# *YOUTH IDEAS REPORT*

# *FOR THE CONFERENCE*

# *ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE*

Conference
on the **Future**
of **Europe**

EYE 2021

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## *MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS*

In 2021, we all ask the same collective question: what now? What is the next piece of history going to look like?

Europe has faced enormous challenges in the past three years. Across our diverse continent, our citizens have faced floods, forest fires, economic downfall, human rights violations, threats to their livelihoods, and lives. Each of us has lived through a global pandemic that has shown us just how fragile our economies and health services can be, and how important it is to protect and support each other. Our unity is more valuable than ever.

The Conference on the Future of Europe has the potential to change the direction in which we are heading. It has made it more important than ever to collect, shape and voice the visions of those who are and will continue to be at the centre of Europe's future: young people.

What policies and laws can younger generations advocate for to ensure a safe and vibrant future? That's where this **Youth Ideas report** comes in.

This report is the result of the youth consultation process organised by the European Parliament in the framework of the Conference, contributing to

the citizens' consultations process happening at local, national and European level and online on futureu.europa.eu.

The collection of young people's ideas culminated in **EYE2021: the fourth edition of the European Youth Event** that brought together at the European Parliament in Strasbourg thousands of young people from all over the European Union and beyond, to **shape and share their ideas** on the future of Europe.

Since the last EYE report was published following EYE2018, young people have made their voices heard by demanding climate policies that can ensure our future; educational policies that offer fair chances to everyone; social policies that support where support is needed and much more. There is no doubt that Europe has an active young generation eager to shape the future, which was also showcased by a sharp increase of young people's participation in the last European elections.

Over the past six months, the European Parliament collected over 1500 ideas and proposals from young citizens around the continent on *Youthideas.eu*. The most popular ideas from the youth consultations, chosen by us, the EYE editorial team, were taken to EYE2021 and further developed by participants during ideation sessions. Out of these, 20 ideas were selected and all EYE participants, onsite and online, voted to choose the top 5 ideas, presented at the closing of the event. This document collects the **20 final ideas developed at the EYE, highlighting in colour the most supported proposals** discussed at the closing plenary of EYE2021. Many more youth ideas from the consultation process can be found on search.youthideas.eu.

We believe these most voted ideas are a true and fair representation of young people's top expectations for future policymaking.

A report like this would not have been possible without all the young people who participated in the youth consultations and made the effort to share with the world the changes that they would like to see happen. Neither would it have been possible without the many young people who joined EYE2021 to further develop the most popular ideas - thank you!

This report is more than just a collection of ideas, it's a voice of many, with a concrete vision for our shared future. It will be uploaded to the Conference platform futureu.europa.eu as part of EYE2021, and presented to the Conference on the Future of Europe plenary and the Members of the European Parliament to serve as inspiration for the political debate and future policy proposals.

*The EYE2021 Editors team*

## MAKE RECYCLING EASIER ACROSS THE EU

Borders should not interrupt our efforts to reduce waste and transition to green and circular economies. Member States currently have diverging approaches to recycling policies, which results in disruption to recycling habits and huge amounts of waste. This is why it is important to come up with a **standardised recycling system** that applies to the whole continent. A good approach can be seen in the system of '**reverse vending machines**'. Citizens will pay a small fee whenever they buy packaged goods that will be returned to them when they deposit the packaging back into these vending machines.

In order to make this work across the EU, it is critical that manufacturing and material use are unified. Additionally, simplifying the composition of packaging will ensure that every single scrap can be effectively recycled everywhere. This system should be implemented with a significant transition period, to allow adjustments in production, and time to educate people on new practices and expectations. Mandatory labels could also empower and inform customers about this new system and where to recycle their waste.

## *GREEN EQUALITY WITHIN BUSINESS*

The empowerment of eco-friendly, small businesses is a key tool to achieving a green transition. Large, less sustainable corporations remain dominant in the market, leaving almost no room for greener companies to compete. To ensure that **economic growth is ecological**, EU institutions should remove all incentives to use fossil fuels, immediately. These funds can then be repurposed to develop eco-friendly initiatives within small business ventures. For example, we can make access to credit more flexible for smaller companies who respect green trends and practices.

Additionally, it is important that the European Union encourages and subsidises the creation of local markets, where small business farmers can sell local produce to nearby consumers, shifting the focus from large supermarket consumption and **making local consumption more attractive** for families and customers.

## HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HEALTH

We need to take a more holistic approach to health on an institutional level. **A new EU health pact** would educate people on the importance of eating a balanced diet, exercising, and employ mental health experts within schools. COVID-19 has shown us that we must educate and empower people to take better care of their mental and physical health.

New legislation should include:

- Support to train and empower mental health experts within schools

- Lessons on eating a healthy diet and the importance of exercising, for schools to employ

- Mental health safe spaces in cities and towns, where people can seek refuge in busy areas if they suffer a panic attack or other symptoms of a mental illness

- An information campaign which signposts citizens to reliable information on eating well and looking after your mental wellbeing

## *HOLD COMPANIES ACCOUNTABLE*

Climate change is wreaking havoc on our and our planet's health, and the problem is becoming more urgent. Floods, droughts, toxic waste and air pollution within cities is damaging the health of European populations.

We need to hold companies accountable to the damage they do to our lakes, oceans, air and land for the sake of our wellbeing. Companies should be sanctioned for damage to the environment, and subsequent consequences on public health. Often it is the public and public funds that pay for

general healthcare and welfare. We need to immediately come up with a strategy to measure company waste and pollution in cities; we can look at rising chronic disease and allergy rates as markers for local pollution and damage to population health.

Additionally, employers must facilitate the use of **sustainable transport,** such as public railways and bicycles via subsidies or appropriate storage facilities. These choices not only better the planet, but better our physical health.

## QUALITY START TO WORKING LIFE

Reducing youth unemployment should be a primary EU priority, especially in a post-pandemic economy. The Union should allocate more financial resources to initiatives which **facilitate new jobs for young people** and assist young people in entering the job market.

We need to:

• Establish specific funds to end unpaid internships, regardless of education or social status.

• Create a platform in coordination with youth organisations and employers (companies, institutions, and NGOs) to help young people to find paid internships according to their preferences across a range of industries.

• Create a network of mediators within Member State schools, to reach potential "early school leavers", and educate them on their options. This is especially important for underdeveloped countries.

## *FISCAL AND POLITICAL INTEGRATION WITHIN THE EU*

To ensure better integration within the Union, now is the time to apply **one fiscal system across the EU**, in order to achieve Member State equality.

This fiscal integration would have many advantages:

- It would result in fairer distribution of funds between wealthy and underdeveloped Member States.

- It would lead to a larger budget and common fiscal policy legislation.

- It would minimise bureaucracy.

- We could develop investments for other proposals, such as common wage policies, a joint action against unemployment and a consistent retirement age.

## EDUCATION ON THE SAFE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Education on safe social media use should be a priority in 2021, as platforms come to dominate our personal and professional lives. Digitally literate people will not only be better equipped to deal with cyber threats, but will also use social media platforms with respect and tolerance.

No one should be left behind in the digital world; **we must educate all generations to use their digital presence with care.** For children in particular, we can:

- Integrate digital literacy into the school curriculum.

- Celebrate international digital days, during which children will be provided with practical and theoretical lessons.

- Use interactive games as learning tools.

- Create a simulated social media platform, so children can learn about the danger of cyber attacks and avoid the real life consequences.

## STRENGTHEN EU LEGISLATION ON CYBERSECURITY

In our increasingly digital world, we need a **greater level of cybersecurity** by strengthening international legislative frameworks. An EU-wide legislation is needed in order to ensure that citizen privacy and digital rights are more effectively protected.

The EU should create a committee of experts who will represent all Member States and define what a cybercrime is, and what legislation we should adopt. Such an institution needs to be shielded from potential lobbying and large corporations.

Legislation should also guarantee that online platforms verify user ID in order to fight online anonymity, which can lead to online abuse, invalid information and cyber attacks.

## THE RULE OF LAW

The EU is a union of values. We want binding mechanisms to uphold the Union's values expressed in Article 2 of the Treaty, such as rule of law and respect for minority rights. The treaties should be changed so that the unanimity rule in Article 7 is replaced by a **qualified majority rule**. Moreover, the European Commission and the Parliament should have a vote in the process, included in the calculation for the qualified majority. Once launched, Article 7 processes must have clear timelines. The Court of Justice must remain the only competent court to adjudicate EU law, including matters concerning rule of law.

We must give full effect to **the rule of law** conditionality clause attached to the EU budget and the Next Generation EU fund. The Commission must adopt relevant guidelines now.

In addition, the EU must assess Member States' respect for the EU's fundamental values, modelled on the pre-accession reporting processes for candidate countries.

## *EQUAL RIGHTS FOR LGBT +*

The EU should embrace dignity, fairness and respect as recognised and shared values. We must ensure that LGBT+ communities across the EU enjoy equal rights. The EU can and should define attacks against the LGBT+ community as hate crimes.

Real change begins in collective attitudes, and top down initiatives on their own, without support from the ground, can be counterproductive. The EU needs to **support bottom-up** **initiatives**, by promoting awareness of LGBT+ issues, and empowering regional and national activist groups. This support should take the form of an action plan, event production, new LGBT+ publications and funded group initiatives. Our communities need to be better informed about the rights that LGBT+ people are currently lacking, and struggles that LGBT+ communities face. Empathy and understanding is the first step in empowering others.

## SUPPORT FOR YOUNG REFUGEE SCHOLARS

The EU should fund a program which gives **access to EU universities to refugee students and scholars**. It should identify European universities interested in hosting refugee scholars, and liaise with the UNHCR to identify and contact refugee scholars. Universities could set some requirements for scholars, such as specific knowledge criteria, but should not be allowed to discriminate on grounds of origins in any way. Interested candidates should receive support from the EU, which would provide funding for NGOs that in turn supports candidates throughout the application process. Once accepted, refugee scholars should have access to preparatory training if needed.

**A central European fund** would be the best way to sponsor universities that accept refugee students, supporting primary needs such as accommodation, food, and language courses. Such a program would help the EU to respond to the challenge of an ageing population; strengthen EU values of solidarity and human dignity; allow refugees to gain skills in return for contribution to host countries, allow host countries to gain a new, skilled workforce; and, importantly, reduce mistrust of migrants and populist rhetoric.

## *BETTER SUPPORT TO ASYLUM SEEKERS*

The accommodation of asylum seekers for long periods in camps in Member States is inhumane and unsustainable. Improving this situation must be a priority. **The EU should strengthen centralised funding** which incentivises Member States to accept migrants. Funding should be used to sponsor states' acceptance of migrants, and to streamline bureaucratic and integration processes. It should be used to:

• immediately recruit translators and immigration lawyers to be present in Mediterranean countries, reducing processing times for asylum requests;

• provide for migrants' initial needs in countries of immediate reception; and cover the cost of food, shelter, medicine and infant needs;

• support integration in destination states, reducing unwillingness to accept migrants;

• provide technical support and advice across the EU.

• Assistance should also be given to states to set up apprenticeships for asylum seekers, and accelerate integration; enabling them to contribute to their host countries; and reducing host communities' mistrust of migrants. This may be complemented by increased recognition of migrants' previous qualifications, and by assigning processed asylum seekers to Member States according to their skills and states' needs.

## NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

The EU must provide more funding to enable all young Europeans to participate in non-formal education. The mechanisms already exist: Bridging Education, Study and Training (BEST) would easily fit into the Erasmus+ programme alongside actions such as eTwinning and staff exchanges. What we need now is the political will.

Non-formal education can have many different faces - among them voluntary services, youth exchanges and sports programmes. Young Europeans need to **learn practical skills** to grow into well-rounded,

responsible, and conscientious citizens and non-formal education is a great place to allow for a more holistic education.

In addition, a European non-formal education program could create a platform bridging the gap between school teachers and service providers that can provide expertise on topics relevant to contemporary life. The platform would also feature information on innovative, interactive and engaging learning methodologies as well as networking opportunities.

## *BETTER SCHOOL CURRICULA*

Let's rethink school curricula! European schools need to offer a more useful and practical education, and include **subjects relevant to life in the contemporary world**, such as mental health awareness, sex education, digital and financial literacy, environmental education and intercultural skills. Schools need to continuously reevaluate what their students need in order to facilitate a generation that is prepared for the workforce.

Furthermore, in an increasingly globalised world, both intercultural skills and knowledge about the opportunities and benefits that Europe brings become more and more important.

If schools help to strengthen both, we could create a more vibrant, diverse and engaged society in which we are one Europe, working towards common goals and actively engaging with the world. We can respond to challenges on a political and personal level, effectively.

Creating these new school subjects is beneficial to young people and Europe as a whole in several ways. Exposing young Europeans to topics with modern and practical implications will help nurture a citizenry that is open-minded, inclusive and tolerant. It will build empathy and bring Europeans closer together.

## *FEDERAL EUROPE*

Climate change, COVID-19 and international security concerns represent significant challenges to the European Union, its Member States and citizens. To tackle them, we need to commit to a federal state.

This way, we can become a greater global force to be reckoned with – economically, politically, militarily, and culturally. A federal Europe is by no means an easy task, but a long-term project with great prospects: cutting costs to national governments will allow us the opportunity to invest in health policy and climate change.

Furthermore, a federal Europe can unify people from all backgrounds and ideologies, and strengthen European identity by bridging internal gaps, which, in turn, will then make the State of Europe a strong, resilient player. This gives us the ability to speak with a common voice and enables us to promote European values and peace in an international arena.

## *STRONGER COMMON FOREIGN POLICY*

A more effective common foreign policy could give the European Union a stronger presence in world negotiations, and eliminate the need for several bilateral agreements between Member States and third party countries. As a **strong, multilateral and non-hegemonic power**, our Union can address global challenges and react more quickly and efficiently to international security threats both in Europe and worldwide.

By adopting a common foreign policy, we can:

- Promote values, for example by effectively banning any trade of goods which supports forced labour.

- Strengthen a European identity – and build trust from citizens in this new power.

- Improve resistance vis-à-vis and react appropriately to undemocratic powers and security threats

- Assure our voices are heard in international negotiations and world politics

## *A SINGLE STANDARDISED EU PASSPORT*

Let's unlock the potential of EU citizenship! As a first step, we can create a **single, standardised EU passport and ID card** for all EU citizens, which would be valid for entry and residence within all Member States.

Secondly, we must experience Europe in order to feel European. For that, it is important to make it easier for citizens to live in different Member States and move between them. That's why we need standardised relocation and registration processes in all EU countries: it should be as easy to move within the EU as it is to move within a Member State.

When designing such policies and processes, we must ensure everyone is treated equally. Therefore, we should make EU-wide rules for relocation to and registration in different Member States. For example, EU citizens should be allowed to vote in all elections of the country they reside in - regardless of their native country.

# TRANSNATIONAL LISTS AND "SPITZENKANDIDATEN" FOR EU ELECTIONS

The EU has a problem: its citizens are still not properly represented, which affects their trust in politics and their level of engagement with policy-makers.

To change this, the European Parliament elections need to be more European, and not 27 elections happening at the same time. We should use **transnational lists**, where voters would be given a list of national candidates, and an additional list with candidates from all Member States. This way, a voter could vote for both - their country candidate and another country's candidate, creating two different ways for politicians to be elected. With this, we can make sure that candidates still represent all regions, and at the same time make the elections truly transnational, forcing politicians to take the opinions of all Europeans into account.

The same should apply to the candidates for the President of the Commission who should not be elected in backroom negotiations among winning parties. We should enforce the so-called **"Spitzenkandidaten" system**, where each party announces their candidate for the President of the Commission before the election campaign in the case that this party gains a majority. Through active participation in the campaign and direct interaction with the citizens, the future President could become more closely connected to the European population.

## UNITE IN MULTILINGUALISM

Let's unite for multilingualism!

More EU funding should be used to support multilingualism. As a first step, **language learning in schools needs to be reformed**: whereas many students get to study languages spoken in larger EU countries, only few get to study languages spoken by fewer EU citizens, even though those languages might be spoken in countries much closer to them. Many bilingual students are also unable to study their native language in school, and many languages spoken by national, ethnic and linguistic minorities are not offered to them, threatening their right to use their native tongue. More funding must facilitate language classes and train teachers who can promote multilingualism in the education system.

As a next step, we can **enhance youth exchanges** such as study trips aimed at learning a foreign language, as well as changing official communication. Some events and programs targeted at young Europeans are already carried out in multiple languages: more EU funding could enable even more events and programs to provide such language learning opportunities to young Europeans.

## *PRIORITISE TRANSPARENCY IN EU POLITICS*

All European policies need to be evaluated in a transparent way. Some of them may not reach their goals or target communities: they might, for example, forget to take the specific situation of citizens living in rural areas or economically weaker countries into account. To learn from the mistakes we have made in the past and **create better policies in the future**, citizens must be able to understand why individual policies are created and reformed: transparent and understandable evaluations will enable them to make well-informed decisions in elections.

Secondly, the work of lobbyists in the EU must be made more transparent. Lobbyists must be regulated more strictly to make sure that politicians listen to their voters. Over the past few years, there have been some initial efforts to strengthen regulation. These are a step in the right direction: one way to further foster transparency would, for example, be to expand the scope and use of **transparency registers**. Such measures will additionally increase citizens' trust in the Union and in its policies.

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