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**Pathways to Solidarity**  
**National Report Ireland**

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# Preface to report

## The Role of Young People in Ireland: Empowering the Youth in European Context

### 1. Introduction

Ireland, located on the westernmost edge of Europe, plays an active role within the European Union (EU) and possesses a youthful population that significantly contributes to its social, economic, and cultural fabric. Here we explore the role of young people in Ireland within the European context, highlighting their contributions, challenges, and the various initiatives aimed at empowering the youth.

### 2. Youth Demographics in Ireland

Ireland has a relatively young population, with individuals aged 15 – 34 comprising a significant segment. According to Eurostat data, as of 2021, the youth population in Ireland stood at approximately 1.6 million, accounting for around 33% of the total population (*Eurostat, 2021*).

### 3. Contributions of Young People in Ireland

#### 3.1. Economic Contributions

Young people in Ireland have played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's economy. They have been at the forefront of entrepreneurship, innovation, and technological advancements. For instance, many start-ups and digital enterprises have been founded by young Irish entrepreneurs, contributing to economic growth and job creation (*Department of Business, Enterprise, and Innovation, 2020*).

#### 3.2. Social and Cultural Contributions

Ireland's young population actively engages in social and cultural activities, enhancing the country's diversity and vitality. They participate in music, literature, arts, and sports, preserving and promoting Ireland's rich cultural heritage. Moreover, young people often act as catalysts for social change, advocating for equality, environmental sustainability, and human rights (*National Youth Council of Ireland, 2021*).

### 4. Challenges Faced by Young People in Ireland

#### 4.1. Education and Employment

Despite their contributions, young people in Ireland face challenges in accessing quality education and suitable employment opportunities. The demand–supply gap in the labour market, coupled with limited job prospects in certain sectors, can hinder their career development and financial independence (*Central Statistics Office, 2021*).

#### 4.2. Mental Health and Well-being

Young people's mental health and well-being are important concerns in Ireland. Factors such as academic pressure, social media influence, and economic

uncertainties can contribute to stress, anxiety, and depression among the youth population. Adequate support systems and mental health services are crucial to address these issues (*Health Service Executive, 2021*).

## 5. Empowering Young People in Ireland

### 5.1. Youth Empowerment Programmes

Ireland has implemented several initiatives to empower young people and provide them with opportunities to develop their skills, talents, and leadership potential. Examples include the Youth Work Ireland, Foróige, and the European Solidarity Corps, which offer training, volunteering opportunities, and support for young people (*Youth Work Ireland, 2021*).

### 5.2. Education and Training Policies

The Irish government has recognised the importance of education and training in empowering young people. Policies and programmes, such as the National Skills Strategy and the Higher Education Authority's initiatives, aim to equip young individuals with the necessary skills for the changing job market (*Government of Ireland, 2022*).

Young people in Ireland play a significant role in shaping the country's social, economic, and cultural landscape. They contribute to entrepreneurship, innovation, social activism, and cultural preservation. Despite challenges in education, employment, and mental health, Ireland has implemented various measures to empower its youth through targeted programmes and policies. By fostering an environment that supports and encourages young people, Ireland aims to harness their potential and secure a brighter future for both the youth and the nation as a whole.

#### References:

- Central Statistics Office. (2021). *Young People and the Labour Market*.
- Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation

## Report methodology

In order to research how EU values, particularly solidarity, can be implemented through volunteering, we organised online focus groups with both representatives of youth organisations and young volunteers. The reason we did this was to find the responses of those in larger cities and those in rural Ireland as their views may be different.

Dependent on the group in question some of the sessions ran over however these were particularly engaging and participants welcomed the opportunity to give their views and perspectives.

The interviews were completed online via Zoom, they involved representatives of volunteer involving organisations, young volunteers and youth participants.

Below, you will find summaries of the focus groups (combined) and conclusions we draw from them, transcripts from the interviews, and the final national report, highlighting the key elements found during the research.

## Organisational interviews

### Damien (St John of God / Menni Services)

In the conversation, Damian explains that his organisation, which has a long history and is a worldwide Catholic organisation, values care, compassion, and respect. They embrace diversity and accept people from different countries and religions. They align their values with EU principles such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights. They have witnessed significant changes in promoting human rights for people with intellectual disabilities over the past 30 years.

Regarding youth engagement and volunteering, he mentions that they primarily involve third-level students in their organisation for placements related to social care and nursing for people with intellectual disabilities. While they have engaged with secondary schools in the past, they have made a conscious decision to focus on older students. However, they recognise the project's definition of youth as individuals aged 18 to 30 and consider their involvement through student placements as valuable for bringing new ideas and a proactive attitude to the organisation.

He discusses the organisation's efforts to support solidarity and EU values through inclusive practices. They actively engage service users in decision-making processes and strive to provide support based on their individual needs and preferences. They emphasise dignity, freedom of choice, and informed decision-making, aiming to help service users lead fulfilling lives and be active members of society. Damian acknowledges that there is room for improvement, such as involving people with

intellectual disabilities in interview panels and enhancing the understanding and communication around volunteer placements.

When it comes to raising awareness among youth about their role in building solidarity and EU values, Damian mentions some past initiatives, like presentations in secondary schools and placements for transition year students. However, he acknowledges that more needs to be done in this area, particularly in actively promoting volunteering among young people. He expresses the desire to see greater government support and recognition of volunteering, both in terms of funding and public awareness.

Damian highlights the challenges faced during the COVID-19 crisis, where there was a lack of coordination within the organisation regarding volunteer recruitment and retention. The initial idea of having volunteers on retainer was impractical and could have compromised the safety and well-being of service users. He emphasises the need for better communication and decision-making processes to address such challenges effectively.

Regarding the development of innovative approaches that support activism and youth leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity, Damian stresses the importance of government support and increased funding for volunteering programmes. He believes that government policies and public consciousness play a significant role in shaping the volunteering landscape.

In terms of benefits and challenges for fostering youth participation in promoting EU values and solidarity, Damian points out that certain areas receive more financial support and facilities compared to others, potentially creating disparities. He highlights the need for accessible and free facilities for young people to engage in various activities beyond sports. Damian also mentions the significance of recognising and appreciating the efforts of volunteers, providing hospitality, and acknowledging their contributions.

Overall, Damian advocates for greater support and recognition of volunteering, improved communication within organisations, inclusive decision-making processes, and the provision of accessible opportunities for youth to actively contribute to EU values and solidarity.

## Jenna, (Ballina 2023 Youth Programme)

Jenna's conversation revolved around various topics related to solidarity, EU values, youth engagement, and obstacles in promoting EU values and youth participation. Jenna mentioned that Ballina 2023 Youth Programme understands solidarity through intersectoral work and community collaboration. She highlighted the work of OutWest, an LGBTQIA+ support group, and their efforts to fight for LGBTQIA+ rights and provide support and education to the community. Jenna also mentioned the challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community in rural Ireland and the need for education to combat prejudice and discrimination.

Regarding youth engagement, Jenna discussed Ballina 2023's Youth Programme and their efforts to bring together young people from different backgrounds. The programme focuses on empowering the youth, providing workshops, outings, and opportunities for leadership. Jenna also acknowledged the importance of creating safe spaces for discussions about sensitive topics, such as the experiences of Ukrainian refugees.

When asked about support for activism and youth leadership, Jenna expressed unfamiliarity with specific programmes like Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps.

She speculated that awareness of such opportunities might vary among young people based on their background and context. Jenna mentioned the need for youth-led initiatives and the importance of young leaders or advisory roles to facilitate open discussions.

Regarding youth participation in politics, Jenna shared that while many young people may not have a strong interest in politics, they still value their vote. Their political decisions are often influenced by family perspectives and discussions. Jenna acknowledged the need for education and awareness to encourage youth participation in political processes.

Overall, Jenna's answers highlighted the importance of community collaboration, LGBTQIA+ support, youth empowerment, education, and creating safe spaces for open discussions.

## Kyle, SpunOut

Kyle's interview provides insights into how their organisation, SpunOut, understands solidarity, promotes EU values, and supports youth engagement. Kyle emphasises that their organisation operates on a youth-led model, with 16 to 25 year olds playing a crucial role in decision-making, content creation, and volunteer involvement.

Solidarity is fostered through the collaboration and sense of community among volunteers and staff members. While EU values like equality, democracy, and human rights are not explicitly stated, they naturally manifest through the organisation's structure and operations.

In terms of activities and programmes, Kyle mentions the *Action Panels*, where young people participate in consultations, contribute to specific content areas, and provide feedback on campaigns. There are also national panels and volunteer roles like contributors and proof readers. These programmes actively involve young people, provide them with leadership opportunities, and ensure their opinions are heard.

Regarding the promotion of solidarity and EU values, Kyle highlights the sense of solidarity among volunteers and the shared commitment to youth participation. They mention the importance of volunteers knowing that others with different skills and interests can continue the work, creating a supportive and collaborative environment.

When it comes to raising awareness among youth and fostering their active role in building solidarity and EU values, Kyle mentions events like regional and national panels, as well as town hall meetings. These gatherings facilitate community building, provide opportunities for face-to-face interactions, and reinforce the sense of belonging and shared purpose among volunteers. Additionally, online platforms like Slack channels allow volunteers and staff members to collaborate and learn together in a shared space.

Regarding the comprehension of values in different contexts, Kyle discusses the core value of youth leadership within the organisation. While the value remains constant, its facilitation and accessibility may change during crises or challenging situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. Balancing the benefits of online accessibility with the energy and interaction of in-person events poses a challenge. However, the organisation remains committed to providing evidence-based content and ensuring the safety and well-being of volunteers.

In terms of support needed to develop innovative approaches to support activism and youth leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity, Kyle mentions the importance of resources. They specifically highlight the need for a volunteer software platform to streamline administrative tasks and enhance communication. The availability of such resources would free up time for staff members to focus on meaningful engagement with volunteers and higher-level projects.

Finally, Kyle acknowledges the main benefits of fostering youth participation, which include a sense of belonging, community, unity, and shared purpose. However, they also recognise challenges such as resource constraints, limited capacity to look beyond the organisation itself, and concerns about sharing volunteers or opportunities with other organisations. Safeguarding the organisation's safety and ensuring funding stability are identified as crucial challenges in sustaining and expanding youth participation initiatives.

Overall, Kyle's feedback emphasises the importance of youth-led approaches, Community building, accessibility, resources, and collaboration in promoting solidarity, EU values, and youth participation.

### **Lorraine, University of Galway ALIVE Volunteer Programme**

Lorraine, the Student Volunteer Coordinator at the University of Galway, discusses the university's understanding of solidarity and EU values, as well as their activities and interventions to promote youth engagement and contribute to these values. The university strives to instil solidarity among staff, students, and the wider public, with values like democracy, respect, openness, equality, diversity, and inclusion being integrated into their strategic plan and projects. Initiatives such as the University of Sanctuary programme and civic programmes aim to provide educational opportunities, build understanding of democracy, and involve students in decision-making processes.

Lorraine describes over 50 volunteer programmes and organisation available to students, some of which involve partnerships with staff. One notable programme is the Lyft leadership programme, where students receive training as facilitators and lead peer groups in values-based and personal development. The skills developed in these programmes align with EU values such as respect, inclusion, diversity, and sustainability.

In terms of raising awareness among youth about their active role in building solidarity and EU values, Lorraine mentions the Nelson Mandela Anti-Racism Week as a significant intervention. This event allows students and staff to showcase their ideas and engage in activities that combat racism. Other interventions include anti-racism training, equality conferences, and initiatives to encourage student registration and understanding of the voting process.

The specific comprehension of values in different contexts greatly influences the work of the organisation. Students are responsive to current issues such as climate change, LGBTQ+ inclusion, the impact of capitalism, and social housing challenges. However, their focus tends to be more personal and localised, relating these issues to their own struggles and agendas. She believes there is an opportunity to expand students' understanding by looking to European countries as examples of healthcare,



accessible transport, and democratic practices.

When it comes to developing innovative approaches that support activism and youth leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity, Lorraine suggests providing more opportunities for students to engage with larger institutions like the European Commission, national governments, and local governments. Visiting these institutions and experiencing their decision-making processes first hand would give students a sense of empowerment and help them understand the scale and duration required to effect change.

Lorraine recognises that challenges exist in gaining access to larger institutions and overcoming local obstacles to change. Students may face resistance from businesses or encounter a perception of cronyism, hindering their ability to achieve tangible wins and witness change in their local areas. Overcoming these challenges and facilitating meaningful change on a smaller scale would enable young people to see the possibilities and actively contribute to EU values and solidarity.

Overall, Lorraine emphasises the importance of expanding students' awareness, providing access to decision-making processes, and enabling them to see the impact of their efforts in order to foster youth participation and contribute to EU values and solidarity.

### Wesley, YMCA Dublin

Wesley, a representative from an YMCA Dublin, provides feedback on various aspects related to their understanding of solidarity and EU values, the activities and programmes implemented to support youth engagement and volunteering, interventions to raise awareness among youth, the influence of specific contexts on their work, the support needed to develop innovative approaches, and the benefits and challenges for fostering youth participation in EU values and solidarity.

In terms of the YMCA Dublin's understanding of solidarity and EU values, Wesley emphasises the importance of inclusion, person-centered interactions, equality, and equity. They believe in providing basic needs and rights to everyone, irrespective of their background or circumstances. While Wesley acknowledges that they are not familiar with the official stance of the organisation, their experience aligns with the values of equality and equity.

Regarding activities and programmes that promote youth engagement and volunteering in line with EU values and solidarity, Wesley highlights the organisation's offerings such as homework clubs, youth services, childcare, outreach programmes, sports activities, gardening, dance classes, circus acts, and work experience placements. He also mentions the *Reidh programme*, which supports early school leavers, newcomers, and underemployed individuals through various pathways and courses. The organisation strives to be inclusive and open to all.

Wesley believes that these activities and programmes support solidarity and EU values by being completely inclusive and open to all. They mention closed groups that are limited and primarily focused on trust-building but emphasise that most of their services, such as homework clubs, drop-ins, and sports activities, are open to anyone within the appropriate age group. Wesley also mentions the warm welcomes series, which hosts events for newcomers to demonstrate inclusivity and openness.

In terms of interventions to raise awareness among youth about their active role in building solidarity and EU values, Wesley recalls instances where discussions were held with young people to address their questions and concerns. They strive to provide honest and appropriate answers, reinforcing the organisation's values and countering potentially divisive narratives. Wesley mentions protests and conversations surrounding the Ukrainian situation as examples of raising awareness among participants about different contexts and ensuring they have accurate information.

When it comes to the influence of specific comprehensions of values in different contexts on the organisation's work, Wesley emphasises that the values of equality and fairness remain constant. They acknowledge that the delivery of services may vary based on circumstances, such as the pandemic or issues like homelessness. However, the core values remain the same, even if certain aspects of comprehension may change due to increased awareness of specific challenges.

Regarding support needed to develop innovative approaches that support activism and youth leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity, Wesley suggests that additional funding and resources would be beneficial. They express confidence in the existing skills, experience, education, and dedication of their colleagues and believe that more funding and people would enable them to reach and support more individuals.

In terms of benefits and challenges for fostering youth participation in EU values and solidarity, Wesley identifies public opinion as a potential obstacle. They mention opposition to non-Irish ways or beliefs, which may hinder the integration of young people from diverse backgrounds. However, they also highlight the benefits of inclusive activities and programmes that bring together people from different areas, countries, schools, and abilities, fostering a sense of integration, diversity, and the ability to handle challenges in adulthood.

Overall, Wesley's feedback emphasises YMCA Dublin's commitment to inclusion, equality, and openness, along with the challenges and opportunities they face in promoting EU values and solidarity among youth

## Bel, SpunOut (Youth participant / Volunteer)

Bel, a new activist with SpunOut, provides their responses to several questions regarding their engagement and volunteer position in the organisation, their motivation for getting involved, their understanding of solidarity, the most important EU value for them, and how their activism contributes to EU values and solidarity.

Bel joined SpunOut in January and holds two main roles within the organisation. They are a member of the Youth Action Panel, where they provide input on campaigns and take actions. They also contribute as a content writer, focusing on topics they are passionate about, such as writing an article on racism in schools. Bel is attracted to this kind of engagement because SpunOut is a mental health organisation, and they are passionate about spreading awareness and ensuring young people have access to mental health support. Bel's motivation stems from their personal experience with mental health struggles and a desire to prevent others from facing similar challenges.

For Bel, solidarity means standing with others and offering support, regardless of political views. They also see it as a feeling of knowing that one is not alone and that the community will back them. They provide an example of participating in a solidarity march with Amnesty Ireland to show support for refugees and emphasise the importance of welcoming them into the country.

When asked about the most important EU value for them, Bel highlights human rights. As an LGBT and ethnic minority individual, they believe it is crucial for everyone's human rights to be recognised and respected. Bel emphasises the need for everyone to feel safe and not be attacked based on their identity.

Bel's volunteering and activism focus on combating inequalities, particularly those faced by young people. They believe that working together, spreading information, and increasing support and unity are essential to addressing these issues. Their work with Amnesty Ireland includes video actions in solidarity with Turkey and LGBT rights, advocating for the right to host pride events. Bel strives to make their activism inclusive and collaborative to ensure that everyone's voice is heard.

In terms of developing and improving volunteer programmes that support activism and youth leadership in promoting EU values and solidarity, Bel suggests designing programmes based on EU values to increase awareness and understanding. They also propose incorporating solidarity training into activism and leadership programmes to differentiate it from mere pity and encourage active engagement. Bel believes it is important to involve more young people in European politics and foster youth participation within the EU.

Overall, Bel's responses highlight their commitment to mental health advocacy, combating inequalities, and promoting solidarity. They express a desire for increased

awareness, participation, and support in order to strengthen EU values and solidarity among young people.

### **Róisín, Scouting Ireland**

Róisín has been actively engaged in the Scouts since she was six years old, initially as a member and later as a leader. She has been a leader for two years in the 12 to 15 year-old age group. Her role involves planning weekly meetings, organising activities, and ensuring the scouts have a fun and engaging experience. Róisín's motivation to engage in this kind of volunteering stems from her own positive experience in the Scouts and her desire to give back, teach younger scouts the skills she learned, and contribute to the sense of community and connection within the organisation.

For Róisín, solidarity is about people coming together and sharing a common enjoyment or experience. She gives an example of the county competition in the Scouts, where every scout competes and the intense yet enjoyable atmosphere creates a strong sense of community and solidarity among participants.

When asked about the most important EU value for her, Róisín highlights freedom, particularly the freedom to travel and explore different countries within the EU and the across the worldwide Scouting network. She emphasises that being part of the EU enables the Scouts to easily go abroad and have exciting experiences in other countries, fostering a sense of privilege and gratitude.

Róisín sees her volunteering and engagement in the Scouts as linked to EU values and solidarity by giving the scouts the freedom and responsibility to travel and exercise their right to explore different countries. By promoting this freedom and encouraging connections with young people from other EU countries, the Scouts contribute to strengthening EU values and solidarity.

In terms of developing and improving volunteer programmes that support activism and youth leadership in promotion of EU values and solidarity, Róisín suggests focusing on practical experiences and showing young people what they can do as part of the EU. She believes that practical learning, such as creating connections with young people from different EU countries, experiencing equality, and embracing freedom, can make the values more tangible and engaging. By providing these exciting learning opportunities, organisations can enhance young people's understanding of EU values and their place within the EU community.

## Summary and recommendations from interviews

The provided text consists of conversations with various individuals involved in different organisations and programmes related to youth engagement, solidarity, and EU values. Each individual shares their insights, experiences, and recommendations. Here is a summary of each conversation:

### Damien (St John of God / Menni Services):

- Values care, compassion, and respect, embracing diversity and accepting people from different countries and religions.
- Aligns values with EU principles and promotes human rights for people with intellectual disabilities.
- Primarily involves third-level students for placements related to social care and nursing.
- Supports solidarity and EU values through inclusive practices, involving service users in decision-making processes.
- Advocates for greater government support and recognition of volunteering.

### Jenna (Ballina 2023 Youth Programme):

- Focuses on solidarity through intersectoral work and community collaboration.
- Highlights LGBTQIA+ support and education efforts.
- Empowers youth through workshops, outings, and leadership opportunities.
- Suggests more government support and youth-led initiatives.

### Kyle (SpunOut):

- Operates on a youth-led model and involves young people in decision-making.
- Promotes solidarity through collaboration and a sense of community.
- Engages youth through action panels, consultations, and leadership opportunities.
- Highlights the need for resources and volunteer software platforms.

### Lorraine (University of Galway ALIVE Volunteer Programme):

- Strives to instil solidarity and EU values in staff, students, and the wider public.
- Offers over 50 volunteer programmes and initiatives like the Lyft leadership programme.
- Raises awareness through events, training, and civic programmes.
- Suggests more opportunities for students to engage with larger institutions.

### Wesley (YMCA Dublin):

- Focuses on inclusion, person-centered interactions, equality, and equity.
- Provides a wide range of inclusive activities and programmes.
- Raises awareness through discussions and protests.
- Requests additional funding and resources.

### Bel (SpunOut, Youth participant / Volunteer):

- Engages in mental health advocacy and combating inequalities.
- Defines solidarity as standing with others and offering support.
- Considers human rights as the most important EU value.
- Recommends EU-focused programmes and solidarity training.

### Róisín (Scouting Ireland):

- Engaged in Scouts to give back and contribute to the sense of community.
- Views solidarity as people coming together and sharing experiences.
- Considers freedom, particularly the freedom to travel, as the most important EU value.
- Promotes EU values and solidarity by giving scouts the freedom to explore different countries.

## Recommendations:

- Enhance government support and recognition for volunteering initiatives, particularly for youth-led programmes.
- Foster greater awareness and promotion of volunteering among young people.
- Involve young people in decision-making processes and provide opportunities for youth leadership.
- Provide resources, funding, and volunteer software platforms to streamline administrative tasks and enhance communication.
- Offer practical experiences and connections with young people from different EU countries to strengthen understanding of EU values.
- Create safe spaces for discussions on sensitive topics and promote inclusivity and diversity.
- Increase support for mental health advocacy, combating inequalities, and raising awareness on human rights.
- Facilitate opportunities for students to engage with larger institutions, European politics, and decision-making processes.
- Promote solidarity through collaboration, community building, and inclusive practices.
- Emphasise the importance of youth participation, empowerment, and the recognition of volunteers' contributions

## Youth group Focus Group

The Focus Group with young people provided is a conversation among several speakers discussing various topics related to volunteering, solidarity, and EU values.

Here is a summary of the key points discussed:

- The speakers introduce themselves, stating their names, ages, locations, and affiliations with youth organisations or volunteering groups.
- We discussed the fundamental EU values, including democracy, rule of law, equality, peace, and stability.
- The importance of respect and unity in relation to these values is emphasised by the focus group participants.
- The focus group participants mention the strong connection between volunteering and solidarity, highlighting how volunteering promotes unity and respect for others.
- The focus group participants discussed the significance of volunteering in the Irish context, where solidarity is seen as a strength through unity.
- The impact of volunteering on EU values was discussed, focusing on how volunteering efforts can contribute to democracy, equality, and rule of law.
- The speakers mention specific projects and initiatives in Ireland that promote volunteering and active participation in line with EU values which they are involved with.
- They talk about the influence of EU values on personal engagement and volunteering, stating that exposure to different projects and experiences inspires them to bring positive changes to their communities.
- The speakers discuss their personal responsibility to contribute to solidarity and EU values through their actions in society and the community.
- The conversation briefly touches on the impact of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the refugee crisis on taking responsibility for solidarity, human rights protection, and peace initiatives.

**The Focus Group takeaways from the 4 main speakers can be summarised as follows:**

### Speaker A:

- Emphasised the importance of grassroots organisations and local branches working coherently to support EU values and solidarity.
- Mentioned the involvement of youth organisations in the EU Parliament and the exchange of ideas among like-minded individuals.
- Highlighted the need for education about the EU project and its benefits to younger generations.
- Discussed the role of technology in promoting accessibility and improving learning styles.

- Advocated for using tools and knowledge gained during the COVID-19 pandemic to help others question and learn.

**Speaker B:**

- Reflected on how the pandemic and global conflicts have prompted re-evaluation of values and beliefs, questioning issues like refugee acceptance and biases.
- Emphasised the importance of innovation, technology, and improved accessibility in promoting solidarity and human rights.
- Stressed the need for using personal responsibility and learned tools to help others question and challenge established perspectives.
- Mentioned EU initiatives such as the European Solidarity Corps, European Youth Forum, and interrail programmes as ways to promote solidarity and cross-cultural understanding.

**Speaker C:**

- Raised concerns about the lack of financial support for initiatives like Erasmus, particularly for students traveling from countries with higher travel expenses.
- Highlighted the difficulty of finding information about opportunities and events at the European level, suggesting a need for a central source of information.
- Called for more follow-ups, cross-generational dialogues, and opportunities for young people to have direct input in decision-making processes.
- Pointed out the challenges of understanding EU policies and decision-making due to complex processes and inaccessible information.

**Speaker D:**

- Stressed the importance of education in promoting EU values and implementing them in various fields.
- Expressed the desire for more transparency and communication from policymakers regarding young people's role and expectations at events.
- Encouraged continuous learning and mutual exchange of knowledge between young people and decision-makers.

Overall, the candidates emphasised the importance of education, cross-cultural understanding, accessibility, transparency, and active participation in promoting EU values and solidarity. They highlighted the need for improved communication, inclusive representation, and opportunities for young people to have their voices heard and contribute to decision-making processes. They emphasised the point that the EU and programmes for learning such as Erasmus+ are great opportunities to expand their learning, however they said that accessing these programmes as a young person was challenging and in fact not all their friends and colleagues either knew or availed of these opportunities.



## Overview of young people's feedback

The main topics covered in the conversations were as follows:

1. Re-evaluating values and beliefs in light of the pandemic and war.
2. Questioning the treatment of refugees and the impact of labelling.
3. Using technology and innovation to improve solidarity and accessibility.
4. Personal responsibility and using learned tools to help others.
5. Initiatives and interventions by the EU to support solidarity and EU values.
6. Volunteering groups and grassroots organisations at local and national levels.
7. Issues with grants and travel expenses for programmes like Erasmus+.
8. European events and initiatives for sharing ideas and experiences.
9. Representation and diversity in leadership positions.
10. Education as a means to promote EU values and implement them in laws.
11. Lack of cross-generational dialogue and involvement in decision-making.
12. Difficulties in accessing information about EU initiatives and opportunities.
13. Need for more transparency, follow-ups, and two-way conversations.
14. Criticism of the EU's approach to other countries and lack of diverse perspectives.
15. Highlighting the benefits of the EU and debunking negative narratives.
16. Importance of education in understanding the EU and its history.
17. Challenges in finding information about EU activities and decision-making processes.
18. The need for more youth involvement in decision-making and representation.
19. Bridging the gap between politicians and young people through dialogue.
20. Lack of centralised information and communication channels for EU initiatives.
21. Criticism of the EU's portrayal of non-EU countries and the need for balanced perspectives.
22. Addressing age disparity and conservative values in the European Parliament.
23. Emphasizing learning through hands-on experiences and intercultural exchanges.
24. Promoting freedom of movement and the unity of different ideas within the EU.

## Recommendations from young people's focus group

Based on the conversations and feedback provided by the focus group, here are a series of recommendations:

### 1. Education and Awareness:

- Develop educational programmes and initiatives that promote a better understanding of EU values, history, and the benefits of EU programmes like Erasmus+.
- Create accessible and centralized information sources about EU initiatives, opportunities, and decision-making processes to ensure transparency and awareness among young people.

### 2. Youth Involvement and Representation:

- Foster cross-generational dialogues and create platforms for young people to have direct input in decision-making processes at local, national, and European levels.
- Promote diversity and inclusivity in leadership positions, ensuring representation of different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.

### 3. Volunteer and Grassroots Organisations:

- Support and provide resources for volunteer and grassroots organisations that actively promote EU values and solidarity at the local level.
- Encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing between these organisations to enhance their collective impact.

### 4. Technology and Innovation:

- Embrace technological advancements and innovation to improve accessibility, communication, and participation in EU initiatives and programmes.
- Develop digital platforms and tools that facilitate interaction, information sharing, and learning opportunities for young people.

### 5. Funding and Grants:

- Increase financial support for programmes like Erasmus+ to ensure that young people from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to participate.
- Address travel expenses and other financial barriers that may hinder access to EU programmes and initiatives.

### 6. Solidarity and Cross-Cultural Understanding:

- Encourage initiatives and interventions that promote solidarity, cross-cultural understanding, and empathy, particularly regarding refugees and marginalized communities.
- Facilitate intercultural exchanges, both within Europe and with countries outside the EU, to foster unity and appreciation of diverse perspectives.

### **7. Two-Way Communication and Transparency:**

- Promote transparency in EU decision-making processes and increase communication channels between policymakers and young people.
- Ensure that young people have the opportunity to provide feedback, ask questions, and receive follow-ups on their contributions and concerns.

### **8. Collaboration and Exchange:**

- Encourage collaboration and exchange of ideas and experiences among young people from different EU countries through programmes like the European Solidarity Corps, European Youth Forum, and interrail initiatives.
- Facilitate networking opportunities and events that promote dialogue, mutual learning, and the sharing of best practices.

### **9. Emphasise Positive Narratives:**

- Counter negative narratives and misconceptions about the EU by highlighting the benefits, opportunities, and positive impact it has on the lives of young people.
- Promote balanced perspectives and understanding of non-EU countries and their contributions to solidarity and EU values.

### **10. Hands-on Experiences and Practical Learning:**

- Emphasise the importance of hands-on experiences, practical learning, and intercultural exchanges to enhance understanding and active participation in EU values and initiatives.
- Encourage participation in projects and programmes that provide opportunities for young people to engage with different cultures, ideas, and challenges.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers, organisations, and educational institutions can empower young people to actively contribute to EU values and solidarity, foster cross-cultural understanding, and create a more inclusive and participatory Europe.