

**ROBERT SCHUMAN
ESSAY COMPETITION**

YOU ARE THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

2022 TOP TEN PICKS



ESSAY QUESTION

“WE INVITE YOU TO HIGHLIGHT A PROBLEM THAT AFFECTS YOU FIRST-HAND. WRITE YOUR OWN MANIFESTO AND PROPOSE SOLUTIONS TO THE CHALLENGES THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CURRENTLY FACING IN THE EU AND HOW YOU WOULD FIX THEM. WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO MENTION KEY TOPICS THAT ESPECIALLY WORRY YOU, SUCH AS SECURITY, HOUSING, DIGITALIZATION, MENTAL HEALTH, EDUCATION, JOBS, UNEMPLOYMENT, YOUTH RIGHTS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT...”



The past year has been fraught with challenges, including a devastating war, surging costs of living, and inflation. Throughout it all, we have demonstrated unwavering solidarity with the people of Ukraine in their fight to defend their homes and their land. While we have faced struggles of our own, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to the values we hold dear as a united European people. In the face of adversity, we see opportunities to stand up for what we believe in and move forward with even greater unity and conviction.

As we navigate these challenges, it is important to recognise the critical role that Europe's youth plays in shaping our collective future. Young people bring a unique perspective to key issues like climate change, the jobs of the future, and the social dimension. That's why it is essential that they are included in policy discussions and decision-making processes, ensuring their concerns and ideas are heard loud and clear. Young people are a driving force behind positive change in Europe, and we must do more to encourage their participation in politics and civil society. In the pursuit of this, 2022 has been labelled the European Year of Youth, pushing for more opportunities for young people.

This year's Robert Schuman Essay Competition proved to be an exciting precursor to the Youth Week Event. The competition is an opportunity for young people to share their perspectives on the future of Europe. This year, we opted for a broader and more open-ended question than last

year, allowing participants to explore a diverse range of topics. We asked them to 'propose solutions to the challenges that young people are currently facing in the EU and how we could fix them'. The jurors have expressed their pleasure in reading the wide array of topics explored in the submitted essays, and this programme lays out some of those that stood out the most.

It brings me great pleasure to extend my warmest congratulations to Antonio González Mateo, one of our Spanish participants, on his exceptional piece which earned him the well-deserved title of winner of the 2022 competition.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to all the participants for their hard work and dedication in creating such outstanding essays. Your contributions have enriched our competition and given us fresh new perspectives on the work we do every day to build a stronger and more united European Union.

Manfred Weber

Chairman of the EPP Group
in the European Parliament



**YOU ARE
THE FUTURE
OF EUROPE**

Antonio González Mateo
Age: 22, Spain

I. Introduction

Today we are living in a time of great challenges, an era in which the clouds of uncertainty overshadow the bright light of the future. We are witnessing the speed at which humanity is advancing, the unprecedented transformation of our societies and the new challenges that this is creating. The world around us is not the same world in which our parents and grandparents lived, and the world our children will inhabit may be totally different from the one we have known. Everything around us is in a continuous process of change and mutability, and for this reason, knowing how to adapt to this situation will be crucial to solve the upcoming problems of the 21st century.

Adaptation has been a constant key in the history of the European Union and this can be seen if we analyze each of the stages through which the European integration project has passed. From the outset, the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, following the conclusion of the Treaty of Paris in 1951, marked the beginning of a dream longed for by all. Subsequently, the signing of the Treaties of Rome in 1957, the advent of the Treaty of Brussels in

1965, the Schengen Agreement, the Single European Act, the Maastricht Treaty signed in February 1992, the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997, the Treaty of Nice published in 2001, the Berlin Declaration and the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 have shaped the institutions that today represent the common interest of Europeans. Of all these treaties, the Maastricht Treaty, also known as the Treaty on European Union, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, heir to the Treaty of Rome, the Euratom Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights form part of the legislative corpus of our organization and are constituent treaties.

As we can see, the European Union is a constantly evolving project, an idea that was born to ensure peace, security and prosperity among brotherly peoples. Indeed, we are currently witnessing a dream that aspires to open a new chapter for the whole of Europe in which youth is the protagonist. However, the 21st century presents us with a century full of question marks. Firstly, the rise of populism challenges our democracy and our understanding of the world; secondly, the threats posed by autocratic elites in countries such as Russia and China

warn us of the need to build a common defense policy; thirdly, climate change threatens our quality of life; fourthly, the growing crises show that states alone are unable to cope satisfactorily with the increasing demands of their citizens; and fifth, the current technological revolution offers Europe a unique opportunity to be at the fore front of new business trends in the world.

These will be some of the points I will address throughout my essay and among which I will outline some of the challenges that young people are currently facing, as well as possible solutions.

II. The crisis: a crossroads for the labour market

To begin with, I am going to discuss unemployment and the crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic as one of the problems that especially affect young people. Most students and university graduates, after finishing their studies, do not really know where to start, as in most cases the fear of starting a new stage conditions our mood and way of acting. To this we must add the current situation of uncertainty that the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has generated in the labour market. Moody's¹ forecasts that by 2022 and 2023, economic momentum will slow down due to problems stemming from price pressures, war-induced inflation in Ukraine and China's Covid zero policies. Indeed, the Covid crisis has led to unprecedented job destruction and the serious situation in Ukraine has further heightened investor uncertainty for the months ahead. However, it must be recognized that situations such as these demonstrate which economies are able to adapt to the challenges of the environment to

overcome crises and which are not. Against this background, therefore, we must take into account a factor that is unique to the European Union, namely the high level of skills and training that most young people have acquired thanks to the welfare state. This advantage must be exploited and, therefore, we must strengthen Europe's competitiveness in order to stimulate investment in order to create jobs. One possible solution to strengthen our economy and bring unemployment to historic lows could be through the Investment Bank and the EU budget. Both should be used to stimulate private investment and direct investments towards more specific targets. In addition, we should have less regulation, less bureaucracy and more flexibility in order to boost our economy in many areas, including job creation. These proposals are motivated by the great potential of our economy, the increase in highly qualified young people and the intention to enter a new political stage in the European Union. Therefore, the intention that can be deduced from these lines is none other than to try to give new impetus to the talent and merit of young Europeans.

On the other hand, these measures should be accompanied by others that have the capacity to invigorate our economy and revive the entrepreneurial spirit of our industry as a whole. This would require deepening the process of European integration that is, strengthening the internal market, tax harmonisation, progressing towards capital market union, improving inter-institutional coordination, overcoming national segmentation of the energy market, mitigating asymmetric shocks and improving welfare and governance. Moreover, in an increasingly digitalized world, Europe must adapt to the new needs of our era by building and

enhancing a digital single market aimed at creating jobs and interconnecting the entire geographical area of member countries. The rise of new technologies such as block chain and cryptocurrency trading represent both an opportunity and a challenge for the EU economy, since, on the one hand, they have great potential to increase efficiency and data processing but, on the other hand, they must be regulated to ensure market harmonisation, security and consumer protection. As we can see, the advantages of the common market for young people are innumerable. I believe that the training we young people have received needs to be translated into concrete actions to improve society and, therefore, making our economic policy more flexible by removing obstacles and creating jobs must be the launching pad that allows us to promote new projects and initiatives in the scientific and business spheres.

III. Housing: an opportunity for the emancipation of young people

Employment and housing are two fundamental axes in the lives of young people and both are closely related. Currently, access to housing is an essential requirement for independence and emancipation from the family nucleus. However, the high cost of housing often forces young people to continue living with their parents. This is frustrating and is usually linked to situations of unemployment. While the housing problem should be approached with caution, it should be noted that it is a rather complex issue. According to Eurostat², the housing cost burden in 2020 was higher in cities than in rural areas. Indeed, rising house prices and rents caused housing costs to become a burden for younger people. But if we

look at the data³ recorded in 2021, we can see that this problem is different in each of the Member States. The evolution of prices and rents, the quality and size of housing varies from country to country. That is why I will now provide a generic solution that aims to provide a summary answer to part of this problem.

The best way to bring down housing prices and rents could be to expand supply, reduce bureaucracy, reduce taxation and create employment certainty, the opposite of interventionist measures such as price caps on rents. These proposals do not exclude facilitating access to housing for vulnerable people through some kind of scheme or assistance. The European Union's economy is a social market economy, and therefore the only way to protect the social state and the rule of law is to guarantee a future for all our citizens.

IV. Mental health, climate change and education: new challenges of the 21st century

The Covid-19 crisis has been a turning point in addressing the problems of the future. These include mental health, climate change and the education of our children. Let's start with mental health, an issue that has a significant impact on the well-being of young people. During the pandemic, mental illness has worsened as a result of isolation, fear, loss of loved ones or business closures. Indeed, the Health at a Glance Europe 2020 report⁴ notes that both Covid-19 and the resulting crisis have increased levels of anxiety, stress and depression. To combat this, we could do with more specialized healthcare staff, more infrastructure and more awareness raising to avoid stigmatization.

The next issue affecting young people is climate change. Climate change is increasing its impact and therefore its effects on our generation. The increase in chronic diseases such as asthma and poor health habits pose a serious risk to our health. For this reason, the solution must flow around three axes: education, technology and law. We must promote measures that promote the decarbonization of the economy while minimizing the damage caused to our freedom and competitiveness. To this end, we could opt for an effective ecological transition, which discourages the consumption of fossil fuels, subsidizes the use of renewable energy sources and provides Europe with a comprehensive energy supply plan.

Lastly, let us turn to education. Education is a safe investment, as it is essential for shaping the future leaders of tomorrow. Supporting efforts to provide better education ensures greater social cohesion and unity among citizens, and serves as an antidote to extremist and populist discourse. We could now improve several areas related to multilingualism by strengthening our commitments to the efficient teaching of English, French or any other official language of the European Union. On the other hand, promoting equal opportunities and hard-earned merit must be at the heart of young people's education.

IV. Conclusion

To conclude this essay, I would like to recall Robert Schuman's dictum that "freedom is frightening when you have lost the habit of using it".

The brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine has made us realize that these are difficult times for democracy, freedom,

solidarity and respect for human rights. That is why I think that we young people must follow the example of the founding fathers of the European Union, become aware of our situation and act to improve the lives of our citizens. We are the future and the future depends on us.

¹ Higher Rates, Slower Growth [online]. moodys.com [cit. 2023-03-30]. Dostupné z: <https://www.moodys.com/newsandevents/topics/Higher-Rates-Slower-Growth-007052/reports>

² Is housing affordable? [online]. Eurostat [cit. 2023-03-30]. Dostupné z: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/bloc-2b.html?lang=en%23%3A~%3Atext%3DHousing%20cost%20overburden%20highest%20in%20cities&text=In%20the%20EU%20in%202020%2C%2C%20Romania%2C%20Croatia%20and%20Lithuania>

³ Housing in Europe [online]. Eurostat [cit. 2023-03-30]. Dostupné z: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/>

⁴ Health at a Glance: Europe 2020 STATE OF HEALTH IN THE EU CYCLE [online]. OECD [cit. 2023-03-30]. Dostupné z: https://health.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-12/2020_healthat-glance_rep_en_0.pdf



YOUTH AS AN INVESTMENT

Lidia Docampo Kchoroshanskaia
Age: 23, Spain

It is a paradox how we spend our youth trying to understand adulthood and our adulthood trying to understand the youth. Imperceptibly, over the years, we drift away from something we were part of until yesterday, unable to put ourselves in the shoes of the incoming generation.

As a result, the question arises: Can our representatives provide accurate solutions based on simple assumptions? Are our problems comparable to that of the previous generation?

Therefore, my intention is to share a closer and a more direct view of the challenges our youth faces today and existing concerns for the day of tomorrow.

A large part of adults believe that today's youth enjoy a greater number of privileges, but in comparison to their experience, we face now problems without precedents, mostly related to the appearance of new technologies. Our youth is growing surrounded by screens and a massive digitalization of our lives.

However, we find ourselves lacking guidance throughout this journey, sometimes leading to a dangerous and excessive use. Since our reality is

constantly evolving and technology is penetrating every aspect of our lives, this must be accompanied by an updated regulation that properly targets these newly emerged concerns.

Nevertheless, I am not denying the efforts of the existing regulation, but it can be ineffective if implemented too late or if it presents loopholes that make it easy to break.

As previously stated, the development of new technologies is only increasing, revolutionizing the minds and behaviors of those who consume them. As Eurostat claims: *"in 2021, 95% of young people aged 16-29 years in the EU reported using the internet every day"*. The normalization and lack of seriousness in matters of digitalization is an issue on its own, living in a society where it is becoming normal for young people to be unable to leave their phones for a few hours, carrying it with them at all times like an extension of their arm. Over time, this will become more intense, as new electronic devices with new functionalities appear.

Similarly, young parents are concerned about how they are going to educate their children, since it is not yet known how an

excessive use of screens can affect their development and skills. For instance, at what age is it acceptable to introduce children to screens? How to protect them from inappropriate contents such as pornography, violence or cyberbullying?

Thus, the implementation of technology in early childhood and youth needs a better understanding, which can be obtained by conducting studies that provide adequate guidance, to ensure that the health of children is not negatively affected in the long term. Additionally, more powerful programs are needed to ensure undesirable content can be blocked or sorted by age appropriate categories.

Furthermore, one of the main reasons for people using devices every day are social networks. Nowadays, it is considered as a necessity in areas such as studies or work, coexisting leisure and responsibilities, a dangerous mix.

On the one hand, it is amazing how simple it has become to find opportunities and connect with people. On the other hand, distractions and lower productivity can occur, or in the worst-case scenario, addiction.

Unexpectedly, inequality is an issue in this case. Something unthinkable as a global pandemic has highlighted it. In a context of more than a yearlong online classes and remote jobs, certain individuals could not afford phones and laptops, and in families, not everyone had the luxury to own a laptop per family member, which made it impossible for many to attend regularly to school or work. In the direction we are heading, soon it will be impossible to work without owning devices in order to integrate to society, consequently deeper division between classes will be created and many will be left behind.

Moreover, I want to bring attention to the problematic of social media for our youth. These are programmed beforehand to hook people for the biggest amount of time possible, which psychologically harms users.

It poses a threat by promoting unattainable lifestyles and beauty standards, from cosmetic surgeries to filters and Photoshop. Every time it becomes more and more realistic, to the point that users cannot fully distinguish if they are looking at something real anymore.

This has caused many diseases and disorders in young people, who despite being aware of the artificial nature of this content cannot avoid comparing themselves to what they see on the screen, causing problems, especially related to food habits and self-esteem. There needs to be a bigger campaign aimed at promoting a more healthy and responsible use of social media.

Profiting from this situation, companies have discovered that e-commerce is more effective through social media, which is a good communication channel that helps them target new customers. This is the one of the reasons why the figure "influencer" has been created: people with a huge amount of visibility and following, who are in between being a celebrity and a regular person.

Despite attempts of regulation, it is still possible to see them posting publicity undercover or in a deceitful way, since this market is difficult to control, it is hard to tell if we are looking at a commercial or at a genuine post. Young people, as soon as they turn on their phones, are flooded with advertising and purchase stimuli, which has led to a new problem: unbridled consumerism. In many cases, without even thinking about the need or

usefulness of what is purchased, which is detrimental also for local businesses, since the vast majority that can afford this exposure are big enterprises. As Eurostat states: *"In 2019, three quarters of EU enterprises employing 250 or more people (75 %) had an account and used some kind of social networks. By contrast, almost half of small enterprises (48 %) employing 10 to 49 people used social networks."*

These days, young people are encouraged, sometimes due to peer pressure from their circle of friends, to create profiles on social media sharing photos, videos, personal information... This is something that creates worries, since the content that is once uploaded to the internet never disappears. There are legitimate fears that a photo shared as a teenager may come back to haunt you in the future, for example when looking for a job. The age of the first phone is decreasing every year, borderline premature. Children as young as eight are already getting their first phone, which only increases the probabilities of accidents and oversharing, considering children do not have the same value of privacy as adults and can fall into the trap of not seeing clearly what should be posted and what not.

Also, there is a lack of transparency towards internet users, most of the times we do not know if deleting something is enough to permanently make it disappear, or if our privacy is really protected. Now we have phones capable of tracking our location, full of personal photographs, work information, healthcare and banking apps... there is constant fear that if someone steals or hacks our phones they will find every detail of our lives.

It would be adequate to increase the protection of personal information stored in our devices otherwise, we could face

major security threats in the future.

The current economic situation is not ideal for young people either, because, although a large part of them are willing to become independent,... it is impossible, because without the help of their parents they cannot make ends meet, due to the current labor market. Eurostat made a report in 2020, stating that the average age of young people leaving their parental home in the EU was 26.4 years, from Malta and Portugal, for example, among the oldest average by the age of 30 years and over, or by contrast, Germany or Sweden, showing the youngest average ages at less than 24 years.

Most of the young people have a precarious job, aggravated from the pandemic, in which they work long hours for a low salary that, in addition, is usually temporary, so they live in a permanent state of instability. If they know that they may soon lose their jobs, they do not consider starting a family, since children are an important responsibility and it is necessary to have a certain economic security when making such a decision. Eurostat has reported, *"women in the EU give birth to their first child at 29.4 years in 2019. The mean age has increased in all EU Member States over this period, though to varying degrees"*.

Therefore, it is very difficult to be young and become independent or start a family, but this does not mean that young people are afraid of commitment or do not want to have children, but rather with the current situation, there are few who can. We need to focus on promoting a stable economic situation for people in their twenties, since it is in this period that most start in the labor market and decide to start families.

Many young people are educated, have

a university degree and have studied for many years, but cannot find a job on their own, so it is demotivating to be forced to work in another field for lack of opportunities in your own. Eurostat has noted regarding unemployment a slight increase in the span of a year: *“Youth unemployment rate (denominator being the labor force) in the EU: 16.8 % in 2020 compared with 15.1 % in 2019.”* Also, in many cases, it is difficult for young people to find their first job, since it is common to ask for experience, and a young person who has finished studying does not yet have it, so this age group is mistrusted and they are given no chance.

Young people have many ideas and want for instance to be entrepreneurs, but it is very difficult for them to undertake if that is their wish, since large sums of money are required that are not normally available, and governments do not encourage entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, we need to focus on youth problems from a new perspective, encouraging their participation through youth representatives in issues that concern them. It is the only way to get an accurate view of the ongoing reality. We need to prioritize Europe's newest generation and aid them to thrive, provide stable job opportunities and protect their interests in different fields, such as promoting their independence and facilitate the establishment of new families by helping them with their basic needs. Investing in today's youth is ensuring a prosperous future for the entire European family.

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THE STATE OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH

Niall Murray
Age: 24, Ireland

Introduction

The young citizens of Europe deserve a future. A 21-year old European grew up through the financial crash of 2009, had the most exciting years of their lives interrupted by the Covid- 19 pandemic, and now must face the uncertainties from the war against Ukraine. On top of all this, the ever-looming threat of climate change will have significant consequences on their later adult lives, potentially radically changing the landscape of the entire planet.

Building a European Union which guarantees security, opportunity, and freedom is the only way of ensuring that European youth have a firm foundation on which they can build their adult lives. The European Union cannot consider itself a pillar for the protection of human rights, democracy, and freedom in the world if it does not offer an environment that can be prosperous for future generations, as well as provide avenues for young people to develop along the paths they desire.

There are three key areas which must be targeted by the EU in order to establish a free and sustainable Europe:

the environment and democracy. The challenges presented in each of these areas are steep but far from insurmountable, as progress has already been made. The EU needs to push the projects already in place further along or expand some of the measures.

Climate Change

Climate change represents the greatest threat to humanity in the present day. Since the Industrial Revolution, the global temperature of the Earth has risen by 1.2 degree Celsius, significantly above normal global temperature fluctuations. The consequences of climate change will be felt by the European Union just as much as any other region in the world; drastically increased flood risks, storms, and demographic displacement in the most vulnerable regions on the planet all pose significant risks to the security, welfare, and economy of the EU.

No group will be more affected than the European youth. They will have to face a world radically changed by the effects of decades of greenhouse gas emissions. Faced with such issues, the future can appear bleak or unsolvable to

many young EU citizens. At times when they should be looking towards the future with optimism and hope during the formative years of their adult lives, pessimism has taken root. It comes as no surprise, then, that the threat of climate change is the most pressing issue of the future for young citizens within the EU, and they have every reason to be concerned. If the European Union seeks to establish itself as an institution of sustainable growth, geared towards the future, it must recognize the threat of climate change and place youth at the centre of its focus in its efforts to address the issue.

The situation is far from hopeless. Just as it is irresponsible to deny the reality of man-made climate change, it is just as irresponsible to label the situation beyond repair. Thanks to the steps already taken in order to curb greenhouse gas emissions, the total collapse of society due to climate change has largely been avoided. The EU has taken significant steps already in order to combat the issue through the European Green Deal, which seeks to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of all EU Member States by 55% by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2050. Significant efforts have been made to switch away from fossil fuels towards more renewable energy sources, such as electric, wind, and solar. In 2020, 37.5% of gross energy consumption came from renewable sources.

These are great steps forwards, but more can and needs to be done. The prime focus of the EU should be in cementing itself not only as a major international player in the fight against climate change, but as the world leader. The scope of the threat posed by climate change requires international cooperation to respond to it adequately. No institution is better

placed to guide this global struggle than the EU.

The role of young people should also be at centre focus of the EU's strategy. To curb the use of cars in favour of public transport, a key strategy should be implementing significant discounts on public transport for students. This would allow students to move around at a reduced cost during a financially vulnerable time of their lives and encourage more green transportation. Furthermore, to curb the dependency on air travel for international travel, the current scheme of providing an interrail pass to any EU citizen turning 18 years of age should be extended to provide either a free or a significantly reduced price ticket each year until the age of 25.

Where there is crisis, there is also opportunity. With the growing demand for renewable energy sources over fossil fuels, the development of new technologies and the redesigning of current energy infrastructures has become paramount, meaning new jobs will be created across the continent. Young Europeans should be included in this process as much as possible. The green transition requires work from all fields of expertise, from engineers to journalists. Scholarship programmes centred around building skills needed to help the green transition should be offered to prospective students. Postgraduate schemes should be created to offer secure starts to young citizens' careers, with the schemes only offering positions in organizations who align with the EU's Fit for 55 model.

Democracy

Democracy is a cornerstone of the European project. The Lisbon Treaty

signed in 2008 specifically lists a form as being integral to the functioning of the European Union. In other words, a European Union that is not directly formed through input by the European people is no European Union at all. For a democracy to thrive and function, the views and interests of all groups within the Union must be represented and be given ample room to be expressed. Listening to the ideas of European youth should be considered integral when addressing the topic of the democratic process of the EU, as they represent the future and provide a unique viewpoint of society at large.

With that said, there are a number of impediments to the democratic participation of youth within both the European Union's institutions and its Member States. Despite being one of the most politically engaged and passionate citizen groups within these democracies, voter turnout among the youth is too low both at a national level and for European elections. Disillusionment and a lack of trust in the political system play major parts in reducing voter turnout, as young European citizens feel disconnected from the democratic model.

The best way of engaging the youth is by giving them more avenues for them to voice their opinions, as well as demonstrating that their voices have been heard. The European Year of Youth, started in 2022, has laid a good foundation for future development; the Robert Schuman writing competition, the inclusion of youth representation in the Conference on the Future of Europe, and the inclusion of young voices in combatting climate change through the European Youth Energy Day have all allowed for young citizens to participate directly in European democracy and see the fruits of their efforts.

More must be done, however. Youth participation should not be confined to one day or even one year but must be seen instead as an integral aspect of the European Union's functioning in the future. As such, long-term strategies should be put in place to provide means for young people to participate in the democratic system. The European Parliament should establish an annual forum of students from selected European universities to debate, deliberate, decide and present a youth manifesto in the form of a resolution, that will then be voted on in a plenary session. This State of European Youth manifesto would outline the key issues for young students across all the Member States, outline their priorities, and have these seen first-hand by key decision-makers.

Additionally, the meetings for the Conference on the Future of Europe that took place in 2022 provided great spaces for open discussion. Why not keep these meetings in place permanently? In Cork and Dublin, Ireland, the COFOE meetings saw great turnout and were key in providing a means for a diverse group of European citizens to highlight the issues of highest importance. These meetings favoured youth turnout in particular, so they should be kept in place to act as barometers for European citizens. One change to these meetings should be made, however. Rather than have the topics of the meetings be fairly broad and general for every issue facing the EU, the meetings should focus on one specific issue at a time, such as climate change in road transportation for example, in order to make the meetings more accessible to average citizens.

By engaging young citizens directly, political participation among this group will rise substantially, as it integrates youth into the democratic

framework and allows them to see the results of their work. This would spill over into other forms of democracy; a citizen more engaged with their local community and democracy as a whole is more likely to participate in European elections, as well as be more informed on the issues facing the EU. This process would ultimately result in a more engaged, better represented, and better equipped European youth, able to make informed decisions about the future of the European Union.

The lead candidate process first introduced in 2014, also known as the Spitzenkandidaten process, must also become a mainstay of the European election cycle. This system allows for each of the European political parties present in the European Parliament to select a lead candidate to become the President of the European Commission, with the candidate of the party that receives the most votes becoming President. This process is integral in engaging more citizens in European elections for two reasons. First, the system mirrors the electoral system seen in many Member States' parliaments. By maintaining an electoral system which closely resembles the ones in Member States, potential confusion over the process is diminished. Second, giving a single face to a party and allowing European citizens to directly elect the head of the executive body make European elections more democratic and would give more incentive for European citizens to participate in the system. It would also provide a way for young people to directly see the results of participating in the democratic system, as the candidate of the party they voted for would occupy an important place in the EU's institutional framework.


Conclusion

The key challenges facing the youth of Europe today are not impossible to solve, but action must be taken now. As stated prior, the measures already introduced over the last decade or through the projects put in place during the European Year of Youth have laid a solid foundation for further development. An expansion of these projects is needed to tackle the issues of both climate change and the lack of democratic participation.

Cementing the EU as the world leader on the international stage in the fight against climate change needs to become a top priority. The EU's climate strategy should revolve around the role young people can play, offering new opportunities and jobs to help the green transition take place in a sustainable and fast manner.

A high level of importance should be placed on giving youth the tools to engage in the democratic framework, as young citizens don't feel like they are being listened to by their representatives. Forming a council composed of students across the continent and keeping the infrastructures already set up by the Conference on the Future of Europe in place to provide avenues for young people to participate in EU-wide debates on key topics.

The future of the European project lies in its youth. Europe must invest in its youth to guarantee its future.

A portrait of Igor Cadelnic, a young man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background behind him is a yellow and white geometric pattern of zig-zags and lines.

LET'S AVOID UNEMPLOYABILITY BY IMPLEMENTING A CAREER GUIDANCE MANDATORY FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION YOUNG GENERATION!

Igor Cadelnic
Age: 24, Romania

As a young student, during my studies, the problems I'm struggling with are unemployment and housing. From my point of view, the connection between those two is so strong, as the second, housing, can be solved so easily for students and graduate students if the problem of unemployment becomes solved. I can affirm that unemployment directly affects the mental health of the young generation in order to continue to engage in the labor-market and to capitalise on their recently achieved knowledge. This is a problem which maybe seems unimportant for the people who didn't feel it for themselves, but for those who live this experience, it is totally unfair and has a huge impact on unproductivity and the failure of the future generation.

The unemployment of a young generation, seems maybe insignificant to someone, but even if it is 2%, 6%, 10% or 13%¹, that percentage can be the young people who can change the future of the EU and solve the main problems of the present and future.

We are humans, we have the same age of living and if the younger generation which just finished their studies are

struggling with the unemployment at the midlife period, they cannot use their newly acquired knowledge and have to spend from a few months to a few years to find a job in their field of study: this becomes an "ice period" in the life of a young educated European citizen, who has spent their adolescence and youth on university benches and in libraries. This period of studying does not allow students to focus on looking for a job in the exact period after graduating from a higher education institution because till that time they studied. Here we can add that not all the students are from a social domain of studying, which formed them to use their knowledge to find a job. For example a history, foreign languages, political science student, will be able maybe to engage in the labor market by him- and herself, but what's the situation of a technical student, an electrician, mechanic student? If the labor market from the area doesn't give the opportunity of employment to these kind of people without research skills, observational spirit or social skills, what's the solution? They're just trainees for a period, just to find an opportunity of employment. But what if this period continues all their life? No one gives students even a basic promise before

starting their studies that after, the institution where they're studying will help or at least try to help them to avoid the "iced period" after their studies.

I really saw a problem in this direction. But how to solve it? Should we abolish the fields of activity that do not offer personal skills to young people in terms of finding a job on their own? No, obviously not. But we can engage the right people to do this work, the right people who will care about the employment of students after graduation. I think that the educational system in the Netherlands, which has a mentoring program and student counselors and offers Academic guidance and Psychological guidance, is the third guidance and the key of my highlighted problem - a Career Guidance. *"Students in higher education receive guidance from their tutor or adviser. During personal interviews tutors advise their students on how and what to study, and provide individual counseling. Unlike at universities, career guidance is usually compulsory at HBO institutions. Many higher education institutions also have counselors/advisers who provide individual guidance and may act as independent, confidential advisers....HBO institutions and universities also have a role to play, for example, by responding more adequately to the needs of both students and the job market."*² As well as "The Ministries of Social Affairs and Employment" draw up minimum national standards for career guidance, programme information and study choice-related activities for secondary education, upper secondary vocational education and tertiary education³", we can see a decrease in the rate of youth employability in the Netherlands from 2014 - 12,72% the year they implemented the Career guidance, versus 2019 - 6,77⁴. Any sources show that today, the rate is 3,22, much more under the medium European Union rate, which is 6,2.

In conclusion, I really hope that the model of Career Guidance from the Netherlands can be implemented in all the European Union countries and it can become a criterion of joining the EU for the candidate countries. If the problem of youth unemployability will be solved, housing, mental health, and youth rights problems will also be diminished. Those are connected, so for one young European citizen, it is such a primordial requirement to avoid the problem of unemployment after graduating. This problem can even discourage the young until the stage in which he will give up the studies he has followed and will become an unemployed person or a person who will offer services in a field of activity totally different from the qualification and the acquired knowledge. Let's educate the next generation to be stronger and prepared! The young are the future and the future is in our hands!

¹ <https://www.destatis.de/Europa/EN/Topic/Population-Labour-Social-Issues/Labour-market/EU-LabourMarketCrisis.html>, accessed on June 15, 2022;

² https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/guidance-and-counselling-higher-education-47_en, accessed on July 16, 2022;

³ <https://www.euroguidance.eu/guidance-system-in-the-netherlands>, accessed on July 17, 2022;

⁴ <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/NLD/netherlands/youth-unemployment-rate>, accessed on July 17, 2022



EVALUATION OF STRATEGIES TO PREVENT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG YOUNG EMPLOYEES

Julia Synowiec
Age: 20, Poland

Nowadays, young people are experiencing arising global challenges that negatively affect their mental and physical health (Lehnert, Karlsson & Giannopapa, 2017). Cambridge Dictionary (2021) explains “global” as something that relates to the whole world, and “challenge” refers to an issue that needs a significant mental or physical effort. Therefore, global challenges are problems that require, both, mental and physical attempts. Additionally, global challenges are believed to be the negative consequence of globalization (Ibrahim, 2014). United Nations features specific global issues that must be understood and changed. Some of the subjects are ageing, AIDS, climate change, decolonization, poverty, food, gender equality, health, human rights, peace and security, refugees and water. Every day the young generation is suffering from wars, lack of food, climate change, social media addiction, depression, unemployment, violence, natural disasters and many more (Nations, 2021). By differentiating global challenges and understanding them, policy makers and social psychologists can prevent young people from inequalities and influence mental and physical health.

The importance of global challenges is presented in Sustainable Development Goals – a group of global factors that must be implemented in order to improve humans’ and environment’s health (Nations, 2021). One of those goals is “decent work”. Nowadays, young people are struggling with workload, long working hours and poor leadership leading to adverse mental and physical health (Nishimura, Yamauchi, Sasaki et al., 2021). Evidence (Cottini & Lucifora, 2013) shows that there is a causal relationship between job quality and employees’ mental health. Previous study indicates that workload might threaten individuals’ safety, increase stress, and at worst it leads to suicides (OECD Better Life Index, n.d.). According to Pega, Náfrádi, Momen et al. (2021) in 2016, globally, 488 million employees were exposed to long working hours (above or equally to 55 h/week). The exposure lead to 745,194 deaths and 23.3 million heart diseases and strokes (Pega, Náfrádi, Momen et al., 2021). Therefore, this paper seeks to demonstrate the subject of health at work among young people, as the global challenge.

Nowadays, workload is one of the major issues that affects poor mental health

at workplaces (Nations, 2021). The issue may arise due to long-working hours, the amount of work that one has difficulty with, or time to complete it (Bowling & Kirkendall, 2012). The first symptoms of mental health problems caused by workload might be turnover, sickness absence and lower productivity (UNISON, 2021). Evidence shows that in the past five years 83% out of 10.000 employees have experienced stress as a consequence of workload and 20% have been sick due to the issue (UNISON, 2021). Having an appropriate amount of job demands and a work-life balance is crucial for maintaining positive mental health (UNISON, 2021). Therefore, policy makers could change workload by proposing to reduce job demands, introducing shorter working hours and 15-minute meetings. This strategy, arguably, may result in an increased motivation, effective working environment, and consequently an improved mental health. Jennifer Moss, the author of the literature "The Burnout Epidemic: The Rise of Chronic Stress and How We Can Fix It," suggests that in order to prevent workload, 15-minute meetings between workers and the leaders may be efficient in terms of mental health and job productivity (Doniger, 2021). Finally, utilising performance-based measures such as Primary Task Performance to stabilize workload (Miller, 2001). Overall, reducing long working hours and job demands, introducing 15-minute meetings, as well as, measuring workload could possibly change health at work.

One of the aspects of workload, that negatively influences young employees' mental health, is long working hours (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra et al., 2008). The issue may appear due to disadvantageous employee policies made by either the government or

the employer. The regulations are sometimes created to force the workers to stay longer at the office, in order to complete greater number of tasks. According to Pega, Náfrádi, Momen et al. study (2021) in 2016, globally, 488 million employees were exposed to long working hours (above or equally to 55 h/week). The 2021 study (Nishimura, Yamauchi, Sasaki et al., 2021) exposed that before the beginning of mental health disorders among employees, 19% of them were experiencing constant long working hours, gradual increase 27%, or rapid increase 25% in working hours. Therefore, shorter office hours or 4 days working week should be promoted. Due to this strategy, the employees could have improved work-life balance, consequently, leading to increased satisfaction of life and job quality. The method would be discussed with the government and employers, as the subjects that influence policies. However, in order to encourage them to implement changes, social psychologists may introduce the Results Pyramid (Connors & Smith, 2011). The theory indicates that if someone (here social psychologists) wants to change someone's belief, they must influence their (leaders') experience at first. The leaders' understanding might be changed after social psychologists would present the benefits of the implementation. Therefore, the government, as well as, the employers might be more convinced to introduce new regulations, that will positively affect employees' mental health. However, the problem that may occur to change the workload, and therefore decrease business hours, is that some people may want or need to take additional hours in order to have a greater amount of money (Bowling & Kirkendall, 2012). Thus, it might be the case that long- working hours will not be influenced quickly.

Having said that, long working hours might be determined by social norms, that have negative impact on mental health (Compton & Shim, 2015). In some countries social norms have been indicating the fact that young people should work long hours in order to do an effective work (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra et al., 2008). Compton & Shim (2015) indicated that social norms such as cultural believes and biases are the major determinants of mental health. Therefore, in order to modify social norms, informational influence should be implemented through social media. The study (Sundaram, Sharma & Shakya, 2020) suggests that social media is one of the most significant factors that affects decision-making processes. The recent analysis (Dave, 2021) shows that 57.6% of the world's population uses social media, on the average of 2 hours and 27 minutes. Thus, the issue might be changed by creating social media campaigns that promote fewer working hours as a life changer.

Effective type of leadership not only has an impact on social norms, but also on company's culture, employees' satisfaction, therefore, influencing people's mental health (Corrigan, Diwan, Campion et al., 2002). The role of the leaders is significant in order to properly establish direction, align and motivate people and to create a safe place to work in (Ruchlin, Dubbs, Callahan et al., 2004). Consequently, the central role in the organizational structure can either influence positively or negatively people's health. Thus, establishing specific type of leadership could help to create an effective working environment where the young generation's health is the most crucial. Transformational leadership might be promoted as the most effective one for improving employees' health (Corrigan, Diwan, Campion et al., 2002). This type of

leaders is concentrated on one's safety, physiological needs, and empowering workers' self-esteem and mutual respect (Corrigan, Diwan, Campion et al., 2002). Evidence (Corrigan, Diwan, Campion et al., 2002) shows that transformational leadership is negatively associated with burnout (emotional, physical and mental exhaustion) and positively with cohesive organisational structure. Therefore, principals that create friendly and employee-oriented environment are more likely to be perceived as the supporters who respect their young employees. In the result, people might feel safer, happier, and better motivated to work. Consequently, the strategy of transformational leadership could possibly lead to improvement of mental health at work. However, the method by itself might not be enough and in order to implement real changes, company culture should be converted or introduced.

The adverse types of company culture seem to have a significant impact on young people's decreasing health at work (Ruchlin, Dubbs, Callahan et al., 2004). Companies, that fail with their culture, do not emphasize the importance of labour, company's believes, everyday language and employees' perception about the leaders (Ruchlin, Dubbs, Callahan et al., 2004). Consequently, this arguably may lead to lower mood and decreased job satisfaction. Empirical study (Asiedu, 2015) evidenced the importance of rewarding culture, growth opportunities (training culture), supervisory supportive culture and communication. Therefore, for those companies that failed or did not introduce any culture, those factors might be essential to implement in order to create a healthy working environment. Consequently, to apply given cultures, social psychologist may promote Family Friendly Work Practices (FFWPs). One of the FFWPs include flexible working hours, free coaching, appreciation bonuses.

Dex & Scheibl (1999) evidenced the effectiveness of FFWPs. According to the study, people were more satisfied and had better work-life balance after introducing FFWPs. Bevan, Kettley & Patch (1997) explained that it looks like sickness levels in departments where we've extended carer leave have started to drop". Furthermore, Dex & Scheibl (1999) showed that after implementing FFWPs staff relations has improved, as well as, their loyalty and morale. In order to improve company culture social psychologists could utilize reciprocation rule, as well (Cialdini, 2001).

The theory indicates that individuals feel obligated to return what was given to them. Therefore, if some support for employees would be introduced it might be argued that it could influence their mental health and they would feel responsible for giving it back. In the result, it might create some kind of "mutual appreciation circle" in the firm. Consequently, it may be suggested that the strategy of FFWPs and reciprocation rule could influence companies' culture, resulting in improvement of young people's mental health.

Not efficient company culture may lead to low self-efficacy, that could form mental health issues at work (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Albert Bandura (1999) describes self-efficacy as one's belief in their ability to successfully complete a specific task.

Additionally, he evidenced that low self-efficacy influences people's motivation, the amount of stress they experience and depression (Bandura, 1999). Stajkovic & Luthans (1998) indicated that individuals who receive positive and encouraging communication tend to reduce negative thoughts and present higher self-efficacy. Therefore, if company culture is not supportive and employee-oriented, an

individual may experience lower self-efficacy, resulting in decreasing mental health. In order to change that, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs could be utilized (Maslow, 1943). The theory focuses on physiological, safety, love and belonging and self-esteem needs.

Consequently, if emotional wellbeing of young employees will be satisfied, mental health might be improved, as well. However, it was evidenced (Maslow, 1943) that if basic needs are accomplished, the motivation can decrease, what could arguably influence one's well-being. Therefore, Packard's Hidden Needs should be implemented (Packard, 1957) in order to prevent potential mental health issues. The strategy would be based on appreciation bonuses such as gift cards, financial support or opportunity to learn new lan-guages. Overall, introducing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Packard's Hidden Needs could influence self-efficacy of young employees, resulting in improvement of their mental health.

To sum up, mental health at work among the young generation constitutes a real issue that is a global challenge. The factors that may influence adverse employees' mental health include workload, long working hours, social norms, unsupportive leadership, adverse company culture and low self-efficacy. In order to change the global challenge, policy makers and social psychologists may promote reducing job demands and long-working hours, and introduce 15-minute meetings. Additionally, social psychologists could measure workload, implement 4 days working week, informational influence, transformational leadership, FFWPs, and finally, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Packard's Hidden Needs. Even though it may seem like social psychology has an impact on the global is-

sue, there are some limitations to these implications. This includes the need for working long hours, government's or employer's adverse policies, and the decreased spread of informational influence. Overall, it is crucial to introduce the solutions that have a great impact on the global challenge that is health of young people at work. However, considering and challenging the potential limitations of the study, influencing the global issue might be more efficient.

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Work burnout is its own epidemic. Here's how to stop the spread. (2021, November 22). <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/23/the-future-of-work-is-here-employee-burnout-needs-to-go.html>



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Karolina Tulik
Age: 22, Poland

"He who opens the school gates, closes the prison" said famous, French writer Victor Hugo. Education is the main factor that will shape the future of mankind. I strongly believe that by underlining the importance of the quality of education we can change the world for the better.

Education

Unfortunately, the European education system does not meet the needs of the European society of the future. The school system is outdated and needs to be modernised.

The priority should be to conduct classes in the form of workshops and interactive way. Learning about the world is so much fun. School should not kill the young person's willingness to know and discover. When I ask my 6-year-old brother what he likes to learn the most, he replies that he loves learning about the world around him. When I ask my 17-year-old sister the same question, tears fill her eyes.

In Poland there is a stigma of not knowing something. Teachers embarrass students who ask questions for clarification.

Future teachers should be educated in such a way that in the future each student will feel comfortable in the classroom and be able to courageously ask about an incomprehensible issue and learn without stress. After all, school exists to educate, doesn't it?

Undoubtedly, the timetable is also an important aspect. I do not deny mathematics, languages, and history are essential elements in enabling the students to better understand the world around them. On the other hand, education should include activities that will prepare a young person for future needs. I believe the following items should be added, for at least one educational year:

- rhetoric, the art of debating; and negotiating;
- education;
- sexual education;
- climate education.

Disinformation

Hybrid warfare is no joke, and unfortunately many people downplay this problem. I am afraid that in the future

the problem will be even more visible and there will be no way to control it. I believe that the solution to the problem is, first of all, educating people about disinformation, creating a social campaign on the effects of disinformation, and introducing regulations that would slow down the intensification of activities in this field.

I think that a simple way to popularize counteracting disinformation would be to create an ambassadorial project for young people who, as part of the project and with the help of a scholarship, would create their own campaigns on this topic.

The ambassador's tasks could be:

- creating educational videos on disinformation;
- circulating trends in the form of special hashtags that would encourage other people to discover disinformation online;
- organization of workshops and meetings for children, adults and seniors;
- In my opinion, tiktok would be a good platform for such a campaign.

Mental health

The unstable situation in the world is not conducive to mental health. The pandemic and two years of confinement have kept young people shut down and quiet. At a time when we should develop our social skills, we had to stay at home for understandable reasons.

Following the pandemic, the proportion of young people who became depressed has risen. A huge problem in Poland is the lack of access to psychiatric facilities. Their standard is very low and there is also a problem with lack of staff. I believe that a short-term solution

to this problem could be establishing cooperation between educational institutions and universities educating future psychologists and psychiatrists. Future psychologists, from a senior year, could take paid internships and assist students in a one-student-one-pupil format.

Healthy food

In front of our eyes, we can observe the emergence of new civilization diseases:

- obesity;
- diabetes;
- cardiovascular diseases like hypertension, atherosclerosis, stroke, heart attack;
- neoplastic diseases like uterine cancer, pancreatic cancer, colorectal cancer;
- mental diseases like depression, drug addiction, alcoholism.

I would like to note that this is just the beginning. The newest generation has been fed fast food, processed foods and sweets since infancy. If my parents' generation - brought up on vegetables and fruit from the garden, and sometimes on sweets brought from their family from Germany - with such a spectrum of diseases, what will happen to my generation?

The solution is to tax sweets and intensively processed foods and lower the prices of agricultural food. These taxes should be used to promote healthy food. I believe that the emphasis on a healthy society will bring immeasurable benefits in the future, as health care spending will decrease. It is worth noting that it is important to promote local products. Such action will bring benefits in the ecological and economic sphere.



Claire Lemaire
Age: 23, Belgium

The last years have been tough for young people. Although each generation faces its challenges, and although most of those challenges are universal, today's youth are confronted with an unprecedented level of frustration.

On the one hand, in the European Union, progress in the fields of scientific research, health, education, human and minority rights, social policies, trade, self-expression, and so forth, has never been as fast as today. We have access to a quality of life that most of our parents did not even dream of.

On the other hand, the mental health of the youth has never been more alarming. According to a report from Unicef, published in October 2021, suicide is the second leading cause of death in Europe among adolescents, and between 16% and 19% of them suffer from mental health disorders. Earlier in 2022, Scien-sano the Belgian institute for health, highlighted that 27% of the 18-29 years old are affected by anxiety, and 24,5% by depression. These figures are significantly higher than for older age groups.

What is happening to us? In a time and region of the world where every effort is being made to optimize the development of cognitive, social, and emotional skills, where more attention is being paid to the rights, emotions, well-being, and education of children than ever before, and where peace has reigned for 77 years, how come our generation is confronted to these issues even more than the past ones?

The following alarming figures could be other symptoms that our generation is experiencing, but they might as well be part of the cause. Young people no longer trust their institutions and governments; they fear the future. What gave our parents hope and high expectations only brings us anxiety and fear. These feelings have always existed, but these figures, taken from a survey by the Youth Researches Group of the Flemish Government attest that this is getting worse as time goes on: the age group that has the least trust in politicians, the media, and trade unions is the 18-34 years old group.

This survey was conducted in Belgium, but a 2019 survey by SciencesPo France indicates similar results. However, this survey does not distinguish between age groups, and thus only indicates a current trend. 79% of participants distrust politics, 74% believe that politicians are corrupt, and 85% do not feel concerned by politics. The most frightening figures show that less than 50% of the population surveyed trust their deputies, prime minister, European deputies, president, media, unions, and political parties.

While I do not have a concrete answer to the question, 'why are we so skeptical of our institutions today?' - other than perhaps the fact that we have been through a financial crisis, Brexit, a pandemic, and fear of the collapse of our retirement and social systems, the rise of extreme ideologies, unemployment, and many other current stressful and anxiety-provoking topics - I

do think that we can make youth feel more invested, concerned, useful, and hopeful. My proposal, which aims to solve the problems mentioned, is a European tutoring and entertainment platform made by young people for young people, and funded by European Institutions. This platform will be available to all schools, teachers, tutors, and youth organizations in the European Union.

Young people of all ages will be able to post articles and videos, verified by higher education students specializing in that field, or by non-students with relevant experience. The people posting the videos will not be paid, but this platform will be free for all European citizens, and the verifying persons will be paid, as this is considered a part-time or student job. Teachers, professors, assistants, journalists, and other professionals will also be employed by this platform, but their role will only be to supervise the content and make sure that everything is correct. Besides this, multilingual people will have the opportunity to translate this content, thus creating jobs in all fields.

The different tabs of this platform will be study and time management tips, every school and university subjects, as well as political, global, European, and regional actuality and culture. I am convinced that focusing on providing reliable, verified news and popularized information about political systems will reconnect us to politics.

Teachers from all around Europe will be trained to use this platform and to encourage their pupils to submit and consult content. This initiative will not only make education more accessible to all but will also give responsibility and empower young people. They will have more confidence in the media and politics, which will make them want to be

part of society and the future. Moreover, it will develop their critical thinking, open-mindedness, and creativity, which few have the opportunity to do. It will also be of great help for high-potential pupils and pupils with learning disabilities as their specific needs are often overlooked in the classroom.

The only tab that will be run by professionals is the tab 'mental health', which will provide videos and tips on how to feel less stressed, less depressed, and have better overall mental health. Each young person will also benefit from free therapy sessions through this platform, without the need for a doctor's prescription, and in a very short time frame. Chat and discussion tabs for specific age groups will also be available, so that those who feel lonely can discuss their classes or even their feelings with their peers, or so that tutors can be connected with pupils. This is one more job that the platform will create. The tutors will be paid by the institution, and it will be free of charge for the pupil.

Selecting the young people that will check the content and be the tutors will be complicated, and paying them decently while offering free therapies will be high-priced, but it is an investment that is worth the cost, and that we must make.

Needless to say that educational content, study tips, and online therapies are already available on the internet, but in such a large amount and spread over so many mediums that it is overwhelming, and finding what is relevant and what is correct can be hard. This is another thing that makes students and pupils stressed these days. Thus, one more source of anxiety that this platform will combat, alongside the spread of fake news, which is also a threat.

I would be honored to discuss this platform in more detail in the future; as I believe it will help get rid of the frustration our generation is facing. Please feel free to contact me to discuss the budget, how the platform will actually work, and how I think it will help solve the problems I have outlined in this essay. I truly believe that empowering young people is essential. Allowing people to earn money while feeling useful, as well as giving them access to knowledge, support, and therapy will make a big change.



MENTAL HEALTH AS THE KEY TO BECOMING BETTER INDIVIDUALLY AND WITHIN SOCIETY

Nicole Sciberras
Age: 22, Malta

Being a young citizen living in a culture that has already formed a profound idea of how young people should behave, can be very challenging. When one is welcomed into adulthood, issues such as mental health, rights, employment, environmental concerns and further on, do come in mind more often. As for me, I always wanted to be part of change, development and societal evolution.

To begin with, coming from a medical background, I would like to start by emphasizing how mental health is the key to any other motivation in evolving individually and within the society. In my opinion, this is not emphasised enough. Living in a world where digitalization happened and as a consequence one is expected to look great, be informed, behave with the latest attitudes, know the modern jargon, understand the newest hot topics, succeed in their studies, speak in a certain manner and countless other expectations... can be a lot. Even just writing this list got me out of breath. Now, imagine, living with all those educationally hanging expectations above your head, every single day. With all the changes happening around us, youth require support throughout every phase of their lives. As I write this, I am thinking about

the seminars we used to have back in our secondary school. How one shall ask for help when need be or when a situation gets out of hand. However, sometimes this can be too late.

Taking my country, Malta, as an example, from the latest findings, suicide rates have increased by 1.67 % from 2018. As sad as that sounds, it's unfortunately the reality. Life has become too much, and waiting for one to ask for help is not enough. In my country, going back in history, mental health was looked down upon. Going to a counsellor means that you are out of your mind or 'have gone nuts'.

Thankfully, nowadays it is becoming more common in society that counselling is for everyone. Moreover, it is highly probable that every single human being requires some type of help in order to recover from past experiences or work on becoming better individually. However, for one to get an appointment at university for example, it takes weeks and months to get referred due to the high demand. Additionally, to pay a private practitioner costs up to 35-50 Euros which is definitely not affordable for everyone. To shed some light on this, I have certain ideas which I would like to

share. Firstly, youth centers need to be implemented in every locality; a place open 24/7 where everyone is invited, where one can grab some tea or coffee and spend some time relaxing, studying or chatting. Additionally, free counsellors would be available by appointments in every youth hub and free events such as mental health awareness talks, meditation classes and sharing of experiences would be available. This would aid in creating a community, a sense of belonging, especially for foreigners in Malta who come on their own and would crave to meet young people like them coming from different backgrounds.

Another issue that I'm very passionate about, is definitely the rights of youth, voicing our opinion, and getting the rights we deserve. Luckily nowadays, due to social media, as a young community, we have a broad sector where we can voice what we believe in online and via several social platforms. Sometimes, being part of the younger generation, one might believe that our voice has less effect on the community than someone who is older and 'more experienced'. However, people like Greta Thunberg or Malala Yousafzai convince us otherwise. At least they definitely convince me that whatever I believe in I can do. However, a little less resistance from the local community can be of great help for the younger generation to be more open about different ideas, without having to fight forces. For example, if the local councils would provide young people with an opportunity were every once in a while, they group up and gather ideas and implement action towards how these can be adapted to the community, this would serve as great help for the younger generation to know that they are listened to. After all, as Franklin D. Roosevelt correctly said 'We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our

youth for the future'.

Moreover, education plays a substantial role when it comes to youths getting a good general knowledge about life. Nonetheless, high grades will also guarantee a good job. However, what about having a general grasp on debating hot issues, like climate change or environmental developments? What about teaching students that racial differences are important, however they are not there to separate us. Religions too are there to guide us spiritually, but do youths really get to see the differences in regards to their spiritual journey? Or rather growth as a whole human in the mind, body and spirit? What about the different ways of teaching?


I recommend that the school system changes. We should stop promoting silence in schools or rather obedience with shutting out different ideas or behaviors. Education in general requires such a drastic change to recognize the different beings that each and every individual was born in order to develop into. It's okay to say that we all have different ways of learning and showing our knowledge and that isn't by sitting at a desk, listening and waiting to receive all the answers without even having a chance to debate, process or argue an opinion that was proposed in front of you. Rather I promote that education should be more practical. At a young age children should be offered hands-on experiences where they can feel, listen and watch and learn. This would lead to having a young generation that is keen to learn, go to school and be who they really are. Express themselves through learning. I promote having schools that offer the opportunity for youths to learn the style they like, without being forced to follow a system that is not for everybody. In addition, the youth shall be listened to,

therefore, schools shall allow the youth to have a role in the education system such as having different committees that every now and then would allow all the students to participate in some sort of school 'election' where different ideas get proposed, debated and young people would get the opportunity to be active in the society from a young age.

To sum up, this essay includes every area that I have been greatly passionate about and most of all, areas that I hold dear to my heart. I believe in change; however, change requires different attitudes towards it. A mind that's open to learn and a heart that is ready to receive and give back is definitely all it takes for society to change. Lastly, I am a true believer that we, the youths, are the minds of the future. Therefore, what we plant now we will definitely sow later for the coming generations.

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TOGETHER AS A UNION WE WILL ACCOMPLISH MUCH MORE THAN ALONE

Aleksandrs Mironovs
Age: 21, Latvia

I am Latvian and European at heart and soul. Currently I am International Secretary of YEPP affiliated Unity Youth Organization and Vice President of the liberal-centre-right Nordic Conservative Student Union. I wanted to write this essay so that I can assist in problem-solving of the issues very close to my heart/issues I find utmost concerning on European level, problems that are very concerning to me. The first page of the issue – the introduction of my main concerns about the future; the rest of the essay – is problem issue-by-issue, solutions.

Recent events in Europe and the world at large are worrying indeed for the future of our societies, and as a young European, I have some deep concerns about the world that I will live in tomorrow. I was deeply shocked about the world described in the novel “1984” by George Orwell when I first read it at the very young age. A suppressed, communized, destroyed, freedomless, totalitarian society that is fully controlled and that fully accepts its own position. It frightened me and motivated me to get involved in politics, to study international relations, to do everything possible to make sure this world never appears on the doorsteps of my home.

Unfortunately, I can no longer be certain that my freedom will be fully protected in the future. My relatives in Belarus, who have suffered greatly during the Lukashenka’s suppression of prodemocracy protests know very well that there are places in Europe where your wish to have your voice counted, can get you killed or arrested. My friends in Ukraine learned that even in the 21st century in the heart of Europe, your home can be erased by bombs of an authoritarian country that has no regard for human lives.

As I live in Latvia, few dozen kilometres both from Belarus and Russia, I do fear that one day a similar fate can await my home and my country. This threat does not come solely from outside though. Even inside the EU there are countries that want to take whole nations in direction of authoritarianism. So far, they succeed. So far, the EU failed to protect democracy in those countries. In Poland, the ruling party decided that it has the right to control courts. In Hungary, the ruling party made everything possible to crush independent media. More than that, the Hungarian government threw out an American university that was “too liberal”, inviting instead the state

university of totalitarian China.

In my country from the far right parties you can hear such proposals like taking away citizenship of people who show parties to Russia, also deporting them to the East. There are also plans to make it illegal for same-sex families to be defined as families. We also have pro-Russian parties that are openly expressing support for Russian actions in Ukraine. Can I be certain that Latvia won't turn into a second Hungary? I cannot. Can I be certain that the EU will protect my freedom? I can no longer be certain. Seeing how one mighty democracy (USA) that took down a number of totalitarian countries experiences a deep crisis of democracy... It makes me fear that my worst fears are not that unreal.

So, as a young person, my biggest concerns about the future are the state of democracy and the state of security in the EU.

Democracy

The EU is very well designed for its members. Any country can veto any major decision. Any EU member can make sure that the EU is incapable to defend its own values, thus undermining itself. It should not happen. The EU was built as a Union of values and every single member should guard them. This is especially essential for our foreign policy. If there's a genocide happening in China, the EU has the responsibility to its own citizens to call out those atrocities in the name of the whole Union. No country should have the right to veto that. Besides, no member should have the right to veto EU sanctions on other EU members for undermining EU values and principles. Those things should require qualified majority voting. Not unanimity. If this

require treaty changes to achieve that – so be it – but it is necessary work we have to do.

In addition, to protect democracy, we have to make sure that no EU member that openly undermines EU values benefits from the EU funds. The European Parliament did a fantastic job when it adopted legislation to stop EU funds from going to countries that violate EU values. But apparently the European Commission is unable to implement this legislation in a proper way. Therefore, the process shall be maximally depoliticised and maximally automatised. It will be possible if the Court of Justice of the EU would be able to freeze the funding.

Besides, to preserve and promote democracy and European values, there should additionally be a separate institution (or this work can be done by the European Parliament) that would prepare the report on the state of democracy and EU values in each EU country. This report should be comprehensive. It should include yearly developments and recommendations for improvement. Those reports should later be publicly presented in the EP.

Lastly, democracy and human rights should be at the centre of EU foreign and trade policy. The EU cannot sign trade agreements with countries that are not democratic, and we should actively use our global influence to promote democratization. We also should consider making democracy reports on other world countries and introducing additional trade tariffs on undemocratic countries and in doing so motivate their democratisation.

Security

Most of the EU countries are also

members of NATO. Therefore, the cooperation we have should be maximally broadened. We can no longer perceive EU security without the context of NATO or American security. We are interconnected, and to avoid potential wars and security challenges, we shall form common defense policies and coordinate our actions in regards to sanctions, security assistance. There should be permanent and official format of NATO – EU cooperation.

When it comes to the EU, we should strengthen the unity of the Union. It means creating common border guard force (similar to FRONTEX) instead of a national one, and possibly, creating a common EU army (or defense force that would exist in addition to national armies) that would be dislocated in its multinational form in every EU member state. Those steps will lower the possibility of corruption, will make the use of resources much more efficient, it will make the purchases of the weaponry much cheaper, it will make the EU a global military power, and will make sure that foreign enemies will perfectly know that attack on one EU member will surely face all military might of the EU.

Environment

The EU has the potential to do much more in this area through more regulation, more funding for the environment and common policies. Our sky, forests, fields, lakes, rivers and seas shall be clean, full of vegetation and life. It requires funding for cleaning rivers of trash. It also requires strict requirement to restore forests after woodcutting or restoration of fish resources in certain parts of the sea.

We should also have a special EU-wide day of environment when people would

gather together outside for cleaning the trashed areas. This practice is very popular in Latvia. Twice per year our people, including politicians, children, retired people and business people gather together in forests or parks that require some cleaning. We clean the land and then have a picnic together.

I also believe that the EU should better protect biodiversity. Now, each country can determine how hunted or how widespread are certain species/vegetation. Due to the fact that we all are interconnected, those decisions are probably much more efficient (and objective due to the absence of a local lobby) at the EU level.

Climate

The EU is on the right side of history in regards to climate. We invest in green energy and maximally try to minimize emissions. But let's admit, the work could be more efficient and faster. We rely on oil, gas and coal too much, and the EU has done not satisfying job at lowering this dependence. The EU has not widely supported the creation of wind, hydro or solar power plants and the EU has not promoted the creation of nuclear power plants – the only source of energy that can successfully and in the short time replace carbon energy sources.

We also need more regulation on EU level about energy efficiency and sustainability of buildings. Each country have own targets to achieve in this area. Besides, the EU also needs to invest more in R&D of new green technologies such as accumulators and new sources of energy. We also need to make everything possible to make sure that rare earth minerals that are needed for production of electric vehicles, computers and power generators come from Europe or

other countries with highest ecological standards. This is essential because otherwise, we not only create dependence on authoritarian countries such as Russia and China, but we also worsen climate change as mining in China is much more polluting than in Europe. In addition to supporting our companies in this green transition, we also need to maximally assist our citizens. Especially those that are dependent on “carbon jobs” or those who cannot afford green solutions that are currently expensive.

Employment & Jobs

The private sector should always be the backbone of our economies. EPP Group as a centre-right party should firmly stand on its position in regard to the free markets. The phrase that the freer the markets, the freer the people stands true. We should make sure that the EU does not overregulate private business or gets too involved in subsidizing certain companies. Currently, the EU provides large subsidies to the private sector (esp. agriculture) and allows national governments in certain cases involvement in the economy too much. The EU also considers the introduction of EU wide minimum wage. It cripples the concurrence, ignores the opinion of the business and as a result, takes away jobs from young people and everyone else. We should move away from that. Instead, we shall focus resources on R&D, EU-wide business incubators, EU grants in certain sectors (IT, semiconductors, bio and other modern technologies) and try to generally increase the business environment in Europe and business education in schools.

Digitalisation

Access to the internet by young people is perceived as a human right. So, the EU has a certain latitude to work in this area. Firstly, to make sure that high speed internet is truly accessible across the EU. Secondly, that there are no roaming fees in the EU. Thirdly, that credit and debit card payments are widely accessible all across the EU. Fourthly, that internet within EU does not have geographical blocs. Fifthly, that people all across the EU can communicate with EU and its governments digitally.

The EU is one of the greatest achievements of Europeans that came out of cooperation.

By addressing these challenges together, we certainly can make our future better.



Fionna Niazi
Age: 18, France

In recent years, some European states have suffered dramatic regression, while others have experienced more subtle forms of democratic erosion. Several EU governments have constricted civic liberties. There has been lively debate about how much European citizens are losing faith in core democratic values. In general, the demand for democratic participation is outstrip-ping its supply at both the national and EU levels¹.

In response to this challenge, new European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has called for a “new push for European democracy.” The new commission’s promise opens new opportunities for democratic innovation and experimentation.

European leaders frequently commit to defending and deepening democracy, but they rarely follow through amid more urgent crises. EU and national authorities seem to recognize the importance of this endeavor, yet improving democracy often appears to be a more abstract and lower-priority goal than fixing the euro, agreeing on migrant quotas, or negotiating the budget.

She has suggested organizing a Conference on the Future of Europe in which European citizens will “play a leading and active part.” She has promised to formulate a new European Democracy Action Plan focused in particular on the digital sphere².

One of the worst things the EU’s new

leaders could do would be to launch grandiose initiatives that fail to deliver meaningful and tangible change. Raising citizens’ expectations only to dash them would leave trust and faith in democratic norms even lower than before.

It is questionable whether a high-level conference on the future of Europe is really the most effective way to redress Europe’s democratic malaise. Debates about the future of Europe and the “push for European democracy” could become too entangled with each other. The two issues are related to each other but not the same thing. A drawn out conversation about the wholesale reinvention of the EU could simply delay it and divert attention from the need for concrete, targeted democratic reform.

It is important for the EU institutions and member state governments to get reform right at this decisive juncture. A European democratic reform agenda must be broad and multifaceted, with reforms not just at the EU level but at the national and subnational levels too. EU bureaucrats and member state government officials must pursue these various levels and types of democratic innovation simultaneously and work in tandem with each other.

There are at least six constructive, practical ways that European leaders can begin bolstering European democracy. These ideas aim to help EU institutions connect downward and use reforms to facilitate parallel national and subnational democratic improvements. Rather than

replaying the most exhaustively covered subjects of debate - such as punitive rule of law measures against Hungary and Poland, the diverse roots of populism, or the regulation of tech companies - this paper explores less-covered but eminently feasible areas of potential progress. Democratic reform does not start from a blank canvas. Many options have been on the agenda for several years, showing that there is some positive momentum the EU can harness.

Six ideas are:

- Craft a compelling democratic narrative against the rise in illiberal values;
- Establish a more democratic way to elect European leaders;
- Foster a more transnational form of European party politics;
- Improve direct citizen consultations and democratic participation;
- Strengthen public participation through a revamped European Citizens' Initiative (ECI).

There will be no silver bullet to rescue or transform European democracy. Rather than attempt to address every dimension of democracy across Europe, it makes sense to select a number of concrete policy ideas that could help improve European democracy in specific ways. None of these measures would be a wholesale lifesaver for democracy, but together this modest, incremental progress would begin to make an appreciable difference to the quality of the democratic process across Europe.

Ultimately, it would be best for the EU institutions and national governments to work upward and outward from prosaic but tangible political changes that give citizens a real sense that they are participating in, engaging in, and

influencing decision-making in Brussels. There is no one big, eye-catching change that will suffice as a push to save European democracy, much less to defeat nativist populism or restore supposedly European values. The EU should avoid defining the democracy agenda in these questionable, unrealistic terms. Even in the best of cases, it will be a long and iterative process, mostly undramatic, prone to cyclical regression, and requiring quiet perseverance.

The EU can help draw together the diverse range of democratic initiatives under way at different levels. Democratic innovation is at a tipping point of experimentation and growth akin to the early days after the internet went mainstream. There is demand for public participation.

Citizen assemblies on climate change, for instance, have mushroomed across Europe. New forms of participation are becoming commonplace with respect to local and national governments. It is now difficult to imagine a significant policy making process that would not include citizen participation of some sort. Turn back the clock twenty years, and it would be difficult to find one that did.

At this exciting but dangerous moment, democratic innovation could become mainstream. Cities, regions, and countries are experimenting with participation in different ways. At the moment, citizen assemblies are fashionable, while last year it was participatory budgeting, and next year it will be something else. Civic tech's stock is down at the moment, but next year it may be up again. EU-level reforms are a constant topic of discussion. Underlying all the shifts, though, is a clear sense of momentum that points toward citizens having a more participative, personalized, and responsive relationships with the state.

The EU institutions could play a major role not just by enacting the aforementioned policy recommendations but also by serving as overarching standard setters. This kind of coordination is needed because so far the EU, governments, parties, and civil society organisations have only experimented with reforms at the edges. These participatory initiatives have been interesting but fragmented, and episodic rather than continuous. The Convention on the Future of Europe should be used as a means of making such a systemic shift.

The EU will be instrumental not just for its own sake but for others and for the system as a whole. Policy issues are inherently multilayered. European institutions cannot enact democratic reforms on their own. They need to harness local and national institutions and conversations, working in coordination to access the networks of other institutions and organisations. Brussels can help to set open standards and support the broader network of democratic and participative initiatives.

The EU will benefit from reaching downward and outward to other democratic partners. European-level policymakers will have a much clearer understanding of public views, and a much broader set of inputs into their policymaking processes, which would improve both the legitimacy and the quality of the policies that result. Building this kind of high-quality engagement with the concerns of citizens is an important part of making the case for European unity, as von der Leyen has stated³, a coherent effort, working inter-institutionally, should aim to join up at European level the existing routes for participation.

Europeans can choose to have their institutions open to public participation

or allow them to become essentially privatized. If they are to be open, the infrastructure of government, citizen networks, and civil society that is working in this area needs to improve. If the EU engages, a new sense of political normality could emerge, whereby populist voices are challenged by a more open governance system that has a much richer flow of information and opinions between the different levels of government as well as between citizens and the institutions that serve them. If the EU chooses to stand back, however, the political and democratic landscape is likely to remain fragmented, along local or national lines, and much weaker in the face of commercial or geopolitical actors who are content for the strongest and the wealthiest to shout the loudest.

Modest but achievable action at different levels and in different areas where European democracy is lacking is the best path forward. These reforms should encompass everything from the way democratic discourse is framed to very specific institutional changes and broader efforts to entice citizens into participating directly. While none of these proposals is a game changer on its own, they would be more effective together. An improved Spitzenkandidaten process and transnational lists could get people more interested in politics, which in turn can make citizens more interested in consultative assemblies, e-participation, and ECIs. And if national voters are taking part in politics and watching closely, the European Commission and the European Council might be more likely to take the Spitzenkandidaten, transnational lists, and ECIs more seriously.

Concrete institutional modifications need to be measured against their ability to foster a spirit of common societal problem solving. The quality of collective participatory engagement is an essential

component of democratic recovery. While there are many other areas of necessary reform, focusing attention on this notion of collective citizenship will hopefully pay dividends as the EU's push for democracy moves forward.

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