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Delegations will find in annex the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the above-mentioned Proposal.

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OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

European Year of Youth 2022

Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Youth 2022
[COM(2021) 634 final – 2021/0328(COD)]

SOC/706

Rapporteur: **Michael M[C]LOUGHLIN**

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Referral	Council of the European Union, 21/10/2021 European Parliament, 21/10/2021
Legal basis	Article 165(4) and 166(4) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Section responsible	Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship
Adopted at plenary	08/12/2021
Plenary session No	565
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	198/0/1

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The Economic and Social Committee welcomes the declaration of 2022 as the European Year of Youth. The situating of the year in the context of the European Pillar on Social Rights and the post-pandemic recovery narrative is also most welcome.

1.2 The EESC is ready to play a lead role in the European Year of Youth, building on successful EESC initiatives such as "Your Europe, Your Say!" and the Youth Climate and Sustainability Roundtables. The EESC is uniquely positioned to facilitate engagement with youth networks.

1.3 Clear indicators and policy goals need to be developed for the Year. These should focus on the impact on policies and cross-sectoral work beyond the activities organised.

1.4 The EESC expresses concern that the agenda and priorities for the Year appear crowded and it considers that simple priorities might assist all stakeholders.

1.5 If promotional activities are the main content of the Year, this should be clear in all communications, particularly with young people.

1.6 The year of youth needs to contribute towards the EU Youth Strategy with clear plans and engagement, particularly in view of the youth strategy's cross-sectoral dimension.

1.7 The Year must ensure that harder-to-reach groups are included. If need be, group level and geographic indicators should be used to ensure this.

1.8 In terms of budget, the EESC believes there is a need for more ambition. Given the critical situation young people in the EU are facing, there needs to be some resources beyond existing programmes for national youth councils and youth organisations.

1.9 The EESC believes that a total allocation of EUR 10 m, with EUR 2 m for coordination nationally, is required. The European Youth Forum and its members are also very important. These funds might be sub-granted via national youth councils.

1.10 Local European Year alliances at Member State level would be welcome. The EESC can also play a role in this.

1.11 Envisaged work on external relations and with the EEAS is also welcome for the Year and beyond. The relatively well-developed youth policies in Europe can play an important role in our neighbourhood and beyond.

2. Summary of the proposal

2.1 The EU Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, announced in the State of the Union address on 15 September that the Commission would propose that 2022 would be the European Year of Youth. Following reflections on the COVID-19 experience in Europe, the Commission president turned her attention to the year 2022 and the need to rebuild after the pandemic. She

drew inspiration from young people's involvement in climate activism and their emphasis on solidarity and determination to continue to strive to make the future better.

2.2 The segment particularly relating to youth was set in the context of the social market and the European Pillar of Social Rights. The speech further referenced the new ALMA initiative from DG Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, which is focused on young people not in employment, education or training. The speech also connected the proposal with the Conference on the Future of Europe:

> "And it is why we will make sure that young people can help lead the debate in the Conference on the Future of Europe. This is their future and this must be their Conference, too. And as we said when we took office, the Commission will be ready to follow up on what is agreed by the Conference".
>
> Ursula von der Leyen, State of the Union address, 15 Sept 2021

2.3 The Commission published its proposal on 14 October. The proposal makes the objective of the year "to boost the efforts of the Union, the Member States, regional and local authorities to honour, support and engage with youth in a post-pandemic perspective". It further sets out three means to achieve this, incorporating "how the green and digital transitions offer a renewed perspective for the future and opportunities to counter the negative impact of the pandemic on young people and on society at large", to engage all young people "to become active and engaged citizens as well as actors of change" and "promoting opportunities for young people" to "support their personal, social and professional development in a greener, more digital and more inclusive Union".

2.4 The proposal references a number of relevant policy areas and funding programmes that can support the European Year of Youth. These measures include: the reinforced Youth Guarantee; the ERASMUS+ programme; the European Solidarity Corps; the Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve (ALMA) initiative; the European Youth Strategy; the European Youth Goals; the European Education Area; the European Climate Pact; the updated Digital Education Action Plan; the HealthyLifestyle4all initiative; the European Skills Agenda; the European Social Fund Plus; Creative Europe; Horizon Europe; the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme; the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund; the Justice Programme; the European Regional Development Fund; the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund; and the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development.

2.5 It is envisaged that those funds that focus mainly on the area of youth, such as ERASMUS+ and the European Solidarity Corps, will have a key role to play in supporting activities under the Year of Youth. These two funds will also be celebrating their 35th and 5th year anniversaries respectively. The Member States are requested to appoint a national coordinator responsible for organising their participation in the European Year of Youth, and the Commission will arrange for EU level coordination.

2.6 Article 3 of the legislative proposal sets out seven possible types of activity envisaged for the Year, including conferences, events and initiatives promoting youth participation. These

activities enable young people to reach policy-makers, gathering ideas using participatory methods, information, education and awareness-raising campaigns, creating a space for exchanges on turning challenges into opportunities in an entrepreneurial spirit, undertaking studies and research on the situation of youth in the EU, and promoting programmes, funding opportunities, projects, actions and networks of relevance to youth, including through social media and online communities.

2.7 In October, DG EAC launched a survey on the European Year of Youth for young people. National coordinators have also been appointed.

3. General comments

3.1 The proposal correctly points out the huge impact that COVID-19 has had on young people, and this should be carefully noted. This is not to set one group against another, merely to ensure that people understand that the impacts on young people can be long-lasting and that decision-makers have a responsibility to address them.

3.2 The proposal contains a very large number of commitments, references to other initiatives, budgets, and policy areas. In most respects, this is welcome. This also reflects the cross-sectoral nature of the policy area and the EU Youth Strategy. However, it is also important to have clarity and focus in the proposal. Sometimes less is more and there may be a fear that a long list of policy areas and shared responsibilities can obscure a clear focus on outcomes, responsibility, and results.

3.3 It is clear from the proposal that the Year of Youth is primarily about promotional activities and events. It is important to be clear on this. While it may be envisaged that these will influence policy or highlight the opportunities for policy input, the proposal does not contain, in and of itself, any policy commitments.

3.4 The proposal is clear that any major funding for initiatives will effectively come from existing sources and the ERASMUS+ programme seems to be the main area of focus. Once more, if this is the case, it is important to be clear about it. Similarly, if national agencies for ERASMUS+ are to prioritise activities relating to the Year of Youth, they will need clarity, support, and direction. The new youth participation initiatives in the ERASMUS+ programme may be well suited to such activities, but, again, proper preparation and information will be needed for applicants in the Member States. Again, it must be clear in all promotional material and other activities that the Year of Youth largely involves existing resources. Such honesty is critical when working with young people.

3.5 It would also be important to ensure that other funding lines from other DGs are fully available for relevant activities and that this is similarly publicised and highlighted by these budget holders. This is particularly apposite given the cross-sectoral nature of youth as an issue and the prominence given to this in the EU Youth Strategy. It would of course also provide more resources for activities, connect other policy areas, and reach out to new groups of young people and possibly those harder-to-reach groups.

3.6 The coordination activity will be critically important for the success of the Year. There is a need for greater involvement of civic society here and a greater role for youth organisations nationally, locally and at European level. National youth councils and other major youth organisations should be equal partners in the National Coordinators Group involved in both co-creating and implementing the Year and should be supported in fulfilling this function. The role of the European Youth Forum should also be recognised as a key partner in the Stakeholder Group.

3.7 The European Youth Strategy is the leading policy commitment by the EU in the field of youth. It too has a significant and welcome commitment to the cross-sectoral dimension of youth as a policy issue. This is critical to making progress on a whole range of policies for young people, such as employment, the environment, education and training. It is vital then that the Year of Youth closely relates to the EU Youth Strategy, particularly the cross-sectoral dimension of youth policy. The proposal does make this clear, but it will also be important that all sectors contribute and play their part when it comes to monitoring and oversight.

3.8 Work must continue in all areas of youth policy and related cross-sectoral fields to ensure there is maximum engagement with the hardest to reach. This should be part the monitoring of the Year and there may be methods to prioritise certain groups or even disadvantaged areas to ensure there are sufficient activities drawn from these. Reference to the ALMA initiative is also welcome here, as is an emphasis on NEETs, although more information is still needed on this.

3.9 The focus on activities and events must be connected to outcomes. For this to be the case, indicators will be required which go beyond the activities. If the outcome is for young people's voices to be heard, this must be reflected in the indicators. As the concepts of "honour, support and engage" are common in the proposal, they may well provide a good framework for indicators. The most important thing is that these go beyond just the output of activities and events and focus on the outcomes of these.

3.10 Much of the prospects of the Year of Youth will depend on action at national level, but time has been extremely tight for national authorities. Similarly, funding will be an issue so late in the day, national authorities inevitably have busy agendas, and there are also considerable differentials in youth policies, as noted by DG EAC's own work. All these factors will present challenges to the implementation of the Year.

3.11 Overall, the EUR 8m budget set out in the proposal is very minimal. even if only for actions at the EU level. There must be some resources provided for national activities and/or coordination for the Year to have some impact and to incentivise maximum buy-in and participation. The EESC believes that a total allocation of EUR 10 m, with EUR 2 m for coordination nationally, is required.

4. Specific comments

4.1 The proposal to designate 2022 the Year of Youth has been developed at breakneck speed. We do not believe this is the optimal way to develop such proposals, as welcome as they may be. The development of the European Solidarity Corps in 2016 was subject to a similar State of the

Union announcement. This presents the danger of important youth-related initiatives becoming more about high-profile political announcements rather than long-term systematic development. Such a move could increase cynicism among young people. Similarly, the legislative process has suffered from this rushed approach.

4.2 While an official document, some of the language in the proposal is rather convoluted and far from the type of plain English we would wish to see when dealing with young people or indeed the public more generally.

4.3 The Commission must ensure the participation of young people and youth organisations at the Member State and sub-regional level, where appropriate, in monitoring and overseeing the Year. We know that youth policies are uneven and approaches to these questions still differ across Member States, so it is most important that the Commission ensures this.

4.4 The provisions on the European Youth Goals are most welcome and provide very concrete areas based on youth participation. They also illustrate well the cross-sectoral nature of young people's needs and aspirations.

4.5 The provisions on digital issues are welcome, particularly as the popular notion of young people as digital natives is indeed rather simplistic. Particularly during COVID-19, it became apparent that such competences are not shared by all, and, in particular, young people accessing content through their phones is very different to the skills and competences needed for online learning. Many of these competences are not technological but social, and the EESC opinion on Blended Learning[1] cautioned against an overreliance on screen time and online activity. There is a solid tradition of outdoor pursuits and environmental activity among young people and in youth work, which must also be fostered and encouraged.

4.6 The Youth Action Plan related to the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument and external action does indeed offer a valuable opportunity for youth engagement and is most welcome. The EESC awaits the proposal from Commissioner Urpilainen on this. It would be most important to ensure the strong involvement of civil society and youth organisations in such an action plan. The European model of youth work has a lot to commend itself to the world and should feature to a greater extent in our external relations.

4.7 Mobility is always an important part of youth policy and has been central to the ERASMUS+ programme. It is natural that it would be an important part of the Year of Youth proposal. However, we must always be conscious that mobility can sometimes be seen in a negative light by young people, particularly when it is involuntary or forced, as can still be the case in poorer regions or areas suffering from "brain drain".

4.8 The idea of action that "specifically aims at strengthening the voice of young people at the European level" is of course most welcome, and all institutions need to further develop the voice of young people in their policy proposals. Again, this might work well as an overarching aim or objective of the European Year of Youth

1 SOC/701: Blended learning (not yet published in the OJ).

4.9 The provisions on implementation, while positive, would benefit from clearer indicators, particularly relating to the impact on policy and programmes in the area beyond the Year and on the cross-sectoral aspects of provision.

4.10 The provisions on the European Youth Work Agenda are positive and welcome, but they also add to the number of initiatives and policy priorities in the proposal, and in the legislative text in particular. Once more, there may be concern about overload, with so many policy areas and priorities, notwithstanding the need for cross-sectoral work.

4.11 Article 3 of the legislative text provides a good summary of what is envisaged and once again makes it clear what the Year will be about. The financial statement sees the European Years as "awareness raising instruments", once more highlighting this aspect.

4.12 The financial tables appear to indicate that ERASMUS+ is expected to be the most significant funder of any activities. The proposals also seem to envisage support at EU level for staff and resources for the delegations and contractors, but not for young people or youth organisations. It also seems unclear how much funding might eventually come from ERASMUS+.

5. Examining European Years more generally

5.1 It is perhaps time that the Commission and other EU institutions examined the "Year of…" concept. The proposal does refer to previous Years, such as the Year of Development and the Year of Citizenship. These seem to arise from time to time and it would seem advisable to have some coherence around their use and purpose.

5.2 The Committee's opinion on the European Year of Citizens[2] concluded that significant dialogue was needed with civil society in developing these Years and that a significant budget was required – more than was proposed. The EESC considered that the planning and implementation process should be as open as possible and should involve all interested players at all levels and all stages: the Committee of the Regions, the EESC itself, representatives of civil society organisations, including the social partners, and representatives of national and local administrative bodies, among others.

5.3 The Committee also called for guarantees for transparent, effective coordination of the 2013 European Year at all levels and between all the stakeholders involved, particularly by making full use of the potential of the steering committees by setting up effective mechanisms for exchanging experience at national level.

5.4 On the European Year of Development, the Committee said it was crucial to avoid spending money on cost-intensive campaigns run by public relations (PR) agencies, or else that such services should be reduced to an absolute minimum. The need for a decentralised approach was also emphasised. Task forces at national level, it was felt, should establish a national motto, slogan or invitation for the Year that best reflects the situation within the Member State. The

2 OJ C 181, 21.6.2012, p. 137.

work of the task forces and support for their work should be continued beyond the Year. Organised civil society should play the key role in the task forces[3].

5.5 The Committee called for specific measures to be drawn up and implemented to ensure a link between the different thematic years and to ensure that the outcome of the events is enduring. The Committee also said it was necessary not only to carry out information campaigns, but also to undertake practical and concrete actions drawn up by decision-makers working together with society and to produce a follow-up report. The Committee supported the allocation of funds via the Commission's representations in the Member States[4].

Brussels, 8 December 2021

Christa Schweng
The president of the European Economic and Social Committee

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N.B. Appendix overleaf.

3 OJ C 170, 5.6.2014, p. 98.

4 OJ C 181, 21.6.2012, p. 137.

Appendix: European Year of Youth EESC Qualitative Questionnaire

We have sought to foster youth involvement in the preparation of the opinion on the European Year of Youth. This was difficult due to timing and resources. We relied on personal connections and organisational links and a qualitative approach to the task. The questionnaire was thus not in any way representative statistically but designed to elicit a qualitative response to provide more information on young people's views. Similar to various efforts currently underway to enhance the voice of young people in the work of the EESC, we felt that it was better to carry out at least a limited youth participation exercise rather than none on this topic.
We have thus presented some summaries, quotes, and direct replies from the questionnaire from 12 young people from 8 different EU countries ranging in age from 18-28.

Education

Summary
Clearly the disruption to education was felt, some could cope but for most it appears this was very negative and long lasting for some. Young people could see where they were lucky however and were able to adapt. Clearly the social value of education was recognised. Not needing to commute and flexibility were positive aspects. Paying fees for effectively an online education was a big issue.

Answers
I could successfully finalise my studies without any issue. In a way, the fact every person was at home facilitated the writing of my two theses in 2020 and 2021, as they were based on interviews.
Failed the final year of my degree, education paused.
The pandemic has impacted my education as a young person hugely. Moving to an entirely online system took away a lot of the richness and excitement of learning. It has been harder to connect with classmates and educators alike, making the experience far more isolating and daunting. The loss of the social element has been one of the biggest blows. As someone from a low income, ethnic minority background I feel the pandemic has increased the gap between me and other classmates. Issues such as even having a quiet place to do work, study and exams presented itself and being able to afford to maintain a laptop reliable enough to stay connected online from 9-5 every day.
Pandemic seriously impacted my education as classes were given online. I arrived in a new city for my masters and end up studying online in a city where I knew no one. At the end, I managed to meet wonderful people, but it was quite a challenging time.
During the pandemic I was still able to be mobile and move abroad to study. Of course, the experience was affected by the restrictions - much of my education occurred online and there was a great limit to the benefits of usual learning abroad. However, it was still a good decision for me, and I have personally developed a lot despite the difficulties of lockdown.
Due to the pandemic, 3 out of 4 semesters in my master's programme were held online. Although I was lucky enough to not have financial problems and always have an appropriate space from where to work, I felt the quality of my academic education drop considerably. This was due to myself finding it harder to engage, but also due to a failure on the part of many professors to adapt to the new circumstances (e.g. in terms of class style or length). On the other hand, as many things moved online, I found it much easier to engage in new projects and to add to my education beyond uni, as I really had more time.
Final year of college online- difficult to maintain focus and goals.

Education was partly and then completely online during the heights of the pandemic. As an international student who was studying a degree abroad for the first time, this made interacting with lecturers and staying focused on the course material more challenging for me. The content of courses might have been the same, however the learning quality decreased; because in my experience, learning on site is a combined experience that involves making a trip to the faculty, seeing your friends, socializing, and feeling part of the program and the university. Otherwise, it is not much different from watching a YouTube video and being examined on it… The campus experience was missing, so it made me question why I was in the city and paying rent just to stay inside and watch lecture videos.
I feel like my education lacked a very important element which is networking. Giving the fact that I was studying my master's, in person education would have been very important for building connections with other students as well as with professors.
From Oct 2020 - April 2021. I was put online for college which I loved as I didn't have to commute and had more time to myself. However, after a few weeks I started to get fatigued was having trouble concentrating. Sleeping in. I really missed the social aspect too I had a practice placement cancelled which was a huge loss My exams were moved online which were very welcome but found they required 10 times more effort.
I have missed out on many days of school as a result of covid scares and teachers not being in as a result of the same issue. Covid has affected my mental health and has had an effect on my ability to concentrate and do well in all my classes.
I was studying while working full time, so the pandemic was actually quite convenient to finalise my studies without having to attend in person classes. In any case, the uncertainty and slow adaptation of teachers to online system made the whole process rather stressful.
I had to finish my education online which was not so stimulating.

Social Rights

Summary

Different young people were impacted differently. Many of our respondents were already in third level. Again, the importance of social outlets emerges. Some did not feel impacted. Travel and mobility issues were clear. The lack of support from educational institutions is mentioned. Young people felt isolated and even blamed sometimes for the spread of the virus. Stress and the poor state of mental health services also feature.

Answers

The wealth of my family has not been affected by the pandemic, so I could not enjoy any more social rights than I already do.
More sensitivity to low pay.
Normal leisure activities like clubbing, restaurants, youth clubs concerts, galleries and exhibitions were halted for so long that trying to return to them feels strange and can sometimes be anxiety inducing. Costs of accommodation seem to have shot up since the pandemic making affordable housing for work/college scarce and difficult to access.
I do think that pandemic impacted negatively my social rights. Most of my classes were given online and I did not have access to most university facilities such as libraries, gym, reception desk and similar infrastructure. Yet, I still had to pay the full tuition fees which I think was not fair.

The limitations on travel were very challenging. Especially during the window of time when travel was allowed, however only with expensive testing requirements. It created an unfair divide and as a homesick student, I felt on the blunt edge of that decision.
I didn't feel much of an impact in terms of access to health care, housing, food... However, getting an end-of-studies internship felt incredibly hard. This is probably always the case, but at no point did I feel I had any support from the institutions I was connected to. Beyond the university's efforts, my access to education was also limited, as governments usually placed re-opening universities last on the priority list and had no regard for the fundamental importance of their non-academic aspects (soft learning, contact with peers...).
Separation in citizens makes it difficult to meet certain friend groups. Some inside some outside.
We had to pay the tuition fee in full last year, the fact that we stayed at home and did not go to campus or use campus facilities did not make a difference. My university cut the tuition fee amount in half this year, but I think it should have been the case last year as well, as the most intense times of the pandemic were felt then.
I found it very unfair to have to pay the full tuition fees despite the fact that my education was fully online, whereas a year later the same university charged half of the tuition fees for on campus education. Moreover, having restricted access to library and study spaces was a big impediment for my education.
Food housing wasn’t affected As I am a vulnerable adult due to mental illness volunteers checked in with me to make sure I was coping ok General Doctors out of fear I stopped going to check-ups such as dental medical and really only used GP for emergencies Mental health services - very poor service discharged me in a very stressful time over disagreed. Still waiting for manage to get back to me a year later.
Not being able to see my friends or travel was a huge impact being afraid to meet in large groups indoors.
Young people have probably struggled the most seeing our social life extremely limited. Also, the period when older people were vaccinated put a target on young people to be blamed for the bad evolution of the pandemic. Now that everyone is vaccinated, and young people are not to be blamed for the current situation, it feels even more unfair what was done and said about us.
I haven't been personally too impacted on my social rights. But there has been an important increase of young French people going to the food aid.

Impact on EU Citizenship

Summary
Freedom of movement and travel was seen as the main issue particularly between EU member states. This was also related to family and friends. The lack of a joined-up EU response is highlighted. Nationalism and the hardening of borders was a concern.

Answers
My right of movement was heavily affected, although only in the worst periods of the pandemic. I was more locked in the context of the states I lived in, but overall, my rights as an EU citizen have not been diminished.
Feel disconnected from Europe due to restrictions.
The pandemic has caused a situation that makes travel increasingly difficult and inaccessible. Unclear messaging about travel requirements (passenger locator forms, vaccine certs, green and red lists etc.)

makes neighbouring European countries feel farther away than ever before. This lack of connection reduces a lot of the sense of European identity that is usually fostered by travelling freely without restrictions.
One of the most challenging aspect of the pandemic for young EU citizens was probably the fact that our freedom of movement was restricted due to national health measures. As a young European used to travel and studying abroad, we tend to forget that borders still exist within Europe. Yet, with pandemic, it is common to not be allowed to travel to another country or to fill up a lot of forms and be quarantine. This made it challenging for us to travel to our families and friends which emotionally was really heavy to carry. We have this feeling to be isolated from our most important relationship in all of a sudden.
While I remained mobile during the pandemic, and living abroad definitely strengthened my feeling of being an EU citizen, at the same time the sharp nationalism and divided decision making by EU leaders made me more worried about the future of Europe. Seeing borders harden during the pandemic was scary, and the illogical differences between restrictions/ risk management measures all fed into an uncertainty for EU leadership to me.
I have been much more active in terms of contributing and making my voice heard, probably due to having more time; the popularity of remote working making it possible to connect with like-minded young people across the Union; and not having felt represented during the pandemic.
Unable to travel. Vaccine rollout slow due to EU restrictions.
The red or orange listing of countries depending on the carried risk levels of the travellers continued during the whole duration. My country, Bulgaria, was not listed as having the same level of risk by every country in the same way, there were countries who decided it was a red zone, or others deciding it carries a medium risk. Therefore, any travel decision always required a detailed, nerve-cracking analysis as to if it is allowed to go to that country as a Bulgarian citizen, or what documents are required and conditions to be met. I do not think the EU responded to the pandemic in a unified way either, as measures and the implementation tactics varied greatly per country. But that is of course, a bigger problem.
As I decided to live abroad while studying, the pandemic made it a lot more difficult to go back home to visit friends and family. I found it particularly difficult during the holidays, when because of self-isolation requirements I had to be away from family.
Actually, I was still active due to European Solidarity funding I participated in a project on youth work works I was done an online European youth work course. I was looking into a youth exchange, but it was postponed.
Not being able to travel out my own country around Europe was a massive impact in the summer as I planned on going abroad.
As an expat in another EU country the limitation of movement was extremely impactful. During the first confinement I was stuck in my hometown, not being able to go back home while paying an apartment that I wasn't using. Afterwards, the restrictions on travelling didn't allow me to visit my family during several periods.
In a positive way because I've been to another EU Country, and I will continue to travel in the EU.

Other Impacts

Summary

There were some positive answers here about reassessing things for the future. However mental health featured once again. Uncertainty about the jobs market is in evidence as are concerns about high rents. The gap between generations is mentioned and a certain sense of uncertainty can be detected.

Answers

Fortunately, the pandemic has not affected my dear ones and my capacity to find a job and pursue my career.

I'm more interested in my wellbeing and future.

Mental health services seem even more inaccessible now as a young person. Different support groups and services that moved online at the beginning of the pandemic are yet to in person. The positive effects of these services feel diluted and there's now a lack of community spirit and togetherness that online services fail to replicate. In terms of physical health, telemedicine and phone calls with doctors have also replaced a lot of in person check-ups which is worrying and often stressful as a young person with underlying health issues who would prefer the opportunity to have in person medical examinations.

It seriously impacted my ability to find jobs and internships during my studies. Most places were either closed or not hiring which was hard for me because I couldn’t make money while studying or gain professional experiences.

Definitely made my future more uncertain in the job market. When studying abroad, of course I hoped to find employment where I studied or in another European country. However, securing employment as a graduate expat has been significantly more difficult in the past few months than before. The vast majority of my course mates also returned home, and those who stayed are now LL.M graduates working behind bars and in coffee shops, which reflects the challenges of entering the graduate job market. Furthermore, the sharp increases in rent, cost of living, and widespread uncertainty about what will happen in the next few months with restrictions on travel and work are very concerning. These factors combine to make me feel worried about my ability to secure work, sustain myself and lead a fulfilled life in Europe.

It has made me more aware of how much of a social disconnect between generations there is sometimes.

Mental Health at home, nowhere to go.

Being away from friends and family is usually very much bearable when you study abroad, considering you choose to have a new experience and enjoy it. However as social life was pretty much diminished there was not much to hold on to during the pandemic.

Moving into a new city in the middle of the pandemic without having any connections or friends was very difficult given the context. Socialising was definitely a challenge and because of that dealing with new restrictions or other day to day difficulties was hard as I couldn't connect with other people as I used to.

For the first 8 months I loved it as it gave me a break from my busy schedule and helped me appreciate the small things I also think that zoom will be very handy in years to come.

My mother passed away the day after the first lock down and I suffered greatly as I was unable to see any friends or family. It was so difficult to do any work or engage in activities online but as a positive having the classes online also helped as I had my siblings and father by my side and we became closer as a result.

In January 2021 I got my first job with a certain level of responsibility (managing a big project funded by EU institutions). All the changes that I needed to apply to the project to still make it successful and impactful in its online version resulted in very high stress levels, very close to a burnout in several situations throughout the to years of implementation.

If you Were in Charge

Summary
Participation in running the year of youth was to the fore along with a focus on the most disadvantaged and mobility projects. Reaching out to seldom heard young people also features. Connecting and networking young people gets mentioned and the need to avoid tokenism. There is a desire to see follow up and the need for debate were also mentioned.

Answers
If I was in charge of a European Year of Youth, I would enable a majority of the decision making to be undertaken by young people as to what occurs during the year. I would set up a panel or board to represent young people of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, nationalities etc. to input the views of their peers as to the things young people really care about. It would be important to highlight that young people are not pulling from homogenous lived experiences, but rather from really singular and unique individuals' circumstances and backgrounds.
I would try to reach out to those young people who did not have the chance in their life to get to know realities other than the communities they were born in. It's fundamental to make people realise their potential
Fund High Quality Mobility Projects.
I would make sure that European Youth are heard and have the ability to speak up at national and European institutions. European Youth should be able to express their points of views on every matters and to connect with each other across the continents in order to find common goals to reach at the European level.
I would focus on improving employment opportunities for graduates across Europe and promote the right to move freely around Europe for young people.
I would make an extra effort to reach people outside the usual young public for EU institutions. Although English-speaking, politically-engaged young people are part of the picture, we are often not very representative of the broader youth in our Member States (and usually are able to get involved because of having many of our more basic needs covered).
Focus on travel and social.
I would first and foremost focus on establishing good networking webs between the youth communities of different EU countries. This might be beneficial in challenging the EU for creating a more unified response in pandemics like this.
I would establish new programs that would make it easier for young people to travel across Europe without having to worry about the difference of exams between universities.
Come up with a way of really celebrating and appreciating youth more than a tokenistic website or event. Use it as an opportunity to develop a long term facility resource that will address where there's a gap
Listen to the young people find out what we all need and what affects us all and find a solution.
Make sure that there is a follow-up of the proposals. The EU proposes many participatory processes, but we have the feeling that they don't lead to any change.

I would organise a debate on how every young European from different countries have perceived the role of the UE during the crisis, and if the crisis strengthened or if it illegitimated the EU role in their own country.

What should a European Year of Youth look like in your life?

Summary

Celebrating achievements is highlighted as is the need to reconnect after the pandemic. There was a call for more student discounts and for it to be vibrant recognising the sacrifices of young people during the pandemic.

Answers

I would like a European Year of Youth to celebrate the achievements of young people, while also addressing the areas in which we are struggling and need support.
It should be an opportunity to reconnect people, to make them get out of the isolation we have been living in for two years, and rediscover that there is an entire world beyond their local reality.
Impactful Listening Exercise by the Commission.
We should have student discounts everywhere in every EU member states and especially for traveling.
It should look vibrant, be present in public discourse, and reflect the fact that young people have sacrificed and missed out on an awful lot. We are also the ones who will need to work to bring Europe out of the economic crisis that is following the pandemic - so I would like to see this recognised and supported by those in power in Europe.

3 Priority Areas

Summary

There is a lot of agreement on Climate, education, and social policy.

Answers

1. Climate Action 2. Equality, Inclusion and Diversity 3. Poverty
Climate action, social policy and security.
Employment Rights and Decent Work Climate Action Wellbeing and Mental Health.
Education, mobility and increase EU aids.
Education; Employment; Environment.
Climate change, social rights (e.g. access to healthcare), and employment situation.
Subsidised travel, access to jobs across EU and education.
Education ~ Networking Crisis/ Financial Aid Management Cooperation with the EU.
Education Mobility EU aid.
Refugee crisis, homelessness, protection from war and terrorism EU wide.
Climate action plan/ education/ transport.
Education, Participation and Climate.
Mainly the social policy for youth, the environmental policy and the policy to help youth Europeans to work in another EU country.

How would the Year of Youth Look in your Local Community?

Summary
The need for good communication is clear along with the need for more exchanges and youth projects. The need to connect young people who feel distant from the EU project is mentioned. There is also a desire for practical projects such as biodiversity and more cycle lanes, electoral reform, and student discounts.

Answers
Campaigns, advertising and events to promote European ideals and identity, breaking down some of the barriers that cause the EU to feel far removed from young people's day to lives. Actions to show how integrated Europe is in our communities.
We could resume organising exchanges for students, volunteers and young workers, so that everyone has a chance to get out of their comfort zone for once.
Well-resourced/funded youth led projects.
We could provide more investments for EU projects but also we should make sure that we are creating a stronger connection between local youth and the EU. Some young people do not feel that connected to the EU values and it would be a good thing to organize EU funded events for them and teach them about the EU benefits.
Biodiversity initiatives; encourage international and local employment opportunities; support businesses and also support culture/ entertainment industries.
Raise more awareness of the opportunities for young people to experience other countries in Europe (again, beyond the usual suspect of Erasmus in university degrees or Interrail).
Travel subsidies.
Student discounts everywhere but especially in my local community first. Taking a bigger part in networking with the students from other communities.
Investment for youth projects Support for the elderly and for abandoned children Support on what are the requirements to access EU funds.
Focus on lowering the voting age to 16.
Something as simple and more accessible services for young people or cycle lanes.
Supporting already existing and new projects that have an actual local impact.
Organise exchanges in another European country, as the programme COMENIUS (3 nationalities).

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