

# Youth empowerment

## SUMMARY

The proportion of young people (15-29 years old) in the general EU population is declining. On the whole, young people have a higher level of education than older adults, and youth unemployment rates have begun to decrease. Nevertheless, young people are still more exposed to poverty and social exclusion than other sections of the population. They are less prone to put their health at risk than previous generations. For instance, fewer young people smoke, get drunk, or become involved in a road accident than previously, but young people are still over-represented among those who are injured in road accidents. Obesity due to bad eating habits and lack of physical exercise is still an issue. Young people are also less likely to vote, or stand for election than older adults, but in recent years there has been a slight increase in interest in politics, political action and volunteering. Almost 80 % of young Europeans identify themselves as European citizens. In a Eurobarometer survey published in 2018 they placed education, skills and the environment at the top of a list of priorities for the EU.

The European Union is engaged in helping Member States address young people's needs and aspirations through a youth strategy which covers areas such as employment, entrepreneurship, social inclusion, participation, education, training, health, wellbeing, voluntary activities, the global dimension, creativity and culture. The strategy is backed by a number of funding programmes that are specifically focused on young people, most notably the Youth Employment Initiative, Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. It also draws from funds directed at other specific policy areas. EU action in the area of youth empowerment is best known for the mobility opportunities it has created, in particular through Erasmus. Future challenges include reaching a wider spectrum of young people, especially those from disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups, making the results of the consultative process, known as structured dialogue, more tangible, and improving synergies between policy areas for greater effectiveness.



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## State of play

According to [Eurostat](#) data, currently 88 million young Europeans are aged between 15 and 29 years. They [constitute](#) 17.2 % of the total population, a slow but steady decline from 19.6 % (96.6 million) in 2006. While women are a majority in the overall population, the reverse is true in this age bracket. Some 66 % of young people live with their parents; 28.8 % are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

### Eight areas covered by the EU's youth strategy 2010-2018

- Employment and entrepreneurship;
- social inclusion; participation;
- education and training;
- health and well-being;
- voluntary activities;
- the place of young people in the world;
- creativity and culture.

The role of the European Union (EU) is to support Member States, each of which is in charge of its own youth policy. A strategy (the '[EU youth strategy](#)') covering eight areas of action (see box) gave coherence to this support. This is important, as the strategy drew from several EU funds to achieve its aims. It also involved different sectors and different levels of decision-making. The strategy aimed to encourage young people to participate actively in society, to increase opportunities for young people, especially in education and work, and to provide more equal access to these opportunities.

The situation for young people in the EU seems to be improving on some fronts but remains unsatisfactory on others. What follows is a snapshot, drawn mainly from a European Commission 2018 report on the situation of young people in the EU (the '[youth report](#)'). This snapshot presents general trends in the EU, without looking at differences between and within Member States or the impact of origin and gender. These differences are discussed in the 'youth report' which presents a detailed picture of the situation of young people in the EU. This report is published so that policy-makers at EU level and within Member States can verify the extent to which the strategy and national policies are working. Another important source of information is the [Flash Eurobarometer 455 on European Youth](#), published by the Commission in January 2018. This survey measured the extent of youth participation, one of the focuses of the EU youth strategy. It also helps the European Commission to better understand the areas in which young people expect the EU to be more active. These areas will be discussed below.

## Developments

On average, young people and children spend 17 years in formal [education](#). In 2016, 83 % of 20-24-year-olds attained upper secondary education, compared to 69 % of 55-64-year-olds. Forty per cent of 30-34-year-olds held a tertiary degree. This is a 5 % increase since 2010. The number of young people leaving school early is declining. In 2017, the [digital skills](#) of 79 % of 16-24-year-olds with a high level of education surpassed basic requirements. By contrast, only 57 % of highly educated adults (25-64-year-olds) had digital skills at the same level.

The percentage of young people aged between 15 and 24 years who are neither in education, training nor in employment (NEETs) was 11.6 % in 2016. This is an improvement on the peak of 13.2 % reached in 2012. More young people are in employment than in the last few years. At the age of 22 years, young people are more likely to be working than studying. Youth unemployment reached its highest level in 2013 (23.6 %), and while in 2016 this fell by 4.6 %, it is still higher than the levels before the economic recession in 2007. Eighteen to thirty-four-year-olds tend to express

greater interest in setting up a business than older adults, but young people are more likely to start businesses in the service than in the manufacturing sectors.

On average, young people leave their parents' home at 26, and this has not changed since 2010. Young people's access to adequate housing has improved, however, with most countries registering a decrease in the rate of overcrowding for young people. Severe material deprivation rates are lower than they were in 2010, but this still concerns 8.3 % of children, aged 14 years and under, and 8.7 % of young people.

The rate of young people who could not afford medical care fell from 2 % in 2010 to 1.4 % in 2016. Young people also seem less prone to put their health at risk. Fewer young people smoked in 2014 than they did in 2008. However, 15.5 % of young people between the ages of 15-24 years and 24.6 % of young people between the ages of 25 and 29 years nevertheless smoked daily. Besides, fewer 16-year-olds reported having been drunk at least once in a whole month in 2015 than they did in 2011. The proportion of young people in road traffic accidents decreased in many Member States, but young people are still over-represented among those reporting injuries related to road accidents.

Interest in volunteering seems to be growing, 31 % participated in 2017, an increase of 7 % since 2011.<sup>1</sup> There is also a slight increase in the percentage of young people who take part in activities at local community level (12 % in 2011 and 13 % in 2017). Just over 50 % of 15-24-year-olds expressed interest in politics in 2017, compared to around 40 % in 2010. While interest grew across all age groups over the same period, young people registered the largest increase in interest. In 2017, 16 % of young people also said that they expressed their views and ideas online. Almost 80 % of young people aged between 15-24 years in 2017 said they feel they are EU citizens. This is 9 % higher than 2010. It is both the greatest increase and the age group with the highest rating for this sentiment. The same increase of 9 % was also registered by the 25-39-year-olds.

## Challenges

A fifth of EU 15-year-olds do not have a solid command of reading, maths and science, and while foreign languages are taught in all Member States, few have the means to check whether students become independent users. Only 47 % of 16-24-year-olds with a low level of education have digital skills beyond basic use, while 20 % have low digital skills.

Those with lower secondary education or less are three times as likely to be unemployed as graduates in the 25-29-year age group; 5.4 % of the youth labour force are among the long-term unemployed. In 2016, 39.6 % of 20-24-year-olds and 23.1 % of 25-29-year-olds had temporary work contracts. These contracts are more common for young people than for other age categories. While they can be an important stepping stone, some young people become trapped in alternating periods of temporary contracts and unemployment. This situation lowers their financial security and gives them fewer opportunities to develop their skills and careers. In 2016, one in five aged between 15 and 24 years worked shifts, weekends and evenings, compared to one in six among older workers.

In 2016, 11 % of young people aged 18 to 24 years and 12.1 % of young people aged 25 to 29 years lived in households where people worked very few hours and earned little. The percentage for young people between 25 and 29 years in this situation increased by 2 % between 2010 and 2016, making them the most vulnerable group in the total population. The rate increased for all young people, even if households made up of only students were not counted. On the other hand, the rate decreased for children and adults in their prime working age.

A third of those working part-time in the 20-24-year-old age group, did so for lack of alternatives. In-work poverty affected 10.4 % of young people between 16 and 29 years of age (compared to 9.7 % of those between 25 and 54 years old). However, this phenomenon is growing for all age groups in most of the Member States. Young people are the most vulnerable to the risk of poverty or social exclusion. The percentage of young people at risk increased by 2 % since 2010, whereas over the same period of time the percentage of children at risk decreased by 1 %. Both groups, however, are

more at risk than the general population. Risk of poverty is especially high among 16-29-year-olds born outside the EU (50 %).

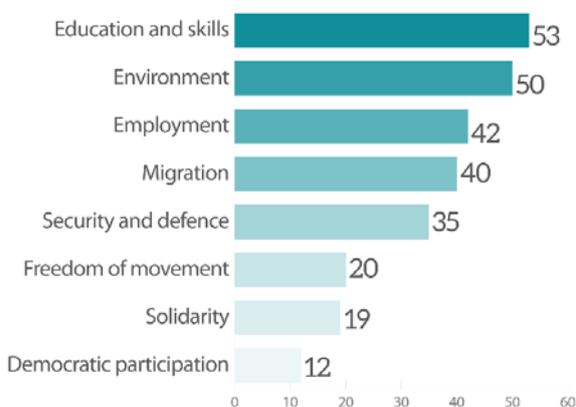
Risk of poverty is also almost 18 % higher among young people living independently and this rate continues to increase in most Member States. In 2016, 7 % of young people live in a house which is overcrowded and either has a leaking roof, no bath or shower or an indoor toilet, or is too dark. This is 1.5 times higher than the general population. Over 14 % of 20-29-year-olds faced housing costs which were more than 40 % of their disposable income, compared to 11.1 % of the total population.

On average, 5.8 % of young people were obese in 2014. This is a third of the rate for the general population (15.4 %), but even among young people, obesity is increasing due to unhealthy eating habits and low levels of physical activity. Almost 5 % of young people show moderate to severe symptoms of depression, compared to 6.3 % in the total population. Suicide rates remained largely unaltered in the EU at 6.5 per 100 000.

Young people are not very likely to vote or to stand for election. Election turnout of 15-30-year-olds dropped from 79 % in 2011<sup>2</sup> to 46 % in 2014, but rose again to 64 % in 2017.<sup>3</sup> When they do vote, young people are more likely to participate in local and national elections than in regional and European elections. The proportion of European Parliamentarians who were younger than 30 years old dropped from 3.4 % in 2009 to 1.9 % in 2014. In 2017, 7 % of young Europeans said they belonged to a political party. This is an increase from around 5 % in 2011.

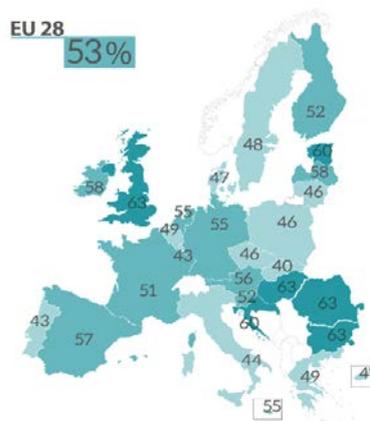
## Public expectations for EU involvement<sup>4</sup>

Figure 1 – In your opinion, which of the following topics should be a priority for the EU? (%)



Data source: [Flash Eurobarometer 455](#), 2018.

Figure 2 – Percentage of young people, who chose education and skills as a top priority for the EU.

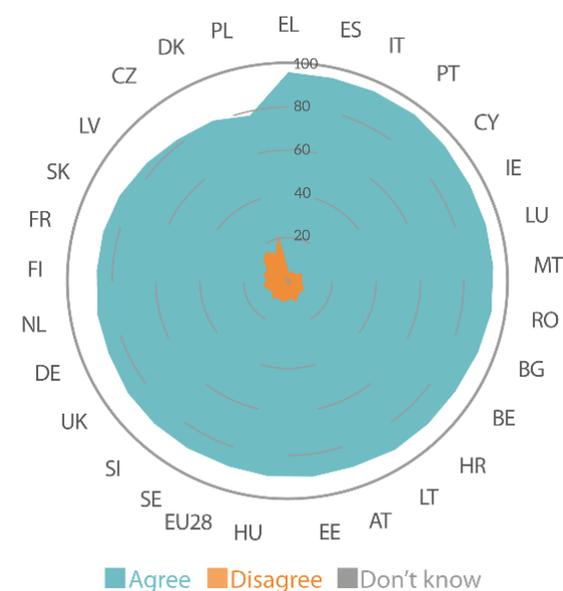


Flash Eurobarometer 455 asked young people to identify a maximum of three topics (listed in Figure 1) which should be considered a priority for the EU. They also had the possibility to suggest other topics, indicate 'none', or choose 'do not know'. These latter options are not displayed in the graphic, as 'none' received 1 % of the responses and the other two options received 0 %. 'Education and skills' attracted the highest response rate (53 %), followed closely by 'environment' (50 %) and 'employment' (42 %). 'Freedom of movement', 'solidarity' and 'democratic participation' were the topics that attracted fewest responses. These percentages are EU averages. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of the response for education and skills by Member State. At the upper end of the range are Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and the United Kingdom, where 63 % of the respondents identified 'education and skills' as a priority. At the bottom is Slovakia, where 40 % of respondents chose this

topic. However, according to the survey, this percentage is a joint second with 'employment' in Slovakia, while 'environment' scored highest at 46 %. It is interesting to note that young people's top priority for EU action is an area for which actual responsibility lies legally with the Member States, even though the EU has specific [targets](#) it wants to reach by 2020.

The gap between the highest and lowest EU average for a priority is of 41 points. At the very bottom is democratic participation. Young people in Denmark were the ones who chose the topic most frequently (24 %) and those in Italy chose it least frequently (4 %). This reflects statistics on the low participation of young people in elections. Yet when young people were asked whether they agreed or not that national governments should strengthen school education about their rights and responsibilities as EU citizens, 89 % of respondents agreed, 10 % disagreed and 1 % were undecided (See Figure 3). This means that practically all the respondents had an opinion on the matter. 'Don't know' was 0 % in seven Member States (AT, EL, IE, IT, NL, PL, and SI), and only in Denmark did the score reach 5 %. In 16 Member States (AT, BE, BG, CY, EE, EL, ES, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, PT and RO), respondents agreed with the statement at a level of 90 % or higher. Young Poles were the least likely to agree, but their response rate was still 78 %. This tallies with the fact that, despite low participation rates in elections, young people are still interested in politics, but the 'youth report' cited above indicates that they prefer to express their views on social media instead.

Figure 3 – National governments should strengthen school education about rights and responsibilities as EU citizens (%)



Data source: [Flash Eurobarometer 455](#), 2018.

## EU Framework

### Legal framework

As the European youth strategy encompasses several policy fields, EU measures rest both on the Treaties and EU laws for each of the policy areas upon which it touches.

- The Treaty on European Union ([TEU](#)) establishes freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law as fundamental values of the European Union. [Article 3\(3\)](#) ties the internal market to environmental protection, social justice, cohesion and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity. In the European youth strategy, these values are translated into practice through efforts to empower young people and to promote their civic and democratic participation in society and globally.
- [Article 6](#) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) establishes the duty of the Union to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of Member States in the area of youth, as well as in education, vocational training, sport, culture and the protection and improvement of human health. All these areas are mentioned in the European youth strategy.
- [Article 165](#) TFEU permits the EU to encourage young people to gain experience in other Member States and to participate actively in democratic life. The same article clarifies that the EU can contribute towards the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States. In doing so, it should respect Member States' responsibility for the content of teaching, the organisation of educational systems and the

safeguarding of cultural and linguistic diversity. Article 165 TFEU also enables the EU to promote the European dimension of sports as a voluntary activity with social and educational functions.

- [Article 166](#) TFEU authorises the EU to implement a vocational training policy which supports and supplements Member States while respecting their responsibility.
- Similarly, other specific articles<sup>5</sup> in the Treaty stipulate the Union's responsibilities in the fields of employment and entrepreneurship, social inclusion, health and wellbeing, creativity and culture. Mainstreaming clauses ([Article 9](#) TFEU) make synergies between policies and the youth strategy possible.

## Financial framework

While the legal framework delineates what the EU can do to promote youth empowerment, this requires concrete actions which depend on financing. The EU draws upon a number of funding programmes which are aimed at young people more specifically. Other funding programmes, supporting a variety of sectors and policies, can also finance measures which benefit young people among others.

[Erasmus+](#) 2014-2020 is the EU's funding programme for education, training youth and sport. A budget of just under €15 billion aims to secure learning mobility for 4 million participants. More than 100 000 schools, vocational education, training, higher education and adult education institutions, youth organisations and enterprises have come together to form partnerships and alliances for innovative projects that create know-how and develop skills for specific sectors.

A new proposal is being discussed to extend the programme's activities over the 2021-2027 period. The proposal suggests a budget of some €30 billion, of which €3 billion would be dedicated to youth, €25 billion to education and training, and €550 million to grassroots sport. The aim is to reach out to 12 million participants, three times as many as the current programme. Parliament wants a budget closer to €45 billion, and greater focus on the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.

The [Youth Employment Initiative](#) was launched in 2013, to support young people living in areas with youth unemployment rates higher than 25 % in 2012, and was renewed in 2016. The total budget of the Youth Employment Initiative for all eligible Member States is €8.8 billion for the 2014-2020 period.

The initiative has a framework, the [youth guarantee](#), which is a commitment made by all Member States that young people under 25 years of age will receive a good quality offer of a job, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or inactive after leaving formal education. Since 2014, each year more than 3.5 million young people took up such an offer.

The scheme led to the development of a number of [projects](#) in the Member States, for instance the Centres for Lifelong Career Guidance in Croatia. Eleven such centres are operating currently, and the plan is to double their number by 2020. The EU financial support provided through the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative feeds into national spending schemes. The total [cost](#) of the scheme in all the Member States is calculated to be about €50 billion a year, but doing nothing would have cost €162 billion a year in benefits and in loss of earnings and taxes.

[Erasmus for young entrepreneurs](#) is an exchange programme which gives new young entrepreneurs opportunities to learn from experienced entrepreneurs in another participating state. The young entrepreneurs collaborate with more experienced ones for a period between one and six months. All entrepreneurs are from micro-, small or medium-sized enterprises. The programme has a funding [envelope](#) of €55.3 million until 2020.

The [European Solidarity Corps](#) is an expansion of the European Voluntary Service under 'Erasmus+'. Announced in his 2016 State of the Union speech, the President of the European Commission,

Jean-Claude Juncker stressed the importance of investing in young people by providing them with new opportunities. Through the Corps, young people engage in solidarity projects that foster a sense of belonging in the European project, nurture one of its most basic values and help them improve their skills and their job prospects. The Corps has a total [budget](#) of €375.6 million for the 2018-2020 period, with the objective of involving 100 000 young volunteers. Parliament is discussing a new proposal to extend the period of activity to 2021-2027.

## Achievements of the current parliamentary term

### EU policy initiatives

The legal basis and funding programmes make it possible for Member States to jointly undertake policy initiatives at EU level. Some of these initiatives set standards or propose benchmarks, other initiatives are project-based and promote developments along specific directions.

- Student mobility is not just supported financially, but also by encouraging universities to recognise studies within what is known as the [European higher education area](#).
- An equivalent [process](#) for vocational education and training made it possible for vocational, education and training (VET) students to benefit from apprenticeships in other Member States.
- Vocational education institutions in different Member States can also develop [projects](#), in collaboration with public authorities and businesses, to make their programmes more relevant to the world of work.
- The [European qualifications framework](#), which creates standard definitions for different levels of qualifications and [Europass](#), a set of documents that make it easy to present your skills and knowledge to future employers across Europe, are being [updated](#).
- EU tools are being developed to [recognise skills](#) acquired during volunteering trips or other experiences abroad.
- To support cross-border volunteering, the European Commission offers young people volunteering opportunities under Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. It also developed a volunteering database which is accessible in the [European Youth Portal](#).

European ministers placed [work-based learning](#) as a top priority for 2015-2020. This led to a number of initiatives such as:

- The [Blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills](#) which facilitates strategic collaboration between stakeholders in line with the [new skills agenda](#) adopted in 2016 by the European Commission to strengthen employability and competitiveness;
- The [European pact for youth](#), proposed by the European Commission and [CSR Europe](#) to create business-education partnerships, apprenticeships, traineeships or entry-level jobs in line with the Council declaration on a '[European alliance for apprenticeships](#)' and the Council recommendation on a '[quality framework for traineeships](#)';
- [European vocational skills week](#), an awareness raising effort.

The 2015 [Paris Declaration](#) called on policy-makers to focus their efforts on fighting inequalities, racism and discrimination, to encourage citizenship education, and to develop young people's media literacy and critical thinking.

- The EU work plan for youth for 2016-2018 identified young people at risk of marginalisation as a [priority](#). It uses monitoring tools such as the youth wiki to contrast marginalisation.
- Council discussed the role of [youth work](#) and its reinforcement to improve social cohesion. The European Commission also published a [handbook](#) (2016) and a number of studies to inform the policy debate on youth work.
- The [inclusion and diversity strategy](#) ensures that roughly one third of participants in the 'youth' part of Erasmus+ are young people with fewer opportunities.

- The European Commission launched the [European agency for special needs and inclusive education](#) to bring down barriers for learners with special needs.
- While the principle of equality and the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual identity are embedded in EU legislation, research indicates that homophobia and bullying in schools are still a problem. EU funds have served to finance [programmes](#) that challenge attitudes in schools and local communities, as well as share good practices internationally.

The EU supported networks between Member States to promote the health and wellbeing of the general population, including those of young people. Participants exchange experiences and learn from each other. They also think more strategically and are encouraged to take bolder actions. Examples include: the [EU platform for action on diet, physical activity and health](#); the [action plan on youth drinking and on heavy episodic drinking](#) (2014-2016); the [HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis and TB Civil Society Forum](#); and the [joint action on mental health and wellbeing](#).

To support young people's participation on the global stage, the EU funds international mobility projects for young people and youth workers through Erasmus+.

- International [youth cooperation](#) projects allow young people from the EU, the diaspora and partnership regions to test new approaches to pre-identified policy areas. This includes [increased cooperation](#) with countries neighbouring the EU.
- Working with the Council of Europe, [annual symposia](#) bring together youth policy-makers, researchers, youth workers and young people.

[Creative Europe](#), the EU's programme in the [cultural and creative sectors](#) and [Erasmus+](#) fund projects that develop young people's creativity, improve their access to culture and new technologies, promote specialised training, support partnerships between the cultural and creative sectors, youth organisations and youth workers and support young people's talents and promote knowledge on culture and heritage.

In May 2018, the European Commission adopted a [proposal](#) for a new EU youth strategy 2019-2027. The new strategy adopted the words 'Engage Connect Empower' to identify its core areas of action. They were further broken down into 11 goals, identified with the participation of young people from around the EU. The new strategy came into force on 1 January 2019.

#### Eleven goals for the European youth strategy 2019-2027

- connecting EU with youth;
- equality of all genders;
- inclusive societies;
- information and constructive dialogue;
- mental health and wellbeing;
- moving rural youth forward;
- quality employment for all;
- quality learning;
- space and participation for all;
- sustainable green Europe;
- youth organisations and European programmes

## European Parliament

The European Parliament considers that the current method for developing youth policies needs to be complemented by other measures that are better coordinated and more targeted. During the current term, with regard to policies that favour youth empowerment, the European Parliament spoke in favour of [empowering](#) young people with fewer opportunities to be active in public life. It indicated that schools should [teach](#) how the EU functions and how they can make their voice heard

within it. It affirmed that education and [culture](#) have a role in developing an intercultural [dialogue](#) that includes the perspectives of young people suffering from multiple forms of discrimination.

The European Parliament [affirmed](#) that inequalities threaten the European project and called for improvements in working conditions and other measures that address the [social needs](#) of young people who do not have access to the labour market and of [refugees](#), such as universal access to affordable housing. It drew attention to the importance of investing in public [health](#) promotion and disease prevention and the impact of environmental, health, educational and cultural policies on the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). These issues and policies affect young people directly.

The European Parliament [stressed](#) the need for flexible, learner-focused educational systems that do not lock students into their initial choices. Education should develop young people's communication skills and their self-confidence. It should be [modernised](#) to improve inclusion, fight inequalities and become more in tune with societies. More specifically, the education of young [migrants](#) and refugees would facilitate their social inclusion.

The European Parliament also stressed that investment in education is needed to improve digital skills and tackle the [digital divide](#). Schools should incorporate new technologies in the learning process; even more so with the rolling out of [5G technologies](#) that will revolutionise the future labour market and other spheres of life. It is [in favour of](#) close collaboration between schools, vocational training institutions, authorities, businesses and civil society, especially encouraging student and youth organisations to work together to better match the skills profiles of young people with those needed by employers. Parliament [pointed out](#) that women, who are now the majority of graduates, are still disadvantaged on the labour market. Girls need to be encouraged to engage in STEM areas (science, technology, engineering, and maths), and lifelong learning and counselling are important for disadvantaged groups.

With regard to EU programmes and initiatives, the European Parliament stressed the importance of [EU initiatives](#) to create mobility opportunities such as Erasmus+, the European qualifications framework, the Europass CV, the European skills passport, and the European job mobility portal (EURES).

It indicated that the [successor programme](#) to Erasmus+ should align its objectives with those of the EU youth strategy. More funding is needed to [improve access](#) for young people with fewer opportunities, including the [Roma](#). The European Parliament wants to strengthen mobility opportunities for young people in [higher education](#) and [vocational education and training](#) (VET). Parliament also drew attention to persistent difficulties related to recognition in the home institutions following an Erasmus exchange. It called for [simplification](#) of Erasmus+ to improve the participation of small organisations, especially in sport.

The European Parliament [drew attention](#) to the importance of non-formal and informal learning through participation in sport and volunteering activities to develop civic, social and intercultural competences among young people. The European Parliament was [insistent](#) that the European Solidarity Corps should form part of a wider policy strategy that favours volunteering. During negotiations on the regulation covering this corps, the European Parliament [secured](#) €76 million in fresh money besides the contributions from existing programmes, and ensured that 90 % of the budget is dedicated to volunteering.

The European Parliament also called for specific measures to address the needs of disabled persons, such as the [removal of barriers](#) to quality inclusive education and full access to EU programmes such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps and the youth guarantee.

Parliament also called for [efficient monitoring](#) of the youth guarantee to check if the results are long-lasting. Member States should calculate the [cost](#), so that realistic objectives and targets are set. The European Parliament points out that this EU programme should not replace national spending. It called for a [legal framework](#) with minimum standards on the quality of apprenticeships and wages and for the removal of cross-border barriers to vocational training and apprenticeship opportunities.

Drawing attention to the fact that core labour standards and other quality standards are central to the [Youth Employment Initiative](#), the European Parliament [deplored](#) that young people who are not in employment, education or training cannot access the youth guarantee scheme. It also lamented the loss of young people who leave the EU to seek employment elsewhere. It called for laws that support young people who want to [start a businesses](#) and on Member States to [promote](#) the EU Erasmus for young entrepreneurs programme.

Parliament called for the inclusion of the [creative and cultural industries](#) in the Youth Employment Initiative and highlighted the importance of improving young people's [access](#) to culture by removing financial barriers and encouraging [interest](#) through educational activities.

The European Parliament adopts legislation on EU funding with the Council. It contributes by examining European Commission proposals with a view to ensuring they are best designed for citizens' needs, and then monitoring implementation in its capacity as budgetary authority. It also proposes [pilot projects](#) which, if successful, can become EU programmes. The European Parliament consistently defends the share of funding dedicated to education during the discussions leading up to the adoption of the EU budget, and has been instrumental in obtaining an [increase](#) in the budget for Erasmus+ over the current programme. In this respect, Parliament managed to achieve an 8 % rise for 2019.

## Potential for the future

More can be done so that decision-makers in youth policy cooperate with those from other policy fields to create services and opportunities that address the issues outlined above. At EU level, this means taking steps so that the objectives of relevant EU funds and other pertinent policy areas become aligned more closely with the objectives of the EU youth strategy.

At the same time, the structured dialogue between young people and policy-makers needs to reach a wider range of young people. Policy decisions need to become more transparent about the way they reflect young people's input in the dialogue. EU funds need to match ambitions, but they also need to better target young people with fewer opportunities.

## Budgetary outlook

For the [general budget](#) of the European Union 2019, Parliament decided to amend Council's position on the 2019 draft EU budget and increased funds linked to young people.

In the run-up to the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework, the European Commission claims to be doubling the funds dedicated to the [Erasmus programme](#), and is proposing a budget of €30 billion. The new programme is intended to triple the number of participants and to contribute towards the establishment of a '[European education area](#)' by 2025. Parliament wants a budget closer to €45 billion and greater focus on inclusion. The proposed budget for the [European Solidarity Corps](#) is €1 260 million at current prices. The European Solidarity Corps has absorbed the [European Voluntary Service](#) and the proposal is to absorb the [EU Aid Volunteers initiative](#), extending its scope to non-EU countries. The Youth Employment Initiative fund and its youth guarantee framework will form part of the [European Social Fund Plus](#), whose main aim is to invest in people and to implement the [European pillar of social rights](#). The pillar stands for equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, social protection and inclusion. The incorporation of a number of complementary programmes into the European Social Fund Plus enhances coherence, improves synergies, increases flexibility and responsiveness, allows simplification and reduces the administrative burden for authorities and beneficiaries. The proposed budget is over €100 billion.

## Policy strategies and debates

The [idea](#) of strengthening the social aspects of the Economic and Monetary Union, including improving access to education, gained momentum in the wake of the financial crisis and subsequent limited economic growth. The European Parliament stressed the need for a substantial

boost to programmes that address young people and called for new legislation and other measures to modernise access to education. The new budgetary proposals for the 2021-2027 period increase the resources allocated to programmes such as Erasmus, the Youth Employment Initiative and European Solidarity Corps. This indicates that youth empowerment as a priority has not only maintained its relevance, but has even [gained](#) in importance. The challenges for the next parliamentary term are threefold. The first is to better align the European youth strategy with other policy areas, this would improve synergies and make it possible to put policies in place with a positive, tangible impact on young people. The second is to empower all young people through their fair and proper representation in the structured dialogue, irrespective of their circumstances and life experience. This needs to be combined with accountability, to show how the outcomes of the structure dialogue translate into policies. The third is to create a European education area that would improve contacts between all education and training institutions around Europe, not just those at tertiary education level.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Flash Eurobarometer report 455, p.20.
- <sup>2</sup> For 2011 data, [Youth report](#), p.80.
- <sup>3</sup> For 2014 and 2017 data, Flash Eurobarometer report 455, p.15.
- <sup>4</sup> Graphics in this section are by Nadejda Kresnichka-Nikolchova.
- <sup>5</sup> Article 32 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights establishes the protection of young people at work. Article 9 TFEU presents the objective of a high level of employment as a horizontal social clause which must be considered and implemented in all EU policies and activities. Each year the European Council draws up guidelines that Member States must consider in their employment policies (Articles 145-149 TFEU) and the EU guarantees free movement of workers through directives and regulations issued by the European Parliament and Council (Articles 45-46). Social policy is a shared competence under Article 4 TFEU, social security and social protection are covered by Articles 151-161 TFEU, which set out the objectives of 'proper social protection' and how the EU can support and complement the actions of the Member States. Articles 10 and 19 TFEU state that the EU aims to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation through its policies and activities and allow for legislation to combat these forms of discrimination. The legal basis for health and health care policies is primarily Article 168 TFEU and Article 35 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which stipulate a high level of human health protection in all EU policies and activities. These are complementary to national policies. The EU is to encourage cooperation between Member States while respecting the boundaries of national responsibilities. Article 3(3) TEU ensures that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced. Article 6 and Article 167 TFEU declare that the EU should support, supplement and coordinate Member State efforts.

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