



European Year of Youth: High Time for Action!

Adopted by the PES Presidency on 24/02/2022

Young people across Europe have suffered massively and disproportionately from the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, particularly in terms of their education, employment, self-development and social situation, as well as opportunities to gain experience from moving abroad at this crucial time of their lives. Education in all its forms has been shaken to its core. Many learners were dismayed by the difficult learning conditions, and many others were left without access to education or training.

Job opportunities for young people remain very limited. Work-based learning opportunities, traineeships and apprenticeships have been hard hit. Young people are also experiencing financial pressures: they have had a significant decrease in personal income and face a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. Many young people's mental health has also been severely affected during the pandemic; in the spring of 2021, 64 % of young people aged 18 to 34 were at risk of depression due to loneliness, social isolation and the lack of long-term employment, financial and educational prospects. The prolonged and repeated closures of concert halls, sports stadiums and places for recreational activities further excluded young people from social life and intellectual stimulation, with appalling consequences on youth wellbeing and social cohesion. The COVID-19 crisis has also brought to light the importance of ensuring access to decent and affordable housing for young people.

Young people are essential players in taking decisions today to build tomorrow's societies. Yet this gloomy situation dramatically weighs on their motivation to get involved in policymaking.

As we look ahead to a post-pandemic Europe, **we, socialist, democratic and labour parties and youth movements believe that the European Year of Youth is our chance to change a structural reality.** Together with those young people who have no job, financial or educational prospects, we must fix their pressing needs. **Europe's success is the success of those who have the least opportunities for emancipation.**

The COVID-19 crisis affects youth education, employment, mental well-being and income, so **we, PES and YES, advocate for making youth policies a horizontal priority integrated into all Union policies:**

- **Quality education is a right for young people, a duty to society and an investment in our future: we must invest to ensure quality education that is affordable and accessible to everyone.** This means extensive support for students facing difficult financial or social backgrounds. This also means free access to higher and further education. The automatic mutual recognition of degrees should finally be



implemented across the EU; non-formal and informal learning experiences and youth work should be recognized alongside formal education.

- **Quality jobs and decent working conditions, including fair wages, must be made available to all by taking advantage of the huge potential of the green and digital transitions.** This is why **we demand the right to work**, building on public- and private-sector job creation. Sectors such as education, health and care are facing significant shortages of workers. Improving the attractiveness of these professions will enhance the chances of younger people being employed in these sectors. The ecological transition also needs investment in green jobs.
- **Promotion of stable contracts** through employer penalties for repeated short-term contracts.
- **Specific measures for youth** in the National Recovery Plans must be fully implemented.
- Specific measures to **support youth entrepreneurship and young researchers & innovators**, often faced with unsurmountable financial difficulties to realise their entrepreneurial or R&I projects.
- Our goal is to **eliminate exploitative practices by banning unpaid internships, traineeships and apprenticeships**, using all the tools at our disposal including the **revision of existing instruments such as the Quality Framework for Traineeships and the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships.**
- Introduction of a framework with **clear and binding quality standards for all offers provided under the Youth Guarantee, including the principle of fair remuneration and access to social protection**, to promote positive and sustainable outcomes for young people, including a successful transition to the labour market.
- **Ensure equal treatment for all adults in the labour market irrespective of age, guaranteeing that young people receive a fair wage** for their work and are paid the same as older workers if they do the same work in all European countries. There must be equal job opportunities and pay for both young women and men entering and progressing in the job market.
- **Ban all age-based and gender-based discrimination in accessing minimum income schemes** and take measures to facilitate young people's access to these schemes in the upcoming Council Recommendation on Minimum Income to help all young people living at risk of poverty across the EU.
- **Ensure access to decent and affordable housing and tailored social services for young people.**
- Youth work must be recognised as making an important **contribution to young people's personal development, wellbeing and self-realisation.** The pandemic has uncovered the lack of support provided to young people experiencing issues connected to mental health, yet youth work structures have been weakened or even shut down by the pandemic.
- Ensure **equal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights**, including affordable menstrual hygiene and contraception; **combat gender-based violence online and offline.**

- **Mental health must be a priority** included in the upcoming EU Care Strategy **and mental health care must be accessible and affordable** for all age groups, especially young people. Mental health care must be covered by health insurance and be offered in all regions, including rural areas.
- Ensure **access to culture**, finding strategies to make culture production and consumption accessible to all young people, among this should be comprehensive support for youth centres and local cultural projects.
- We welcome the proposal promoted by the S&D Group in the European Parliament to set up a **European Festival of Culture and Ideas** bringing together the best of culture and arts, during which young people could celebrate by rediscovering the importance of creating social bonds and set the building blocks for a more social, just, green and digital Europe.
- Ensure and promote **the right to participate**: young people must be empowered to make the changes Europe needs. This can only happen if they have the means and space to participate in the EU's political and civic life and to actively contribute to the debates.
- **Ensure the European Year of Youth is also a feminist one by including and promoting young women's voices** and by breaking down structural barriers for women and girls to participate equally in education, careers, as well as economic and political decision-making.

By working together to push these priorities at the local, national and European levels, we, socialists and democrats of all ages, undertake to fight for a better future where **all young people have access to decent jobs, quality public services and personal and collective wellbeing**. The Young European Socialists, the Party of European Socialists and their member parties and organisations will collaborate on **a series of pan-European actions** to further the demands laid out in this declaration and increase the weight of young voices, making the European Year of Youth **a real year of progressive mobilisation and change**.