

A New Generation of Europe

EU Youth Summit Declaration

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Introduction

The EU Youth Summit, organised for the first time, brought together a group of young people aged 15-25 to discuss important goals for the new generation of Europe. During the two-day event, participants engaged in dialogue with decision-makers, discussed various EU themes in working groups and learned about opportunities for influence in the EU.

The idea to organise an EU Youth Summit came from a need to strengthen the voice of young people in the discussion on the future of the European Union. Young people should be able to influence the European Union's decision-making easily in order for them to see the European Union as accessible and its decisions justified.

A total of 142 young people from all over Finland applied to attend the summit, of which 75 were selected to participate the event. The selection process emphasised motivation while also aiming to achieve the most balanced representation possible regarding gender, geographical location, age, educational background, minority groups and participation in different organisations.

Before the summit, a survey was carried out to find out participants' thoughts regarding the European Union. The responses revealed that the common market, free movement, shared values and peace were seen as EU's main strengths. On the other hand, slow decision-making processes, disagreements and differences between Member States, and the complex structure of the Union were seen as its main weaknesses. In the survey, participants were also asked to suggest themes for the summit, the basis on which working groups were set up.

The summit was held as part of the Europe Forum in Turku. The Finnish offices of the European Parliament and Commission, European Youth, EYP Finland and the Union of Local Youth Councils acted as partners in the event. The Youth Summit was partly funded by the Erasmus+ programme.

The present declaration was approved at the Joki Visitor and Innovation Centre in Turku on Friday, August 28, 2020.

Inclusion and Democracy

The role of young people in the European Union's decision-making should be strengthened. It is important to ensure that more young people can make a stronger and better impact. We cannot take Europe's democracy for granted, but instead it has to be actively safeguarded and strengthened.

Every young person needs to feel that they are included in their society, community and neighbourhood, and that they can influence the actions of these. Alongside representative forms of inclusion, we also need new channels of influence. The voices of young people, especially those at risk of exclusion, are easily left unheard as traditional models of consultation do not reach them.

At present, young people have just a few direct opportunities to influence the activities of the European Union. The EU's main official youth consultation channel, the EU Youth Dialogue, does not directly feed information gathered from young people into formal decision-making or preparation processes. There is a danger that youth inclusion remains weak and ends up turning against itself. The European Citizens' Initiative is also relatively poorly known and requires a great deal of resources from young people in order for them to reach their goal.

One tried-and-tested way to increase youth inclusion effectively, which has been around for a long time, is youth delegates. The Finnish Youth Council Allianssi has appointed UN youth delegates since 1997, and youth climate delegates since the beginning of the century. These delegates are responsible for representing all Finnish youths at various UN meetings and the climate summit, for example. A similar system of youth delegates is yet to be developed at the European level. Should one be created soon?

In Finland, the voter turnout of young people is lower than in other age groups. For example, in the 2014 European elections, only 10% of Finns under the age of 24 exercised their right to vote compared to the EU-wide average of 22%. Youth turnout in Finland increased in the 2019 European elections, but still fell far short of the target. In the spring of 2019, the turnout of people aged 20–24 was 23.3%.

Inclusion is passed down through generations and varies according to a person's level of education. Young people with a university degree are more likely to vote and participate in youth organisations while young people lacking higher education often abstain. Inclusion is therefore stronger among active youths.

Genuine inclusion requires knowledge and skills. Young people may feel that despite their interest, they may not have enough skills or knowledge to influence decision-making. People grow into inclusion and it is important to guide young people towards greater participation already at home and in early childhood and further education.

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The working group highlighted the following problems and possible solutions:

How can we promote co-operation between young people and decision-makers on EU issues in Finland?

Cooperation between the Union and existing youth organisations could be strengthened by increasing regular consultation and discussion events with European and national institutions. At the same time, current national procedures should be strengthened so that the views expressed at the Grand Committee's hearings would bind Finland's negotiating position even more strictly. Also, youth organisations should inform more young people about opportunities for greater influence in a timely manner.

How can we increase young people's confidence in the European Union socially and on multiple levels?

EU awareness should be increased throughout education as part of democratic education and the curricula of European educational institutions. These education and training procedures should encourage individuals to create their own European identity. At the same time, different ways to promote the inclusion and participation of young people should be developed, especially as part of the activities of the European nation. Young people should be encouraged to participate and create social networks, as well as to seize opportunities for influence.

How can the representation of young people be brought into and consolidated in the EU's influencing and decision-making processes?

By setting up three separate youth advocacy and decision-making bodies linked to the EU Treaties: a youth parliament representing each Member State, the post of youth delegate in the meetings of the European Council, and an expert body composed of young people acting under the auspices of the Commission.

How can cohesion and mutual solidarity be strengthened in the EU now and in the future?

In order to combat conflicts and inequalities within the EU, discriminatory societal reasoning and structures should be prevented and dismantled through education, training and access to information, so that everyone's right to be represented can be accomplished and the threshold for participation in decision-making lowered.

Education, Economy and Employment

Education policy is determined independently by each Member State of the European Union, and the EU mainly only supports the activities of the Member States. However, global megatrends such as ageing, the growing demand for skills in jobs and the development of technology are examples of common challenges faced by all Member States, which therefore require cooperation and a high level of skill. Requirements and aspirations regarding the EU have increased in the field of education policy.

Education has a direct link to livelihoods and employment. In 2017, the employment rate of Europeans with primary or secondary education was only 55.6%, compared with 85.3% for the highly educated. Young people's livelihoods and future are therefore strongly linked to their access to education. People often drop out of school when they lack basic skills, for example literacy, numeracy and study skills. Families living in poverty may also often lead to young people dropping out of school. The best learning outcomes are achieved in schools where there is a good team spirit, little bullying and efforts to ensure the inclusion of all pupils and students.

The EU influences employment policy, following an employment strategy that was launched in 1997. The main goal of the employment strategy is to create more and better jobs in the EU. The focus is on young people, as they were hit particularly hard by the financial crisis of 2008; as a result, many were unable to enter employment at all, which in turn led to prolonged unemployment. There are currently 3.3 million unemployed Europeans aged 15-24. EU countries have set a target of a 75% employment rate throughout the Union, which calls for a clear increase in youth employment.

So, what exactly is the EU doing to ensure that young people are not excluded from employment? One of the adopted measures is the European Youth Guarantee, a model that has also been deployed in Finland, which has now been extended to include other EU Member States. The idea behind the programme is that every unemployed jobseeker under 25 is entitled to a quality job offer, internship or training place within three months of becoming unemployed. The EU has allocated

over 15 billion euros to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee initiative. In addition, the EU and its Member States have channelled money into education projects aimed at improving youth employment. Employment and education are closely linked to the economy, which is why the Youth Guarantee programme should be continued and extended to recent graduates under the age of 30.

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The working group highlighted the following problems and possible solutions:

Economy

Problem: Innovation and growth companies are not evenly spread across the Union. Labour mobility is currently too one-way.

Solution: The EU should provide financial support to Member States with less worker mobility. In order to receive support, Member States must adhere to the Union's principles and be able to carry out the funded project.

Measures include: Granting EU-guaranteed loans for growth companies located in parts of Europe where there is less worker mobility. Encouraging higher education institutions to specialise through European higher education networks. Creating opportunities for employees to do project-based work in other EU countries.

Training

Problem: The world is changing at an accelerating pace. It is important to reach all young people and to aid their transition to working life through inclusive training activities. Opportunities for more diverse mobility in Europe should be guaranteed.

Solution: Improving students' access to the Erasmus+ student exchange application process in order to guarantee equal internationalisation capacities for higher education institutions. Removing bureaucratic barriers from project application processes so as to improve the chances of smaller organisations and schools.

Employment

Problem: The weak labour market status of young people and youth unemployment are Europe-wide problems. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has expressed her willingness to flesh out this problem with the European Pillar of Social Rights, which defines equal opportunities and access to the labour market for Europeans.

Solution: By using the European Pillar of Social Rights as a tool, the European Commission should make issues regarding the youth labour market a priority. This requires more visionary leadership and that the Commission implement the rights guaranteed by the pillar through legally binding measures. This is the only way to ensure equal opportunities for young people on the labour market.



Climate, Environment and Security

Global sustainability is a prerequisite for the future of young people. The threat and effects of climate change are most severe in developing countries, where young people make up the largest proportion of the population. Also in Europe, climate change will affect current and future generations, for example through increased extreme weather events and reduced biodiversity.

Climate change is, in very concrete terms, a global challenge that requires global responses. The EU is determined to help raise the global target and set an example. It is one of the signatories to the Paris Agreement, and EU countries have reaffirmed the goal of achieving climate neutrality in the EU by 2050.

In the Youth Barometer, which measures young people's values and attitudes, climate change resulting from human activities constantly appears on the list of key issues causing insecurity amongst young people. In the 2018 Youth Barometer, 67% of young people reported feeling insecure or uncertain about climate change.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the current commitments made by states to reduce their emissions would lead to a three-degree rise in global average temperatures. According to the IPCC, a two-degree rise would lead to the death of almost all the world's corals and a rise in water levels, among other things.

In their climate policy, Finland and the European Union should commit to keeping the world viable for future generations - the climate catastrophe cannot be left as a legacy for young people. Europe's developed industrialised countries should accept their responsibility in curbing climate change by reducing emissions in Europe, as well as financing and supporting climate action in developing countries.

In the last European elections, climate was a major theme and youth turnout increased. Demands towards the EU regarding climate action have intensified, and the first impressive initiative of the post-election Commission has been to launch the European Green Deal. The Green Deal presented by the European Commission permeates all sectors of society, from industry to energy and from food production and transport to education and construction. Its goal is to create a Europe-wide climate law that would make Europe the world's first carbon-neutral continent.

Allianssi has acted as a strong proponent of the Youth, Peace and Security resolution approved by the UN Security Council. Under the leadership of its youth, Finland has become the first country in the world to prepare a national action programme on the subject. The programme recognises the role of young people in building lasting peace, as well as the impact of conflicts on young people's lives. Youth, peace and security action programmes should also be developed in other EU Member States and at EU level.

Working Group: Joona Jokilampi (Chairperson), Maria Markkula (Chairperson), Sinituuli Suominen

(Facilitator), Joonas Gynther (member), Maija Kuivalainen (member), Maija Luukka (member), Daniel Marenk (member), Sami Matikainen (member), Matti Mustonen (member), Sara Nyman (member), Nina Seppälä (member), Emma Toikkanen (member), Patrik Wilska (member)

The working group highlighted the following problems and possible solutions:

How can the European Union take a leading role in sustainable development on an international level?

The EU has the technological and economic capacity to move from words to deeds and to play a leading role in sustainable development internationally. The EU can become a stronger international player only if it is internally united. The Union's internal integration should be supported, in particular by bringing young people closer to the Union through DiscoverEU-type projects. The focus of taxation policies should be changed so that they favour ecological development and investment in green technology and business. Emission targets should be set at the scientifically proposed carbon-neutral level and these should be followed in order for companies to operate reliably in accordance with the targets. There should be a gradual transition from a linear consumer economy to a circular one. This can be done by training companies in the ways of an economically viable circular economy.

How can the EU-Africa partnership be made more equal in the future in a way that takes into account the needs of young people?

Development cooperation between the EU and the African Union should be gradually transformed in the direction of equal economic cooperation, in line with the level of development of each country. The involvement and empowerment of young people should be promoted through supporting education, student union work and youth startup activities. Both sides will benefit if the EU invests primarily in sustainable African companies. The type of activities that China engages with in Africa, mostly for the benefit of just one party, should be avoided. This will help to facilitate a green transition in Africa.

What action should the EU take to prepare for the security threats posed by climate change?

The EU needs to draw up a contingency plan involving experts, civil society and young people to prevent the adverse effects of climate change. The plan should describe the impact of climate change on the Union's security and the means to prevent and prepare for threats related to climate change. The plan should be drawn up and implemented immediately. It should take into account the effects of climate change on food security, groundwater, migration and the release of pathogens from permafrost. Also, more research is needed on the link between climate change and conflict.

What else does the EU need to do to protect biodiversity?

The EU should play a clear role in safeguarding biodiversity. It is essential to increase the number of untouched natural parks and expand the existing ones. In order to safeguard Europe's diverse nature, clear-cutting should be reduced and traffic made greener. The EU aims to be climate neutral by 2050. In order to reach that goal, it is important to protect carbon sinks, i.e. forests. Every European should learn, through education and the media, how they can protect nature and contribute to its diversity.

Equality and Non-Discrimination

Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibits all discrimination based on personal characteristics or background. The premise of human rights is that all people are equal before the law. In 2016, the EU's FRA conducted a study which found that discrimination still exists across the EU.

Equality and non-discrimination should be actively promoted in order to ensure the well-being of young people. This means that all young people should have equal opportunities to live a good life and participate in society, regardless of their background. A climate that promotes negative attitudes can be particularly effective in hindering equality.

Prevention of discrimination is part of promoting equality and non-discrimination. It is highly important, as discrimination undermines the well-being of young people in many ways. For example, young people who experience discrimination feel insecure more often than the average person, find it harder to feel hopeful about the future, and have more regular health symptoms than other young people.

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The working group highlighted the following problems and possible solutions:

Problems:

1. Not everyone has equal opportunities to move forward in their lives due to their place of birth.
2. Citizens lack knowledge and understanding regarding ethnic minorities and there are significant differences between the Member States of the European Union.
3. Sexual and gender minorities face discrimination and violence from individuals, communities, societies and the state.
4. Other important problems include inter-generational poverty and social exclusion caused by poverty.
5. Gender impact is not assessed enough in research and product development.

Solutions:

1. The European Union should focus funding on improving regional equality through the restructuring of the ESI fund, so that, in addition to factors that support economic growth, resources are directed more resolutely to improving the educational and employment opportunities, and the scope of influence, of people living in sparsely populated areas. Instead of economic growth, emphasis should be placed on developing people's well-being. The application system for financial support from the European Regional Development Fund should be simplified and the effects of decision-making, especially on the lives of young people in sparsely populated areas, should take into account. Telecommunication connections in sparsely populated areas should be improved in order to compensate for the disadvantages caused by regional differences.
2. The European Union should encourage Member States to increase the amount of information on ethnic minorities and their status in the country in basic education. The Union should develop an education strategy that takes into account the educational challenges faced by ethnic minorities. In order to prepare this education strategy, the Union should set up a special group of experts, including representatives of various ethnic minorities, and consult them on decisions that affect them.
3. European Union law should recognise the existence of non-binary genders and their legal rights. The European Union should devote financial resources to safeguarding the rights and well-being of sexual and gender minorities.
4. The European Union should support projects that are aimed at promoting employment opportunities for young people affected by intergenerational poverty. The European Union should ensure that young people have equal opportunities to seek and take up employment, regardless of their background. One way to do this is by introducing anonymous job seeking services in Member States.
5. The European Union should add the requirement to take gender impacts into account in the awarding criteria for EU-funded research and development. In addition, the European Union should provide equal support to researchers of all genders.





Health and Well-Being

The European Union's health policy was not directly addressed in the Union's Treaties until 1992, leaving much room for Member States' own policies to form in the meantime. Health has, however, been touched upon in many agreements since the 1950s. At present, our health is directly affected by issues that appear in concrete agreements, such as product safety. For example, the use of certain colourants and additives in food sold in the internal market is prohibited. In the future, actions linked to data collection and analytics will play an increasingly important role in enabling the EU to improve the health of its citizens.

When it comes to megatrends affecting health policy, it is impossible to ignore ageing. The population of the European Union is ageing as fewer children are born and people live to be older than before. This puts pressure on the financing of health services in particular, as health care expenditure is on the rise while the number of payers is decreasing. One important way of resolving this issue is to take better care of citizens' health so that they can work longer and stay healthy. The EU has its own health strategy, which has been set up to complement the work carried out by the authorities and NGOs of individual Member State.

At EU level, health policy regarding young people has in the past focused more on solving individual problems, such as drug use. Now, however, the trend is moving increasingly towards a holistic approach to health. The most common health problems among young people are mental health problems, and preventive work is often based on holistic methods. When it comes to young people, the EU Health Strategy should focus more on preventive work and the treatment of mental health problems.

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The working group highlighted the following problems and possible solutions:

Question 1: How can we make sure that everyone has access to mental health services?

Solution:

The European Union should work towards eliminating the stigma associated with mental health issues. The mental health of young people in particular should be supported and they should be encouraged, through various campaigns and projects, to seek help. Mental health services should be easily affordable and accessible at the individual level. Member States of the European Union should promote the idea that physical and mental well-being are equally important. The Commission should introduce legislation in which mental violence is legally prosecuted as severely as physical violence.

Question 2: How can equal health and social services be guaranteed in the EU?

Solution:

Member States' preparedness regarding health crises should be increased in health care. In order to do so, a common EU resource pool should be set up to ensure security of supply between Member States during exceptional periods. Information related to health and well-being should be accessible to all. Health information and resources should be able to move freely between Member States.

Disadvantaged citizens should be able to participate in decision-making regarding health care. Everyone should have access to healthcare in any EU country, regardless of their social status, personal characteristics, nationality, place of residence or wealth. This could be done, for example, by organising remote reception for those outside the current healthcare system. In addition, tax on essential health products should be reduced.

Equality in health care should also include gender equality, which should be promoted at all times. Gender and sexual diversity should be emphasised in decision-making. Compulsory sterilisation should be abolished by EU legislation.

Question 3: How can medical research be developed in the EU?

Solution:

The EU should be made more attractive for medical research. EU legislation should eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy related to research, as it pushes research out of the European Union. Research funding for private companies and research institutions should be increased at EU level. In order to receive such funding, entities should meet certain boundary conditions relating to the price and distribution of drugs, for example. In order to receive funding, research should not be done from an economic point of view, but from the point of view of necessity.



Summary: What does the new generation of Europe look like?

Finland has been a member of the European Union for almost 25 years. What does the next quarter century look like for young people?

The idea to organise an EU Youth Summit came from the need to strengthen the voice of young people in the discussion on the future of the European Union. Young people should be able to influence the European Union's decision-making easily in order for them to see the European Union as accessible and its decisions justified. At present, young people have very few direct opportunities to influence EU action. The voice of young people, especially those at risk of exclusion, is easily left unheard when traditional models of consultation do not reach them.

One of the goals set out in the EU Youth Strategy is to bring the EU closer to young people. We need young people to shake up the old ways and to create a new Europe that reflects their needs. People grow into inclusion and it is important to guide young people towards greater participation already at home and in early childhood and further education. To this end, we work in the field of youth every day.

Young people often feel that, despite their great interest, they do not have enough skills or knowledge to influence decision-making. In order to participate, one has to have sufficient knowledge of the EU. The threshold to participate in discussions is always higher if one feels like they do not understand the language and topics of discussion. People are less willing to participate when discussions include foreign and complicated terms. Participation is higher amongst active and highly educated young people, and special attention should therefore be paid to ensuring that all young people are given sufficient information to take part in the discussion on the future of the European Union.

Young people have a great desire to change the world. In Finland there is a whole generation of young people who have lived their entire lives in EU-Finland. In the current exceptional circumstances, organising a safe summit for all required special arrangements and a great deal of work. But it was worth the trouble; it was great to see young people learn new things and passionately discuss the directions of the new generation of Europe.

Proposal for action based on the declaration:

- The Grand Committee should consult with young people regularly, for example through round table discussions, when determining EU policies in Finland.
- Three separate youth advocacy and decision-making bodies should be created in connection with EU Treaties: a youth parliament representing each Member State, the post of youth delegate in the meetings of the European Council, and an expert body composed of young people acting under the auspices of the Commission.

- Everyone should receive adequate and equal knowledge and skills through their education in order to participate in EU debate and opportunities for influence. This should also be taken into account in teacher training.
- Project-based working in other EU countries should be made easier, thus facilitating labour mobility, especially to areas in the Union with declining populations.
- Youth employment should be treated as a priority in employment policy. The implementation of the European Youth Guarantee should be continued and extended to new graduates aged 25-30, as in the Finnish model.
- The idea of European university networks should be developed even further. The splitting of degrees between different universities digitally should be made easier. In other words, students should be able to pick studies that complement their degrees from different universities in the network without restriction.
- International opportunities should be made truly available for every young person by making Erasmus+ exchanges more accessible.
- The bureaucracy linked to European funding (Erasmus+ and others) should be reduced so that smaller youth organisations and youth action groups can and would apply for support for different projects and activities.
- The European-African partnership should be made more equal and take into account the needs of young people. In particular, it is important to work together in Africa to increase the inclusion and future opportunities of young people by promoting education, student union work and youth startups.
- Peace is one of the EU's most valuable achievements, and lasting peace in the world can only be achieved through the strong commitment of young people. The UN Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security (2250) should be promoted in the Member States and at Union level, for example by setting up practical implementation programmes that set out the objectives, resources and indicators required for the application of the resolution.
- The EU should draw up a contingency plan involving experts, civil society and young people to prevent the adverse effects of climate change. The plan should take into account the effects of climate change on food security, groundwater, migration and the release of pathogens from permafrost.
- The EU should play a clear role in safeguarding biodiversity. It is essential to increase the number of untouched natural parks and expand the existing ones. In order to safeguard Europe's diverse nature, clear-cutting should be reduced and traffic made greener.
- The European Union should focus funding on improving regional equality through the restructuring of the ESI fund, so that, in addition to factors that support economic growth, resources are directed more resolutely to improving the educational and employment opportunities, and the scope of influence, of people living in sparsely populated areas.
- European Union law should recognise the existence of non-binary genders and their legal rights. The European Union should devote financial resources to safeguarding the rights and well-being of sexual and gender minorities.

- The European Union should add the requirement to take gender impacts into account in the awarding criteria for EU-funded research and development. For example, for too long, crash tests have only been performed using male dummies.
- The European Union should work to eliminate the stigmas associated with mental health. The mental health of young people especially should be supported and they should be encouraged, through various campaigns and projects, to seek help. Mental health services should be easily affordable and accessible at the individual level.
- Member States' preparedness regarding health crises should be increased in health care. To this end, a common EU resource pool should be set up to ensure security of supply between Member States during exceptional periods. Information related to health and well-being should be accessible to all. Health information and resources should be able to move between Member States.
- The EU should be made more attractive for medical research.
- EU legislation should eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy related to research, as it pushes research out of the European Union. Research funding for private companies and research institutions should be increased at EU level.

Turku, 28.8.2020

Janika Takatalo and Tuomas Karvonen

The authors acted as general contractors for the EU Youth Summit.









EU-huippukokous
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The EU Youth Summit, organised for the first time, brought together a group of young people aged 15-25 to discuss important goals for the new generation of Europe. During the two-day event, participants engaged in dialogue with decision-makers, discussed various EU themes in working groups and learned about opportunities for influence in the EU.

The present declaration was approved in Turku on August 28, 2020.

