



**EURYKA**

**Reinventing Democracy in Europe: Youth Doing Politics in Times of Increasing Inequalities**

**Blueprint on “European Youth Reinventing Democracy”  
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The Blueprint on "European Youth Reinventing Democracy" presents key policy results of the EURYKA project and relevant recommendations with the aim of helping policy-makers in Europe to identify a more comprehensive and concerted problem-solving approach that recognizes the diversity of European youth and gives great potential for the political socialization and influence of young people in democratic politics.

Throughout its 36-month duration, EURYKA researchers from France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom examined ways of strengthening European democratic life, and reaching a better understanding of the conditions, processes, and mechanisms underpinning how young people do politics: how they form opinions and take actions to bring about social and political change.

At the core of EURYKA's conceptual framework was the idea of youth political participation as a form of coping mechanism for dealing with inequalities. Thus the norms, values, attitudes and behaviors underpinning such mechanisms and how these relate to issues such as democracy, power, politics, policy-making, social and political participation (online and offline) and the organization of economic, social and private life were investigated.

Key evidence and policy recommendations presented in this blueprint cover the following aspects or themes:

1. Youth Policies across Nine European Countries
2. Young People's Claims in the Media: Evidence from Nine European Countries
3. Organizational Opportunities for Youth Involvement
4. Youth Political Engagement and Experiences
5. Youth Doing Politics in Social Media
6. Stakeholders' Views About Youth and Politics



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## REINVENTING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE: YOUTH DOING POLITICS IN TIMES OF INCREASING INEQUALITIES

### Youth Policies across Nine European Countries

#### INTRODUCTION

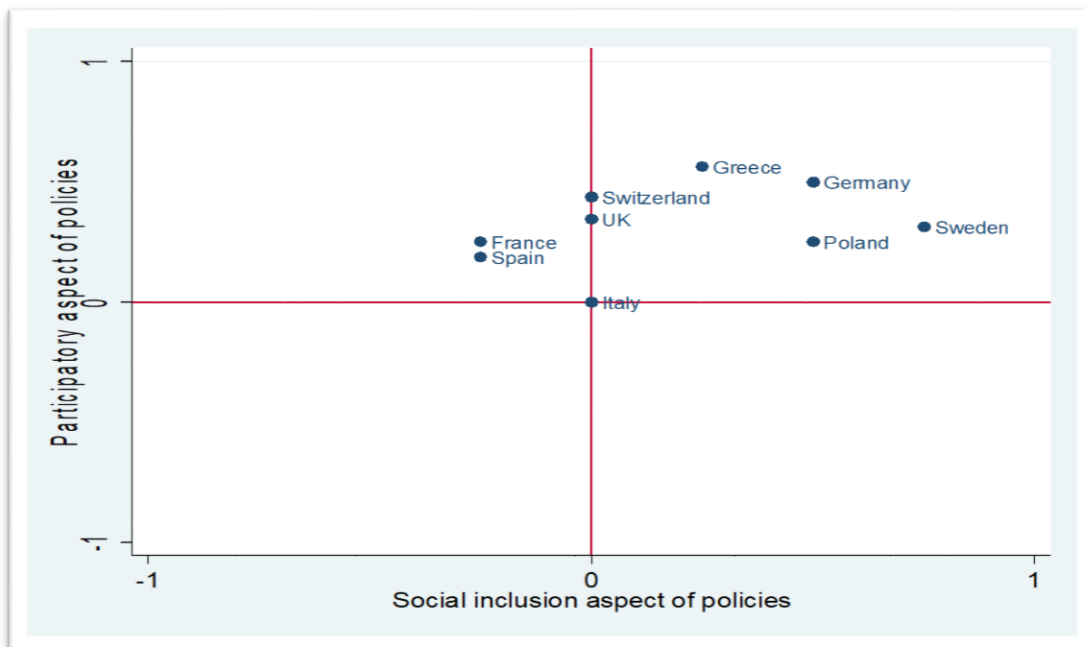
It is often said that the challenges faced by young Europeans today are unprecedented, from unemployment to job precarity, multiple forms of inequality and exclusion. This is particularly noticeable for youth belonging to vulnerable and marginalized groups. There has therefore been an urgent call to put policies in place that prevent the emergence of a 'lost generation' and empower young people for social and political participation. This policy brief aims to stimulate and inform policy debates on how governments are coping with this challenge. Do existing policies open up spaces where young people in general, and vulnerable youth groups in particular, can have a voice and an influence? This question was examined as part of our analysis of public policies in nine European countries: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Our analysis involved a two-track approach, motivated by the knowledge that political activism is hindered by inequality. First, we identified a range of contemporary public policies that are intended to regulate political and civic participation, labour market activism, and social and cultural activism. Second, we ranked countries by evaluating these policies along two axes: their 'participatory dimension' and their 'social inclusion dimension'. The ranking was done on the basis of specific scores from  $-1$  to  $+1$ : in respect of the 'participatory dimension', policies given a score  $-1$  are those that give fewer opportunities to young people compared to other age groups or clearly discourage youth participation, while policies given a score  $+1$  are those that encourage youth participation and provide young people with more opportunities than other age groups. Accordingly, in terms of their 'social inclusion dimension', policies given a score  $-1$  are those policies that seem to exaggerate inequalities as vulnerable groups of young people face restrictive treatment; in contrast, policies given a score  $+1$  are policies intended to reduce inequalities, as vulnerable youth groups enjoy positive special treatment. These scores were averaged for every country and eventually allowed us to show which of the nine examined countries are more likely to provide young people with opportunities for participation and decrease the existing inequalities (these are countries with positive scores on both axes) across all policy fields under discussion.

Voter apathy among young people has long been described as a worrying trend. According to Eurobarometer, the percentage of Europeans aged 15-30 who voted in an election fell from 80% in 2011, to 73% in 2013, and to 63% in 2015. The level of turnout at elections is often seen as an indicator of the health of a democracy ([Fieldhouse et al., 2007](#)),<sup>1</sup> especially as it is seen as giving legitimacy to political representatives. In this regard, improving young people's access to elections should remain a priority.

Our analysis of the **electoral policies** shows that Greece fares better than the other eight countries in respect to 'participatory dimension' (vertical axis in Figure 1). With its voting age of 17, simple rules for setting up a political party, and automated system of voter registration, Greece is ranked as the country where young people (in comparison to other age groups) have more opportunities for electoral participation than the lowest ranked Italy. The low rank of Italy is related to its policies which do not allow people under age of 25 to vote for the Senate, and people under the age of 40 to be elected into the Senate. Moreover, the rules for setting up new political parties are relatively complicated. Concurrently Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Sweden, France, Poland and Spain have very similar election-related policies which do not open up any specific opportunities for young people in comparison to other age groups. The normative aspect of this question, that is whether countries *should* lower their voting age and provide young people with more opportunities for political participation, was not part of our analysis. Despite the fact that in Switzerland the general regulations for voting age are very similar to these other countries, there is a significant state initiative for getting the youth out to polling booths, thus Switzerland scores higher. France restricted the age of running for office in the national legislature to those over 23 years old, so therefore it gains a somewhat lower score than Switzerland or the United Kingdom.

Figure 1. Participatory and social inclusion aspect of electoral policies



The evaluation of the 'social inclusion dimension' of electoral policies (horizontal axis in Figure 1) suggests that establishing accessible and inclusive voting procedures is an ongoing challenge for several of the nine countries studied. France and Spain have the lowest scores because there is a clear lack of or poor implementation of policy initiatives to support the electoral participation of

<sup>1</sup> Fieldhouse, E., M. Trammer and A. Russel (2007), "Something about young people or something about elections? Electoral participation of young people in Europe: evidence from a multilevel analysis of the European Social Survey" *European Journal of Political Research*, 46 (86).

vulnerable groups (e.g. people with disabilities). The picture is more positive in Sweden, where several well-established schemes exist. Several countries (Germany, Greece, Poland, and Spain) restrict the voting rights of people with mental disabilities following a general trend - observed in most EU countries - of linking the right to political participation to what is called the "legal capacity" of an individual ([FRA, 2010](#)).<sup>2</sup> This means that also young people with special mental disabilities would not be allowed to vote in these countries. Similarly, prisoners are sometimes – depending on the seriousness of the crime – disenfranchised in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom while no such limitations exist in Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

Given the problem of low voter turnout, particularly among young people, policy-makers worldwide have tried to work out what would get young people voting in the sorts of numbers they did in the 60s and 70s. While in some countries such as Austria and Argentina, voting at 16 has been seen as a way of inspiring young people, other countries like Estonia have offered e-voting. Evidence from Estonia, one of the leading nations in taking internet voting forward, has shown an appeal to younger people, a lack of digital divide and an appeal to casual voters ([European Parliament, 2016](#)).<sup>3</sup> What emerges from our analysis is that none of the examined countries uses e-voting in national elections, although France used to allow e-voting for citizens residing outside the country until the June 2017 elections, while Switzerland and the United Kingdom have tried internet-based voting on a few occasions.

The digital divide has often been seen as the main barrier to e-voting. Concerns that parts of the population remain excluded from information and communication technologies have been brought to the forefront. As the digital divide is a problem in the majority of the nine countries studied (except Sweden), some have introduced special programs for increasing the digital skills of vulnerable groups (e.g. France). Other countries, such as Germany, Greece and the United Kingdom use regional policies for encouraging digital education, but invest less in making the existing information easily accessible to people with disabilities and/or ethnic minorities. The Italian National Plan for Digital School (PNSD) was launched in 2015 and has not shown any clear results yet. Overall, while countries have taken initiatives for improving the digital competencies of citizens and diffusing the use of Internet-based technologies, more effort should be put into ensuring that the digital divide fades away and becomes negligible.

In addition to the legal opportunities for participation, academic debate has identified that social-economic conditions, such as the level of education or being unemployed, play an important role in youth political activism. Therefore, we have also analysed how the countries under study enhance economic empowerment, prevent and tackle social marginalisation, and preserve a framework of equal opportunities for all.

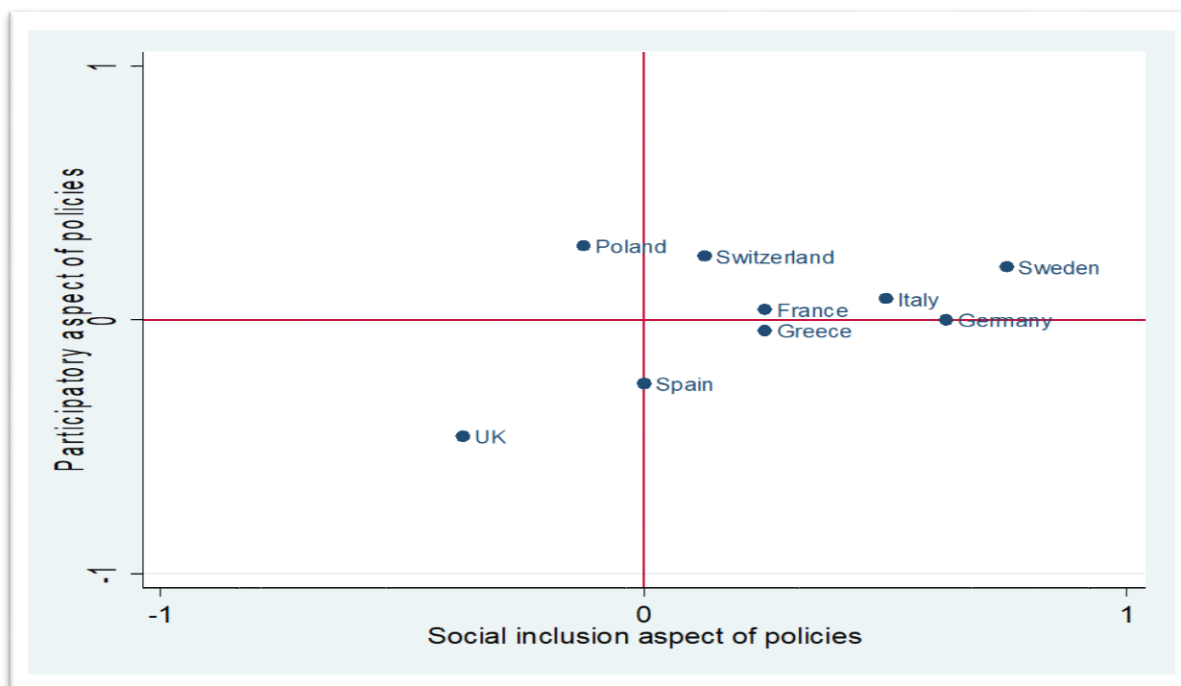
Our investigation of **labour market policies** suggests that the nine examined countries do not have very many initiatives which open up spaces of participation for young people or improve the situation of the young unemployed. Based on our evaluation of the 'participatory dimension' of labour policies (vertical axes on Figure 2), Switzerland and Sweden score high but Poland gets an even higher score due to its specific youth-focused labour initiatives. The United Kingdom and Spain fare worst among the nine countries as in the context of the recent economic crisis these countries restricted youth opportunities at the labour market (decreased minimum wage and unemployment benefits). The result that Italy, Greece and France and even Germany have a low score suggests that majority of the examined countries the labour market policies do not provide young people with more opportunities than other age groups even though youth unemployment is very high in some of these countries.

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<sup>2</sup> FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2010), *The Right to Political Participation of Persons with Mental Health Problems and Persons with Intellectual Disabilities*, Vienna: FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

<sup>3</sup> European Parliament (2016), *Potential and Challenges of E-Voting in the European Union*, Study for the AFCO Committee, Brussels: Directorate General for Internal Policies Policy Department C: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs.

Figure 2. Participatory and social inclusion aspect of labour and unemployment policies



Italy also has introduced labour market reforms (Jobs Act), which has made the labour market more flexible and increased the precarious status of young workers. Yet, Italy fares better than France and Greece, as these two countries have not promoted youth employment to a similar extent. Though Greece performs at a relatively low level, the Ministry of Rural Development and Food adopted a somewhat innovative measure against youth unemployment in cities – it aims to attract young people to rural areas and promote their involvement in agriculture. Crucially, the problems of temporary employment for young people are common in the southern and northern welfare states. Swedish labour policies, for instance, particularly the law of employment protection (LAS), has a principle which states that the last person to be employed is the first person ‘to go’ in times of work shortages.

In terms of the 'social inclusion dimension' of labour market policies and the extent to which these policies target vulnerable groups (horizontal axes on Figure 2), in the lowest position we find the United Kingdom. The low 'score' is explained by the situation where the policies for claiming out of work benefits for people with disabilities are becoming increasingly stringent and restrictive. Furthermore, there are no visible state initiatives for engaging newly arrived migrants to the labour market. The picture is more positive in Germany where a recently adopted law provides more assistance and help for people with disabilities than the previous legislations in December 2016 (*Bundesteilhabegesetz*). However, the policies for including migrants in otherwise well-working vocational training programs have not been very effective ([Enggruber, Rützel, and Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014](#)).<sup>4</sup> A similar situation can be found in Sweden, where despite special programs for increasing the employment of migrants and people with disabilities, as well as those just released from prison, the difference between the unemployment rate among young migrants (16%) and the general population (7%) has not decreased.<sup>5</sup>

Besides efforts to encourage labour market activism and inclusiveness of the vulnerable groups of youth, governments need to build up their social safety nets in order to support young people systematically in their transition into the labour market. In many cases, the targeting and effectiveness of specialized **social inclusion policies and services** has to be strengthened, especially in order to be able to offer tailor-made support to particularly disadvantaged young people, including people with a migrant background, asylum seekers and refugees. While in Germany, the services of youth welfare

<sup>4</sup> Enggruber, R. and Rützel, J. (2014), *Berufsausbildung junger Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to: [http://www.scb.se/contentassets/5a6d6bf5609f42b3ba5d4f02bc255dc2/am0401\\_2016a01\\_sm\\_am12sm1701.pdf](http://www.scb.se/contentassets/5a6d6bf5609f42b3ba5d4f02bc255dc2/am0401_2016a01_sm_am12sm1701.pdf)

offices are fully available for migrants and asylum seekers, in Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom the services are accessible only to those legally residing in the country.

Also, the analysis of **family policies** calls for the need to reach young people at risk – especially early head start and teen parents and their children. None of the nine countries studied have any special treatment for young people in their family policies – every family with children, including teen parents, are entitled to parental leave as regulated in the particular country and parental benefits according to the general rules. One exception is Spain, where parents under 21 are not required to have made a minimum of social security contributions for receiving benefits.

Moreover, although with some notable exceptions, such as France, **housing policies** targeting young people and particularly vulnerable groups of youth have been limited. Greece, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom generally fare worst in our nine-country comparison. There are only some *ad hoc* initiatives in Greece, though there are some provisions for vulnerable groups (asylum seekers, victims of domestic violence, single parent families, the homeless and women and children in danger). Young people under the age of 25 do not have any special housing benefits in Germany and Switzerland; the United Kingdom has removed housing benefit entitlement from young people aged 18 to 21 just recently; and in Spain the State Plan of Housing 2018-2021 that is aimed at young people under aged 35 has not yet been adopted. As inter-generational inequalities between 'housing poor' young people and 'housing rich' elders is expected to increase (McKee, 2012),<sup>6</sup> a fundamental re-examination of how housing policies work for young people is required if young people's housing needs are to be met more adequately in the future. In some countries (e.g., Spain), problems with housing have led to widespread protests of young people, while segregated urban neighbourhoods are known of low levels of electoral participation.

In terms of **health policies**, our evidence shows that Germany, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland fare much better in our nine-country comparison, as these countries provide children up to 18 years of age inclusive public healthcare services and there are also some special opportunities for young adults. Vulnerable groups are addressed less frequently, and there are also clear differences between the more inclusive Germany and Sweden, and the less inclusive France, Spain and Switzerland. In particular, the evidence suggests that access to healthcare for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers remains a key challenge to be tackled amid repeated calls on governments for the "need to do better" policies.<sup>7</sup> National responses vary in this respect. In Switzerland the rules are restrictive and since 2006, following the tightening of the Asylum Law (LAsi), persons who have been rejected from asylum can only receive very limited emergency aid. In contrast, Sweden – a country with the highest proportion of asylum seekers per thousand inhabitants (at 8.4, compared with 1.2 for the EU as a whole) - has adopted more inclusionary measures for asylum seekers and illegal migrants who are entitled to emergency aid, while all asylum seekers under 18-years-old have the same rights for healthcare as the residents of the country.

Despite the differences experienced in the nine countries in terms of offering opportunities for labour market and social inclusion participation and activism, all countries surveyed have seen a general trend towards inclusionary **cultural policies**. The majority of the countries have initiatives which provide special fares and discounts for young people. Most notably in France, there is also increased interest in cultural education after the terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016, considering it to be a way of creating a bond of solidarity between young people. Thus, in terms of cultural activism, young people are encouraged to participate and there are also, although to lower extent, many initiatives for reducing inequalities of such participation in all examined countries.

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<sup>6</sup> McKee, K. (2012) 'Young people, homeownership and future welfare', *Housing Studies*, 27 (6).

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. European Commission (2015), *Health Assessment of Refugees and Migrants in the EU/EEA*, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health\\_food-safety/docs/personal\\_health\\_handbook\\_english.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_food-safety/docs/personal_health_handbook_english.pdf)

### Better empowering young people for political participation

Our research suggests that the policy-makers will need to put more effort into enabling all groups of young people, particularly those in vulnerable situations and with fewer opportunities, to participate in electoral processes. From the perspective of the inclusion of vulnerable groups, electoral rules in several of our examined countries (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom) which do not allow voting for those with mental disabilities and prisoners rather exaggerate than reduce the existing inequalities of political participation. In the EU as a whole, a number of countries (Austria, Finland, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden) have opted to give persons with mental disabilities the right to vote and to be elected like all other citizens in the spirit of the international and European standards favouring the full participation of persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with mental health problems in the electoral process. Comparing their experience can be useful in order to drive insights on how to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in political life more broadly and the type of support systems required. The evidence on (opportunities for) electoral participation also speaks to the need for developing accessible online youth-friendly tools, narrowing the digital divide, and strengthening the interlinkages between formal and non-formal settings for young participation, such as classical electoral participation and e-voting. Although this is no silver bullet, the experience of Estonia and Switzerland,<sup>8</sup> proves that e-voting has the potential to increase the attractiveness of electoral participation for young people and compensate for older people's disproportionate influence on the on-paper ballot.

### More focus on disadvantaged young people

Our cross-country findings on evaluating the inclusionary aspect of policies for labour market and social activism and participation suggest that there is still a need for further development of outreach measures to address vulnerable groups and particularly, young migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Ensuring access to healthcare services and tailor-made social welfare services, including benefiting from family and housing support services, should be central for receiving countries. Supporting effective integration of young migrants from third countries into the labour market is a challenge – as we have seen - not only for Germany and Sweden or Greece and Italy where the highest number of migrants arrive. In the EU as a whole, non-EU migrants have a lower than average level of skills and qualifications. Moreover, two-thirds of highly-educated third-country migrants work in low or medium skilled occupations or simply fail to find a job. Realising fully the potential of vulnerable jobseekers within labour markets can only be made a success if government develop inclusion models and invest in upskilling especially in the context of the refugee crisis and rapid technological change. The new [Skills Agenda for Europe](#)<sup>9</sup> is of vital importance.

### Youth concerns are not yet in the DNA of governments

Although the [EU Youth Strategy](#)<sup>10</sup> calls on governments to embark on mainstreaming a youth focus in a number of policy areas and measures, our analysis shows that a clear youth perspective across and within policy areas is still lacking, most notably in family and housing policies. Young people have been among the hardest hit by the recent economic crisis and this has had mixed results. On the one hand, it has contributed to placing policy initiatives to ease youth unemployment high up the agenda. Yet, while the youth agenda acquired more policy attention, it also became rather focused on the topics of employability as issues of pressing importance. This seems to have overshadowed the need for providing robust social protection and social assistance to help young people stand on their own

<sup>8</sup> For Switzerland, see A. H. Trechsel and U. Gasser (2003), "Casting votes on the internet: Switzerland and the future of elections", *Harvard International Review*, 34(4).

<sup>9</sup> See also, European Commission Recommendation *A New Skills Agenda for Europe: Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness*, Brussels, 10.6.2016 COM(2016) 381 final

<sup>10</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy_en)



two feet as they transit into difficult labour markets<sup>11</sup>. It's time for governments to refocus youth agendas, break silos, and adopt holistic and transversal policy approaches to youth issues, ensuring that young people are not left to grapple on their own. This is of particular importance to countries of both the European South and North, as our findings show that the difficulties for young people to find sustainable employment are common.

### **Youth intelligence and 'benchlearning' for more informed policy-making**

Effective mainstreaming requires that governments are able to identify, analyse, and access sound evidence on what works and what does not work for young people and society, that evidence is used meaningfully in the design of policies and programmes that capture the needs, skills and aspirations of young people, and that young people are active agents in evidence creation. Crucially, youth intelligence entails more than just collecting domestic data that can inform the design of youth mainstreaming initiatives and help evaluate the impact youth mainstreaming; it also requires putting your data in a comparative cross-country context. 'Benchlearning' (combining benchmarking and mutual learning among countries) has not yet gained much attention in youth policy (with the exception of issues of education and training<sup>12</sup> and Youth Guarantee implementation by PES)<sup>13</sup>. Yet, it can provide policy-makers and practitioners with useful data on opportunities and solution approaches to improve policy interventions both, within and across national borders. By enhancing policy performance in this way, young peoples' chances for a future in which they can succeed and lead meaningful lives will also improve.

Benchlearning can be useful in order to enable countries to learn from each other based on evidence, understand the meaning of a country's performance gap, and to suggest a possible way of overcoming this gap. For instance, drawing on our sample of nine countries – on issues concerning boosting youth electoral participation - Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Sweden, France, and Poland can try to learn from Greece. The decision of Greek lawmakers to lower the voting age to 17 has been seen - particularly by youth organizations<sup>14</sup> - as a positive development and a step forward for young people's rights to participate in democracy.

Benchlearning can help other countries to understand the context-specific enablers of this reform, and support the development of relevant objectives and related actions for getting there. It can also shed light on why countries, such as Italy, with similar socio-economic context to the situation of young people in Greece (in both countries growing numbers of young people are living on the edge as a result of the recent economic downturn) shows such different policy performances (Italy is a low performer in the area of youth electoral participation vis-à-vis best scoring Greece).

Still drawing on our nine countries surveyed, Greece, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom can learn from France, which has been able to implement housing policies which are particularly inclusionary vis-à-vis the needs of vulnerable groups of youth; France, Spain and Switzerland can build insights from what works best in the more inclusive health policy systems of Germany and Sweden; Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom can learn by looking at Germany, which performs better in the provision of welfare services for young people with a migrant background, and Spain and the United Kingdom can try and learn from the strengths of best performers in youth labour market participation, namely Switzerland and Sweden and - most notably - Poland. Future benchlearning exercises on youth policy issues could offer promising evidence to increase the relevance of the cross-country implications and improve the quality of policy-making, informing national and EU policy-makers alike.

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<sup>11</sup> Similar concerns have been raised by national and EU policy stakeholders as part of the interim evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy, see European Commission (2016), *Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council Recommendation on the Mobility of Young Volunteers across the EU*, Final Report.

<sup>12</sup> Refer to European Commission - Fact Sheet, *Investing in Europe's Youth: Questions and Answers*, Brussels, 7 December 2016, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-16-4166\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-16-4166_en.htm)

<sup>13</sup> European Public Employment Services – PES, *Shaping the Future of Europe through Benchlearning*.

<sup>14</sup> European Youth Forum, [www.youthforum.org/latest-news/greece-lowers-voting-age-to-17/](http://www.youthforum.org/latest-news/greece-lowers-voting-age-to-17/)



EUROPEAN

# POLICYBRIEF



## REINVENTING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE: YOUTH DOING POLITICS IN TIMES OF INCREASING INEQUALITIES

**Young People's Claims in the Media:  
Evidence from Nine European Countries**

### INTRODUCTION

This study is conducted within EURYKA's Workpackage 2. It investigates how young people raise claims in the media against both inequalities and social and political exclusion in a context of austerity. It explores how young people's ways of doing politics are dealt with in the media and to what extent organized youth and contestation are visible in the public domain.

Applying the method of political claims analysis, we systematically study the actors intervening in public debates, the issues they address, their policy positions and the frames they advance.

The sources used in this study are daily newspapers (sometimes including tabloids), of as high a circulation as possible and of different political orientations, during the period of interest, with continuous coverage of the whole study period – i.e. from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2016. Five newspapers/tabloids are selected per country (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK), aiming at a representative and unbiased sample. Overall, we used national random samples of about 500 claims in each country.

### Who talks about youth and at which level(s)?

- Our data show that when it comes to youth-related claims by all actors in the public sphere, *state actors are more prevalent* in all countries except France and Germany. Focusing on those claims raised only by youth actors, the data reveal the dominance of political youth groups and university students/young adults. When examining the spatial profile of the claimants, the importance of the subnational level is evident since education-related actors, youth actors and youth-related civil society organisations are more active at the local or regional level compared to other actors who have a national scope.

### What issues are addressed by youth-related claims?

- Issues addressed by all actors relate mostly to education, welfare, social benefits and socioeconomic issues, as well as employment.
- However, turning to youth actors specifically, although they also focus primarily on education, for them political issues come second in frequency and these are raised by political youth groups. Reflecting austerity and inequality concerns, youth claimants in Greece score particularly highly in political issues while those in Spain and Italy show the highest score in education-related issues.

### To whom are these claims addressed?

- The findings on addressees of all claims reveal the prevalence of state actors in France, Greece, Spain and the UK. Youth actors are also addressees of claims.
- Request addressees make up almost half (45%) of the addressees. Blamed addressees appear in about one third (34%) of all claims. It is noteworthy that political parties are the highest blamed addressee, followed by state actors.

### How are youth-related claims made?

- When it comes to the form of youth-related claims by all actors, these are mostly verbal statements (60 to 80% national averages). This pattern changes when looking at claims by youth actors, with verbal statements being of lower frequency while much higher frequencies are noted in protest actions. Together with the higher rates of political participation issues raised by youth actors, these findings document that young Europeans are indeed more politically alert and active compared to the average claimant across the nine national public spheres.

### The object of youth-related claims

- The findings show that when it comes to all claimants, the main objects are teenagers and school students. However, for youth claimants, university students and young adults are the main objects of their claims. Group-specific youth are more frequently the object of the claims raised by civil society organizations, whereas disadvantaged or marginalized youth are the objects of 'other actors' and youth-related civil society organisations.
- Most claims by all actors portray a positive evaluation towards the object. Reflecting the experiences of the economic crisis but also the migration crisis, the majority of claims by youth actors also reveal a pro-object position, with variations across-national contexts.

### Framing inequalities

- Inequality frames appear in about one quarter of all claims made in the public sphere - with Switzerland and France recording the highest frequencies, while diagnostic and prognostic frames are of lower frequency. Reflecting the North-South divide, especially in the past

decade, South European countries come first in socio-economic and political inequality frames, whereas North European countries lead in discriminatory inequality frames.

### **Gender and political participation**

- Young women are largely not visible within claims relating political participation and socioeconomic issues, among other 'high political' issues. This findings indicates that there is a low propensity to directly address young women in the public sphere, even on issues relating to their own interests. Regarding how young women are framed, Holecz and Smith have analysed claims made by, as well as addressed towards, young women, in the public sphere. They have observed that the issues of these claims relate largely to stereotypes, such as motherhood/ family planning and sexual themes including sexual health and sexual violence.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The overview of the findings show that the debate about youth in the nine European countries is mostly conducted by non-youth actors, who actually take decisions on youth issues. Stakeholders and politicians hold a big share of the public debate about youth and youth-related issues and thus have greater influence, but also greater responsibility regarding the unfolding of the debate. Only in France and Germany do the youth express their voices as equally as other actors.
- These findings reflect a combination of weak forms of youth organization as collective actors and the exclusion of youth from press reporting, which places emphasis on reporting decision makers. They also show that youth largely remain distant from conventional politics and do not engage in dialogue with other non-youth actors whose public claims bear on their interest.
- From a policy-making perspective, this suggests the need to provide incentives for youth participation in consultation processes related to youth policies, which presupposes that they are essentially considered to be key stakeholders in the issues that concern them.
- These findings also recommend that there is room for improvement of the communication channels between young actors and others. Therefore, press and media in general should support and give voice to representatives of youth in a series of issues that are important to them. Given the youth may opt for their own unconventional and digital media, their visibility in the public domain depends on how effective mainstream media professionals follow up the media which youth actors choose to express themselves.
- Our findings also demonstrate the importance of the subnational level, due to the dominance of subnational education-related actors, youth actors and youth-related civil society organisations. The salience of subnational actors indicates the necessity of developing context-specific policies and providing more opportunities for local initiatives of youth empowerment to flourish. Thus, policy makers should prioritize strengthening local structures and establish public deliberation at the local and neighbourhood level, thus ensuring that local voices will reach and inform decision-making processes at the aggregate/national level. Most important in this direction is the role played by local authorities, municipalities and prefectures, which are

responsible for facilitating communication between the various local groups towards more effective policy making at the local level.

- Our findings show that university students and young adults are the main objects of the claims raised by youth claimants. Thus, politicians should focus more on policies concerning young adults facing uncertainty and place emphasis on policies related to socioeconomic issues, as well as employment. Indeed, youth unemployment rates are still very high in the European Union. Policies aimed at facilitating the transition from education to work are therefore needed, especially in Southern countries such as Greece, Spain and Italy which record the highest youth unemployment rates.
- Regarding the issues addressed in the public sphere, the prevalence of education may be explained in terms of a gap between the policy-making processes and those whose lives are affected by these policies. More often, politicians introduce educational reforms and young people oppose them. This highlights the need to allow more time for public consultation before drafting educational policies. Public authorities should therefore promote youth participation practices, dedicate funding to support innovative proposals, create spaces of participation and dialogue, document and share good practices. In addition, there is a need to educate the different actors about what “new forms of participation” are and how they are important in the democratic process, with the aim of debunking mainstream conceptions of an “apolitical youth”.
- The fact that political issues are the second most discussed issue by youth actors demonstrates that young people are indeed interested in politics. In addition, the high rates observed in the adoption of contentious forms of political action by young actors indicate that youngsters, contrary to their frequent portrayal as a depoliticized generation, are engaged in political activity. Considering the adoption of new forms of youth political participation and the distancing of young people from party politics, there is a need to adopt more inclusive indicators of youth participation as well as to embrace new and alternative forms of youth political engagement, towards more inclusive models of political participation.
- The visibility of welfare issues in youth-related political claims may be seen, particularly in South European contexts, in relation to the implementation of austerity policies and the systematic abolition of social rights. Combined with the fact that risk groups (such as young individuals from low-skill backgrounds) tend to have reduced political efficacy and political participation, implementing social policies directed to young adults (the re-establishment of a social security net) is expected to increase youth participation in the democratic process, as well as to reduce generalized youth uncertainty.
- Finally, our data indicates numerous persisting inequalities in the visibility, addressing and framing of young women by collective actors via the printed media. As these inequalities are likely to negatively impact upon political participation, they need to be addressed. Politicians should focus on policies which encourage female participation, while paying special attention to gendered claims, which tend to exacerbate inequalities, when addressing young women.



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

## REINVENTING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE: YOUTH DOING POLITICS IN TIMES OF INCREASING INEQUALITIES



### Organizational Opportunities for Youth Involvement

#### INTRODUCTION

The following policy brief is based on the Euryka project's WP3. The aim of the WP3 has been to systematically map this 'supply side' in the nine countries under analysis, and thus to gain a better understanding of the possibilities young people have to get involved politically at the grassroots level. Findings reveal that in each country, a quite extensive field of informal groups and civic organizations are engaged in youth-related issues. Differences are considerable within these fields, when considering funding, organizational structures, activities, communication tools and mobilization strategies. Our interviews present the framework of opportunity at the local level, where young people live, and where they are socialized into political life. The findings show that young people are highly involved in political participation at the local level, and that the cities studied offer considerable opportunities for participation. Most of the cities studied have some formal instance of participation for young people (councils, fora, youth parliaments, etc.) and all the cities have organizations that provide opportunities for young people to participate (like youth wings of political parties), as well as organizations set up and led by young people. In spite of this, and the fact that cities are often actively engaged into promoting youth participation, youth participation in all the cities is limited by significant inequalities: there are some groups of young people who are virtually absent from these circles and who are not being properly reached by these initiatives.

## The structure and contours of youth-related organizational fields: main findings of website coding

Organizational fields diverge considerably between the nine countries under analysis. In the first instance, this is true when observing the historical trajectories, given that the field mirrors diverse political transformations. After each of these transformations, new youth organizations have been founded. Related to these observations, the relative age of youth organizations in Northern Europe contrasts with Poland and the Southern European countries.

The organizational fields also mirror the different institutional contexts. In fact, the countries' political structures clearly have an impact on how youth organisations are operating: in federalist countries, like Germany and Switzerland, youth organizations also establish multi-layered structures, whereas in other countries such structures are either more centralized (e.g. Sweden) or less developed (e.g. Poland). In some countries laws impose specific rules for associations, like in Germany and Switzerland, while in others a central "charity register" exists (the UK) that reflects the role appointed to youth organizations. These factors (among others) appear in our data to impact political orientations, organisational structures, how activities are organized and other characteristics of youth organizations across Europe.

However, especially in light of these considerable institutional and contextual differences, other features of the organizational fields are surprisingly similar. This applies to their focus of activities, their beneficiaries and activities, and the ways they try to reach their aims. Recreational activities are central, followed by education. Especially in France, Germany, Greece, and Italy, youth organisations also focusing on promoting democracy. This, along with the promotion of values (e.g. friendship, citizenship, cooperation) and self-empowerment, are also widespread among otherwise unpolitical organisations, like the Scouts.

The youth organizations included in our data offer different forms of engagement. First of all, the high number of youth-led organizations is noteworthy. Almost 26% of all coded websites describe the organization as being youth-led, while this number is lowest in Poland and highest in Greece (which is related to the high number of student groups in Greece). Moreover, in more than 30% of the cases across countries, the youth are actively involved in organizing activities. Just short of 70% of the organizations report that young people are active participants, including Scouts, athletes, and musicians. A little less than 60% of the organizations say they provide services for passive beneficiaries (e.g. soup kitchens, educational programmes, or providing information) or engage in activities for young people (e.g. lobbying for youth rights).

While organizations in all countries seem to target and mobilize young people in quite similar ways, this is not true when taking a closer look at youth beneficiaries. Organizations report making a difference between the young beneficiaries actively engaged in organizational work, and those passively receiving goods and services. For example, both young people in poverty and disabled young people are targeted more frequently as passive beneficiaries across countries. And we find also (a small number of) organizations across countries with very specific target groups, such as victims of abuse or violence, substance ab(mis)users, but also employment related groups. In sum, youth organisations tend to offer active participation to the general youth (sometimes including specific groups explicitly), whereas specific groups are more likely to be targeted as passive beneficiaries by specialized organisations.

This service orientation might be the reason why so many organizations (i.e. more than 80% of the websites analysed) do not mention any political orientation or mission; 9.4% even explicitly say they are non-partisan. This does not mean, however, that they are fully unpolitical. On the contrary, the majority of youth-related organizations across all countries is political in terms of actions. While they do not connect with specific political ideologies, they do portray themselves as issue-driven.

## **The lived experiences and political actions of young people across the nine cities: main findings of the qualitative study**

Interviews suggest that the authorities understand 'youth' as a period of transition and, in that sense, consider that young people have specific needs and grievances such as asserting independence, forming an identity, and transitioning from education into the labour market. Therefore, interviewees identify the lack of affordable housing, difficulties in finding a job (or a traineeship), and lack of spaces for leisure as the main problems affecting youth and delaying their process of asserting independence. Interviewees from Stockholm and Bologna also add isolation, addiction and poor mental health as significant problems. Still, all case studies suggest that stakeholders and organisational actors understand youth as a highly differentiated segment of the population and, thus, consider that the grievances and problems are also very diverse. Interviewees from Cologne, Stockholm, Paris and Geneva stress discrimination based on ethnic origin as an important problem affecting young people and limiting their possibilities for participation. Furthermore, stakeholders in Cologne, Stockholm and Paris express concerns about the spatial segregation in their cities and the stigmatisation of young people from some working-class neighbourhoods.

The general perception among city stakeholders is that young people are not always interested in institutionalised political action, but they are at least interested in issues such as environmentalism and the protection of gender and sexual diversity. There is no unanimous diagnosis when it comes to youth participation: some interviewees argue that the cities offer enough chances and that sufficient numbers of young people are active, while others lament the lack of participation of young people and the absence of diversity in public debates.

In most cases, though, it is clear that participation is different between milieus. One of the main challenges identified by interviewees is to reach those segments that are under-represented in public life: working-class youth, migrants, and young people with disabilities. The role played by inequalities (social, ethnic, gender, academic and even spatial) is a point of dispute. While the majority of interviewees admits that inequalities influence political participation, and recognise that young students from middle-class backgrounds are over-represented in political circles, some of the stakeholders argue this has to do with interest, and that some young people are busy with everyday life and thus have no interest in institutionalised politics. Others stress that inequalities in socio-economic status and in the access to education can explain the low levels of participation of some segments of the population. Furthermore, some of the young interviewees and organisational representatives argue that young people become disappointed because they don't feel taken seriously by politicians and decision-makers. In these cases, youth itself is perceived as a form of inequality.

Most of the interviewees mention the use of social media and digital mechanisms of participation as innovative ideas to increase youth participation; this includes using online chats, Facebook groups, blogs, YouTube channels and Instagram series. Social media is used as a mechanism to reduce logistical hurdles, but also as a way to explore creativity and allow for more horizontal communication. Including information and activities in foreign languages, like Dari and Arabic, has been a mechanism designed to integrate refugees and new migrants into social life. Decentralising activities have also been a strategy to tackle the lack of participation in some districts; some stakeholders in the public sector have made reference to the implementation of local deliberative projects at the districts where young people live, and some of the organisations also offer their services directly at the localities. Lastly, initiatives like mock elections have tried to get young people interested in electoral politics.



- **Addressing social problems first:** There cannot be full political integration of young people without increasing their social access on equal bases, so it is first of all necessary to tackle the main social problems that young people encounter, such as access to affordable housing, access to education and the labour market.
- **Engaging young people with urban planning:** Since several interviewees argued that young people are not regarded as equal interlocutors by policy makers, and in view of the spatial segregation and lack of spaces of socialization, local governments need to consider the voices of young people in urban planning. Diverse youth groups should be consulted at the local level. Initiatives should consider needs such as affordable housing, non-commercial spaces of encounter, and good public transport. It is important to create attractive places specifically for young people, both during the day and at night, so that they can meet there whenever they wish, nurturing a collective sense of belongingness, as well as engaging in common expressive activities.
- **Shaping policies on the diversity of youth:** We should no longer think in terms of 'youth policy', as if we were dealing with a homogenous public. Young people are a very heterogeneous group, socially, culturally and even territorially. It is essential to set up a large range of 'youth policies', which is a way of saying that youth diversity must be taken into account. At the local level, it is important that districts develop differentiated approaches to address their young people and promote bottom-up approaches based directly on the expectations and practices of young people. City councils should generate forms of consultation and participation for young people. These need to be institutionalized, sustainable and to consider that young people may prefer informality. In turn, this means multiplying the more informal and *ad hoc* forms of participation.
- **Raising visibility for instances of participation:** There are numerous schemes and instances of participation for young people in the cities studied, however, they are not well-known by young people. Those who do find these instances are usually middle-class, educated young people who are already mobilized. Thus, young women, young people with migrant, working-class and non-academic backgrounds are often absent from these instances. It is crucial to increase the visibility of these schemes; for this, cities can promote the creation of grassroots organizations at the local level in order to reach young people in all districts. Moreover, the spaces and the mechanisms of socialization need to expand: organisations and district authorities promoting youth participation should reach out to school pupils, but also to unemployed youngsters, to young workers, to young migrant groups, neighbourhood associations, etc.
- **Using the language and the channels of the young:** Since young people communicate through social networks and favour creative and informal forms of communication, it is crucial that public authorities master some of their 'codes' and use them to raise their collective awareness and political participation. It is important to create accessible spaces of exchange between young people and policy-makers where communication is horizontal and less formal.
- **Creating channels to communicate with marginalized youth:** Policy-makers and organisations working to promote youth participation need to reach out to the more marginalized youth, such as those who are neither in education nor in employment (the so-called NEET phenomenon), those who belong to poorly integrated communities or who live in marginalized neighbourhoods. Contact should not be limited to a social-work approach, but should concentrate on giving these young people an opportunity to voice their concerns and, in the long term, offer the chance for bottom-up initiatives to rise. This is a paramount challenge in which neighbourhood associations and district authorities can play a crucial role.



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## REINVENTING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE: YOUTH DOING POLITICS IN TIMES OF INCREASING INEQUALITIES

### Youth Political Engagement and Experiences

#### INTRODUCTION

The following policy brief is based on the Euryka project's WP4, WP5 and WP6.

**WP4** collected data on political engagement, online political participation and media use, attitudes and values, policy satisfaction and issue priorities, and finally, economic outlooks and conditions, life engagement and mobility through a panel survey (repeated measures within individuals over time) on national representative samples of the general population in each of the countries included in the project and also include booster samples for young people in order to have large enough samples to analyse also differences between different sub-categories of young people by gender, class, age, educational level including levels of digital literacy, etc.

**WP5** has investigated the presence of a causal effect of different dimensions of the youth experience of inequalities and their support and potential for social and political change for strengthening democratic life in Europe that may include avenues for creatively reimagining democracy. This was done by conducting seven survey experiments: six vignette experiments and one conjoint experiment. We tested the effects of a number of treatments on young people's attitudes and behaviors relating to social and political engagement, including protest behavior.

Through the in-depth interview method, **WP6** collected a large variety of data concerning the lives, daily routine, and major events and experiences faced by the young people who do politics nowadays. The target population was young individuals who define themselves as members of different organizations/groups involved in socio-political activities. The time period of the fieldwork varied in the different countries, but overall it ran from February 2018 to January 2019. The 252 interviews lasted between one and two hours and were digitally recorded, by prior agreement from the respondents.

### **WP4 – Panel survey analysis**

- We tend to see a higher proportions of younger relative to older citizens tend to be involved in more unconventional forms of participation such as strikes and occupations; these forms also tend to attract smaller proportions of individuals participating. On the other hand, more conventional activities such as contacting or visiting a politician or government official generally show higher proportions for older citizens.
- In terms of associational involvement, labour/trade unions, political parties, environmental, church or religious and youth organisations (amongst youth) tend to attract slightly larger proportions relative to other organisations in defence of civil and human rights, etc. Higher proportions of younger citizens tend to be involved in these than older citizens.
- Younger citizens tend to be about as involved as older citizens in community forms of participation such as raising money for a charitable cause or working or cooperating with others to solve problems in their community or neighbourhood. Overall, higher proportions of young people tend to be involved through online forms of political participation such as discussing or sharing opinion on politics on a social network site e.g. Facebook or Twitter or joining or starting a political group on Facebook / following a politician or political group on Twitter etc though older citizens tend to show higher proportions of searching for information about politics online at least once a month.
- In terms of media use for political news, higher proportions of older citizens appear to follow the news everyday be it on the newspaper, TV, radio and even on the internet though results are more mixed for social media. For most types, it appears to generally by the case that higher proportions of younger citizens post political content through social media though the pattern is reversed or more mixed in some cases.
- When it comes to political efficacy, it seems that lower proportions of young people feel internal political efficacy: i.e. that they feel well-qualified to participate in politics or that they have a good understanding of political issues facing the country. More young people feel externally politically efficacious however, lower proportions say that public officials do not care about what people like them think or that people like them do not have a say about what the government does relative to older people.

### **WP5 – Experimental analysis**

- The survey experiments suggest the presence of a causal effect on youth's political attitudes and behaviors of contextual aspects such as elites discourse about young people and of state as well as police repression.
- Perceptions of inequalities influence young people's levels of social trust and political engagement. Moreover, taking into account perceptions of who is to blame affects the form of political engagement of young people.
- There is an effect of peer pressure on youth political action. However, young people tend to react to peer pressure indirectly, that is, mediated by their personal convictions.
- The expected violence of a demonstration is something that is strongly related to the probability of allowing such demonstration to take place. It also showed the causal effects of mobilizing groups on the perceived legitimacy of demonstrations as well as analyze the political tolerance towards specific political groups.

### **WP6 – Biographical analysis**

- Similarities overshadow the differences in particular if we look at the respondents' primary socialization. They generally seem not to have experienced any major challenging situation at the domestic and public levels. Because of this, the generational conflict hardly emerges as something relevant across our respondents during their first socialization. Most of our

respondents say they share their families' political standing. Only a few respondents mentioned that their parents opposed somehow their political involvement.

- Respondents in our sample, during the adolescent phase of their lives, shift from being generally interested in political issues or not showing interest at all to gradually starting very similar processes of political socialisation at home and at high school, during some important turning points.
- The respondents' narratives suggest continuity between the previous politicization phase and their first mobilization in an organisation/group. For the large majority of our respondents, the motivation driving their mobilization was to find a vehicle that would allow them in a practical way to be able to produce a better society.
- For members of youth branches of right-wing and left-wing political parties, ideology still plays an important role. For the rest of our respondents, instead, ideology is no longer considered an important means of tying people within an organisation/group. On the contrary, being a non-ideological organisation/group appears to be an advantage for our respondents.
- Our respondents, from all the different cities as well as from different types of organisations/groups, seem to recognise the profound personal impact, most of the time narrated in a positive way, that doing politics has had on their own life. Respondents say they have acquired through participation different skills, to have become more sociable and self-confident, to have matured, to have become more pragmatic in relationship with their political standing in order to achieve major outcomes, to have changed their priorities, and to have brought them knowledge.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Invest in political education** to stimulate internal political efficacy amongst youth in particular and also media/news consumption for information and evidence-base which should help guard against empty rhetoric, prejudice, scapegoating vs addressing complex structural problems, etc.
- **Offer political choice**, e.g. proportional rather than first-past-the-post electoral system.
- **Invest in research and education**, particularly ensuring history is a subject studied for the duration of compulsory education including modern and contemporary history to this day to give young citizens a sense of time and social change.
- **Ensure that the education system is rigorous** and provides students with the tools to engage in the world and consume information be it the news or data which will be increasingly important for evidence-base.
- **Prioritise better data collection and analysis** on understanding the multifaceted connections between youth empowerment, inequalities and social trust and political participation which will enable evidence-based policies for ensuring right conditions for young people to become active citizens and exercise leadership in society and politics.
- **Provide incentives for businesses** to develop green technologies and use stimulus packages for great redevelopment works in order to reshape cities in the service of citizens.
- **Encourage large investments** to stimulate the economy particularly in poorer regions to stop emigration and restart growth with new projects linked also to reclaiming territories and welcoming migrants.
- **Strengthen representation in educational institutions**, which is seen as a stage leading young people to acquire skills that are important for taking political action later on.
- **Work with youth and civil society organisations to develop an enabling environment for young people to participate meaningfully** by putting forward programs and initiatives that are not replicating pre-existing inequalities that affect youth participation and mobilization.
- **Encourage the political participation of young people as early as possible**, so that they get in touch earlier with the adult world and in a subordinate way, therefore avoiding to see politics as part of a generational conflict.



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## REINVENTING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE: YOUTH DOING POLITICS IN TIMES OF INCREASING INEQUALITIES

### Youth Doing Politics in Social Media

#### INTRODUCTION

This policy brief builds on the findings of a social media study that has been conducted within the framework of EURYKA's **WP7**. It investigated young people's ways of doing politics online and the impact of inequalities on this, by exploring the use young people make of social media (Twitter) and how digital participation and representation may (or may not) provide the seeds for reinvigorating democracy in Europe.

The coordinated study has been carried out in the nine countries participating in the project (France, Italy, the UK, Germany, Poland, Greece, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland). The goal was to see how young people in these nine different countries participate and interact in the public debates around two important issues: the climate crisis and feminism. In order to make data retrieval operational, two case studies were selected: Twitter debates on #ClimateStrike (a global movement, studied at the country/language area level) and the local campaigns or movements on feminism taking place in each country/language area.

The partners agreed upon the most relevant hashtags for both topics (carefully searching for equivalents in each country). The tweets were retrieved using Kalium, a tool developed by Eurecat that allows one to efficiently and flexibly manage the tracking of social network data in real-time. This system was used to retrieve information from the Twitter streaming API<sup>1</sup>, monitoring the hashtags identified as relevant for each country. Data about Twitter users found in the tweets (authors, mentioned, and retweeted) were then anonymised,

<sup>1</sup> See <https://developer.twitter.com/en/docs/tweets/filter-realtime/api-reference/post-statuses-filter>

processed and enriched with additional demographic information, namely gender, age range and geographic location. The gender and age range of users were estimated using the state of the art library M3Inference.<sup>2</sup> The tool relies on a deep learning model trained on multilingual data to infer gender and age range of users based on the user name, the short bio text and the profile picture of the user. In addition, the tool also infers whether a user account is a personal account or corresponds to an organization. The tool returns estimations as the probability of a user to belonging to a given class (male/female, age range, organization/not organization).

Retrieved data include all the tweets posted between July 12th and September 30th, 2019, which contain at least one of the agreed-upon hashtags. This period is especially relevant for the #ClimateStrike movement that organized massive global strikes and demonstrations between September 20th and 27th. In this regard, our dataset contains the process of the formation and growth this movement over two months, including the preparation and the celebration of the strikes and demonstrations in the last week of September 2019.

## EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

### **Main findings of the social media study: the importance of differences**

#### **Country differences**

- The study shows considerable differences in the use of Twitter by young people in different countries. This can account for the importance of the cultural context, in which the appropriation of this social media by the youth is inscribed.
- The big size of the networks created for the UK may be interpreted in light of high levels of Twitter activity in the country and of engagement in social movements, together with the fact that the language of the country corresponds to the global language of the movements, so the criterion used for generating the UK dataset, i.e. tracking global hashtags and then considering conversations involving at least one user located in the UK, has resulted in big datasets in both cases, and especially in the case of the climate strike movement.
- The Swiss networks, which were created in the same way, are also of considerable size in comparison with the limited population of the country, highlighting a high presence on Twitter and high participation with global hashtags also in Switzerland, especially in the climate strike movement.
- Smaller networks were obtained in the Polish and Greek cases, suggesting lower online participation, although it is possible that some conversations were missed due to additional local hashtags that we were not tracking.

#### **Age differences**

- In general terms, our results show that young people tend to be less central in the Twitter networks. Older cohorts were much more active compared to younger ones.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://github.com/euagendas/m3inference>

- Specific age differences were found regarding the degree of centrality of female tweets on feminism. In the case of Spain, for instance, the youngest women were much more central than the oldest women.

## **Gender differences**

- The gender composition points out a higher presence of men in the conversations; interestingly, this result also holds, although to a lesser extent, for the case of feminism, a topic on which one could expect women to be more active. Italy and Spain present a different scenario: the presence of women is higher in the case of feminism and comparable to the presence of men in the case of climate change (only slightly lower). The presence of women is comparable to the presence of men in the conversations on Feminism in the UK and Switzerland networks.
- As a general trend, we observe a higher level of homophily (in this case the tendency to favour interactions with users of the same gender) for women, in line with previous literature. This is true in particular in the French, German, Italian, UK and Swedish networks, where homophily is generally quite high for women, and lower for men. Interestingly, in the countries where the presence of women is higher, and where they get to be a majority in the conversations on Feminism (Italy and Spain) the homophily among men and women is comparable and close to neutral. In the Spanish conversation networks on Feminism, men are a minority and tend to have a higher homophily.
- The analysis of inequalities by gender unveils that men are not only a majority in most networks on Climate Change, but tend also to be more active and central in these conversations, with the exception of Spain and Italy. In the networks built for Feminism, instead, women are often less active in terms of number of tweets, but equally or more central than men in the networks of mentions and retweets; this is the case for most countries, and specially marked for Spain, where women's centrality overcome men's centrality by a big margin.

## **Main contributions and challenges**

The main value of the work developed in WP7 is that of proposing a data collection and analysis methodology for a cross-country study covering nine European countries, and creating datasets and results for each country.

This has implied a special effort for accounting for the intrinsic differences between the scenarios of the different countries, and the issues associated with special cases. We had to define special strategies to deal with countries that cannot be identified with a language, such as the UK, with English spoken at a global level, or Spain, with Spanish widely spoken in many Latin American countries, or Switzerland where various languages are spoken, overlapping with other countries. In these cases, the ability to detect the country from the user location indicated by the users was essential in order to filter messages and users by country. We also had issues with Greece, for which due to low level of activity in Twitter it

was hard to retrieve a sufficient amount of data, and different criteria were combined to create the dataset.

Another critical point was that of developing a demographic analysis of inequalities, without any demographic metadata being explicitly associated to the users (due to Twitter internal policies regarding access to personal data). In fact, social media analysis was limited to Twitter and did not include Facebook (as initially planned) because of the impossibility of reaching any personal data from this last social media. The ability to infer demographic data for each Twitter account through the methods presented above was fundamental to allow for a deeper analysis of inequalities across countries. Even so, the results for age differences are less representative, as age range could be inferred with sufficient accuracy only for a minority of users, so the underlying patterns may remain in part uncaptured.

As stated above, we chose to focus on two relevant demographic variables (namely age and gender) and two main metrics quantifying activity and centrality (namely the number of tweets and the in-degree in the interaction networks, respectively). Notwithstanding the challenging and huge investment of effort to analyse this specific data, data regarding other variables were also retrieved: on the one hand, metrics of individual relevance or centrality that were computed for each user, such as pagerank, outdegree or k-index in the interaction networks; on the other hand, user attributes retrieved or inferred for each user, such as being an organization or not (as estimated through the m3inference library for inferring demographic information), seniority (based on the registration date or on the total number of tweets posted), influence in the social network, in terms of number of followers, growth in the number of followers during our observation period, geographic location. All of these variables are included in the datasets generated with this document, and may be leveraged for extending the results presented here with further analyses.

We believe that a geographic analysis could be particularly relevant for assessing to what extent the debate within a country may be centralized in big cities, in urban areas, or in specific regions. This kind of analysis would be possible with the datasets we have produced, that includes a mapping of user self-reported locations to countries and cities, providing homogeneous locations.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- It appears to be very important to **address differences between countries** regarding the uses of Twitter **as a space for political participation of young people**.
- It is necessary to **go deeper into the processes that are generated around the use of social media by young people**. Paying attention to these processes implies taking a closer look at the languages, the topics of interest of the young people themselves (instead of looking for the voice of the young people and their positioning regarding the issues defined by the public-adult agenda in each country).



- It is necessary to **change the policies for promoting the online participation of young people**. Rather than investing in technological innovations, more effort must be invested in reversing structural dynamics that limit participation opportunities to a mere issue of accessibility and technological literacy.
- The European Union should devote **greater attention to youth initiatives regarding their own way of claiming a place in the online public sphere**. This implies recognizing their ability to lead political debates on issues that not only concern them as specific generation, but that have a significance for the future and the transformation of society as a whole. This is true not only regarding specific issues such as climate change or feminism, but also addressing crucial aspects concerning the right of education, the right of accessing a good job or a minimum guaranteed living conditions regardless the nationality, the origin or the colour of the skin.
- Any policy that aims to promote the political participation of young people through social media must necessarily contemplate **geographic multi-scalarity**. It is important to **observe the opportunity to raise local actions to the field of global debate**, as well as the opportunity to **translate a global campaign into deliberative processes at the regional or local scales**.
- Any policy to promote the political participation of young people through social media must necessarily **address geographic inequalities regarding urban/rural scenarios**. Local authorities, especially in deprived rural areas, often do not have/provide enough resources to include/invigorate the voice of the youth.
- **EU policies on youth political participation should apply the gender perspective**. The Twitter study demonstrates how the voice of young women is acquiring centrality in public debates. The challenge is not to apply a mere quota policy in relation to the presence of young women in the deliberative online spaces, but to recognize the qualitative transformation of these spaces from the moment when women exercise their management. The key question here is to not just “let” young women participate, but to admit that a transversal management from a gender perspective can really open and transform the spaces of (online, networked) participation.



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## REINVENTING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE: YOUTH DOING POLITICS IN TIMES OF INCREASING INEQUALITIES

### Stakeholders' Views About Youth and Politics

#### INTRODUCTION

This policy brief examines stakeholders' views about the youth relationship with politics and policy. It is based on priority action roundtables with stakeholders held in each of the nine countries included in the project. Participants were asked to discuss research findings and recommendations in the light of their practical experiences and their expertise.

One priority action roundtable was held in each country. Depending on the specific event, they involved a number of different stakeholders, in addition to members of the EURYKA teams, ranging from youth organizations and activists, policy-makers, academic experts, and journalists. Each event addressed a specific topic: youth barriers in accessing the public sphere (Spain); the role of youth organizations in youth political participation (UK); youth doing politics in times of increasing inequalities (France); apolitical youth between public discourse and field data (Switzerland); youth activism: motivations and hurdles (Germany); the forms and places of youth political participation (Italy); youth policy top priorities (Greece).

## EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

### Key conclusions

- The young generations between 18-35-years-old have suffered most of all age groups from the economic and political crisis of the past decade, and need holistic and generation-specific policy measures to address new inequalities.
- The young generations are at a structural disadvantage when participating in politics and public debate: a diversity of young people should be given leading and decisive roles in debates about the Future of Europe, about the future of politics and society in each country to address this structural disadvantage.
- Even after the worst of the economic crisis has past, young working people are significantly disadvantaged due to short term contracts, weaker protection of rights and weaker unionization: policy makers need to empower young working people to defend and advance decent working conditions and job security, through prioritizing this in the European Labour Authority, at regional and national levels and creating youth ombudsmen.
- Young people have successfully put combatting climate change and protecting the environment to the top of the political agenda: European democracy has an interest in young people being politically empowered to play a leading and decisive role in how this challenge is met.
- Young people themselves are asking for more and better political and civic education to prepare them for participating equally in politics. European countries and institutions have a strong interest in investing in young people practising democracy at school and in civil society organizations, as well as learning about the history of political change.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Generate recommendations for the media** to address youth issues.
- **Introduce voting at 16 years old instead of 18 years old** in order to bring awareness about politics to younger people, since not being able to vote means less interest in political parties' programs and actions.
- **Better understand the importance and effectiveness of different forms of political participation in youth-based social movements** such as the recent environmental movement, anti-Iraq war movement, campaigns to introduce free sanitary products in schools.
- **Better understand young activists' relations with the city.** A particular point of 'contention' was the issue of 'spaces' within the city in which young people can organize and self-manage their activities.
- **Promote closer working practices between youth organisations from different sectors** in order for more cohesive work on youth political participation.
- **Give young people leading and decisive roles** in debates about the Future of Europe, about the future of politics and society of their countries.
- Develop **holistic and generation-specific policy measures** to address new inequalities.
- **Empower young working people** to defend and advance decent working conditions and job security, through prioritising this in the European and national employment agendas.

- **Enable young people** to be involved in the political discussion about how to improve social protection and rights at work and whether conditions and forms of work are acceptable and decent.
- **Provide opportunities and equal access** to quality civic and political education and literacy in schools, and support training programs to empower young people from diverse backgrounds to speak in and access public venues for expressing voice and the media.
- **Create more and better opportunities** and access to political and civic education to prepare young people for participating equally in politics.
- **Empower local government, cities, municipalities and regions**, which are all venues where young people can more easily get involved and pursue their political goals than national politics.
- **Embrace a positive and transformative vision for the future of Europe** which addresses the concerns of young people and gives them voice and political agency over their lifetimes.
- **Support and enable the associations, movements and groups** through which young people can become active as a means for reinforcing political participation of young people in times when institutional trust at national and European levels may be low.
- **Empower and give voice to young women and other young people who are at risk of intersectional discrimination** through a targeted and long-term strategy to channel their views and needs into national and European political agendas.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

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|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>PROJECT NAME</b>         | Reinventing Democracy in Europe: Youth Doing Politics in Times of Increasing Inequalities (EURYKA)  |
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| <b>CONSORTIUM</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• European Alternatives, London, United Kingdom</li><li>• Sciences Po, Paris, France</li><li>• Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence, Italy</li><li>• Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain</li><li>• University of Crete, Rethymnon, Greece</li><li>• University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland</li><li>• University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom</li><li>• University of Siegen, Siegen, Germany</li><li>• University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland</li><li>• Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden</li></ul> |
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| <b>WEBSITE</b>              | <a href="http://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/home">www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/home</a>  |
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### Disclaimer

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