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CURRENT CHALLENGES IN THE EUROPEAN YOUTH POLICY

ABSTRACT: This article aims to focus on the current challenges of the European Youth policy, relying on data from the two most recent European Youth Strategies: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030. Both strategies, which build on earlier initiatives and are intended to serve different priorities and purposes, emphasize the needs and issues facing young people. The article focuses on whether these policies are efficient enough to support young people to achieve their rights. Considering the youth's current challenges, the analysis reveals what can be done and who can help achieve a coherent framework which can be integrated with national policies? Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the significant repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis, which has affected every sector of a society, including the young generation sector, especially in the following areas: technological, social, civic, political, and personal. For a multitude of reasons, it is time for the European Union to raise awareness about the implications of the pandemic, to review the priorities for the future, and to focus on the new challenges that arise, based on the developments over the last 24 months. The European Union must focus on implementing the bottom-up approach and participatory vision when it comes to addressing the needs and issues of youth and their situation in the future of Europe. It is crucial for the sustainable development of the European Union that youth receive long-term solutions and comprehensive strategies, where young people are the main subject of European policies and an active part of the decision-making processes, at all levels.

KEYWORDS: European Union, youth, strategy, COVID-19, challenges

WYZWANIA EUROPEJSKIEJ STRATEGII NA RZECZ MŁODZIEŻY

ABSTRAKT: Niniejszy artykuł koncentruje się na bieżących wyzwaniach europejskiej polityki na rzecz młodzieży, opierając się na danych z dwóch najnowszych europejskich strategii: Strategii Unii Europejskiej na rzecz młodzieży na lata 2019-2027 oraz Strategii Rady Europy na rzecz sektora młodzieży do roku 2030. Obie strategie, które opierają się na wcześniejszych inicjatywach i mają służyć różnym priorytetom i celom, podkreślają potrzeby i problemy młodych ludzi. Artykuł koncentruje się na tym, czy te polityki są wystarczająco skuteczne, aby wspierać młodych ludzi w osiągnięciu ich praw. Biorąc pod uwagę obecne wyzwania, analiza pokazuje, co można zrobić i kto może pomóc w osiągnięciu spójnych ram, które można zintegrować z politykami krajowymi. Ponadto należy zauważyć znaczące reperkusje kryzysu COVID-19, który dotknął każdy sektor społeczeństwa, w tym sektor młodego pokolenia, zwłaszcza w obszarach: technologicznym, społecznym, obywatelskim, politycznym i osobistym. Z wielu powodów nadszedł czas, aby Unia Europejska podniosła świadomość na temat skutków pandemii, dokonała przeglądu priorytetów i skupiła się na pojawiających się nowych wyzwaniach w oparciu o wydarzenia z ostatnich miesięcy.

cy. Unia Europejska musi skoncentrować się na wdrażaniu podejścia oddolnego i partycypacyjnej wizji, jeśli chodzi o zaspokajanie potrzeb i problemów młodzieży oraz ich sytuacji w Europie. Dla zrównoważonego rozwoju UE kluczowe jest, aby młodzież otrzymywała długoterminowe rozwiązania i kompleksowe strategie, w których młodzi ludzie są głównym podmiotem polityk europejskich i aktywną częścią procesów decyzyjnych na wszystkich szczeblach.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Unia Europejska, młodzież, strategia, COVID-19, wyzwania

INTRODUCTION

The progress of any country lies in the hands of the young generation, which should be strengthened and empowered to enable countries to prosper and thrive. However, there is no news that youth has been dealing with several challenges such as poverty, poor education and health care, unemployment, inequality, human rights violations, gender discrimination and other forms of marginalization, which does not allow for these generations to accomplish their goals, improve their own lives and the lives of the future generations.

Youth are change-makers, once they are given the proper tools and rights to engage, to participate and become effective leaders of the society. Empowerment and engagement in society also means giving them an increased sense of ownership and attachment to their communities. To achieve these ambitious goals, the EU must make all youth aware of their potential and power to build a nation and its future, by dealing with the obstacles they face every day and ensuring that they are encouraged to step up in the social arena and make their voices heard. This can only be reached by addressing the needs and issues of the youth and providing them with the proper means to develop knowledge, skills and competences in order to become active members in the society and agents of change.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the paper has a constructivist approach which aims to offer a better understanding of the importance of youth in the European Union. In this context, previous experiences and lessons learned are key factors for the evolution of youth policy. The critical thinking skills allow for new ideas and proposals based on capitalizing experiences which can shape perspectives and shed a light on how the future should look like for European youth. The methodology of the study is based on the empirical review of the available literature and articles and analysing the relevant contexts, with a focus on the practical impact and consequences and future perspectives.

The developments are presented in a chronological timeline in order to show how the youth policy has evolved over the years, from its first approaches and how it should become made to measure, in accordance with recent evolutions, considering the important bottom-up approach and a Europe that not only protects its values and interest but proves to be more resilient, sustainable and close to its citizens.

In part one of this research paper, the aim is to review the concept and evolution of cooperation between the institutions of the European Union and to analyze its objectives and methods of coordination, which have led to the adoption of strategies in the youth sector, as well as the aims and results of these strategies. Part two will focus on the effectiveness of the existing European youth policies and the challenges youth is being confronted with. Part three deals with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth. Finally, Part IV will tackle the required course of action for addressing all obstacles reviewed in order to strengthen youth policies and its implementation, in a multi-level approach, for the future, especially in the context of the 2022 European Year of Youth and the Conference on the future of Europe.

COOPERATION OF EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS IN THE YOUTH POLICY

Both the Council of Europe and the European Commission have been working on youth issues since the 1960s and, respectively, 1986. Soon after, in 1998 the two institutions decided to initiate a Partnership agreement that would allow them to work closely “to promote active European citizenship and civil society by giving impetus to the training of youth leaders and youth workers working within a European dimension”.¹ The two institutions share a generous amount of priorities, objectives and values, while they also share some differences, but their working together has proven to be extremely beneficial to the development of common principles and guidelines regarding the youth policies, needs and issues.

While we are all familiar with the Erasmus Programme or Youth for Europe Programme, which were launched by the European Commission in the late 1980s, it was not until 2002 that the European Commission and member states agreed upon the so-called *open method of co-ordination*² regarding the youth policy, based on the European Commission’s White Paper, a new impetus for European youth, which proposed four thematic priorities: participation, information, voluntary activities among young people and greater understanding and knowledge of youth.³

The Commission’s White Paper on Youth was followed by the European Pact for Youth, adopted in 2005, which focused on three areas: Employment, integration and social advancement; Education, training and mobility and Reconciliation of working life and family life⁴. Four years later, in 2009, the Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field⁵ was developed and is best known as the Youth Strategy 2010-2018, the predecessor of today’s European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

¹ Youth Partnership, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/eu-coe-youth-partnership> (02.12.2021).

² Commission of the European Communities. 2002. Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field (2002/C168/02). [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32002G0713\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32002G0713(01)&from=EN) (02.12.2021).

³ Commission of the European Communities. 2001. European Commission White Paper – A New Impetus for European Youth. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a3fb3071-785e-4e15-a2cd-51cb40a6c06b> (02.12.2021).

⁴ The European Pact for Youth, European Pact for Youth_18112016.pdf (02.12.2021).

⁵ Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), Council of Europe.

Most significant improvements of EU's Youth Strategy 2010-2018 were made in the education and training of the young people, but many concerns still need attention from member states in the near future. The remaining issues, which still affect youth and have benefited only from a few improvement rates during the implementation of the strategy, were the following.

- the involvement in civil society organizations;
- access to employment;
- access to social services;
- the involvement and influence of youth in the policy making and decision-making processes;
- poverty;

Overall, the European Union Youth Strategy 2010-2018 has proven to be successful in terms of making youth policy issues more visible, across member states. We need to emphasize the fact that there was a different starting point for all member states, some of them being more familiar with youth policies, while others barely having one, so we can say that the Youth Strategy 2010-2018 was able to encourage the development of new ideas, principles and approaches for youth challenges and national policies.

THE EUROPEAN YOUTH STRATEGY 2019-2027

The new EU Youth Strategy is the third-generation framework in the sector and it is based on a dual approach: mainstreaming youth-relevant initiatives across policy areas and addressing the “Engage. Connect. Empower” core areas in the youth sector.⁶ The development of the strategy comes from broad consultation with young people and stakeholders across the European Union and its main objective is to empower youth and build their resilience by focusing on the three core areas mentioned. To be more specific:

- *engaging* means supporting youth to participate in the democratic life in all sectors (civic, social, cultural, political);
- *connecting* means supporting the access of youth to exchanges, cooperation, and cultural and civic actions in the European Union, in order to develop competences, critical thinking, creativity, and new ideas, be more active as European citizens and improve their chances to become employed;
- *empowerment* means supporting youth to overcome their challenges and gain confidence in the process of taking charge of their own lives.⁷

Using the Structured Dialogue, the strategy was able to identify crucial issues raised by the young people across Europe and **11 European Youth Goals** were agreed upon. These are the following:

⁶ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027), https://europa.eu/youth/d8/sites/default/files/inline-files/1_EN_ACT_part1_v3.pdf (02.12.2021).

⁷ The new European Youth Strategy – what's it all about? <https://blog.leargas.ie/blog/the-new-european-youth-strategy-whats-it-all-about> (02.12.2021).

1. Connecting Eu with Youth
2. Equality of All Genders
3. Inclusive Societies
4. Information & Constructive Dialogue
5. Mental Health & Wellbeing
6. Moving Rural Youth Forward
7. Quality Employment for All
8. Quality Learning
9. Space and Participation for All
10. Sustainable Green Europe
11. Youth Organisations & European Programmes.⁸

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE YOUTH SECTOR STRATEGY 2030

The new strategy of the Council of Europe builds on previous achievements of the institution in the youth sector and is based on the Council of Europe's three core values: democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The strategy aims to strengthen young people's participation in decision-making processes at all levels, to strengthen their access to their human rights and freedom and deepen their knowledge and expertise.⁹ With these objectives in mind, the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy has developed four thematic priorities for the achievement of their goals:

1. Revitalizing pluralistic democracy;
2. Access to rights;
3. Living together in peaceful and inclusive societies;
4. Youth work.

The strategy was adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 22nd January 2020 and launched on 23rd January 2020 for the period 2020-2030 and it was designed to give assistance to EU member states in the process of developing youth policies that meet the standards of the organization and share the European values.

The Council of Europe Strategy emphasizes the need to broadly involve youth in the decision-making processes and consider the challenges that they face in light of the digitalization or Internet governance, the effects of climate and environmental change, artificial intelligence, increased mobility and changes in the employment sector.¹⁰

⁸ European Youth Goals 2019-2027, <https://youthforeurope.eu/european-youth-goals-2019-2027/> (02.12.2021).

⁹ Youth Sector Strategy, Engaging young people with the Council of Europe's values, <https://rm.coe.int/ys-strategy-with-resolution-2/16809f4458> (02.12.2021).

¹⁰ Two youth strategies – one objective. The Council of Europe Youth sector strategy 2030: a strong backbone for youth work, <https://www.eywc2020.eu/en/news/two-youth-strategies--one-objective-the-council-of-europe-youth-sector-strategy-2030-a-strong-backbone-for-youth-work.6> (02.12.2021).

HOW EFFICIENT ARE EUROPEAN YOUTH POLICIES IN SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE THEIR RIGHTS? WHAT ARE THE CURRENT CHALLENGES OF YOUTH?

Youth policies do not have a common and widely accepted definition of what they are and which elements should be included in them.¹¹ That is why countries come up with their own policies and strategies, which can sometime be less efficient than expected and do not support youth in realizing their aspirations and reaching their full potential. However, elaborating youth policies in any member state should be in line with the recommendations of the European Union and be knowledge-based and evidence-based approaches.

What is the definition of a youth policy? According to the Council of Europe, “Youth policy is a strategy implemented by public authorities with a view to providing young people with opportunities and experiences that support their successful integration into society and enable them to be active and responsible members of their societies, as well as agents of change”. (Council of Europe CM/Rec(2015)3). One more interesting question appears from the definition mentioned: What is youth? And there is no right answer to the questions, since the definition varies from country to country, from 13-year-olds to 30-year-olds.¹² This makes it quite difficult to take into consideration and tackle all challenges these age categories face during their transition to adulthood, and that is the same for member states, which may create slightly different approaches to their national youth policies.

Developing youth policies and strategies requires many factors to be involved, especially intergovernmental cooperation and a cross-sectoral approach, while also making more room for non-governmental youth organizations to make their voices heard. While many countries have tried to put together national youth strategies, it has been proven that these are not as effective as promised and do not have a clear direct impact on youth.¹³

Throughout the European Union, there are many differences which can clearly be noted regarding member states’ living conditions, demographic, social, economic or governance circumstances which limit the development and opportunities of the young generation and from which we can conclude that youth cannot be considered as a “homogeneous group”.¹⁴ This also means that one or more strategies, at the level of the European Union, will not solve all of youth’s obstacles in achieving their rights and improving their lives for the future.

¹¹ E. Bielecka, *Youth Participation and Solidarity – Handbook for students and teachers of Social Professions*, p. 16.

¹² Z. Lavchyan, H. Williamson, *European Union – Council of Europe youth partnership, Youth Policy Essentials*, Revision 2019, p.6, <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261953/Youth+Policy+Essentials+-updated.pdf/92d6c20f-8cba-205f-0e53-14e16d69e561> (02.12.2021).

¹³ *Youth policy: Doing it right*, p. 211,

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/556251468128407787/ch9/additional/359990WDR0complete.pdf> (02.12.2021).

¹⁴ F. Hofmann-van de Poll, H. Williamson, *European Youth Strategies – A reflection and analysis*, p. 10, <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/101043895/European+Youth+Strategies+-reflection+paper.pdf/ba2cb002-9705-620d-3ddb-bc4939c6d3b4> (02.12.2021).

However, we can definitely tackle some of the main challenges youth face nowadays and that all youth can relate to. First of all, societies are aging across all Europe's territory which particularly impacts the young generations and calls for new ways of distributing resources and re-thinking the intergenerational relations. Secondly, youth faces social challenges which means that youth needs to be guaranteed access to their rights and freedom, access to education, training and employment, access to non-formal education/learning and work, all in the scope of combating social exclusion, inequalities, discrimination, poverty and promoting social cohesion and tolerance. Social exclusion, marginalization, vulnerabilities and their implications for well-being and mental health should be addressed better by the EU in order to show support to the young, build on their capabilities and empower them. Social exclusion can also lead to the disconnection from civil society, the feeling of being marginalized and not heard when it comes to expressing their views and concerns. From a political point of view, radicalization, terrorism, racism, discrimination are the main factors that have led to a lack of trust from the youth in the political systems and to the need to improve their participation in the political life and ensure their proper representation in political decision-making, especially for minorities and women.¹⁵ Also, technologically speaking, robotization, artificial intelligence, digital democracy is some of the challenges that youth policies should consider in the future period, since the technological development has definitely impacted the youth's both personal and professional lives.

What can be done to improve youth policies and who can do it? There are many things to improve on, from the European level, to as close as it gets, to the young generation themselves. Policy makers, the people who are directly responsible for thinking and elaborating youth policies, are the ones who should make sure that all relevant actors from the youth sector (young people, organizations, councils) are included in the entire process of designing a targeted policy, including in the most important steps: implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of its impacts for youth. At the European level, the Youth Dialogue with young people from the EU, which supports the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, is a great example of the European mechanism, addressing all young people and involving also national levels by means of consultations and activities with young people, organizations and policy makers, within national working groups.¹⁶ All data and outcomes of activities, both at national and European level, are gathered together and presented during EU Youth Conferences and the conclusions are furthered to the Council of the European Union and can result in the adoption of policy documents containing the youth's vision for their future in the EU.

Furthermore, tackling the challenges of the youth sectors goes far beyond the European level. It is crucial that member states get involved, especially the central government, which is usually responsible for the creation of policies and can lead the way for regional and local levels, as

¹⁵ Youth Sector Strategy, Engaging young people with the Council of Europe's values, <https://rm.coe.int/background-document-youth-sector-strategy-2030-english/1680a0bb33> (02.12.2021).

¹⁶ https://europa.eu/youth/get-involved/eu-youth-dialogue/what-eu-youth-dialogue_en (02.12.2021).

well as for monitoring and evaluating the implementation process in the respective countries. This way, the general objectives of the national level can be developed into specific objectives, considering each country's specificities and needs in the youth sector. Using a multi-level approach, clear and measurable objectives and outcomes is an effective way of evaluating the direct impact of youth policies for the young people, the level of reach, the challenges and obstacles of the process and what to change in order to deliver better results for the future.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

Youth has been one of the most vulnerable and affected categories as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of the economic crisis caused by it. The impact of the pandemic has been hard for the young people, especially in the labour market area, with an average rate of unemployment that reached 11.5% for 15 to 29 years old or 19.1 million unemployed young people, as OECD shows in their Employment Outlook 2021¹⁷. As unemployment remains one of the top challenges of the youth policies, other factors have been added, as the pandemic developed and physical-distancing measures were established, learning became remote, incomes dropped and on top of all of this, the previous situations and even mental health conditions, in some cases, worsened.

Also, young people are now dealing with an increasingly digital world, since the labour market and economy have been forced to rapidly and effectively adapt to digitalization, which stresses the fact that youth needs to be guaranteed the right to take part in shaping the future and in the decision-making processes which significantly impact their social life, employment, and the future of their work. Technology is threatening many jobs that are performed by people, and it has been estimated that 20-40% of job specifically undertaken by youth will be replaced in the future by robotization and/or automation¹⁸. In light of these changes and the need for young people to adapt to the digitalization in the labour market, a strong emphasis needs to be put on policies that ensure their social and economic rights. There are many differences across member states in regards to the digital skills of the youth and the access to such opportunities that threatens to increase inequalities between these generations, their level of preparedness for the digital age and the development of digital tools and platforms that take into consideration the specific needs of young people, including the disadvantaged categories.

According to the OECD Risks That Matter 2020 survey¹⁹, many young people have been confronted either with job losses in their households or job disruptions, such as fewer working hours, less income or even unpaid leave and this needs to be considered differently, since the situation of member states varies across the European Union and the economic im-

¹⁷ OECD, *Jobs: a slow rebound*, <https://www.oecd.org/employment-outlook/> (02.12.2021).

¹⁸ European Youth Forum, *The Future of Work and Youth 2019*, <https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Future%20of%20Work%20-%20online%20version%202.pdf> (03.12.2021).

¹⁹ *The OECD Risks That Matter Survey*, <https://www.oecd.org/social/risks-that-matter.htm> (03.12.2021).

pact strikes them respectively. The young people from low social classes were the ones most affected by the pandemic, considering that 61% of them reported that they or a member of the household suffered from different forms of job disruption, while 21% of them lost their jobs, compared to lower rates of other age categories or low/medium educated youth.²⁰ As a result of job disruption or job loss, the financial difficulties have been raised accordingly, since the start of the pandemic, which caused them to find solutions for covering their expenses, such as taking money out of their savings, asking for money from families and friends, taking additional debt or credits from the bank. In some severe cases, the financial burden was so high that people lost their homes.

Closely linked to the worries about financial security and long-term effects on their well-being and household finances, is also the mental health of the people, especially of the vulnerable youth, in this case. Moreover, the restrictive measures of the pandemic, which strongly limited access to education, exercise, social activities and employment, are all factors that influence one's mental health and increase anxiety and depression. OECD data shows that young people have been seriously affected by all protective measures, which caused symptoms of anxiety and depression to raise around 30% to 80% or higher in countries such as Belgium or France.²¹

CONCLUSION AND PERSONAL VIEWS FOR THE FUTURE OF YOUTH POLICY

The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030 are both designed to tackle the needs and issues young people are being currently faced with. When it comes to the implementation though, it is important to acknowledge the existing difference between countries across Europe, in terms of their governance, ways of living, the organization of the societies and even related to the importance of youth, their role and contribution.

The challenges of the past, such as global economic shifts, threats to democracy, climate change and environmental degradation are still present and the COVID-19 pandemic has had great impact on the youth, aggravating young people's mental and emotional health, their interpersonal relations, their working and financial situation, as well as their mobility and access to education and training.

There are five major themes which contribute to young people's disruption, and these can be applied globally and not only at European level: education and training; mental health;

²⁰ OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), *Young people's concerns during COVID-19: Results from risks that matter 2020*, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/young-people-s-concerns-during-covid-19-results-from-risks-that-matter-2020-64b51763/#fnotea0z2> (03.12.2021).

²¹ *Supporting young people's mental health through the COVID-19 crisis*, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/supporting-young-people-s-mental-health-through-the-covid-19-crisis_84e143e5-en (03.12.2021)

career prospects; safety and isolation; personal development²². These were all identified this year, 2021, during the Global Youth Summit and represent the result of local, national and transnational studies of the impact of COVID-19 crisis on youth.

Although youth has been extremely affected by the last 24 months, I believe that the COVID-19 pandemic should not be looked at only from a negative perspective. Instead, we should focus on the way that the pandemic has proven to us that societies are able to adapt and they should invest more time and resource into new ways of working, education and training for all young people categories, including the disadvantaged and those who live in remote area, the need to speed up digital transition, the creation of new platforms for participation and expression, especially for the youth sector and many other things. To address these issues and achieve these goals, the European Union needs “effective youth policies, the democratic decision-making of young people at all levels, as well as resources for quality youth work.”²³

In the context of multi-level governance, the European institutions are cooperating with member states, regional and local authorities, relevant stakeholders and representatives, as well as with the young people themselves, in order to organize a series of activities that will start at the beginning of next year and will be dedicated to challenges and issues that affect young people mostly, in close alignment with the priorities displayed in Youth Goals²⁴ (equality, sustainability, inclusion, mental health and well-being, quality employment). The objectives that the European Year of Youth is aiming at are to support, honour and strengthen the young people who are most affected by the pandemic and by the twin transition (green and digital), to encourage all categories of youth (disadvantaged, living in remote/rural areas, vulnerable) to become active citizens and change-makers, to build upon the Conference on the Future of Europe²⁵ (considering the European Citizen’s Panels which allow citizens to jointly about the future of the EU) and to promote opportunities of the EU policies for the support of the young people in the development of all aspects of their lives (personal, social and professional).²⁶

The outcomes of the Conference on the future of Europe are a clear contribution to the future of youth. The past year has offered both citizens and decision makers to fully concentrate on various aspects of how the future of Europe should look like by addressing the obstacles and inequalities which young people face nowadays and concentrate on making decision making accessible for youth. The innovative process was citizens-focused, a perfect example of the bottom-up approach which should be used when tackling specific end groups and results of policies. Starting with May 2021, over 2000 proposals²⁷ coming from youth across Europe were submitted on the online platform of the Conference and resulted in the Youth Ideas report and are available online on searchyouthideas.eu. In regards to youth, which was

²² European Youth Strategies - reflection paper.pdf, p. 22 (03.12.2021).

²³ Ibidem, p.

²⁴ *Youth Goals*, <https://youth-goals.eu/> (04.12.2021).

²⁵ *Education, Culture and Youth*, <https://futureu.europa.eu/processes/Education> (04.12.2021).

²⁶ Brussels, 14 oct 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5226 (04.12.2021).

²⁷ *Conference on the Future of Europe, Report on the final outcome*, May 2022.

one of the main focuses of the Conference, the results of the consultations, events and all activities developed in the past year, proved that a holistic approach is much needed for the future of youth in the EU. Youth needs to be empowered economically and socially, altogether and challenges need to be addressed especially in the context of the effects of the pandemic, as many young people felt left behind and suffer many consequences, including on their mental state and health.

In light of all the information presented in the paper, I believe that the EU should focus more, in the near future, on the following aspects of youth policy:

- The democratic reform of the EU, employment and social affairs, and education and youth should be placed at the heart of the EU's efforts to achieve sustainable development, while ensuring coherence with other policy sectors, using a long-term based approach.
- Promote easy access to quality education and training to address inequalities and challenges faced by youth in Europe, especially in the case of vulnerable and remote young people;
- The involvement of youth in the policy making and other decision-making processes should be strengthened, with an emphasis on the importance of close dialogue and cooperation with young people;
- Ensure that young people benefit from decent proper working conditions and salaries and take measure against those who discriminate, in any form, youth; fair working conditions and access to their rights should be enforced by the EU;
- Update national youth strategies by collaborating with youth stakeholders;
- Aligning short-term responses with investment in longer-term objectives.

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