

Let's Speak Diversity!

POLICY PAPER

Promoting Greater Inclusivity in Youth Organisations

A call to policy makers

Most of the time policy makers listen to the claims of those who have a louder voice, those who represent a bigger group within society. But what about the demands of those who are part of a smaller group? What about the perspectives of those who find themselves between the intersection of several discriminated identities?

The under-representation of youth from diverse backgrounds, specially minorities, is driving their existence towards the periphery of society. Hence ignoring a significant part of European voices and experiences. Concerned with the complicated situation of many young people in Europe, young change makers gathered by JEF Europe propose several initiatives to promote a more inclusive Europe for everyone.

Supporting young people's participation in policy is within the priorities of the Council of Europe (CoE). As part of the Youth Work for the 2024-2027 period, the CoE has committed to focus on intersectionality as a way to combat discrimination in active participation. The aim is to provide training and activities whilst identifying what can be done further on. Although it is too early to assess the effectiveness of this work, what can be said is that the proposal on paper is too vague, and more concrete actions and respective reports are needed. On the same line, in January 2024, the European Commission pointed out the need to listen to young Europeans when they announced that they would be implementing a "Youth Check" to make sure that the needs and voices of young people are considered across various policy areas. However, youth in Europe cannot be perceived as one big homogenous group. The voices and needs of minority youth groups will remain unaddressed unless they are actively included in the dialogue, and intersectionality is genuinely considered, both in policy-making and in the actions taken to implement those policies.

This policy paper not only builds upon the analysis and concerns of JEF Europe but also represents the worryment of several young Europeans from diverse backgrounds who took part in our Let's Speak Diversity Event on 17 December 2024 in Brussels.

These demands may only succeed should youth organizations and organizations representing minority groups be recognised as key partners in the improving and implementation of policies at the European level. Furthermore, for social inclusion to succeed, a stronger commitment from public authorities is needed, policy makers at all levels must embark with the above mentioned organizations on coordinated policies, studies, and projects.

Reaching out to youth minorities for deeper inclusion

Young people from marginalized and under-represented backgrounds (be it ethnic minorities, language minorities, or any other minority group), are continuously being discriminated against. Despite new mechanisms having come into force recently, the reality is that these peoples are not included at any stage of the decision making processes where majorities' stance is commonly the only one considered.

For these groups to be included and to make policies more inclusive, policy makers need to make sure they are specifically reaching out to them. This can only happen by adopting a more inclusive language, diversifying the communication channels, including both verbal and visual communication, and, most importantly, directly addressing the group.

Make all voices heard equally

Policy makers and institutions too often align their actions with the views and interests of the majority groups. There is a gap between input and impact. Therefore, a significant part of our society remains ignored. We must make sure that everyone's voice is heard.

Thus, for a genuine representation of EU citizens to exist there should be a quota mechanism to ensure that not only all countries but also all groups within them are participants and have a say.

Concrete follow ups on Youth Consultations

Policy makers must acknowledge the importance of receiving first hand information from minority groups and youth organizations representing them. For proper exchanges to happen there must be a space for continued encounters and exchanges. These meetings must be constant, as a single conversation would not leave room for policy makers to learn about current changing dynamics. Moreover, there should exist more and diversified channels for minority groups to have a dialogue with policy makers in which they have the chance to express their needs and demands. A conversation that would allow policy makers to learn about the reality.

The Council of Europe created a co-management system. This mechanism aims at strengthening participatory democracy by providing a common space for reflection and co-production in which the voice of public authorities and that of European Youth are represented. Similarly, in 2022 the EESC decided to start a pilot project to implement the EU Youth Test in its opinions and to set up a new Youth Group. In January 2024, the Commission announced that they will be implementing a "Youth Check" in which youth experts will be included in consultative exercises whenever new legislation is produced. While as a youth organization we enthusiastically welcome these consultation

mechanisms, which are crucial for ensuring that youth voices reach policymakers, we unfortunately recognise that there have been little to none advances in the topic.

In order for policy makers to propose relevant activities, granting schemes, policies, they must be well informed about current dynamics. If they don't analyze and understand the field properly, they cannot propose funding mechanisms or shape policies, among others, in an efficient way. We urge European-level institutions to strengthen open consultations and youth dialogues, and to ensure that these engagements lead to tangible outcomes rather than being one-off events with no follow-through

Continuous evaluation is needed

Whereas most public reports and texts on the Council of Europe's website are quite outdated, we firmly believe that for policy makers to adapt to the changing environment and evaluate whether their policies are having an impact or not, they need to be constantly measuring, analyzing and reporting. Whenever,

To assess current trends effectively, policymakers should request more frequent monitoring and updated reports. The data collected needs to be more comprehensive and accurate than what is currently available. Furthermore, setting clear goals will provide a specific path to follow, enable precise progress evaluation, and facilitate the development of coherent responses. The current statistics are outdated, having been gathered too many years ago, and the infrequent monitoring renders them irrelevant.

Ensure Awareness for all Youth

In the findings of an exploratory survey conducted by the European Youth forum in 2014, quite often, young people are not aware of the legislation or policy aspects in terms of discrimination, and therefore do not realize the situation they find themselves in. For them to be conscious and for exclusion to be better tackled, it is indispensable to bring antidiscrimination laws to their attention.

For this reason, we urge policy makers to create forums to talk about policy, disseminate their reports, and make sure young Europeans are fully informed of their rights so that they can identify discrimination and bring it back to them so it can be tackled. Participation in these forums must be designed inclusively. To achieve this, policymakers should engage with networks representing minority youth, who can serve as a bridge to connect with these groups.

Closing statement

We demand policy makers to take into consideration youth minority groups and intersectionality, both in the **making of policies** and in their **implementation**.

Proper exchange channels must be established between policy makers and representatives of youth minorities. We call for new and existing consultation mechanisms to deliver properly and we urge European-level institutions to request more frequent and accurate monitoring.

Used:

- <https://tools.youthforum.org/policy-library/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Multiple-discrimination-and-young-people-in-Europe.pdf>
- [https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/minority-youth-organisations#\[%2278919099%22:\[0\]\]](https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/minority-youth-organisations#[%2278919099%22:[0]])
- <https://www.diplomacy.edu/resource/meaningful-youth-engagement-in-policy-and-decision-making-processes-our-common-agenda-policy-brief-3/>
- <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/essentials>
- <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/council-of-europe-youth-policy>
- <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/co-management>

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About The Work Plan 2024 Let's Speak Diversity! project:

The Work Plan 2024 Let's Speak Diversity!, aimed at developing the competences of both youth workers and youth-led organisations, focusing on how to sensitively approach, empower, include and work with people coming from minority and linguistic backgrounds, including Roma youth.

Working on living together in peaceful, democratic and inclusive societies is one of the core topics that JEF Europe has been focusing on in the past few years, placing it among its Strategic Priorities in 2021-2024.

The vision of LSD, co-funded by the European Youth Foundation and the European Commission, was to further increase the knowledge of young activists on language and ethnic minority communities across Europe, understand their challenges and stories and encourage partners from the youth sector to listen, learn and build their work in a more inclusive way. It has focused primarily on combating all forms of discrimination, racism and exclusion, including structural forms, with a specific focus on: Roma youth participation and inclusion; the inclusion of youth from ethnic and linguistic minority groups, in particular refugee youth; intercultural dialogue.

Through 5 activities, JEF has focused on building concrete ways to include minority youth, while still exploring intersections with refugee and migrant communities, racialised groups and people oppressed through gender-based discrimination in their communities.

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