

Global Gateway High-Level
YOUTH Event
Engage . Empower . Connect

Youth Recommendations on International Partnerships for the next European Commission

Global Gateway High-Level Youth Event

*These are **Youth Recommendations on International Partnerships** elaborated through a participative process by young people engaged in the implementation of the Youth Action Plan in EU External Action and under the initiative of the members of the EU Youth Sounding Board for International Partnerships. They have been presented at the Global Gateway High-Level Youth Event that took place in Brussels on 9 and 10 October 2024.*

Summary of the recommendations - Call to Action

The recommendations are a forward-looking expression of views by young people and are designed to inform and inspire the political leadership of the European Commission to keep youth among political priorities for its new mandate.

The young people endorse the ongoing implementation of the Youth Action Plan and recommend:

Under the **Partnership to Engage**,

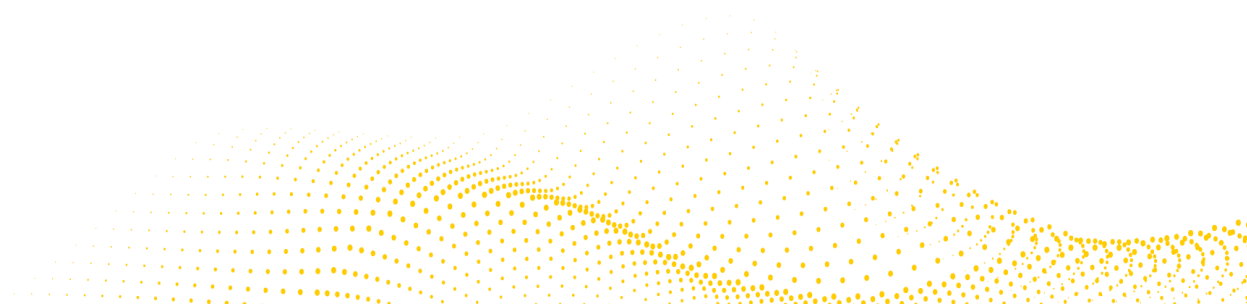
- Continue the **establishment of EU Youth Sounding Boards** and their regional networks and **equipping the EU Delegations** with stable means and solid skills to collect and integrate inputs of young people ensuring that youth engagement is substantive and co-creative.
- Integrate **youth perspective** in the **country roadmaps for EU engagement with civil society** and in the **Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Advisory Platform**.
- Develop a **more comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation system** that tracks the relevance, effectiveness, and inclusivity of youth contributions.
- Strengthen the role of youth in peacebuilding and conflict resolution by establishing a dedicated **EU Youth Peace and Security Forum** and collaborating with existing youth structures.
- Remove structural barriers to participation of marginalized and underrepresented youth by **providing targeted outreach and financial support**.

Under the **Partnership to Empower**,

- Integrate youth and enhance youth-specific projects within Global Gateway infrastructure initiatives by dedicating a specific portion of the available €300 billion funding to **youth-led innovation projects** and creating **youth advisory committees**, as well as establishing **Global Gateway Youth Fellowships**.
- Continue building **leadership skills** of young people by expanding the existing capacity building and peer learning programmes, especially for rural and underserved regions, and introducing **virtual apprenticeship** and **entrepreneurial exchange platforms**.
- Create partnerships for **data collection** in rural and disadvantaged areas addressing the critical lack of reliable data on the specific conditions and needs of youth populations, especially marginalized youth.
- Increase the **accessibility of education and healthcare** for youth, including youth in crisis contexts by expanding the EU's support to the healthcare and education sectors in emergencies.

Under the **Partnership to Connect**,

- Foster global youth networking and further reduce barriers to participation by launching **targeted awareness campaigns** and **mentorship programs**.
- Develop a **Global Youth Information Hub**, expanding the number of **virtual exchange programs** and introducing a **dedicated fund** to cover travel, visa costs, and participation fees for marginalized youth to ensure their full inclusion in international exchange and mobility programs.



Youth Recommendations on International Partnerships for the next European Commission

Global Gateway High-Level Youth Event

Introduction

The EU **Youth Sounding Board for International Partnerships** has led the process of collecting inputs and drafting these recommendations, focusing on amplifying the voices of young people who have been engaged in the development and implementation of the [Youth Action Plan \(YAP\)](#)¹ since its adoption in 2022. The consultation process included a **survey** sent to members of the EU **Youth Sounding Board (YSB)** for International Partnerships and the different **local Youth Sounding Boards created by EU Delegations**, the **Special Youth Advisors** to Commissioner for International Partnerships, the **Core Group of the Youth Dialogue Platform**, and other young people engaged in the flagship programs of the YAP. Dedicated online meetings were also organized to incorporate diverse perspectives of the young people representing different regions and situations. Previous youth recommendations issued in the framework of regional or thematic international events organized or supported by the EU have been taken into account.²

All youth participants to the Global Gateway High Level Youth event have received the final draft in advance, so that they have been able to consult with other youth advocates. The recommendations have been discussed in-depth during the event on 9th October in different workshops to reflect a broad range of perspectives and were aligned with youth needs and priorities.

The recommendations have been presented to the EU Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen and the participants to the Global Gateway High Level Youth event on 10 October 2024 in Brussels.

The recommendations are structured around the **three pillars** of the Youth Action Plan: **Engage**, **Empower**, and **Connect**.

The state of the world and youth

In a world where rapid social, political, cultural, and environmental changes are reshaping the global landscape, young people stand at the forefront of these transformations. With over half of the world's population under the age of 30, the energy, perspectives, creativity and skills of youth are

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022JC0053>

² Non-comprehensive list of geographic or thematic Youth recommendations: [Joint Outcomes of the Youth Track, Africa-Europe Week – Towards the EU-AU Summit](#) (2022), [Youth Declaration on Transforming Education UN Summit](#) (2022) (EU supported the youth engagement track of the Summit), [EU-ASEAN Youth Summit Recommendations](#) (2022), [EU-Latin American and the Caribbean Youth Day Recommendations](#) (2023), [Declaration of the OCT Youth Network at the EU-OCT Forum](#) (2023), [Joint Recommendations Civil Society and Youth Forum](#) (2024), [Arctic Youth Recommendations at EU Arctic Forum and Indigenous People's Dialogue](#) (2024)

indispensable for addressing the complex challenges of today and tomorrow. **Engaging youth is not just an option, it is a necessity.** Their voices, experiences, and ideas are critical for shaping inclusive, forward-thinking policies that respond to the needs of our evolving societies.

While over 50% of the global population is under the age of 30, yet the average age of world leaders is over 62. This striking imbalance highlights a critical gap, as young people remain underrepresented in key decision-making roles that will profoundly impact their future.

The **Youth Action Plan in EU External Action (YAP)** (2022-2027) is already leading the way by creating opportunities for young people to engage in the EU's international partnerships and initiatives. But more needs to be done. With global challenges escalating—ranging from **increasing armed conflicts** that affect over 250 million **children and many more young people worldwide** - to the existential threat of **climate change**, the need for youth engagement has never been more urgent. Young people are not just the ones impacted **by these crises**, but also the **innovators and leaders** one needs to drive sustainable solutions.

The EU's Global Gateway is a visionary investment strategy aimed at mobilizing **€300 billion** by 2027 for sustainable and high-quality infrastructure projects around the world, focusing on digital, energy, and transport, as well as health and education. Yet, for this ambitious initiative to succeed and deliver long-term, meaningful impact, **youth must be at the center**—as key drivers of innovation, sustainability, and inclusive growth. The Global Gateway must be an opportunity for scaled-up investments in human development (health and education), with young people at the center, to ensure youth are healthy, equipped with relevant skills, making positive contributions to their communities and societies.

With **85% of the world's youth living in newly emerging and low-income economies**, their role in shaping the future of global partnerships, sustainable development, and conflict resolution is undeniable. Young people's contributions are critical to the success of initiatives like **Global Gateway**, which aims to bridge infrastructure gaps and promote sustainable development on a global scale. Communities that are not burdened by concerns over basic social needs, such as health and education, are better positioned to focus on long-term growth and development. It is vital to address these areas as key drivers in eradicating poverty and enhancing the socio-economic prospects of young people. The recommendations outlined in this document are a testament to the power of youth-led perspectives. By amplifying their voices, integrating their ideas, and providing them with the tools and platforms to lead, one can ensure that the future is more inclusive, resilient, and responsive to the needs of generations to come.

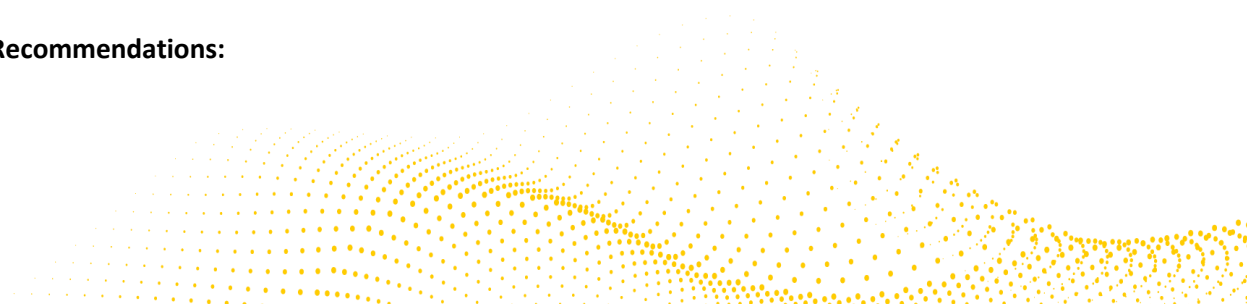
Recommendations on Partnership to Engage

Promoting Continuous Youth-Policymaker Dialogue

Situation: Many young people feel disconnected from policymakers due to irregular engagement and lack of transparency on feedback usage, creating a trust gap.

Challenges: Limited dialogue platforms, minimal feedback from decision-makers, and social/economic barriers to youth involvement in politics are the main challenges to a better dialogue.

Actionable Recommendations:



- Institutionalize **regular dialogue platforms** (e.g., bi-annual youth summits) for continuous engagement of youth with policymakers.
- Ensure **funding for grassroots youth** organizations and collaborate with existing platforms like Youth Councils.
- Integrate youth perspective and youth organizations in the **country roadmaps for EU engagement with civil society** and in the **Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Advisory Platform**.
- Develop **youth recommendations** alongside **monitoring frameworks** to ensure accountability to track progress, and secure structured involvement in programming.

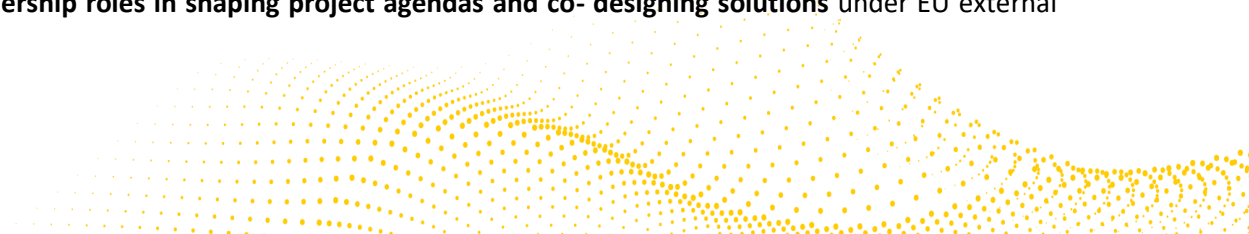
Investing more in the Implementation of the Youth Action Plan, including Youth Sounding Boards (YSBs), and Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System to ensure genuine co-creation of solutions with youth

Situation: Today, more than 30 EU Delegations have already established local Youth Sounding Boards (YSBs) designed to advise on youth-related issues and to ensure youth voices are incorporated into EU actions and policies. While youth actively contribute through youth advisory structures to EUDs, regional and global initiatives, the Youth Dialogue Platform, etc, there is **no comprehensive system to monitor and evaluate** the impact of their contributions. For youth engagement to be meaningful, young people need to be part of the processes assessing the outcomes of their recommendations. Moreover, young people need **more formal platforms** for continuous collaboration and exchange.

Challenges: The implementation of the Youth Action Plan at the local level by the EU Delegations varies across countries and regions in its intensity and forms of implementation, and so does youth participation in decision-making and evaluation processes. Youth **participation is sometimes seen as symbolic**, with youth being involved for representation purposes but not meaningfully engaged in decision-making processes. Without a better structured M&E system that includes youth participation, it is difficult to ensure that their inputs translate into impactful changes, risking disengagement. **Limited regional collaboration infrastructure** and insufficient peer-to-peer collaboration opportunities prevent youth from engaging in sustained joint initiatives.

Actionable Recommendations:

- **Continue the creation of Youth Sounding Boards** - making sure that no region is left behind - and provide EU Delegations with **stable resources** to ensure YSBs' sustainability and management. Enhance the impact and structure of **regional Youth Sounding Boards**.
- Create **clear guidelines for EU Delegations** to better understand and utilize the input provided by YSBs: organise monthly advisory sessions and have efficient project feedback mechanisms. At country level, youth focal points shall collaborate with existing local structures - youth councils, child parliaments, youth-focused organizations - and regularly report on youth participation levels and the impact of youth inputs.
- Invest in the **establishment of regional youth networks** connecting regional YSBs through formal regional networks to enhance collaboration and to allow sharing of best practices. Develop formal regional peer-to-peer **YSB mentorship programmes**.
- Develop a **more comprehensive M&E system** that tracks the relevance, effectiveness, and inclusivity of youth contributions shall be developed, ensuring the presence of youth in the evaluation process and accountability.
- Ensure that youth engagement is substantive and co-creative by **empowering youth to take leadership roles in shaping project agendas and co- designing solutions** under EU external



action, including their involvement in planning, decision-making and evaluation processes and securing ownership of initiatives from youth leaders, beyond mere consultations.

Further Strengthening Youth, Peace and Security Engagement

Situation: Youth play a crucial role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, but their involvement is often limited to **symbolic participation**, especially in fragile and conflict-affected regions. **Protection concerns** are a big barrier to youth participation. In contexts with heavily restricted civic space, young activists and peace builders are being targeted for their work by armed groups and autocratic governments.

Challenges: Despite the existing EU's efforts, youth, particularly in fragile regions, struggle with meaningful participation in peace processes, often being **excluded from decision-making** roles and processes. Protection concerns can prevent active participation of young people in peace and decision-making processes.

Actionable Recommendations:

- Establish a **dedicated EU Youth Peace and Security Forum** that ensures that youth, especially young women, and marginalized groups are actively involved in national and international peace dialogues.
- Ensure that **youth perspectives are systematically integrated** into all dimensions of peace and security policies. Promote youth inclusion in peace negotiations, bilateral dialogues, and normalization processes, particularly in conflict-affected regions.
- Enhance **preventive measures** and increase the **protection of activists and peacebuilders** to ensure their safety and participation.
- **Collaborate with existing youth structures**, such as youth umbrella organizations and grassroots networks, to formalize youth participation in peace processes.

Facilitating Access and Participation of Marginalized Youth

Situation: While diversity - gender, sexual or gender orientation, ethnicity, regional representation, age,- is considered in the selection process of YSB members, **youth from disadvantaged or rural areas are still underrepresented** and have limited opportunities to engage meaningfully in policy formulation and decision-making processes. Young people from marginalized communities - women and girls in particular - face **structural barriers** that restrict their access to resources and opportunities.

Challenges: **Financial, logistical, and informational barriers** exist preventing youth with disadvantaged backgrounds from participating fully in EU initiatives and programmes: lack of resources, high travel costs, and limited access to opportunities for marginalized groups. Adolescents and children are continuously excluded, often due to safeguarding concerns. In addition to economic instability, young women often encounter **challenges related to gender inequality, including limited access to technology, financial literacy, and sexual and reproductive health services**. Early pregnancies, restricted access to contraceptives, and child marriage further compound these issues, reducing young women's opportunities for education and employment. Lack of information and **safeguarding measures** means that many adolescents, especially girls, are excluded from all participation processes.

Actionable Recommendations:

- Provide **targeted outreach and financial support** (e.g., travel stipends, data cost coverage, and technology access) for underrepresented youth, including adolescents; for the latter -



through safeguarding measures or partnerships with child-focused organizations. Enable flexible participation through **virtual meetings** and **regional consultations**. Ensure intentional inclusion of disadvantaged youth by addressing their realities and engaging local representatives and leaders. Implement dedicated strategies to help youth mobilize and organize networks.

- Create pathways for economic engagement through **greater links with the Global Gateway initiative**.
- Continue implementing **programs aimed at addressing gender gaps in access to technology, economic resources, and financial literacy**. Advocate for policies that provide comprehensive sexuality education, expand access to contraceptives and abortion care for adolescents, and work to eliminate child, early, and forced marriage.

Recommendations on Partnership to Empower

Integrating youth and enhance youth-specific projects within Global Gateway infrastructure initiatives

Situation: Under the Global Gateway strategy, the European Union invests heavily in infrastructure. More **emphasis is needed on direct youth-led projects** related to the digital sector, climate and energy, transport, health, education and research.

Challenges: Despite the scale of investment, **youths are not sufficiently included** in the decision-making, planning, or implementation phases of the Global Gateway projects. This lack of involvement reduces opportunities for youth to directly influence infrastructure developments that will shape their futures.

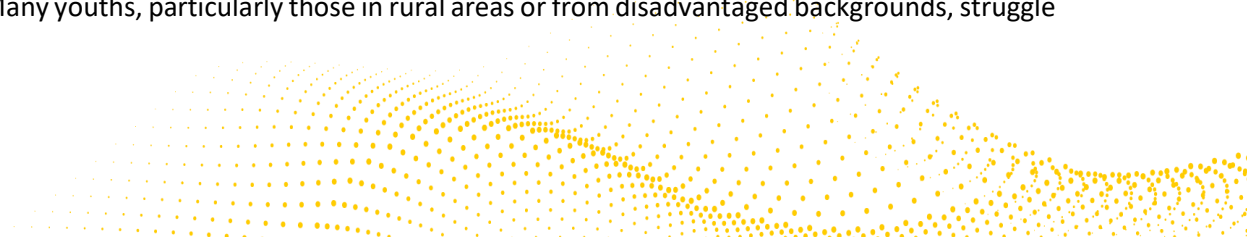
Actionable Recommendations:

- Dedicate a specific portion of the available €300 billion funding to **youth-led youth-responsive innovation projects**.
- Create **youth action committees** within the Global Gateway strategy, ensuring that youth voices guide the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects in sectors such as green energy, smart cities and digital connectivity, education and health care.
- Introduce **Global Gateway Youth Fellowships**, which provide financial support, knowledge exchange and mentorship support to individual young (social) innovators working in thematic fields of the five Global Gateway pillars in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Western Balkans, Türkiye and Middle East, ensuring youth have a stake in shaping their regional futures. Those impacted by social and climate injustice should be in the center of attention.

Building Leadership Skills and Increasing Capacity of Youth

Situation: Youth engaged in EU programmes need **more structured training** in areas such as policy advocacy, leadership, and professional development. Initiatives like the Youth Empowerment Fund (YEF) support youth-led grassroots projects globally, providing funding for initiatives that advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Challenges: There are insufficient opportunities for youth to build their leadership and advocacy skills, which limits their effectiveness in engaging with EU initiatives and contributing to decision-making processes. Many youths, particularly those in rural areas or from disadvantaged backgrounds, struggle



to access EU programmes due to **information gaps, limited capacity for proposal writing, fund management and reporting skills. Financial, logistical, and bureaucratic barriers** continue to limit the participation of youth, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, in cross-border apprenticeships and mobility programs, reducing the inclusivity and reach of these opportunities.

Actionable Recommendations:

- Expand **capacity-building programs** – especially for women - that provide structured workshops on **leadership, policy advocacy, and public speaking** (in online and offline formats) strengthening youths' skills for greater political participation and civic engagement.
- Develop **mentorship programs** where youth can be paired with experienced professionals to guide their growth, using a peer-to-peer methodology and recognizing youth as experts in their respective fields.
- Offer affordable and accessible **language courses** tailored to young people's needs and living circumstances to improve youth's professional fluency in English, French, and Spanish languages, empowering them to engage effectively in international and regional discussions.
- Increase outreach and capacity-building **programs for rural and underserved regions** and marginalized young people overall by setting up regional information centers and building project writing/ project management skills of young people.
- Expand national, regional and global **exchange programmes** for young people from different countries to share experiences that foster leadership and skills training for civic participation.
- Engage young people in the design and monitoring of existing projects and programmes focused on entrepreneurship, skills development and job creation. Support **self-sufficiency through skills training and start-up grants** that empower young people to create sustainable livelihoods and to positively influence their respective communities.
- Introduce **virtual apprenticeship and entrepreneurial exchange platforms** to ensure that youth who cannot travel can still benefit from peer-to-peer learning and professional development. Focus on creating pathways for youth in rural areas and marginalized communities to access these apprenticeships, ensuring that they lead to meaningful employment.

Creating Partnerships for Data Collection in Rural and Disadvantaged Areas

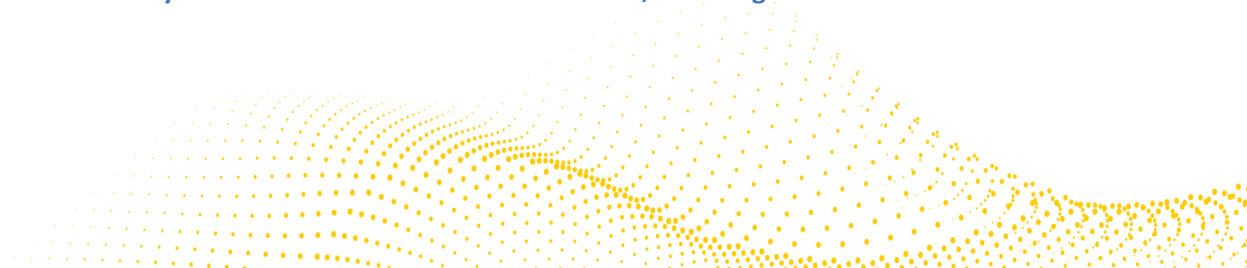
Situation: There is a **critical lack of reliable data** on the specific conditions and needs of youth populations, especially marginalized youth, making it difficult to implement targeted interventions. Without accurate data, EU development initiatives may not adequately address the challenges faced by young people, leading to misallocated resources and ineffective solutions.

Challenges: In many countries and communities, **access to reliable data** on demographics, socio-economic conditions is **limited**.

Actionable Recommendations:

- **Partner with local and international research institutions** and data specialist companies to collect real-time data in underserved regions on youth and women's access to economic resources, education, and healthcare. This data will inform targeted youth-led initiatives and guide public policy and infrastructure investments to address specific regional needs and would allow for the measurement of project impact in regions with limited data infrastructure.

Increasing the Accessibility of Education and Healthcare for Youth, including Youth in Crisis Contexts



Situation: Access to healthcare and quality education is a **fundamental right**, yet millions of youths, including those in conflict and crisis areas, are deprived of these opportunities, often due to systemic barriers such as displacement, lack of infrastructure, and underfunding.

Challenges: Youth in crisis zones, face **significant challenges** in accessing healthcare, education and vocational training.

Actionable Recommendations:

- Expand the EU's support to the healthcare and education sectors in emergencies. Pilot **mobile learning initiatives** and **psychosocial support** services for displaced youth, ensuring that education efforts are adaptable to crisis conditions.
- Accelerate learning programmes and education infrastructure development in crisis-affected areas.
- Support programmes that help to **eliminate legal barriers** that prevent displaced youth from accessing education and health care in host countries.

Recommendations on Partnership to Connect

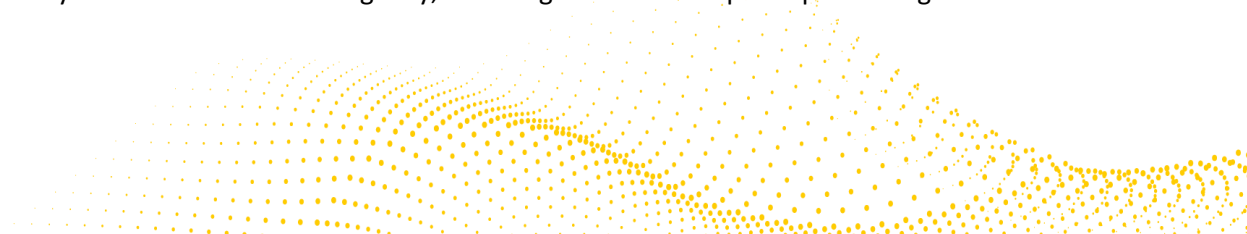
Fostering Global Youth Networking and further Reducing Barriers to Participation

Situation: The EU has prioritized youth networking and leadership development through a variety of programmes and projects creating networks of young leaders and facilitating collaboration and learning across regions. However, many youths, particularly those from rural and underprivileged backgrounds, are either **unaware of these opportunities** or face **significant challenges** that leads to limited participation from disadvantaged regions.

Challenges: Youth – especially marginalized youths - face **financial costs, visa challenges, language barriers**, and **logistical constraints** that prevent them from fully participating in global youth networking and exchange programs.

Actionable Recommendations:

- Launch **targeted awareness campaigns** and alumni and **mentorship programs** enhancing the outreach efforts to connect alumni with youth from underrepresented regions.
- Develop a **Global Youth Information Hub** accessible via the European Youth Portal, ensuring that young people are informed about opportunities for study, work, and volunteering abroad.
- Cover YSB members' **participations costs** to, among other, address the challenge of connectivity.
- Strengthen **partnerships with local youth organizations** to ensure that information about EU programs reaches rural and disadvantaged communities.
- Reduce financial and logistical barriers by introducing a **dedicated fund** to cover travel, visa costs, and participation fees for marginalized youth to ensure their full inclusion in international exchange and mobility programs.
- Provide **interpretation and translation services** to include non-English-speaking youth and promote multilingual platforms for wider accessibility.
- Expand **virtual exchange programs** by increasing the number of virtual mobility programs that connect youth across borders digitally, allowing for broader participation regardless of



geographical or financial constraints and ensuring that these virtual exchanges maintain the same level of quality in terms of mentorship, cultural exchange, and leadership development as in-person programs.

