YOUTH

Youth is a national policy area, so EU-level harmonisation is not possible. The EU therefore can only play a supporting role. The youth strand of the Erasmus+ programme encourages exchanges of young people within the EU and with third countries. Over the past few years, the European Union has strengthened its policies towards young people, as illustrated by the European Solidarity Corps initiative and the DiscoverEU project.

LEGAL BASIS

Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) are the basis for EU action in the youth field. Action falling within the scope of Articles 165 and 166 is subject to the ordinary legislative procedure. As regards youth policy, any harmonisation of Member States’ legislation is expressly excluded. The Council may adopt recommendations based on Commission proposals.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which has the same legal value as the treaties (Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union), includes an article on children’s rights (Article 24) and an article forbidding child labour and providing for protection of young people in the workplace (Article 32).

OBJECTIVES

Article 165 of the TFEU provides for Union action in order to encourage the development of youth exchanges and exchanges between youth workers, and to encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe. Article 166 enables the EU to implement a vocational training policy to support and supplement the action of the Member States. It tasks the Union with facilitating access to vocational training and encouraging mobility of instructors and trainees, particularly young people.

In addition to these provisions, children and young people benefit from EU policies in other fields, such as education, training and health, or in relation to the rights and protection of children and young people.
ACHIEVEMENTS

A. Strategic Framework

1. EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027: engaging, connecting and empowering young people

On 26 November 2018, the Council adopted a resolution on the new EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. The text proposes that particular attention be devoted to the following points:

— Fostering the participation of young people in civic and democratic life;
— Connecting young people across the European Union and beyond to foster voluntary engagement, learning mobility, solidarity and intercultural understanding;
— Supporting youth empowerment through quality, innovation and the recognition of youth work.

In June 2021, as part of this strategy, the Commission appointed Biliana Sirakova as the first ‘European Union Youth Coordinator’. Her role is to strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation within the Commission.

B. EU spending programmes on youth

1. Erasmus+

Under the Erasmus+ programme for 2021-2027 some 10.3% of the budget – more than EUR 2.5 billion – is earmarked for youth activities, which is a substantial increase on the EUR 1.48 billion for 2014-2020. Beneficiaries of DiscoverEU include school pupils and higher education students, but also trainees and youth workers. A new facility under Erasmus+ is a special funding scheme for ‘small partnerships’, which should be of particular benefit to youth associations. One of the aims of the programme is also to promote a sense of belonging to the European Union by means of a new initiative called DiscoverEU, which gives young people opportunities to discover Europe’s diversity through its cultural heritage.

2. European Solidarity Corps

Launched in December 2016, the European Solidarity Corps is an initiative which aims to give young people aged 18-35 the opportunity to take part in solidarity activities in their own country or abroad through volunteering, a traineeship or a job in a range of areas such as healthcare and environmental protection. To date, more than 60 000 young people have taken advantage of the scheme.

C. Other EU initiatives

1. The reinforced Youth Guarantee

Created in 2013, the Youth Guarantee is a scheme to ensure that young people receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. In view of its success, the scheme was enhanced in 2020 on the basis of the
2. Child protection policies

As laid down in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a child is any human being below the age of 18. The Treaty of Lisbon introduced an objective for the EU to promote children’s rights, while the Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantees the protection of children’s rights by EU institutions, as well as by Member States.

On 15 February 2011, the Commission adopted a communication entitled ‘An EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child’. Its purpose is to reaffirm the strong commitment of all EU institutions and of all Member States to promoting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of the child in all relevant EU policies, and the willingness to translate this commitment into concrete results. The rights of the child and the prevention of violence against children, young people, women and other groups at risk are also protected and promoted under the Rights and Values programme (2021-2027).

In 2016, Parliament and the Council adopted a directive on procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings. That directive should ensure that children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings are able to understand and follow those proceedings and to exercise their right to a fair trial. It should also prevent children from reoffending and foster their social integration.

3. Youth and media

Online technologies offer a great opportunity for children and young people to benefit from digital learning and to participate in public debate. However, children can also be especially vulnerable to modern technology. Adopted in 2010, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive ensures that minors are protected from content that may impair them, whether offered by traditional broadcasters or through on-demand services. In 2016, the Commission proposed revising the directive to include video-sharing platforms when it comes to tackling hate speech and protecting minors from content that may be seriously harmful to them.

4. European Youth Portal

The European Youth Portal is a website to help young people all over Europe navigate the many opportunities the EU offers in different areas of interest, such as volunteering, working, learning, culture and creativity, and many others.

5. European Youth Week

Every two years, the Commission, together with Parliament, organises the European Youth Week, whose purpose is both to celebrate youth activities across all of the countries taking part in the Erasmus programme and to present the various mobility opportunities that are on offer to young people in the EU.

6. European Year of Youth 2022

The principle of a European Year of Youth in 2022 was announced by the President of the Commission in her State of the Union address in 2021. The aim of this event is to
celebrate the generation that suffered most from the COVID-19 pandemic, to support the most vulnerable young people and to promote the opportunities offered to young people by the EU, with the idea of drawing inspiration from young people’s ideas to strengthen the European project.

7. European Youth Capital

The ‘European Youth Capital’ is an initiative created in 2009 by the European Youth Forum. Every year, a European city chosen to be the European Youth Capital is given the opportunity to highlight innovative initiatives launched by and for young people.

8. Youth4Regions competition

The Youth4Regions competition is aimed at young journalists interested in the EU’s regional policy. The winners of the competition can receive training on European issues and mentoring from senior journalists, as well as having the opportunity to take part in press trips to the Member States organised by the Commission.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Parliament has always supported close cooperation between Member States in the youth field. It has taken an active role in the formulation of youth policy, for example in its resolutions on:

— the assessment of the EU Youth Strategy 2013-2015
— a Youth Guarantee
— promoting youth entrepreneurship through education and training,
— youth employment
— skills policies for fighting youth unemployment
— the impact of COVID-19 on youth and on sport
— empowering European youth: post-pandemic employment and social recovery.

In the decision on a European Year of Youth 2022, Parliament insisted on sufficient funding being provided for the Year and for youth organisations to be involved at all stages in its preparation. The European Year should also explicitly promote measures tackling the challenges faced by young people, such as for instance their post-COVID social situation and well-being, as well as their working conditions. It should also boost efforts to empower young people to acquire relevant knowledge and skills and a better understanding of their working environments.

On 18 May 2021, Parliament adopted the European Solidarity Corps programme for the period 2021-2027. For the first time the project has a dedicated budget, of more than one billion euros, which will allow some 350 000 young people to participate. MEPs voted for the programme to be made more accessible to young people with limited opportunities, such as people with disabilities and those from isolated or marginalised communities, and to young people with learning or health difficulties. They also supported a clear distinction being made between volunteering activities and job placements to avoid participating organisations using young people as unpaid volunteers when potential quality jobs exist. Parliament insisted that host organisations
need be prove the quality of the activities on offer and comply more fully with the rules on health and safety at work. Lastly, it ensured that the programme will be assessed in terms of its contribution to the EU’s climate objectives.

In its [resolution](#) of 14 September 2017, Parliament recommended aligning the priorities of the Erasmus programme, the EU Youth Strategy and other EU-funded programmes. It was also Parliament which recommended that more than 10% of the budget of the [Erasmus](#) programme should be spent on youth activities.

Parliament also safeguards the **best interests of children on the basis of petitions** addressed to it. It has adopted a resolution on [child poverty](#). Parliament has also focused on children’s rights beyond the EU’s borders, in particular by adopting resolutions on [education for children in emergency situations and protracted crises](#) and on [child malnutrition in developing countries](#). In 2015, it adopted a resolution on [fighting child sexual abuse on the internet](#)[1]. In October 2018, it adopted the Commission’s legislative proposal for a [revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#). Under the new provisions, broadcasters will be required to reduce children’s exposure to publicity on unhealthy food or beverages; content inciting violence, hatred and terrorism will be proscribed; and gratuitous violence and pornography will be subject to highly stringent rules.

To encourage young people to pursue European projects of their own, Parliament and the Foundation of the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen launched the [European Charlemagne Youth Prize](#) in 2008, which is awarded every year to projects which promote European and international understanding. Parliament also runs the [Ambassador School](#) and [Euroscola](#) education programmes to help improve knowledge about EU democracy and values.

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04/2022

[1]For further information, see Fact Sheet [3.6.2](#) on Audiovisual and media policy.