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#### COVER NOTE

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| To:              | Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union         |

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Delegations will find attached document SWD(2023) 702 final.

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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

**Youth engagement in delivering the 2030 Agenda**

*Accompanying the document*

**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE  
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE  
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**EU Voluntary Review on progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for  
Sustainable Development**

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## **Introduction**

This annex provides a state of play regarding the **tools and mechanisms present in the EU policy landscape when it comes to young people and their role in implementing the 2030 Agenda**. The review goes beyond those initiatives visibly labelled as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), instead taking a broader approach to policies that significantly impact the implementation of those goals in the EU.

After outlining the connection between young people and the SDGs, this annex presents key EU policy initiatives and actions that strengthen their role within and outside **Europe in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda**, based on three headline themes: empowering, engaging and connecting young people.

This includes key initiatives that seek to benefit and harness the potential of young people (**empower**), where young people participate in decision-making (**engage**) and where young people are provided with opportunities to interact and exchange (**connect**).

### **Drawing a link: young people and SDGs in the EU's internal and external policy**

The European Commission has developed a series of initiatives to ensure the **mainstreaming of the SDGs across all policies, both internally and externally**. Drawing a link between these headline initiatives is an important step in understanding the interconnectedness of the SDG agenda and how the EU and young people engage with it.

With 2022 proclaimed as the **European Year of Youth**, it is more imperative than ever to promote a strong and lasting partnership with young people to achieve the SDGs, ensuring that no one is left behind. The legacy of the European Year of Youth falls into the broader policy context of the 2019-27 **EU Youth Strategy** and the follow-up to the **Conference on the Future of Europe**.

In the spirit of the European Year of Youth and in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, the [Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2022](#) review focused on the challenges for young people in Europe, in particular related to SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender quality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).

As indispensable contributors and **natural custodians of this inter-generational agenda**, ‘young people are **agents of development and change**’.<sup>1</sup> However, this enormous potential of youth is often untapped, and to date, global youth engagement in this process has been ‘somewhat limited’, according to the [UN World Youth Report](#) from 2018.

The **Better Regulation Toolbox**, published in November 2021, explicitly sets out that every legislative proposal of the EU must contribute to the implementation of specific SDGs, while

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<sup>1</sup> Report from the Commission Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals across the world: The 2019 Joint Synthesis Report of the European Union and its Member States (COM/2019/232 final) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0232>

stressing the importance of youth engagement in EU policy-making.<sup>2</sup> The goal of mainstreaming young people's interests as a priority across all policy areas can only be achieved, as set out in the [EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#), by enabling and encouraging the capacity of young people to be architects of their own lives while **involving young people more in policy decisions** across all sectors.

Under the EU Youth Strategy, young people should meaningfully participate in the 'development, implementation and follow-up of policies affecting them' (**Principle C: Participation**). More importantly, this contribution should **go beyond policies limited to the youth field**, and take a cross-sectoral approach among different policy areas (**Principle E: Dual Approach**).

Given the universality of SDGs, young people's voices should be taken into account 'whenever global issues are addressed', making SDGs especially prominent, as emphasised in **Principle D (Global, European, national, regional & local dimension)**. The Better Regulation Toolbox<sup>3</sup> clearly commits the EU to ensure the implementation of SDGs in its **externally-oriented policy measures**. The [Youth Action Plan in EU External Action](#) mirrors the three strands of the EU Youth Strategy, namely engage, empower and connect youth, and will shape the EU's partnership with young people in partner countries.

Mainstreaming young people's interests as a priority across all policy areas will **benefit the EU and young people in Europe and beyond**. By strengthening the role of young people in policy-making, the EU contributes to support SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and specifically target 16.7. ('ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels').

For young people, it will reinforce them as rights holders while promoting inclusion and meaningful youth participation at all levels of society and in decision-making processes, thus supporting democracy. Similarly, it will enable the EU to develop an alliance of common values and principles and position the EU as a role model globally.

## **Internal EU youth initiatives to fulfil the 2030 Agenda**

### **Empower**

The EU has developed different internal instruments to **empower** young people, promote their political and civic participation and provide them with tools to complete the SDGs.

- The **11 Youth Goals** of the **2019-27 EU Youth Strategy** focus on harnessing young people's potential to meet the vision of the SDGs. Youth Goal 2 'Equality of all genders' can for

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<sup>2</sup> Tool #19 'Sustainable Development Goals and Tool #31 – Education and Training, Culture and Youth' of the [Better regulation toolbox \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> Tool #35 'Developing countries' and Tool#25 'Internal market' of the [Better regulation toolbox \(europa.eu\)](#)

example serve as a complementary indicator to SDG 5 tackling gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls.

- The **Council Recommendation on establishing a Child Guarantee** aims to prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing effective and equal access for all children in need to key services including free early childhood education and care, free high-quality and inclusive education, free healthcare, adequate housing, healthy nutrition, and physical activity.
- The **reinforced Youth Guarantee** ensures that all people under the age of 30 receive a quality offer of employment, education, apprenticeship, and traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. This would align with SDG 8 on decent work and SDG 4 on quality education. The new flagship initiative ‘**Aim, Master, Learn, Achieve**’ (**ALMA**) aims to provide the first work experience abroad for disadvantaged young people who are not in employment, education or training.
- The **European cooperation network of employment services (EURES)** is a platform developed by the European Commission to facilitate the free movement of workers by offering targeted schemes for people aged 18-35 to find their first job or traineeship in another EU Member States, Iceland or Norway.
- The **2022 European Year of Youth (EYY)** was the first European Year to be fully co-designed by EU institutions, Member States, and youth stakeholders. Through over 100 policy initiatives, more than EUR 127 million were identified in EU programmes linked to the Year’s implementation. Moreover, the eight policy areas of the European Year of Youth are closely associated with the EU Youth Strategy, whose goals form an integral part of several SDGs.
- The **European Youth Portal** serves as the primary source of European and country level information about opportunities and initiatives directly benefitting young people in Europe (such as equality and inclusion, sustainability, mental health and well-being, and quality employment) with more than 8 500 activities (as of 9 December 2022).
- In its internal organisation, the European Commission is attempting to **mainstream young people’s interests into all policy areas**. An **EU Youth Coordinator** was nominated in June 2021, to strengthen cooperation across sectors within the different European Commission departments on issues affecting youth. Pursuing this mainstreaming effort, **the Better Regulation Toolbox<sup>4</sup>** provides the EU with concrete solutions on youth engagement, integration and opportunities during the policy-making process.
- In 2022, the **Committee of the Regions**, along with the European Youth Forum, created a **European Charter for Youth and Democracy**. The Charter strives to build a democratic space that ensures young people are formally and continuously represented in the EU.

## Engage

The [2022 EU Barometer on Youth and Democracy](#) revealed that young people's most common expectation for the European Year of Youth is for **decision-makers to listen more to their demands and act on them, and to support their personal, social and professional**

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<sup>4</sup> Tool #31 – Education and Training, Culture and Youth of the [Better regulation toolbox \(europa.eu\)](#)

**development (72%).** As such, EU institutions developed internal instruments that allow young people to **engage** and participate in the decision-making process.

- The **EU Youth Dialogue** is the largest organised citizen involvement process in the EU, under which several youth consultations are held on a subject relevant to young people across Europe. It is organised by youth-led national working groups, together with an EU-level steering group, in 18-month cycles. The current theme of this cycle is ‘A sustainable and green Europe’ which covers SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).
- In addition, the **Youth Policy Dialogues** enable in-person exchanges between each European Commissioner and young people on topics covered in the Commissioner’s portfolio, thus covering the full SDG spectrum.
- The European Economic and Social Committee launched the **Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Tables**, which provide a space for regular, structured and meaningful dialogue between young people and EU decision-makers.
- The **Conference on the Future of Europe** that took place in 2021-22 included European Citizens’ Panels which consisted of 800 randomly selected citizens, of which one-third were young people. One of these recommendations, proposed by the European Youth Forum and set out in the final report of the Conference published on 9 May 2022, is an **EU Youth Test** that would evaluate the impact of policy proposals on young people.
- The **Commission Youth Network** established in 2021 serves as a forum for exchanges on youth issues and helps strengthen cross-sector cooperation and the mainstreaming of youth policy. This initiative is linked to the European Year of Youth, whose legacy seeks to create a strong cross-sectoral dimension, reflecting young people’s interest in many EU policy areas.
- The **Young Twente Board in the Netherlands** created a regional online panel where young people can sign up to receive a short survey six times a year about a wide range of topics relevant for their future.

## **Connect**

Active young participants in society are a unique pool of committed people who strive to promote SDG and EU values to further advance youth engagement. It is important to identify and **connect** these individuals and provide them with meaningful opportunities to develop their skills as agents of change.

- The EU’s flagship initiative, the **Erasmus+ Programme**, has facilitated international youth exchanges and study opportunities abroad since 1987. With EUR 26.2 billion, the programme’s budget for 2021-27 was almost double that of 2014-20.
- The **European Social Fund (ESF)** and the **Youth Employment Initiative** have helped over 24 million young participants from 2014 to 2022 to improve their education, skills, employment opportunities and social inclusion. **The ESF+**, with a budget of roughly EUR 98.5 billion for the 2021-27 programming period, will continue to support this mission.
- The European Commission’s new ‘**Voice your Vision**’ platform allows young people to express their hopes and aspirations for the future of Europe in short, recorded messages.

- The **Young Elected Politicians programme (YEPs)** is a network of local and regional politicians under the age of 40 in Europe. The programme provides networking opportunities within the YEP Community and the Committee of Regions as well as training on EU topics.
- The **EU Climate Pact Ambassadors** is a European Commission initiative connecting people, especially young people, communities and organisations towards the goal of climate action and building a greener Europe. It contributes to both SDG 13 on climate action and SDG 17 on partnerships.
- The **European Solidarity Corps** offers volunteering opportunities for young people who want to help, learn and develop an inclusive society. As from 2022, the European Solidarity Corps opened up to the world with the **European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps** offering new cross-border volunteering activities in support of humanitarian aid operations in countries outside the EU.
- The regional **Danube Youth Council**, established in 2022 and co-funded by the City of Vienna and the European Commission, provides a platform for the institutional and political involvement of young people in the Danube region, including countries in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership.
- The **2017-18 Irish UN youth delegates** group prepared a report entitled ‘Generation for Change: Spotlight Report on Young People, the Sustainable Development Goals and Ireland, 2018’ to provide a youth perspective on key issues for government departments leading SDG work, in advance of Ireland’s 2018 Voluntary National Review (VNR).

### **External EU initiatives to fulfil the 2030 Agenda**

#### **Empower**

With instruments like Global Europe (under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)), the EU **empowers** young people by fighting inequality and providing young people with the skills and tools they need to thrive.

The **Youth Action Plan in EU External Action**, adopted on 4 October 2022, is the first-ever EU policy framework for a strategic partnership with young people around the world. The Council Conclusions on the Youth Action Plan in EU external action from 28 November 2022 underline that young people worldwide are essential and reliable partners in the implementation of the SDGs.

- The EU committed to invest at least 20% of the overall funding for NDICI-Global Europe in human development. Moreover, the EU aims to invest in education at least 10% of the overall funding under Global Europe for Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific including through Global Gateway investment. In addition, the EU allocates 10% of its humanitarian aid funding to education in emergencies and protracted crises, to reach the

most marginalised children and young people, including those in areas of armed conflict and refugee sites.<sup>5</sup>

- Since 2017 the **EU4Youth initiative** increases the employability, upskilling and active participation of young people in the Eastern Partnership countries with special focus on disadvantaged youth and women. 18 000 young people have benefited from EUR 42.6 million in targeted support.
- In 2017 the EU and the UN launched the **Spotlight Initiative**, a multi-year partnership to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The initiative seeks to empower women, in line with (i) SDG 5 on gender equality and (ii) the commitment to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence affirmed in the [New European Consensus on Development](#).
- The **EU Youth Guarantee in the Western Balkans** and the **2022 Youth Package in the Neighbourhood South** support youth employment, through activities addressing the challenges of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) and boosting entrepreneurship in the countries covered by the EU Neighbourhood policy.
- The EU flagship programme **EUROSociAL+** implements measures that promote **social cohesion in Latin America**, such as promoting science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) studies for girls in Uruguay and the Dominican Republic, youth employability in Peru and organisation of university debates with young students on the Chilean constituency process.

## Engage

‘Young people are a constituency who hold uniquely critical perspectives and skills, necessary for informing and driving policy, service delivery, and research’<sup>6</sup> states the Youth Sounding Board for International Partnerships. The EU is committed to **engaging** young people beyond Europe in increasing their voice and leadership, in particular young women and girls, youth activists and organisations, at all levels of governance, from domestic politics to multilateral forums, and within EU processes.

- The **Youth Action Plan in EU External Action** has been drawn up after extensive consultations with over 220 stakeholders across the world, in particular youth and children’s rights organisations. It responds to the legitimate demand by young people, also reflected in the outcomes of the Conference on the Future of Europe, to be involved in a more structured way in internal and external decision-making processes.
- In 2021, the European Commission set up the first **Youth Sounding Board for EU International Partnerships** comprised of 25 young people from around the world which advises the Commission on how to improve youth participation and empowerment in external action. The Youth Sounding Board was closely involved in the drafting of the Youth Action Plan and

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<sup>5</sup> Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on the Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU external action 2022 – 2027 [pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on the Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU external action 2022 – 2027 [pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)



will participate in its monitoring and implementation. At country level, examples include the Youth Sounding Board in Nepal and Ethiopia, the Youth Network in Mauritius and the Youth Advisory Panel for Palestine. By 2027, most EU Delegations should have **youth advisory structures**, as set out in the Youth Action Plan. The Commission has also already appointed two Special Advisers on Youth to the Commissioner for International Partnerships.

- In the countries covered by the EU's Neighbourhood policy and in the Western Balkans, the EU provides regular opportunities to **Young European Ambassadors, EU Goodwill Ambassadors** and **Jeel Connect networks** for engaging and exchanging with their peers in their region and the EU. In the context of the European Year of Youth, the **EU4Youth Days** brought together over one thousand young people, including members of these programmes, around the topic of youth resilience.
- The ongoing **Western Balkan Youth Lab Project**, implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council, provides a forum for young people and other stakeholders to participate in the decision-making of youth-relevant policies in the Western Balkan countries.
- The EU is also supporting the participation of young people in **multilateral fora through youth delegate programmes, notably the EU@UN Youth Delegates programme**. The EU also sponsored the participation of young people in the **Biodiversity COP15** (training, mentoring, regional consultations) and the **COP26 in the European Economic and Social Committee delegation**. Moreover, the EU-funded youth engagement processes for the **UN Transforming Education Summit** in September 2022. The EU also supports the participation of young people in the **European Development Days (EDD)**, through the EDD young leaders.
- The **African Union-EU Youth Hub** is an empowering multi-stakeholder platform which aims to improve public welfare and revitalise communities together with civil society organisations and the private sector, for the benefit of an estimated 150 000 young people.

## Connect

The EU aims to **connect** young people across the world by promoting study/work abroad for young people ('youth mobility'), exchanges and networking as an essential aspect of the people-to-people dimension of the Global Gateway strategy. The goal is to ensure diversity and inclusiveness, while paying special attention to social and economic barriers and the digital divide.

- For Africa alone, the EU will invest EUR 970 million until 2027 on youth mobility through the NDICI-Global Europe funds. In the context of the Global Gateway, the **Team Europe Initiative on Youth Mobility for Africa** will also promote youth exchanges and mobility in Africa and Europe through almost 40 Erasmus+ partnerships in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- The **EU Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR)** programme supports projects that connect Europeans to global social, economic and environmental issues by working with European civil society organisations and local authorities. Through projects for education for sustainable development (Shaping Fair Cities), global citizenship (Bridge 47) and awareness raising (Start the Future), the programme promotes SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

- The **Transcultura project** brings together youth in Cuba, the Caribbean and the EU through the EU Culture and Creativity Programme (2019-24) to strengthen skills and increase opportunities through knowledge transfer and exchanges, thereby contributing to SDG 4 Quality Education.
- The **Hiwarouna project** supports intercultural and interfaith dialogue initiatives by young people in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq with EUR 1.5 million of EU funding between 2018 and 2022. So far, 67 youth-led initiatives have been supported, including storytelling, theatre, music festivals, painting and community dialogues.

### **Looking ahead**

According to the [2021 European Year of Youth online survey](#), almost two-thirds of young people did not know or were unsure how to make their voice heard or express their opinion. Meanwhile, the [2022 EU Barometer on Youth and Democracy](#) highlights that young people's main expectations from the EU for their generation include preserving peace, reinforcing international security and promoting international cooperation (37%) (SDG 16), increasing job opportunities (33%) (SDG 8), fighting poverty and economic and social inequalities (32%) (SDG 10), and promoting environmentally friendly policy and fighting climate change (31%) (SDG 6, 7, 12 and 13).

Building on the vast array of opportunities created by the 2022 European Year of Youth, the **2023 Commission work programme** proposes to update the EU learning mobility framework with the aim of helping young people to study, train or do their apprenticeship in another EU country, enabling the connections that will drive Europe towards the implementation of the SDGs. It also proposes to update the quality framework for traineeships to address issues including fair remuneration and access to social protection, targeting mainly young people.

The younger generation's legitimate demands to be involved in a more structured way in EU decision-making processes is clearly reflected in the outcomes of the **Conference on the Future of Europe**. For instance, [Proposal 36 - Citizen information, participation and youth](#) sets the objective of increasing youth involvement and effective participation in democracy beyond election periods. Based on the experience of the European Citizens' Panels throughout the Conference, the Commission is enabling a **new generation of citizens' panels** to deliberate and make recommendations ahead of certain key proposals.

The panels, whose format will reflect their Conference predecessor (at least one-third of young participants), cover topics such as food waste, learning mobility and virtual worlds, such as the metaverse. The panels will result in citizens' report that will feed into the reflections on the actual policy proposals.

The Commission will be taking stock of the results delivered by the European Year of Youth, which will be assessed in a subsequent implementation report by the end of 2023. The report will include ideas for future common endeavours in the field of youth. The [European Youth Work Agenda](#) is one such idea promoted by the EU Youth Strategy (2019-27) and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030. The initiative adopts a targeted approach to further developing cooperation among stakeholders in diverse areas of youth work in Europe, connecting political decisions with their practical implementation, especially on SDGs.

Moreover, another way to raise awareness about SDGs and to bring them closer to young people is through communication initiatives, such as digital media, youth influencers and other contemporary means of engagement. To ease the transition from an abstract concept to concrete actions, SDGs can be more explicitly linked to existing EU initiatives during presentations and workshops for young people. As well as encouraging peer-to-peer learning about SDGs amongst young people, it is important to make sure they feel addressed by highlighting the target group, the specific purpose of the meeting and the role that young people play in it, as well as by ensuring the issues are followed up. Furthermore, simplifying administrative procedures and monitoring processes could encourage a greater uptake of SDG-related youth projects.

For external action, the main priority will be the implementation of the recently adopted **Youth Action Plan in EU External Action**. Its objective is to shape external action in partnership with young people, to ensure their ownership and thus accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other international commitments. Among several forward-looking initiatives, the Youth Action Plan includes three key initiatives:

- The **Youth Empowerment Fund** is a new EUR 10 million pilot initiative that will provide financial support for youth-led initiatives in partner countries focusing on local SDG implementation, particularly on projects related to climate change, environment and the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised youth.
- The **Youth and Women in Democracy Initiative**, worth EUR 40 million, will increase the voice and leadership of young people and youth-led organisations across the world, by strengthening their rights and empowering their participation in public and political affairs. The initiative will support grassroots organisations and young activists in efforts towards anti-corruption, citizen election observation, civil education, promotion of the right to vote, freedom of association and assembly and human rights.
- The **Africa-Europe Youth Academy** will channel EUR 50 million in financial support to formal and informal learning opportunities and exchanges for young people, to improve their leadership skills and to create connections between change-makers in Africa

Looking ahead, raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda and educating citizens on SDGs is an ongoing process critical for establishing a European vision for sustainable development, generating support and promoting a whole-of-society approach to implementation. The **Summit of the Future in 2024** proposed by [UN Secretary General António Guterres](#) will seek to ‘advance ideas for governance arrangements in the areas of international concern [...] where governance arrangements are nascent or require updating’.

The organisation of this Summit is an integral part of Commitment 11 (‘Listen to and work with youth’) of the [UN’s Common Agenda](#), whose proposed actions are designed to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. It will promote youth participation and empowerment globally, create global alliances in line with the principles of the Youth Action Plan in EU external action and create partnerships with young people, worldwide. Thus recognising their role as essential and reliable partners in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.