



# ADVOCACY GUIDE

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Turning voices into change  
Using music to bring the European  
Youth Goals to life



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# Table of Content

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	5
The EU Youth Strategy - what it is about .....	5
The European Youth Goals - a shared vision .....	6
Bringing policy closer to real life .....	8
What this guide is (and what it is not) .....	9
<b>2. From Youth Goals to Real Life</b> .....	10
When goals meet reality .....	10
Bridging the gap .....	10
Starting from what matters .....	11
Creating meaningful connections .....	11
Why creativity plays a role .....	11
A starting point, not a checklist .....	12
<b>3. Music as a Tool for Advocacy</b> .....	12
Music has always been part of social change .....	13
Music can influence — in different directions .....	13
Why music works: more than just words .....	15
What this looks like in practice .....	15
From creation to conversation .....	16
Reaching beyond traditional audiences .....	17
Keeping authenticity at the centre .....	17
A tool with real potential .....	18
<b>4. How to Turn Music into Advocacy</b> .....	19
From music to awareness .....	19
From awareness to dialogue .....	20
From dialogue to influence .....	22
Connecting the steps .....	23
Keeping it grounded .....	24
<b>5. Selected Practices</b> .....	25
From lyrics to discussion on inclusion and equality .....	25



Addressing rights through storytelling and metaphor .....	25
Music as a way to speak about justice and human rights.....	26
A song as a starting point to talk about dignity .....	27
A song about solidarity, inequality and shared responsibility .....	28
Making EU values visible through music .....	30
A music video as a tool to reflect on inequality and perspective.....	31
Bringing music into a policy discussion.....	32
A song about identity, diversity and staying true to yourself .....	33
A song challenging systems and giving voice to lived realities .....	35
Music as a tool for protest and public visibility .....	36
What these examples show .....	38
<b>6. Engaging Policymakers through Creative Advocacy .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Creating entry points for dialogue with policymakers .....	39
Bringing creative outputs into policy spaces .....	39
Using campaigns to reach policymakers.....	40
Amplifying youth voices through storytelling .....	41
Examples beyond Songs for Rights.....	42
Making engagement meaningful.....	43
A shared space.....	43
<b>7. Conclusion: From Ideas to Action.....</b>	<b>44</b>
Starting where people are.....	44
Small actions can travel far .....	45
Creating connections.....	46
Working with what you have.....	47
Staying open and honest .....	47
Moving forward.....	47
An invitation .....	48



# 1. Introduction

Across Europe, young people care deeply about what is happening around them — from climate change and mental health to equality, democracy, and their future opportunities. At the same time, many feel that politics and decision-making are far away from their everyday lives. Policies can seem complex, abstract, or simply not made for them.

This is where the **EU Youth Strategy** and the **European Youth Goals** come in. They are meant to close that gap ; to bring young people closer to the decisions that shape their lives, and to make sure their voices are heard. But for this to really work, these ideas need to be more than documents or frameworks. They need to be understood, felt, and used in real life.

That is not always easy.

Many youth workers, educators, artists, and young people themselves are asking the same question: **How do we make these goals meaningful in practice?**

This guide was created as one possible answer.

## The EU Youth Strategy - what it is about

The EU Youth Strategy (2019–2027) is the European Union’s main framework for working with and for young people. It sets a shared direction for how countries, organisations, and institutions can support young people across Europe.

At its core, the strategy is built around three simple ideas: helping young people to take part in society, to connect with others, and to build the skills and confidence they need for their lives. These ideas are often described as **engage, connect, and empower**.

To make this happen, the strategy is supported by a number of tools and programmes. For example, the **EU Youth Dialogue** creates spaces where young people can share their views and influence policies directly. The **European Youth Week** highlights youth participation and brings projects and ideas into the spotlight. Programmes like **Erasmus+** and the **European Solidarity Corps** offer opportunities for young people to learn, collaborate, and volunteer across borders.

All of these initiatives are part of a bigger effort to make sure that young people are not just included, but actively shaping the future of Europe.





## The European Youth Goals - a shared vision

The European Youth Goals sit at the heart of this strategy. They were not created by institutions alone, but through a large participatory process involving young people across Europe. Between 2017 and 2018, around 50,000 young people took part in surveys, workshops, and dialogues as part of the EU Youth Dialogue. Their ideas, concerns, and priorities were collected and brought together, leading to the creation of the 11 European Youth Goals.

Because of this process, the goals reflect what matters most to young people today; not in theory, but based on their lived experiences. They represent a shared vision shaped directly by young people from different countries, backgrounds, and realities across Europe.

They cover a wide range of topics; from mental health and inclusion to participation, sustainability, and access to information. Together, they form a shared vision of what a better Europe could look like for young people.



While the Youth Strategy provides the framework and tools, the Youth Goals give direction. They highlight the areas where change is needed and where efforts should be focused.

In simple terms, the Youth Goals express what young people want to see happen, and the Youth Strategy is one way of making that happen.

To better understand what this vision includes, it is helpful to take a closer look at the 11 European Youth Goals. Each of them focuses on an area where young people across Europe see a need for change:



### **1. Connecting EU with Youth**

Young people want to feel more connected to the European Union and to understand how it affects their daily lives. This goal focuses on making the EU more transparent, accessible, and relevant, so that young people feel part of it, not distant from it.



### **2. Equality of All Genders**

This goal highlights the importance of equal rights and opportunities for all genders. It calls for an end to discrimination and for creating spaces where everyone can participate fully, safely, and with respect.



### **3. Inclusive Societies**

Young people want societies where everyone is included, regardless of background, identity, or circumstances. This goal is about reducing inequalities, fighting discrimination, and creating opportunities for all.



### **4. Information and Constructive Dialogue**

Access to clear, reliable information is essential for participation. This goal focuses on improving how young people receive information and how they can engage in meaningful, respectful dialogue; both online and offline.



### **5. Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Mental health is a major concern for many young people. This goal calls for better support systems, more awareness, and environments that allow young people to feel safe, supported, and able to thrive.



### **6. Moving Rural Youth Forward**

Young people living in rural areas often face fewer opportunities and more challenges. This goal aims to ensure that they have equal access to education, services, and participation, no matter where they live.



### **7. Quality Employment for All**

Young people want fair, stable, and meaningful work. This goal focuses on improving working conditions, access to jobs, and recognising skills gained through different experiences, including non-formal learning.





### **8. Quality Learning**

Education should prepare young people not just for work, but for life. This goal highlights the need for inclusive, flexible, and relevant learning opportunities that support personal development and critical thinking.



### **9. Space and Participation for All**

Young people want to have a real say in decisions that affect them. This goal is about creating more spaces where young people can participate and ensuring their voices are taken seriously.



### **10. Sustainable Green Europe**

Climate change and environmental issues are key concerns. This goal focuses on building a sustainable future and supporting young people to be part of the green transition.



### **11. Youth Organisations and European Programmes**

Youth organisations play a crucial role in supporting participation and engagement. This goal aims to strengthen them and ensure that European programmes, such as ERASMUS+, European Solidarity Corps and others are accessible and beneficial for all young people.

## **Bringing policy closer to real life**

Even with all of this in place, there is still a gap.

Many young people are not aware of these Youth Goals and these processes, or they do not feel connected to them. Policy language can feel distant, and participation formats do not always reach those who are outside of organised youth structures.

This is where **creative approaches** can make a real difference.

**Music**, in particular, has a unique way of connecting people. It can express ideas and emotions that are difficult to put into formal language. It can bring people together, start conversations, and make complex topics more accessible. A song, a lyric, or a short video can sometimes say more than a long policy paper.

Over the past years, many youth organisations and communities have started to use music and the arts not only for expression, but also for engagement and advocacy. They are turning experiences into stories, and stories into messages that can be heard.



## What this guide is (and what it is not)

This guide builds on those experiences. It is meant to support youth workers, educators, artists, activists, and young people who want to explore how music and creative methods can be used to connect with the European Youth Goals and bring them into practice.

It offers ideas, examples, and simple approaches that can be adapted to different contexts. Some sections include practical suggestions, but this is not a step-by-step training manual or a collection of ready-made workshop plans.

Instead, it is a guide to inspire action; to show what is possible, and to encourage you to find your own ways of using creativity to engage with the issues that matter.

Because in the end, the goal is not just to understand the European Youth Goals, but to **live them, express them, and shape them together.**



## 2. From Youth Goals to Real Life

The European Youth Goals set out an inspiring vision. They reflect what young people want to see change; in their communities, in their countries, and across Europe.

But for many people working with young people (and for young people themselves) a common question remains: **What do these goals actually look like in everyday life?**

It is one thing to talk about participation, inclusion, or mental health. It is another to recognise how these issues show up in real situations; in a classroom, in a youth centre, in a rehearsal space, or in a local community.

### When goals meet reality

Take participation as an example. Many young people want to have a say in decisions that affect them, but do not always know where or how to start. Meetings can feel formal, language can be difficult to understand, and the space may not feel open to everyone.

Or think about mental health. It is widely recognised as important, yet support systems are often not accessible, and conversations around it can still feel uncomfortable or stigmatised.

The same applies to inclusion, employment, education, or sustainability. The challenges are real and visible; but they are not always connected back to the Youth Goals, even though they are closely linked.

### Bridging the gap

This gap between ideas and reality is not a failure of the Youth Goals. It simply shows that translating big ideas into everyday action takes time, creativity, and the right approaches.

Many young people do not engage with policy language; not because they are not interested, but because it does not speak to them. Long documents, abstract terms, and formal processes can feel distant from their own experiences.

What often works better are approaches that start from real life: **stories, emotions, shared experiences, and creative expression.**



This is where youth work, education, and cultural activities play an important role. They create spaces where young people can explore topics in their own way, connect them to their lives, and express their views.

## Starting from what matters

Working with the Youth Goals does not always mean starting with the goals themselves. In many cases, it starts with a question, a feeling, or an experience:

- frustration about not being heard
- concern about the environment
- pressure related to school or work
- the need to belong

These are all entry points.

When these experiences are explored and shared, they naturally connect to the themes of the Youth Goals. What matters is not to “teach” the goals as concepts, but to recognise them in what young people are already living and expressing.

## Creating meaningful connections

For the Youth Goals to become meaningful, they need to be:

- **understandable** - using language that makes sense
- **relatable** - connected to real experiences
- **visible** - present in everyday spaces and activities
- **actionable** - something people can actually do something with

This does not require complex methods. Often, small steps are enough: opening a conversation, creating a space to share ideas, or connecting a local activity to a wider topic.

## Why creativity plays a role

Creative approaches can help make these connections more natural. A conversation can start from a song. A discussion about equality can grow out of lyrics. A video or performance can express ideas that are difficult to explain in formal terms. Creative work can turn personal experiences into shared messages.

In this way, the Youth Goals become less like a framework to follow, and more like a **lens through which to understand and shape** what is already happening.



## A starting point, not a checklist

It is important to remember that the Youth Goals are not a checklist to complete. They are a starting point; a way of looking at the world and identifying where change is needed.

Different people, organisations, and communities will connect to different goals in different ways. What matters is that the connection feels real and meaningful.



## 3. Music as a Tool for Advocacy

In the previous chapters, we looked at the bigger picture; the European Youth Goals, and how they connect to real life. From here on, this guide becomes more concrete.

This chapter focuses on how music is already being used in practice (by young people, artists, and movements) to raise awareness, start conversations, and influence change. Not in theory, but in real situations, with real examples.

Because music is not just something people listen to. It is something people use.

## Music has always been part of social change

Using music to speak up is not new. Throughout history, songs have played a role in movements for rights, freedom, and social change.

In the 1960s, during the civil rights movement in the United States, songs like “*Blowin’ in the Wind*” by **Bob Dylan** became closely associated with protests against racism and inequality. Around the same time, “*A Change Is Gonna Come*” by **Sam Cooke** captured both frustration and hope for change.

In South Africa, during the fight against apartheid, artists like **Miriam Makeba** used music to draw international attention to injustice. Songs travelled across borders even when people could not.

More recently, artists continue to engage with social and political issues. “*This Is America*” by **Childish Gambino** addresses violence and systemic racism in a way that sparked global discussion. **Billie Eilish** has brought topics like mental health and climate anxiety into mainstream conversations, especially among younger audiences.

Across different contexts and decades, music has been used to question, to protest, and to bring people together around shared concerns.

## Music can influence — in different directions

Music has not only been used for positive change.

In different historical contexts, songs have also been used to support political agendas, strengthen national identity in times of conflict, or spread exclusionary ideas. In some cases, music has been part of propaganda, shaping how people see others or understand events.

For example, during World War II, music was widely used by governments on different sides to influence public opinion, boost morale, and frame the enemy in certain ways. Songs broadcast on radio were designed to create unity within one group while reinforcing division against others.

In Nazi Germany, music and cultural production were tightly controlled and used to promote ideology and exclude those who did not fit into it. Certain types of music were banned, while others were encouraged to shape a specific worldview.

In other contexts, nationalist songs have been used to strengthen identity during times of conflict, sometimes creating a sense of belonging, but also sometimes deepening divisions between groups.

Even today, certain forms of music can be used to spread harmful messages. In some cases, lyrics promote hate speech, racism, sexism, or homophobia. For example, parts of the white supremacist music scene (often referred to as “hate music”) have been used to recruit and influence young people by combining strong emotional appeal with extremist ideology.

There are also examples in mainstream genres where problematic messages appear more subtly. Some songs may normalise violence, reinforce gender stereotypes, or glorify harmful behaviour without explicitly presenting themselves as political.

Even beyond lyrics, music can be used in manipulative ways. Repetition, strong rhythms, and emotionally charged melodies can create a sense of unity or urgency that makes messages more persuasive; regardless of whether those messages are constructive or harmful.

Even today, certain lyrics or messages can reinforce stereotypes or normalise harmful attitudes. This does not make music good or bad in itself. It simply shows how strongly it can shape perception, depending on how it is used and in what context.



## Why music works: more than just words

One of the reasons music is so effective lies in how it reaches people on different levels at the same time.

Lyrics carry meaning. They describe experiences, express opinions, and communicate ideas that people can reflect on. This is the part we consciously process; what we hear and understand.

At the same time, music affects the body and emotions more directly. Research in neuroscience has shown that listening to music activates areas of the brain linked to emotion, memory, and reward. Rhythm can influence energy and movement. Melody can shift mood; from tension to calm, from sadness to hope. Repetition makes phrases stick, often long after the music stops.

Because of this, messages carried through music tend to stay with people in a different way. They are not only understood, but remembered and felt.

This combination is what gives music its particular strength in advocacy. It can make an issue relatable, hold attention, and create a connection that goes beyond information alone.

## What this looks like in practice

Across Europe, young people are already using music in very concrete ways to engage with social issues, EU values, and the European Youth Goals.

Within Songs for Rights ([www.songsforrights.org](http://www.songsforrights.org)), young people come together in workshops to write and produce songs based on their own experiences. Topics often include discrimination, identity, mental health, or participation. The process usually starts with conversations — sharing personal stories — and then moves into writing lyrics and creating music together.

One group, for instance, developed a song around the feeling of not being heard in their community. The lyrics reflected personal frustration, but also a clear demand for more space to participate. The song was later presented at a public event, where it became the starting point for a discussion with local stakeholders.

Through Songs for Change ([www.songsforchange.eu](http://www.songsforchange.eu)), an ERASMUS+ funded project of Songs for Rights, similar approaches are used with youth workers and educators. In trainings and online sessions, participants explore how songwriting, audio production, or collaborative music-making can be used in their own work. Topics like human rights

or EU values are not introduced as abstract concepts, but explored through creative processes.

Many of these outputs — songs, videos, and testimonials — are shared online, including through the Songs for Rights YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@songsforrights>

This allows others to engage with the content, relate to the stories, and use them as inspiration in different contexts.

## **From creation to conversation**

What often makes the difference is what happens after the music is created.

A song developed in a workshop can be performed at a local event, opening space for dialogue. A recorded track can be shared online and reach audiences far beyond the original group. Lyrics can be used in discussions with decision-makers, offering a different way of expressing experiences and perspectives.

In some cases, creative outputs have been brought directly into policy-related settings — such as youth forums or roundtables — where they help shift the tone of the conversation and make it more grounded in lived experience.





## Reaching beyond traditional audiences

Music also makes it possible to reach people who might not engage through more formal channels.

Not everyone will attend a consultation or read a policy document. But many will listen to music, watch videos, or come across content online. A short clip or a song can communicate an idea quickly and in a way that feels accessible.

Because of this, music can help involve a wider and more diverse group of young people — including those who might not usually take part in organised activities or structured dialogue processes.

## Keeping authenticity at the centre

For this to work, it is important that the process remains open and genuine.

Young people need space to express themselves in their own way, without feeling that they have to say the “right” thing. The strength of music lies in its honesty — in how it reflects real experiences, even when they are complex or uncomfortable.

The role of youth workers, educators, and facilitators is to support this process. This can mean creating a safe environment, offering technical or creative guidance, and helping connect the outcomes to wider opportunities for sharing and dialogue.

## A tool with real potential

Music on its own does not change policies. But it can change how people connect to issues, how conversations start, and who is part of them.

It creates links between personal experience and public discussion. It brings new voices into spaces where they are often missing. And it offers a way of engaging with topics like human rights, EU values, and the European Youth Goals that feels closer to everyday life.



## 4. How to Turn Music into Advocacy

By now, it is clear that music can connect people to ideas, experiences, and each other. The next question is how this actually turns into advocacy in practice.

In many cases, this does not happen through one big moment, but through a series of smaller steps. A song is created, shared, discussed, and then taken further into different spaces. What starts as expression can gradually become something that informs conversations, influences perspectives, and sometimes even reaches decision-makers.

This chapter looks at three ways this process often unfolds: **raising awareness, creating dialogue, and influencing change**. These are not fixed stages, and they often overlap. But they offer a useful way to understand how music can move from a personal or creative act into something with a wider impact.

### From music to awareness

One of the most immediate ways music is used is to make issues visible.

Many of the European Youth Goals deal with topics that are present in young people's lives but not always openly discussed — especially when it comes to mental health (Youth Goal 5), inclusion (Youth Goal 3), or access to participation (Youth Goal 9).

A song can bring these topics into the open in a way that feels accessible.

For example, artists like **Stromae** have addressed mental health and emotional struggles in songs like “*Santé*” and “*L’enfer*”, where themes of loneliness, anxiety, and burnout are explored in a very direct and relatable way. By bringing these topics into popular music, such songs have helped open conversations that are often difficult to have, especially among young people.

In another context, “*Alright*” by **Kendrick Lamar** became closely associated with the Black Lives Matter movement. The song combines personal reflection with broader social commentary on racism and inequality, and has been used in protests and public demonstrations. Its message resonated widely, showing how music can move from individual expression into collective action.

Similar processes can be seen in youth work contexts.

Within Songs for Rights, young people have created songs about feeling excluded in school environments or not being taken seriously in decision-making. When these

songs are shared (whether through performances or online platforms) they often resonate with others who have had similar experiences.

A short video of a song can travel quickly. It can be shared in a classroom, posted on social media, or included in a presentation. In this way, awareness does not depend on formal communication channels. It grows through connection.

What matters here is not perfection, but relevance. A simple song that reflects a real experience can often reach people more effectively than a carefully designed campaign message.

## **From awareness to dialogue**

Awareness on its own is only a starting point. What often follows, and what gives it depth, is dialogue.

Music creates natural entry points for conversation. It can make it easier to talk about topics that might otherwise feel uncomfortable or abstract.

For example, a group of young people might write a song about discrimination or identity, linking to Youth Goal 3 (Inclusive Societies). Playing that song in a group setting can open a discussion:

Where do these experiences come from? Who can relate? What needs to change?

Because the conversation starts from something created by the participants themselves, it often feels more personal and less formal.

In Songs for Rights workshops, this shift happens quite naturally. After creating a song, participants often reflect on the meaning behind their lyrics. These reflections can lead into deeper conversations about rights, participation, or access to information (Youth Goal 4).





In some cases, these discussions are extended beyond the group. A performance might be followed by a dialogue session with other young people, educators, or community members. The music helps set the tone, making the conversation more open and grounded in real experiences.

Artists have used similar approaches on a larger scale. Concerts and performances are often spaces where messages are shared and discussed collectively. **Fela Kuti**, whose influence has strongly shaped music scenes in Africa and globally, used his performances to openly criticise political corruption and human rights abuses. His concerts were not just musical events, but spaces where political messages were directly communicated to audiences.

Looking more closely within Europe, **SXTN** have addressed themes such as gender roles, sexism, and empowerment in their music, challenging social norms and sparking public debate, especially among younger audiences. Their work shows how even within mainstream music scenes, performances and lyrics can question existing structures and open conversations.

Dialogue does not always need to be structured. Sometimes it starts with a simple reaction:

“That song reminds me of something I’ve experienced.”

From there, conversations grow.

## From dialogue to influence

The step from dialogue to influence is not always immediate, but it is where advocacy becomes more visible.

This is where music connects more directly to decision-making spaces.

In practice, this can take different forms.

A song created by young people can be presented at a youth policy event, not as entertainment, but as a contribution. It can highlight issues in a way that complements reports or recommendations. In settings like youth forums or roundtables, creative outputs often shift the atmosphere; making discussions more grounded and less abstract.

Within formats like policy debates or roundtables, such as those developed by Songs for Rights, music has been used to introduce topics before discussion begins. Instead of starting with formal statements, participants first listen to a song created by young people. This changes how the conversation unfolds. It starts from lived experience, not from policy language.

This approach is particularly relevant for Youth Goal 9 (Space and Participation for All), which focuses on creating meaningful opportunities for young people to influence decisions.

Music can also play a role in campaigns. A short jingle, a song, or a video can become part of a wider message; for example around sustainability (Youth Goal 10) or access to quality education (Youth Goal 8). These formats are often easier to share and can reach audiences that traditional advocacy materials do not.

There are also well-known examples of artists influencing public conversations and political agendas. Songs addressing climate change, inequality, or human rights often become part of wider movements, contributing to awareness and pressure for change.

At the same time, influence does not always mean immediate policy change. It can also mean changing how an issue is perceived, who is included in the conversation, and what kind of language is used.





## Connecting the steps

In reality, these three elements (awareness, dialogue, and influence) are closely connected.

A song might start as a personal expression (awareness), lead to a group discussion (dialogue), and eventually be shared in a setting where it informs a broader conversation (influence).

This process does not need to be planned in detail from the beginning. It often develops step by step.

What matters is recognising the potential of each stage and creating opportunities to move from one to the next.



## Keeping it grounded

Working with music in this way does not require large resources or professional production.

A simple recording, a live performance, or even just lyrics shared in a group can be enough to start the process. **What gives it value is the connection to real experiences and the willingness to engage** with them.

At the same time, it helps to think about where the music can go next. Who could hear it? Where could it be shared? What kind of conversation could it open?

These small considerations can make a big difference in turning a creative activity into something with wider impact.

Music does not replace other forms of advocacy, but it adds something that is often missing; a way to connect ideas with emotions, and personal experiences with public discussions.

Used in this way, it becomes part of a broader process of participation; one that is creative, flexible, and rooted in real life.



## 5. Selected Practices

The following examples show how music can be used in different ways to connect with the European Youth Goals, EU values, and human rights. They are not meant to be templates to copy, but starting points that can be adapted to different contexts.

Each example comes from real practice - from youth work, creative projects, or wider artistic contexts (most of them from our experience at Songs for Rights) - and shows how music can move from expression to awareness, dialogue, or influence.

### From lyrics to discussion on inclusion and equality

*(Youth Goal 3: Inclusive Societies & Youth Goal 2: Equality of All Genders)*

In another setting, a group worked on a song about belonging, identity, and discrimination. Some participants had experienced bullying or exclusion, others spoke about gender expectations and stereotypes.

A strong example of this approach is “[Gegen Mobber](#)”, where young people address bullying and injustice in school through direct and honest lyrics.

Similarly, “[The Rap Girls – Wir sind wir](#)” focuses on children’s rights and gender equality, expressing confidence, identity, and the demand to be respected.

In both cases, the process started from lived experience, not abstract concepts. The songs were later used in group settings and public presentations, where they opened discussions around equality, respect, and inclusion.

Because the messages came directly from young people, others could relate to them more easily, and conversations became more personal and concrete.

### Addressing rights through storytelling and metaphor

*(Youth Goals 3, 4 & 9 / Human Rights & EU Values)*

Some topics are more sensitive and require a different approach.

In the song “[The Flower](#)”, young people explore reproductive rights through metaphor and imagery rather than direct statements.



Using symbolism allowed participants to express complex ideas and emotions in a way that felt safe and creative. When the song was shared, it opened space for discussion on bodily autonomy, rights, and decision-making.

Another example is “[No Privacy](#)”, which addresses digital rights and the right to privacy - an issue closely linked to Youth Goal 4 (Information and Constructive Dialogue).

The song reflects concerns about surveillance, data use, and the lack of control many young people feel online. When used in workshops, it often leads to discussions about digital awareness, trust, and rights in online spaces.

These examples show how music can make complex or sensitive topics easier to approach and discuss.

## **Music as a way to speak about justice and human rights**

*(Youth Goals 3, 9 & broader human rights themes)*

Some songs take a more direct approach in addressing justice, equality, and human rights.

In “[Smells Like Action](#)”, young people express their views on inequality and the need for change, combining energy, frustration, and a clear call for action.

Another example, “[Turn Over the Rock](#)”, explores different human rights themes and encourages listeners to look beyond the surface - to question what is happening and to become more aware.





These songs are often used beyond the workshop context - in events, discussions, or online - where they help bring human rights topics into spaces where they might not otherwise be addressed.

## **A song as a starting point to talk about dignity**

*(EU Values: Human Dignity & Youth Goals 3 and 9)*

In another Songs for Rights workshop, a group of young people explored the idea of human dignity - what it means, when it is respected, and when it is taken away.

The process began with a conversation about everyday situations. Participants spoke about moments where they felt judged, ignored, or treated unfairly, but also about times when they felt seen, respected, and valued. These reflections made the concept of dignity more concrete and personal.

From there, the group started developing lyrics. Some focused on the feeling of being overlooked, others on standing up for oneself or for others. The writing process moved between discussion and experimentation, with participants shaping their ideas into lines that felt honest to them.



The result was the song “[Letasfi Ruhil Mohatama \(Heal My Broken Soul\)](#)”, which brings these perspectives together into a shared message.

When the song was shared, it became a starting point for further reflection. Listeners connected the lyrics to their own experiences - in school, in public spaces, or online. It opened up conversations about respect, equality, and how people treat each other in everyday situations.

What stood out was that dignity was no longer discussed as an abstract value, but as something lived and felt. The song helped make visible where dignity is present - and where it is missing.

## **A song about solidarity, inequality and shared responsibility**

*(Youth Goals 3, 6 & 9 / EU Values: Equality, Human Dignity, Solidarity)*

During the Songs for Change Training of Trainers in Herľany, Slovakia, participants from different countries came together to explore how music can be used in youth work and advocacy.

As part of the training, the group visited Roma settlements in Kecerovce. The visit left a strong impression. Participants were confronted with realities of inequality, exclusion, and limited access to opportunities - issues directly connected to Youth Goal 3 (Inclusive Societies) and Youth Goal 6 (Moving Rural Youth Forward).

These experiences became the starting point for a songwriting session.

The group began by sharing reflections from the visit. Some spoke about injustice and frustration, others about resilience, community, and strength. From there, they started writing lyrics together - combining different perspectives, languages, and cultural backgrounds.

The result was the song "[STONES](#)", created in English, Greek, Romani, Portuguese, German, and Kurdish.

The song uses the image of a river to describe life; with obstacles, but also movement and possibility. Lines like "*building our homes, together we can move the stones*" express both the challenges faced by communities and the idea of collective action and solidarity.

When shared, the song became more than a reflection of the experience. It opened space for discussion about inequality in Europe, the situation of Roma communities, and the role young people can play in addressing these issues.

What makes this example stand out is the collaborative process. The use of multiple languages reflects diversity, but also shared responsibility. The song does not speak *about* a community from the outside; it reflects on what participants experienced and how they relate to it.

It shows how music can connect personal encounters with broader social and political questions, and how creative processes can turn reflection into a shared message.



## Making EU values visible through music

*(EU Values & multiple Youth Goals)*

Music can also be used to translate broader concepts like EU values into something more tangible.

In “[We Will Add Many](#)”, young people engage with the six core EU values - such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights - and turn them into a collective musical message.

Rather than explaining these values in abstract terms, the song connects them to feelings, identity, and shared responsibility. This makes it easier for others to relate to them and reflect on what they mean in everyday life.



## A music video as a tool to reflect on inequality and perspective

*(Youth Goals 3, 6 & 9 / EU Values: Equality, Human Dignity, Solidarity)*

Within a Songs for Rights *Songs for Action* training, participants explored how visual storytelling can strengthen the message of a song and make complex issues more accessible.

The result was the music video "[Casino de la Vita](#)".

The video builds on the idea of life as a game of chance; where people are "dealt" very different starting conditions depending on where they are born and into which circumstances. Instead of explaining this concept in abstract terms, the video translates it into images and scenes that make the message easier to grasp. Through simple but symbolic visuals, it reflects on inequality, privilege, and responsibility. The viewer is invited to consider how different life paths can be — and how easily one's situation could have been different.

What makes the video particularly effective is the contrast between its playful concept and the seriousness of the topic. The metaphor of a "casino" creates a familiar and accessible entry point, while the underlying message points to real social issues such as inequality, migration, and access to opportunities.

The video was created using simple, do-it-yourself methods during the training. This shows that strong visual storytelling does not require professional production, but rather a clear idea and a shared understanding of what the group wants to express. When used in workshops or shared online, the video works as an immediate starting point for discussion. Instead of beginning with explanations, facilitators can simply show the video and ask:

What do you see? What does this represent? How does it relate to real life?  
From there, conversations often move naturally towards questions of fairness, solidarity, and social responsibility.

In this way, the music video becomes more than a complement to the song. It becomes a tool in itself - one that helps translate complex ideas into something visible, relatable, and open for discussion.



## Bringing music into a policy discussion

*(Youth Goal 1: Connecting EU with Youth & Youth Goal 9: Space and Participation for All)*

In some cases, music has been brought directly into spaces where decisions and policymaking are discussed.

A strong example of this is the online youth policy debate “Voices & Verses”, held in April 2026, where young people, musicians, and policymakers came together to discuss the role of music in promoting the European Youth Goals - particularly Youth Goal 1 (Connecting EU with Youth).

Rather than relying solely on conventional debate formats, the session intentionally integrated music throughout the discussion. Musical breaks and curated examples of music videos created by young people—highlighting human rights and EU values—were used to demonstrate the potential of music as a tool for engagement, communication, and advocacy.



This approach shifted the dynamic of the conversation. Instead of speaking only in abstract or policy-driven terms, participants were able to reflect on concrete, creative

expressions of youth perspectives. Policymakers engaged not just with ideas, but with messages and experiences conveyed through music and visual storytelling.

The discussion moved fluidly between listening, reflection, and exchange. Participants referred back to specific scenes, lyrics, and emotions from the showcased videos, helping to anchor the debate and make it more tangible.

In this way, music became more than a complementary element—it acted as a bridge, connecting young people with policymakers and illustrating how the European Youth Goals can be communicated and experienced in relatable and impactful ways.

## **A song about identity, diversity and staying true to yourself**

*(Youth Goals 2, 3 & 9 / EU Values: Equality, Human Dignity, Diversity)*

Within the Songs for Change in Greece, a group of young people came together through a series of songwriting workshops. Many of them came from different cultural and social backgrounds, and some had experienced exclusion, pressure to fit in, or limitations in expressing who they are.

The starting point of the process was a conversation about identity. Participants reflected on questions like:

What makes me who I am?

When do I feel accepted - and when do I feel judged?

What does it mean to stay true to yourself in a society that often expects you to fit certain norms?

These reflections shaped the songwriting process.





Working together, the group created the band *Believe Wings* and began developing lyrics that reflected both individual experiences and shared feelings. Different languages naturally became part of the process (English, Greek, Ukrainian, Arabic, French, German, Albanian, and Kurdish), each bringing its own perspective and voice into the song.

The result was “[Stay Unique](#)”.

The song speaks about resisting pressure, embracing individuality, and standing up for one’s identity. Lines like “*Stay unique, resist the flow, fight the norms to fly and grow*” reflect both personal struggle and collective strength.

When the song was shared, it resonated strongly with other young people. It opened conversations about diversity, inclusion, and the challenges of growing up in environments where difference is not always accepted.

At the same time, it connects clearly to broader themes; equality, participation, and the right to be oneself; which are central to both the European Youth Goals and EU values. What stands out in this example is how diversity is not only the topic, but also part of the process. The use of multiple languages and perspectives turns the song itself into a reflection of inclusion in practice.

## A song challenging systems and giving voice to lived realities

(Youth Goals 3 & 9 / EU Values: Human Dignity, Human Rights, Equality)

As part of a Songs for Rights *Songs for Action* activity, two young artists, Naomi and Jiska, created the song “[House of Representatives](#)”, inspired by their own experiences with activism and engagement around refugee rights.

Their starting point was frustration; not abstract, but based on real encounters with systems that felt difficult to navigate and often disconnected from the realities of the people affected. In particular, they reflected on how refugees are treated within administrative processes in the Netherlands, where bureaucracy can feel overwhelming and impersonal.

These reflections became the basis for the lyrics.

Rather than describing the situation in neutral terms, the song captures the emotional side of these experiences; confusion, frustration, and the feeling of not being seen as a person within the system. The lyrics speak to what it feels like to move through structures that are complex, slow, and at times dehumanising.

The result is “*House of Representatives*”.

The music video takes this further by using artistic and symbolic elements to reflect the absurdity of the situation. Interestingly, it was not filmed in an actual government building, but in a hotel in Albenga, Italy; showing how creative approaches can transform any space into a powerful visual narrative.

When shared, the song opened up discussions about migration, human dignity, and the gap between policy frameworks and lived realities. It also raised questions about how systems can become more humane and responsive.

What makes this example stand out is its directness. It does not speak *about* policy from a distance, but engages with it critically, grounded in experience. At the same time, it shows how music can turn frustration into expression; and expression into a message that reaches others.



## Music as a tool for protest and public visibility

*(Youth Goals 3, 7 & 10 / EU Values: Solidarity, Equality, Human Dignity)*

Not all music-based advocacy happens in workshops or structured projects. In many cases, it grows directly out of everyday experiences and the need to speak up. A strong example of this is the band [DAFFKE](#), a group formed by nurses in Germany. Their starting point was their own working reality - long hours, staff shortages, and increasing pressure within the healthcare system.

Instead of addressing these issues only through traditional channels, they began writing and performing protest songs. Their music reflects the challenges faced by people working in the health sector, but also the frustration of not being heard in political and public debates.

They performed at demonstrations and small street concerts, bringing their message directly into public spaces. In this context, music became a way to make working conditions visible - not through reports or statistics, but through lyrics, presence, and shared experience.

One of their songs, “*Ein guter Tag*”, captures this mix of everyday reality and the desire for change. <https://daffke.bandcamp.com/track/ein-guter-tag>  
Over time, their focus expanded. While their starting point was the healthcare system, their music now also addresses wider societal issues - including climate action, consumerism, and criticism of far-right movements.

This shows how music-based advocacy can evolve. What begins as a response to a specific issue can grow into a broader engagement with social and political questions.



What stands out in this example is its directness. The music is closely connected to lived experience, and it is performed in spaces where people are already gathered - in the street, at protests, in everyday public life.

It also shows that advocacy through music does not always need institutional support. It can start from a small group, a shared concern, and the decision to speak out. In this way, DAFFKE demonstrates how music can be used to voice policy-related issues, raise awareness, and contribute to public debate; especially when it is rooted in real experiences and brought directly to the people.

## What these examples show

Looking across these different practices, there is no single way to use music for advocacy.

Some approaches are small and local. Others reach wider audiences. Some focus on creating safe spaces for expression, others connect directly to policy discussions.

What they have in common is a simple idea: starting from real experiences, and using music to bring those experiences into a shared space where they can be heard and discussed.

These examples are only a starting point. In the next chapter, we will look more closely at how to connect these kinds of activities to policymakers and decision-making processes — and how to make sure that what is expressed is also heard.

## 6. Engaging Policymakers through Creative Advocacy

Up to this point, we have looked at how music can raise awareness and create dialogue. The next step is about connection - how these creative processes can reach people who are in positions to make decisions.

For many young people, this is where things become difficult. Even when they have clear ideas or strong messages, it is not always obvious how to bring them into spaces where policies are discussed or shaped.

Creative approaches can help bridge that gap.

They do not replace formal processes, but they can change how these processes feel and who is able to take part in them. In this chapter we will describe some examples from the Songs for Rights Network and beyond.



## Creating entry points for dialogue with policymakers

One of the most effective ways to connect young people and policymakers is to create formats that feel accessible to both.

An example of this is the “**Voices & Verses**” youth policy debate. In this format, young people, musicians, and policymakers come together in an online setting that feels closer to a talk show than a formal meeting.

Instead of starting with policy language, the conversation is often introduced through creative content - songs, lyrics, or short videos created by young people. These are used as entry points to discuss topics such as participation, inclusion, or mental health.

This changes the dynamic. Young people are not only asked for their opinion - they are presenting something they have created. Policymakers are not only responding to statements; they are reacting to experiences that are expressed in a different form.

It creates a more balanced exchange, where different perspectives can meet more naturally.

## Bringing creative outputs into policy spaces

Another approach is to integrate music directly into policy-related events.

In the “**Policy Jam**” roundtable format, young people, youth workers, musicians, and policymakers come together in a shared space - physically and online - to explore specific topics linked to the European Youth Goals.

What makes this format different is how the conversation starts. Instead of beginning with presentations or reports, it often begins with creative outputs: a song, a performance, or a video created by young people.





This helps ground the discussion from the beginning. It shifts the focus from abstract ideas to lived experiences.

From there, the group moves into dialogue. Participants reflect on what they heard, connect it to policy issues, work towards concrete ideas or recommendations and draft concrete policy recommendations that reflect young people’s priorities.

This shows how creative expression can feed directly into policy conversations — not as decoration, but as input.

## Using campaigns to reach policymakers

Not all engagement happens in meetings or events. Digital spaces also play an important role.

The **Songs for Rights LinkedIn Policy Makers Campaign 2026** is one example of how this can work. Instead of targeting only young audiences, the campaign is designed to reach policymakers, institutions, and professionals.



Content such as songs, videos, and short messages are shared in a way that connects creative work with policy topics; for example linking a song to a specific Youth Goal or EU value.

This creates a different kind of visibility. Policymakers encounter youth perspectives in a format that is direct and engaging, rather than through reports or formal documents.

At the same time, it opens the possibility for interaction (comments, sharing, or direct contact) in a space that is already used for professional exchange.

## **Amplifying youth voices through storytelling**

Another important approach is storytelling.

The campaign “**My European Youth Goals**” focuses on short, personal videos where young people talk about the Youth Goals that matter most to them and why.

These are not polished policy statements. They are personal reflections, often linked to everyday experiences.

When shared online, especially during moments like the European Youth Week, these videos can reach both peers and decision-makers. They show not only what young people think, but why it matters to them.

This kind of storytelling can make policy topics more relatable and harder to ignore.





## Examples beyond Songs for Rights

Similar approaches can be found in other contexts as well.

Within the European Youth Parliament, young people engage in debates and develop policy proposals. While the format is more formal, there is increasing interest in making discussions more accessible and connected to real experiences - something creative methods can support.

In another context, the global movement around climate change has shown how music and culture can support advocacy. Artists and young activists often combine performances, visual content, and public speaking to bring attention to issues and influence public debate.

Festivals, cultural events, and public campaigns are also spaces where policymakers are present or can be reached indirectly. When creative work is presented in these spaces, it can influence how issues are perceived and discussed.

## Making engagement meaningful

For these approaches to work, a few things make a difference.

First, the **connection needs to be clear**. Policymakers need to understand how what they are hearing or seeing relates to concrete issues and decisions.

Second, the **space needs to allow for exchange**. It is not only about presenting something, but also about creating the possibility for dialogue.

Third, **follow-up matters**. A conversation or event can be a starting point, but it gains impact when it is connected to further steps; whether that is sharing outcomes, staying in contact, or linking to ongoing processes.

## A shared space

What these different approaches have in common is that they create shared spaces.

Spaces where young people, artists, and policymakers can meet - not only through formal roles, but through experiences, ideas, and conversations.

**Music** helps shape these spaces in a particular way. It brings something that is often missing in policy discussions: **a direct connection to how issues are felt and lived**.

Engaging policymakers does not always require large structures or complex processes. Sometimes it starts with a song being heard in the right place, at the right moment, by the right people. And from there, something can begin.





## 7. Conclusion: From Ideas to Action

Throughout this guide, one thing becomes clear: the European Youth Goals are not something distant or abstract. They are already present in the lives of young people; in their experiences, their concerns, and their ideas about the future.

What is often missing is not awareness of the issues, but ways to express them, share them, and connect them to spaces where they can make a difference.

This is where music and creative approaches come in.

### Starting where people are

One of the strengths of working with music is that it does not require a perfect starting point.

It does not begin with policy knowledge or technical expertise. It often begins with something much simpler; a feeling, a question, or an experience.



A group of young people talking about pressure in school.  
A conversation about feeling excluded.  
A shared frustration about not being heard.

These are already connected to the European Youth Goals, even if they are not named as such.

In many Songs for Rights workshops, the starting point is exactly this. There is no need to introduce policy language at the beginning. Instead, participants talk, reflect, and then gradually turn their thoughts into lyrics and music.

Only later does the connection become visible:  
this is about participation.  
this is about inclusion.  
this is about mental health.

This way of working makes the process feel more natural and more relevant.

## **Small actions can travel far**

Not every initiative needs to be large or complex to have an impact.

A song created in a small group can be shared in a classroom and start a conversation.  
A short video can be posted online and reach people beyond the immediate circle.  
A performance at a local event can change how a topic is perceived.

Looking back at the examples in this guide, many of them started in very simple ways.

Songs like *“No Privacy”* or *“The Flower”* were created in workshop settings (with limited time and resources) but went on to be used in discussions about digital rights or reproductive rights. They became reference points for conversations that might not have happened otherwise.





## Creating connections

What makes these approaches meaningful is the way they connect different spaces.

They connect personal experiences with wider issues.

They connect creative expression with public conversation.

They connect young people with those who have the power to make decisions.

Formats like the “*Voices & Verses*” debate or the “*Policy Jam*” roundtable show how this can work in practice. Music is not used as decoration, but as a starting point - something that brings real experiences into the room.

Campaigns like “*My European Youth Goals*” or the LinkedIn outreach to policymakers show another side of this connection. They bring youth perspectives into spaces where decisions are discussed, often in a more direct and accessible way.

These connections do not always lead to immediate change. But they shift how conversations happen, who is involved, and what is being heard.

## **Working with what you have**

One of the most important things to remember is that this work does not depend on having professional equipment, large budgets, or advanced technical skills.

A phone can be enough to record a song.

A simple beat can be enough to build something around.

A small group is enough to start.

What matters more is creating an environment where people feel comfortable to express themselves and where their contributions are taken seriously.

Youth workers, educators, and facilitators play an important role here - not by directing the message, but by supporting the process. This can mean asking the right questions, creating space for reflection, or helping connect the outcome to other opportunities.

## **Staying open and honest**

Working with music and advocacy also means accepting that not everything will be clear or structured from the beginning.

Ideas may change during the process.

Messages may be complex or even contradictory.

Not every outcome will be “perfect”.

But this is part of what makes the process real.

Young people are not expected to provide finished policy solutions. What they bring are perspectives, experiences, and ideas, and these are valuable in themselves.

Keeping this openness is important. It allows space for honesty, creativity, and different viewpoints.

## **Moving forward**

The European Youth Goals offer a direction. They highlight where change is needed and what young people across Europe are calling for.

Music offers a way to engage with these goals - to explore them, express them, and share them with others.

There is no single way to do this.



It might start with a workshop, a conversation, or a simple idea.  
It might grow into a performance, a campaign, or a dialogue with decision-makers.  
Or it might remain something small but meaningful within a group.

All of these approaches have value.

## **An invitation**

This guide is not meant to be followed step by step. It is an invitation.

An invitation to try things out.

To experiment with music and creative methods.

To connect what young people experience with the bigger questions that shape society.

And to create spaces where these connections can be shared, heard, and taken further.

Because in the end, the European Youth Goals are not only about what should change, but about who is part of that change.

And music can help make that participation visible, audible, and real.

