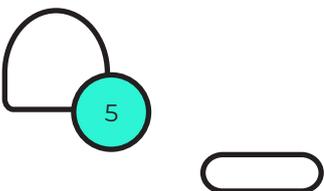
- Fossil fuel subsidies must end, and coal should be phased out quickly.
- Developing Member States should be involved in the energy transition, and community-based renewable energy projects should be prioritised.
- Greater global investment in renewable energy and in the development of new technologies for the production and storage of energy and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions should be prioritised.
- Priority should be given to investment in grid interconnection to overcome the obstacles of intermittent energy supply.
- Nuclear energy and natural gas should not be labelled as renewable energy sources to avoid condoning greenwashing.

Global environmental action

Our vision is that policies prioritise diplomacy and international investments to achieve our goals of 100% renewable energy, better educational prospects and more effective global regulatory mechanisms.

To achieve this

- Europe needs to more strongly support environmental and climate action by the Global South.
- Effective international environmental diplomacy and leadership in addressing the climate crisis should be at the forefront of international agreements.
- Countries' compliance with the obligations they agreed to under international environmental agreements should be better enforced.
- Educate young people on the terminology and policies related to the just transition.
- Educate workers on the importance of a green transition and provide opportunities for reskilling.



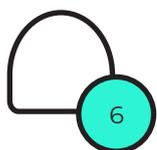
Policy Recommendations by the Working Group on Jobs, Labour Market, Employment and Social Rights

Inclusion, tolerance and respect for diversity

Our vision is to create inclusive spaces and fight against all forms of discrimination. We believe in empowering women and minorities, especially those from ethnic minorities, those with disabilities and people from the LGBTQ+ community. We believe in equal opportunities for all, no matter their background.

To achieve this

- Make the disbursement of EU (project) funds conditional to respect for gender equality, diversity and inclusion; more and better EU funding should be dedicated to these specific issues. Civil society should be given support and training opportunities to learn how to include this perspective in their project proposals and implementation.
- Introduce a European minimum wage, taking into account macroeconomics disparities between Member States, that would particularly benefit women and minorities who are overrepresented in precarious work fields.
- Develop a standardised approach to personal assistance and independent living services for disabled people across Europe; for example, by defining what independent living should be and setting guidelines to equalise policies.
- Enhance digital infrastructure and public transport in rural areas to improve the living situation there, and enhance opportunities for young people living outside cities.



Working conditions and job security

Our vision is about equal pay for equal work. We also believe in giving everyone equal access to job opportunities, and young people in particular. We push for paid internships and an end to zero-hour contracts. Next to this, we want employers to treat their employees fairly.

To achieve this

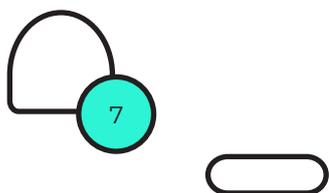
- Create and ratify youth labour laws that regulate internships, access to education and support for youth entrepreneurship, (mental) health care, occupational hygiene regulations, paid leaves, and accountability measures for employers.
- Give priority to funds to combat youth unemployment; for example, by providing opportunities for coaching and grants for self-employed professionals.
- Create independent units responsible for the monitoring and enforcement of occupational hygiene for youth workers.
- Creating educational tools and courses to support young entrepreneurs and young self-employed professionals.

Economic and educational inequality

Our vision is about equal education opportunities for all. We want everyone to have access to education and opportunities to continue learning later in life. We believe in decreasing inequality by creating more coherent tax policies and combating tax avoidance.

To achieve this

- Determine a minimum wage and a minimum income in all Member States, which have to be high enough to respect the dignity of people; furthermore, ban unpaid internships and expand avenues for free education.
- Support lifelong learning by developing EU-wide recognition systems for informal and non-formal education and by assuring that education and career changes are accessible for everyone, regardless of age and background.
- Enshrine the right to learning mobility in the EU treaties as a key step to fully guarantee the right of freedom of movement. Moreover, mobility on local and national level are vital for access to other rights and need to be designed in co-creation with those groups who are most excluded from transportation.



Policy Recommendations by the Working Group on Education and Digital Transition

Education for digital skills

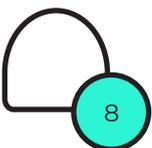
Our vision is a generation with great command of digital skills. For Europeans to be able to safely manage digital tools and continue being competitive in the labour market, all citizens should have a good command of digital skills.

To achieve this

- Introduce a common European framework regulating the teaching of digital skills as a life-long process to close the digital literacy gap between students and teachers and among European countries.
- Online learning and digital exchanges cannot replace physical ones. However, digital exchange should be one of many possibilities, especially for students with special needs or fewer opportunities, and may lead later to physical mobility.
- Expand and update the common understanding of “digital skills” and create guidelines that cover all aspects of the digital. This means not limiting digital skills to computer literacy and related hard skills, but also integrating digital awareness and safety, cybersecurity, and ethical and social aspects.

Digital accessibility

Our lives are shifting more and more online. Therefore, it is essential to have access to digital tools and technologies to take part in social life. Given that currently, 8% of Europeans still do not have access to the internet (Eurostat, 2021), our vision is to create an accessible, safe, inclusive, personalised, affordable and sustainable digital sphere for private and official needs for all Europeans of all ages and social groups.



To achieve this

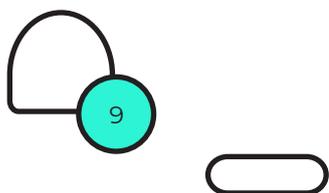
- Educate youth workers, students, teachers etc., so that they know how to use the internet in a safe and sustainable way and can later teach these skills to future generations.
- Include all people in developing the internet further in order to ensure accessibility for people of all ages, with and without disabilities, and take into account diversity from the onset; therefore, projects that aim at strengthening digital accessibility should be encouraged. These projects should be planned and developed by a diverse group of people who can directly voice their specific needs.
- Guarantee universal internet access in the EU, especially in rural areas, which normally have lower internet coverage; there needs to be 100% 4G internet coverage in all Member States in order to tackle the urban–rural divide and allow all European citizens equal access to services, training and education online.

Technology infrastructure and development

Even though we use the internet and technology on a daily basis, the European Union is still largely dependent on tech giants that are not based in the EU. Our vision is to enhance technological development in the EU and to make European technologies accessible.

To achieve this

- Expand the use of European technology, and make it a viable alternative to foreign technology; for this, European institutions should use European software. The EU should encourage technological and digital infrastructure development (including servers) so as to avoid data protection threats posed by external actors using hack-and-leak operations.
- The cost of internet technology and use should be similar or the same from country to country in the EU. In addition to this, internet access should be free at all universities, schools, community centres and public institutions EU-wide. Therefore, programmes like eduroam should be expanded.
- Expand coworking spaces EU-wide, where the internet access is free (or available for a low price); for example, public Wi-Fi spots in Ireland have been implemented very well.
- Authorities should provide better public information on the available technologies and funding. To achieve this, there should be more transparency on technological developments and accessibility opportunities within the EU.



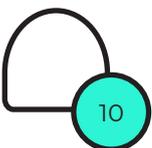
Policy Recommendations by the Working Group on European Democracy and Values, Migration and EU in the World

Strengthening the voice of the youth in EU policies and its institutions

Our vision is to ensure inclusive and meaningful participation and representation in policy processes and EU institutions. The inclusion of young people should be ensured by taking into account the voices of people from diverse and minority backgrounds, which are underrepresented.

To achieve this

- Create pathways for young people to give their feedback to their national governments on EU matters, following the good practice of the Conference on the Future of Europe and implementing it on a national level. Furthermore, a monitoring system needs to be put in place to ensure that the feedback is taken into account.
- Take into wider account the intersectional experience of young people; young people's expertise needs to be relied upon in a wider range of topics and not only youth-related domains.
- Establish youth compatibility testing in the decision-making process in an effort to foster "youth politics" rather than "politics for the youth".
- Provide training on EU competencies to the young people of Europe; this training process can be supported by educated and experienced mentors in all fields to empower the youth to participate in the political process.
- Make it easier and more efficient for young people to submit political proposals; young people shall be advised on how to tailor the right topic to the right stakeholder, with the aim of making said proposals more effective.
- Introduce EU-related school subjects, including non-formal education promotion, to instil the value of active citizenship; this process can be aided through a collaboration with youth civil society organisations that engage directly with young people at the grassroots level.



Ensuring respect for the human rights of refugees and migrants entering the Union

Our vision is to strengthen social interaction and cohesion between migrants and the local community and guarantee accessibility to basic medical and legal rights for migrants and refugees. We also want to see an effective EU solidarity mechanism in receiving and relocating refugees, where the refugees are aware of their rights.

To achieve this

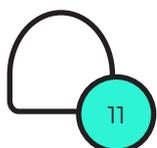
- Provide linguistic support and language training to migrants in order to better their understanding of their rights in the host country and increase mutual understanding.
- Increase support for community and grassroots journalists through a dedicated EU-level journalism fund to amplify local reporting on the migrant situation, raise awareness on human rights violations and combat disinformation.
- Reinforce and review the Dublin Regulation, where NGOs can take part in frontline reception and migrants understand the processes.
- Increase the knowledge and understanding of migrants' situation via Erasmus programmes, and set up more places and occasions for interaction for migrants and the local community through the Cohesion Fund .

EU's role in ensuring domestic democracy and respect for the rule of law

Our vision is for a Union where the rule of law is respected. We ask the EU to enforce the most important EU values through both formal and informal education among the youth. We also acknowledge how the mechanisms currently in place to contrast and fight against breaches in EU values, and the rule of law in particular, are ineffective. To tackle this issue, we urge the EU to effectively implement the existing legal mechanisms or create several legal mechanisms meant to take action against this issue, as well as create new mechanisms when necessary.

To achieve this

- The European Commission should enact national programmes aimed to boost European sentiment through coordinated cultural activities.
- National strategies to educate young people about EU values and democracy should be developed. They should aim at informing participants about hate speech in political discourse and its consequences.
- The EU should take more stringent action regarding the prohibition of hate speech.
- Remove procedural obstacles that prevent the EU from taking measures against Member States in (possible) breaches of the EU values, such as the unanimity voting requirement to enact measures against Member States



Taking the lead in international cooperation through value-driven foreign policy to tackle global challenges

Our vision is a unified European Union with a stronger position at the international level, rooted in the European values (i.e., democracy and human rights) that are truly translated into practice within the Union.

To achieve this

- Reinforce the European Parliament, which should ensure the following:
 - The power of decision-making and oversight of the EU's foreign affairs
 - The ability to democratically oversee an EU army with a peacekeeping and humanitarian mandate
- Develop a unified European voice on foreign policy matters
- Strengthen the following soft power tools:
 - Erasmus program, which should be expanded and better funded. Also, information on the Erasmus programme should reach all youth, exams taken abroad should be better recognised and ties between youth must be fostered.
 - EU Delegations abroad, which should be better equipped to present the EU's voice outside the union
 - Free trade agreements, which should include human rights and environmental awareness clauses
- Include young people in policy making at the national and EU level in relation to foreign policy; this involves empowering existing National Youth Councils, creating new ones, and creating a European Youth Consultative group for foreign policy actions.

