



# EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF



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

### Stakeholders' Views About Youth and Politics

FEBRUARY 2020

#### 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).

### 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.

EURYKA is a cross-national research project which aims to provide systematic and practice-related knowledge about how inequalities mediate youth political participation in nine European countries: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. EURYKA has three objectives:

- ▶ To provide systematic evidence on how inequalities are experienced and mediated by young people, exploring the coping mechanisms which are embedded in how they do politics. These coping mechanisms are manifested in multiple forms, i.e. as either political (dis)engagement and contestation online and offline or as (trans-) national democratic innovation and experimentation.
- ▶ To provide evidence on the conditions and causes underpinning youth political participation. This involves an examination of their values, expectations, and behaviours regarding democracy, power, politics, policymaking, social and political participation (online and offline).
- ▶ To make various, novel suggestions to strengthen democratic life in Europe, with particular emphasis on those that are more inclusive for young people – and especially those with fewer opportunities.

The project's methodology has three main components:

- A multidimensional theoretical framework that combines macro-level (institutional), meso-level (organizational), and micro-level (individual) factors for explaining youth experience of inequalities and the differential aspects of how young people do politics in Europe.
- A cross-national comparative design that includes nine European countries with different degrees of exposure to inequalities and different policy regimes.
- An integrated methodological approach based on multiple methods of analysis, such as:

*Policy analysis:* Tracking public policies and practices which promote youth participation and inclusion in the nine countries as well as at the EU level.

*Political claims analysis:* Studying how young people and their particular ways of doing politics are dealt with in the media, as well as the presence of organized youth in the public domain.

*Organizational analysis:* Investigating youth political participation by examining the networks and (youth-led) organizations that are active in the fields of youth inclusion, participation, national and transnational democratic innovation and experimentation.

*Panel survey analysis:* Conducting a panel survey in all the nine countries to collect information on young people's values, expectations, and behaviours regarding democracy, power, politics, policy-making.

*Experimental analysis:* Conducting survey experiments to capture young people's experience of inequalities and their support for social and political change to strengthen democratic life in Europe.

*Biographical analysis:* Conducting biographical interviews with young people to collect information on the individual trajectories of young people since their childhood and how inequalities impact young people's ways of doing politics.

*Social media analysis:* Investigating youth political participation online and the impact of inequalities on this by examining the use young people make of social media and how digital participation and representation may (or may not) provide the seeds for reinvigorating democracy in Europe.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	Reinventing Democracy in Europe: Youth Doing Politics in Times of Increasing Inequalities (EURYKA)
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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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