

A better Europe for the youth: Proposals of the UNA Europa Students

The European Union is facing some of the toughest challenges of its history. In an era of continuous transformation of our societies, where digitalisation profoundly affects us, where climate change is menacing our futures, where the social and economic fabric is affected by succeeding crises, the European youth considers itself as a power of proposition, as a power of change.

The students of UNA Europa, an alliance of eight leading European universities, allied with the Young European Politicians, and representatives of major youth institutions, worked together and are honoured to present their proposals to make Europe a better democracy for the youth, with stronger and more relevant public policies for the European youth.

Youth participation in European democracy - proposals

1. Promote local engagement by using institutions as facilitators (schools, universities, clubs, organisations).
2. Reinforce the use of social media in the European communication
3. Create a common **European Engagement Force** supporting all youth being in school or in employment - to help involvement. This force would assure a stronger support from the European institutions to existing student and youth initiatives (e.g. UNA Europa Student Board), but would also organise training sessions about engagement (how to create a citizen initiative, gather people, make it succeed, then disseminate it).
4. Make democracy about **topics that youth cares about**, rather than about political fights. Focus communication on the topics that affect the youth, thus encouraging them to take part in the debate.
5. Make **participatory budgeting** a full-fledged European policy. It is an extremely efficient way of encouraging youth to imagine audacious projects to address global challenges at a local level, while giving them the keys to understand budget making and the dynamics of public policy making.
6. Institute **European History** as part of every national History. The History of our continent and of our Union, as well as the organisation of the European institutions, should play a central role in middle and high school. This would be reinforced by mock elections, debates, and learning by doing.
7. Never forget those who can't travel. We can't build the European community without the meeting of the people and of the cultures. We should **encourage mobility** since middle school, and during university as well as in professional life.
8. Reinforce **European volunteering**, especially in European democracy and local/global co-construction fields.
9. Generalise **expert groups** such as the [Youth climate panel](#) - expert panels of youth/students to advise decision-makers on different topics.
10. Proclaim our **universities as core places of debate**, construction and mutual understanding. We should aim to propose in every university a full around-the-year program of conferences, meetings with European stakeholders, online and on-site courses about Europe, its history, its culture, its institutions. These events and courses should be open not only for the students but more broadly to all the citizens.

European policies from the perspective of young European citizens – proposals

1. **Offer better mental health support** to a generation (for self-reporting issues or otherwise) that faces more mental health issues than any previous generations (50% of young people face stress / anxiety according to the ILO). This includes stress issues, taking down barriers to access mental health support systems by improving accessibility and promoting these services among the general youth: twice a month consultations with mental health support systems, at universities or elsewhere.
2. **Expand education and mobility opportunities for students in university** or in apprenticeships, following up the target of the EHEA (100% by 2025) with concrete support, particularly to the weakest students.
3. Reinforce blended mobility and online mobility are two other pillars that help student mobility. Keeping tuition fees low and entrance requirements reasonable such that any student can apply to, and with effort be accepted in, a university programme.
4. More broadly, create new European Universities, on the model of UNA Europa, creating integrated mobility in joint innovative formats for education, making Europe a place of academic excellence while building the European community.
5. Democratise **digital access** by making it a priority in online education and in our universities, guarantee internet for all students / youth and make devices affordable for the students who are not able to afford them by e.g. integrating them into social security programmes.
6. Making online material more accessible while making more material accessible inline, in an easy to comprehend and easy to reach function (e.g. Ministry of Digitalisation, the Netherlands, Gov.uk, United Kingdom).
7. **Ensure diversity & Inclusion** of all students by means of addressing specific barriers to entry and tackling structural issues that create negative outcomes for young people. Examples include physical accessibility, for instance [SIHO](#).
8. Provide free courses of local language or local sign language to incoming students, or youth who have not yet mastered the local language.
9. Democratise **reorientation**, by taking a different view of students / trainees who cannot complete their study track, from “slackers” to students facing genuine difficulties and losing valuable time trying to overcome them, or students who have made a wrong choice of orientation. There is a need to offer the requisite support to these students, encouraging reorientation and ensuring that students who study for a longer period of time or with worse results are not personally penalised.
- **Sustainability & Tackling the Climate crisis**
10. Make available subsidised funding from train companies (e.g. SNCB, Interrail) to students going on exchange. Maintaining discounts on youth and students, public transport passes (including students), public transport cards by the universities / local government.
11. Extend / enforce the EU Single - Use plastics directive, with cheaper containers to be sold / given out to students by Green offices, as an initiative to reduce plastic waste.
12. Translate the United Nations’ sustainable development goals (SDGs) into action, locally and globally. Take inspiration from the SDG conference in Ghent with students and representatives of the tech sector, seeking to find technical solutions to some of these problems. Similar initiatives can be envisaged, which would not only fulfil our international commitments, but reinforce the participation of young people in the multilateral or supranational organs that tackle global challenges.