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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject: Ensuring the youth-friendliness of EU and national policies
- *Exchange of views*

Delegations will find attached a Presidency steering note on the above subject, with a view to the exchange of views at the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) on 11 May 2026.

Ensuring the youth-friendliness of EU and national policies*Presidency steering note*(Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council)

Over the past two decades, cooperation in the youth field at EU level has evolved significantly, shifting from a sectoral approach towards a more comprehensive and cross-sectoral one. This evolution reflects a growing recognition that young people's lives are shaped by a range of interconnected policy areas, including education, employment, mental health, digitalization and democratic participation. The current EU Youth Strategy (2019–2027) has contributed to advancing youth mainstreaming, strengthening participation through instruments such as the EU Youth Dialogue and enhancing inclusion by reaching a broader and more diverse group of young people.

Despite this progress, further efforts are needed to ensure that EU and national policies are genuinely 'youth-friendly'. Young people continue to face persistent and emerging challenges, including rising living costs, access to affordable housing, mental health and well-being, and inequalities in access to education, skills, and opportunities. According to Flash Eurobarometer 556 (2025)¹, nearly four in ten young Europeans believe that the EU should prioritise investment in affordable housing and cost-of-living support, followed by education, training and skills, mental health and well-being. These findings underline the need for policies that are not only targeted at young people but are also shaped with their active involvement.

¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication. (2025). *Flash Eurobarometer 556 – EU challenges and priorities: Young people's views*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2775/9830210>

At the same time, broader societal developments - such as the digital transformation, including the rapid advances in artificial intelligence and the spread of disinformation and online risks - continue to have an impact on young people's lives, and on their well-being and democratic engagement. This reinforces the need for a cross-sectoral and forward-looking approach to youth policy that is responsive to the evolving realities young people face today.

Young people express a clear desire to be meaningfully included in decision-making processes and call on policymakers to respond to their concerns and listen more closely to their voices². During the EU Youth Conference organised by the Cyprus Presidency, young people reflected on how EU policies can become more youth-friendly by effectively addressing their needs, strengthening meaningful participation across all stages of the policy cycle, and improving the follow-up by EU institutions to the recommendations emerging from EU Youth Conferences.

Ensuring youth-friendliness therefore requires embedding the youth perspective across the entire policy cycle, from design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation. This may include strengthening youth mainstreaming tools, such as youth checks and impact assessments, to systematically assess how policies affect young people. Young people advocate for a more coherent and transparent follow-up, and for their contributions through participatory processes to be meaningfully reflected in policy outcomes.

Meaningful youth participation remains at the core of youth-friendly policymaking. While structures such as the EU Youth Dialogue have become more inclusive, young people continue to call for stronger engagement in decision-making and for their input to have a tangible impact. Innovative participatory tools can further support outreach to diverse groups of young people and ensure inclusive engagement and active participation in democratic life.

² European Parliament, Directorate-General for Communication. (2025). *Youth survey 2024 (FL013EP)*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2861/3385523>

At the same time, youth-friendly policies should be accessible, comprehensible, relevant to young people's lived experiences, and effective over time. This includes simplifying communication, reducing administrative burdens, assessing implementation, and ensuring that policies remain inclusive and responsive to evolving needs. Coordinated approaches can facilitate continuous improvement and uphold youth-friendliness as a guiding principle in future policy development. In this context, the development of the next EU Youth Strategy beyond 2027 presents an opportunity at EU level to build on existing achievements while addressing remaining gaps. The discussion aims to provide insights and the sharing of good practices to ensure that EU and national policies effectively respond to the needs and aspirations of young people.

Questions for Ministers:

1. Can you share examples of good practices in your country that have contributed to making policies more youth-friendly? What challenges did you encounter and how were they addressed?
 2. Looking ahead, what concrete ideas or proposals would you suggest to ensure that the next EU Youth Strategy is more youth-friendly, particularly in terms of participation, implementation and impact?
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