YOUTH VOICES FORUM 2026

TURN UP YOUR VOICE!

Young People's Recommendations for the Future of European Youth Policy

Outcomes of the Songs for Rights Youth Voices Forum 2026



6 November 2026 | Online

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1. Introduction: Listening to young people's voices

On 6 November 2026, young people from different European countries came together online for the **Songs for Rights Youth Voices Forum 2026**, under the motto *Turn Up Your Voice!*

Organised by Songs for Rights and facilitated by two young members of its Advisory Board, Alessia Borganti and Paul Klahre, the Forum offered a space for young people to share their experiences, discuss the challenges they face and reflect on the future of European youth policy.

At the centre of the discussions were the **11 European Youth Goals**, developed through the EU Youth Dialogue in 2018 and incorporated into the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027.

These goals address important issues such as equality, inclusion, education, employment, mental health, participation and environmental sustainability. They continue to provide a valuable framework for European youth policy.

However, the world has changed considerably since they were first developed.

The COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, growing concerns about peace and security, the climate crisis and the rapid development of artificial intelligence have all influenced the lives, expectations and concerns of young people.

In October 2026, a revised set of 12 European Youth Goals was presented following the EU Youth Dialogue process. This development, together with the approaching end of the current EU Youth Strategy in 2027, provides an important opportunity to reflect on how European youth policies can respond to the realities of today's young generation.

Against this background, the Forum invited participants to look ahead:

Are the European Youth Goals responding to young people's realities? What needs to be strengthened, updated or given greater attention in European youth policy from 2028 onwards?

The Forum was an opportunity not only to identify challenges, but also to formulate ideas and recommendations that can contribute to discussions about the future of European youth policy.



2. From personal experiences to policy recommendations

The 90-minute Forum combined open discussions, small-group exchanges and creative expression.

Participants first revisited the original 11 European Youth Goals, reflecting on which goals remain particularly relevant, which aspects may need updating and what important issues might be missing.

In smaller groups, they then discussed challenges affecting their everyday lives, their communities and their future opportunities.

Using a shared Padlet board, participants collected their concerns, proposed possible solutions and developed short creative messages, including slogans and song lyrics.

The discussions covered a wide range of issues: access to quality education, the gap between academic learning and practical skills, the lack of accessible public spaces, discrimination and intolerance, climate change, safety, youth participation and concerns about public spending priorities.

The Forum also highlighted the value of creative expression in youth participation. Music, lyrics and slogans helped participants communicate not only what they wanted to change, but also how these issues affect their lives.

One message captured the spirit of the discussions particularly well:

"Don't give us fish, give us fishing rods."

Young people are not simply asking for support. They want opportunities, resources and the ability to shape their own futures.

The following recommendations are based on the challenges, ideas and proposals shared by participants during the Forum. They have been further elaborated by Songs for Rights to translate these contributions into more concrete proposals for policymakers. The final recommendation also considers broader developments, particularly in the areas of peace, security and digital transformation, which are increasingly relevant to the future of European youth policy.

3. Policy recommendations

Recommendation 1. Make education more practical and create better opportunities for young people

Related European Youth Goals: #7 Quality Employment for All and #8 Quality Learning

Young people expressed concern about the gap between formal education and the practical skills needed for employment and independent living.

One participant summarised this challenge as being "graduated but not skilled".



Education should not only provide qualifications. It should also equip young people with the experience, confidence and practical abilities needed to participate in society and enter the labour market.

We recommend that European, national and local policymakers:

- Strengthen cooperation between educational institutions, employers, civil society organisations and local communities to provide more practical learning opportunities.
- Expand access to internships, mentoring, volunteering and non-formal education, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities.
- Encourage universities and other educational institutions to connect students with professionals and experts from different fields.
- Recognise skills developed through youth work, community engagement, creative projects and other forms of non-formal learning.

Our message: Young people need more than qualifications. They need real opportunities to develop their skills and put them into practice.

Recommendation 2. Invest in public spaces, local communities and safe environments for young people

Related European Youth Goals: #3 Inclusive Societies, #6 Moving Rural Youth Forward and #9 Space and Participation for All

Participants highlighted the lack of accessible public spaces and opportunities for young people to meet, participate in community life and develop their own activities.

They also raised concerns about safety in public spaces and on the streets.

Public spaces are important for social interaction, cultural activities, participation and community development. When these spaces are unavailable, inaccessible or unsafe, young people's opportunities to engage in society become more limited.

We recommend that policymakers:

- Increase investment in accessible, welcoming and safe public spaces for young people, including youth centres, cultural venues and community facilities.
- Involve young people directly in the planning, management and development of these spaces.
- Support local initiatives that encourage young people to organise their own cultural, social and community activities.
- Address safety concerns through inclusive urban planning, prevention programmes and cooperation between young people, local authorities and community organisations.

Our message: Young people need spaces where they feel safe, welcome and able to contribute to their communities.



Recommendation 3. Strengthen inclusion, intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity

Related European Youth Goals: #2 Equality of All Genders, #3 Inclusive Societies and #4 Information and Constructive Dialogue

Participants expressed concern about intolerance and the unwillingness of some young people to listen to perspectives different from their own, particularly regarding religion, culture and ethnicity.

In increasingly diverse European societies, opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding are essential.

Schools, youth organisations and community initiatives have an important role to play in creating spaces where young people can meet, exchange experiences and challenge stereotypes.

We recommend that policymakers:

- Strengthen intercultural education, human rights education and dialogue activities in schools and non-formal education.
- Support international youth exchanges and community projects that bring together young people from different cultural and social backgrounds.
- Invest in creative approaches, including music and the arts, to encourage dialogue, empathy and cooperation.
- Provide greater support for youth organisations working against discrimination, exclusion and polarisation.

Our message: Diversity should bring young people together, not divide them. We need more opportunities to listen to and learn from one another.

Recommendation 4. Put climate education and sustainable development higher on the political agenda

Related European Youth Goal: #10 Sustainable Green Europe

Climate change remains a major concern for young people.

During the Forum, participants highlighted the lack of public awareness about the long-term consequences of climate change and the impact on future generations.

They also questioned political spending priorities, calling for greater investment in climate science, sustainable energy and education.

Young people want to see stronger action, but also better opportunities to understand environmental challenges and contribute to solutions.



We recommend that policymakers:

- Strengthen climate and environmental education in schools, universities and non-formal learning programmes.
- Increase support for youth-led environmental projects and community initiatives.
- Provide accessible information about climate science, renewable energy and sustainable development.
- Create more opportunities for young people to participate in local and European environmental decision-making.

Our message: Climate action is not only about protecting the environment today. It is about protecting the future of the next generations.

Recommendation 5. Give young people a stronger voice in political decisions

Related European Youth Goals: #1 Connecting EU with Youth and #9 Space and Participation for All

One of the clearest messages from the Forum was the need for young people to be more directly involved in decisions that affect their lives.

Participants called on governments and political representatives to create opportunities for young people to share their experiences and concerns.

Youth participation should go beyond occasional consultations. Young people should be involved throughout the policy process, from identifying challenges to developing solutions and evaluating results.

We recommend that policymakers:

- Establish regular and accessible opportunities for dialogue between young people and decision-makers at local, national and European levels.
- Involve young people in the implementation and further development of the revised European Youth Goals and the next EU Youth Strategy.
- Ensure that young people from different backgrounds, including those with fewer opportunities, can participate meaningfully.
- Provide clear feedback on how young people's contributions influence policies and decisions.
- Support youth-led initiatives and organisations that enable young people to express their views and take action.

Our message: Don't just ask young people for their opinions. Give them the opportunity to influence what happens next.

Recommendation 6. Ensure European youth policies respond to new challenges: peace, security and the digital world

Cross-cutting recommendation for European youth policy beyond 2027

The original 11 European Youth Goals were developed in 2018, in a very different European and global context.



Since then, new challenges have emerged or become much more urgent.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has brought war and security concerns closer to the everyday realities of young Europeans. At the same time, artificial intelligence and digital technologies are rapidly transforming education, employment, communication and participation.

These developments raise important questions about how European youth policies can remain relevant and responsive to young people's needs.

During the Forum, participants questioned the balance between military spending and investment in education and opportunities for young people. They also reflected on the difference between following social and political developments online and becoming actively involved in creating change.

Building on these concerns, Songs for Rights believes that the next phase of European youth policy should also give stronger attention to peace, security and the opportunities and risks of digital transformation.

We recommend that European policymakers:

- Give greater attention to peace, security, conflict prevention and peacebuilding in European youth policies.
- Strengthen education for peace, democratic values, human rights and international solidarity.
- Address the opportunities and risks of artificial intelligence, including its impact on education, employment, information and young people's rights.
- Promote digital literacy, critical thinking and responsible use of social media and AI technologies.
- Encourage young people to move beyond passive online engagement towards meaningful participation in their communities and democratic processes.
- Ensure that the implementation and future development of the European Youth Goals can respond to emerging challenges and changing circumstances.

Our message: The world has changed. European youth policies must change with it.

4. Looking ahead: From young people's voices to political action

The Youth Voices Forum 2026 showed that young people have clear concerns about the future, but also ideas about what needs to change.

They want better educational and professional opportunities, stronger communities, safe and inclusive public spaces, meaningful climate action and more influence over political decisions.

Their contributions also point to the importance of reflecting on broader developments affecting Europe's future, including peace, security, democracy and technological change.

These perspectives should be taken seriously in discussions about the implementation of the revised European Youth Goals and the development of European youth policy beyond 2027.

Through Songs for Rights, the recommendations developed from the Forum will be shared with policymakers, youth organisations and other stakeholders at European and national levels.



We hope they will contribute to an ongoing dialogue in which young people are not simply consulted, but recognised as active partners in shaping Europe's future.

Young people are not only the future of Europe. They are part of its present, and their voices should help shape the decisions being made today.

About Songs for Rights

Songs for Rights is a European network of youth and civil society organisations promoting human rights, EU values, youth participation and the European Youth Goals through music and creative non-formal education.

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