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## **Youth in Development Cooperation**

### **Analysis of the targeted consultation of the Youth Action Plan in the EU External Action, January 2022**

**Project No. 2910/411278/1**



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## **1. The targeted consultation of the Youth Action Plan (YAP)**

### **1.1. Introduction**

The European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) are preparing an Action Plan for Youth in the framework of EU external action for the period 2022-2027, which is expected to be adopted in the form of a Joint Communication in September 2022.

The Youth Action Plan (YAP) will focus on youth participation and empowerment and could cover several thematic areas. It will provide policy guidance to be implemented at different levels (global, regional, national and local) through different programmes and projects and include innovative pilot actions targeting the participation and empowerment of young people. In terms of geographical scope, the YAP will cover all regions of EU external action.

In order to gather the views and contributions of relevant stakeholders to feed into the YAP, the European Commission conducted a targeted consultation during October and November 2021, composed of several activities involving global and regional youth organisations and civil society organisations working with youth, members of the Policy Forum on Development, EU Member States, relevant UN agencies and other multilateral organisations, the Youth Sounding Board for International Partnerships as well as other EU youth networks.

List of activities:

- **Online survey**, between 18 October and 28 November.
- Consultation activities led by the **Youth Sounding Board for International Partnerships**.
- **Meeting with civil society organizations (CSOs), local authorities associations (LA) and youth organizations in the framework of the Policy Forum on Development (PFD)**, 16 November.
- **Discussion with CONUN Working Party delegates**, 17 November.
- **Workshop** on the YAP during the **5<sup>th</sup> Eastern Partnership Youth Forum**, 23 November.
- **EU youth networks meeting**, 30 November.

In addition to the outputs of those actions, the consultation team has also received a number of other inputs such as position papers (12), general policy papers and clarifications from a variety of responding organisations, bringing together the different views and perspectives of an even wider range of stakeholders.

### **1.2. Actions of the targeted consultation**

#### **1.2.1. The online survey (including position papers)**

One of the components of the targeted consultation was an online survey to gather the views of a wide range of stakeholders. A total of 250 stakeholders were invited to participate, of which 60 responded and completed the survey between 18 October and 28 November 2021. This represents a response rate of 24%.

Civil society organisations of varying size, scope and geographical coverage formed the largest group of respondents (20), followed by 13 often very large multilateral organisations (mostly UN bodies). In total, 9 respondents were youth organisations, the same number as those that responded on behalf of an EU Member State, mostly specialised departments within Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs)). Local authority associations

were represented by 3 respondents and a total of 6 respondents could not assign themselves (by selecting "other"). Out of these 6 respondents, 2 are CSO platforms, and the other 4 can be identified as multilateral or International organisations.

For the list of participating organisations, please see **Annex 1**.

Based on the answers received, the youth focus of most of the participating organisations can be deduced from their willingness and general interest to **cooperate with youth organisations** (39), followed by the projects they run that are **exclusively targeted at young people** (28). For exactly half of the participating organisations (30), youth is **not one of the core areas** of their work, while this is the case for about one-third of all participating organisations (21). Fourteen of the 60 participating organisations also stated that they have a **youth department or a youth-led project** in their structure, while six out of 9 organisations, which label themselves as youth organisations (Question B), state that they are youth-led and have young people as their members.

The majority (39) of the participating organisations have a youth participation and empowerment strategy.

From what has been shared through the consultation process, the strategies mentioned are **rather broad, focusing mostly on the general needs and context of their target groups** including young people **in a certain context** (rather than organisational needs). For example:

- UN Women has a strong focus on engaging with youth in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) or intersectionality in increasing youth participation in decision making as a whole.
- UNESCO has a dedicated Operational Strategy on Youth (2014-2021) and commits resources to promoting youth participation in their programming; UNESCO also engages in knowledge brokering and policy influencing involving and concerning youth.
- UNFPA identifies youth ('adolescents') among their core target groups and has a number of programmes and strategies addressing youth directly, with reference to their health, their communities and their interaction with the world (global solidarity).

Overall, the majority (49) of participating organisations are active **internationally**, while the smallest group (16) is active at **continental** level and 30 of them report being active at **regional/multinational** level. The data provided via the EU survey does not allow for a clear distinction in terms of the countries, regions or continents in which the organisations operate, as the geographical focus is not static for many. Even in the case of those working at both, **national** (25) and **local** (19) level, the participating organisations are, with few exceptions, to be geographically flexible and open. In this regard, one organisation states to be active at all possible levels (national, regional/multilateral, continental, international), while only three out of 60 responding organisations have stated to be active just at one particular geographical level. This does not allow to draw any region or geographic-specific conclusions. In the following analysis of the findings (chapter 2) each chapter includes an overview of the answers received per each thematic area.

The questions are attached to this report as **Annex 2**.

### **1.2.2. Youth-Sounding Board inputs to the targeted consultation**

The Youth Sounding Board for International Partnerships (YSB) is a consultative body composed of an international group of 25 young people, who have been selected in June 2021 following the results of an open

application process for a period of 2 years. The YSB advises the Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen on the relevance and effectiveness of EU external action when it comes to youth.

The Youth Sounding Board for International Partnerships contributed significantly to the targeted consultation, including through the following inputs: defining the general approach; revising the questionnaire of the online survey; issuing recommendations on climate change as part of their involvement in COP 26, and leading their own complementary consultation targeting young people and youth organisations. They have covered five areas of action: Governance and Human Rights; Climate Justice and Environmental Action; Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action; Economic empowerment through education and skills; and Health and well-being.

In the area of Governance and Human Rights, the paper highlights the overall lack of representation of young people in decision-making at different levels, with a particular focus on disadvantaged young people such as LGBTQIA+ or young girls. Another priority of support is the overall lack of a democratic framework that is not conducive to active participation of young people, in some regions hostile to young activists, and does not provide enough space and opportunities for meaningful participation (age-based restrictions as well as a general lack of knowledge of formal political participation processes). In this context, it is also noted that newly introduced restrictions related to COVID-19 countermeasures (inequality in vaccines, public meetings, etc.) strongly hinder young people from accessing opportunities and participating in places and events where they could otherwise be given a platform to be heard.

In terms of Climate Justice and Environmental Action, the report focuses on the necessity of information sharing, research and support with specific regard to young people's concerns and needs (especially to the most vulnerable groups) in the area of Climate Justice and Environmental Action. This is suggested to be based on an interdisciplinary and intersectional matrix, that includes recognition of how populations from variety of backgrounds (gender and sexual orientation, race, age, geographic location, socio-economic background, and intellectual or physical abilities) may be adversely affected by climate change. Additional efforts are needed to ensuring the personal security and safety of climate activists as well as bridging the knowledge gap on matters of environmental sustainability

The areas of Peace, Security and Humanitarian Aid are considered pillars of youth engagement around the world, where an unprecedented number of youth organisations are dedicated to helping young people or engaging them in creating peaceful and just societies. According to the report, more attention needs to be paid to better representing young people at the institutional level, both in conflict resolution and in security dialogues as well as high-level decision-making in the humanitarian field. It is also necessary to ensure that more recognition and funding lead to greater security and better services.

In terms of Economic Empowerment through Education and Skills, the report highlights the increasing difficulties for young people to achieve financial stability due to global uncertainties and the complexity of the modern labour market. In this context, the current education system and policies are described as increasingly ineffective and outdated, failing to meet the demands of modern jobs and future industries. The measures taken so far do not reach the young people concerned and there is often a lack of pragmatic approaches to deliberately target young people, for example in advertising economically empowering opportunities to reach different segments of youth.

With regard to Health and Well-being, the report draws attention to the learnings from the COVID-19

pandemic, in particular its severe impact on young people's mental health, proving that sustainable development cannot be advanced without the prioritisation of human health. Overall, according to the report, young people face a wide range of challenges regarding their health, while COVID-19 pandemic is just the tip of the iceberg. Here the necessity of the integration of evidence-based data on the most prevalent health issues is noted, which affect young people. This is considered fundamental to empower the facilitation of the meaningful engagement of young people in policy-making in terms of advocating for the health of current and future generations.

The report further includes a set of recommendations under each respective area. It can be found as **Annex 3**.

### **1.2.3. Civil society organizations (CSO), local authorities associations (LA) and youth organisations consultation in the framework of the Policy Forum on Development (PFD)**

The CSO-LA Consultation activity on YAP took place on 16 November 2021 in the framework of the Policy Forum on Development (PFD). The online global meeting on YAP, was attended by 50 representatives of civil society organisations, local authority associations as well as youth organisations.

The consultation activity focused on three main questions:

1. What could be considered a successful Youth Action Plan? (Key issues to be accomplished by 2027)
2. What are the main challenges for meaningful youth participation? (EU Priority areas for biggest impact on participation and empowerment)
3. Which should be the thematic priority areas of the Youth Action Plan? (Linking areas of intervention to an overarching approach/framework/narrative)

With regard to the future perspectives of the YAP, participants pointed out the importance of the YAP providing a framework that enables meaningful (not only political) decision-making in partnership with youth by mainstreaming youth issues and perspectives in all issues/areas of work, not only those that are considered youth-specific. This inclusive plan should take into account a variety of age groups and the different backgrounds of the young people, and focus on those who are marginalised and in a vulnerable situation. In addition to guaranteed participation, the plan should have clear requirements and indicators for funding, monitoring and evaluation, transparency, governance, accountability and accessibility. Youth should therefore play a prominent role also in the monitoring and evaluation process.

In terms of priority areas that could have the greatest impact on participation and empowerment, participants believe that the EU needs to promote youth participation in its own decision-making spaces and advocate for youth participation in partner countries to counteract the low representation of youth and their limited political experience/expertise. Furthermore, meeting participants believe that investment in education and capacity building as well as overall funding and administrative support of youth organisations is necessary, in order to ensure more youth-led activities and better and more effective engagement policy debates. In this respect, creation and support of networks and efficient peer-to-peer mechanisms and mentorship is thought to be of great benefit. Addressing digital poverty, which is seen as a major challenge especially in rural areas, as well as addressing socio-economic barriers and inequalities by supporting the development of employability skills, providing natural and financial resources and continuing to work on the SDGs are also seen as necessary.

In terms of the thematic priorities of the YAP as a whole, it is considered a priority that the YAP ensures youth participation in political life and decision-making and gives them a stronger voice on important issues such as

climate change, gender equality, education and quality jobs, and social protection. There should also be a focus on supporting formal and non-formal education and recognising schools as multi-functional institutions that not only serve learning but also provide safe spaces, protection from violence, access to food and the reduction of child labour. The YAP should also link to the peace and security agenda and ensure that the impact of livelihoods on youth migration is considered. Incorporating the SDGs into the YAP would provide a robust global framework through which vulnerable groups can be better supported and gender equality promoted. YAP finally should be based on a multi-layered and multi-stakeholder approach that adequately addresses the needs of a very diverse target group through an effective civil society and public sector collaboration.

The report can be found as **Annex 4**.

#### **1.2.4. Consultation meeting with EU Youth Networks**

A meeting with youth networks took place on 30 November, involving 24 young representatives from youth networks including the Youth Sounding Board for International Partnerships (YSB), the European Development Days (EDDs) Young Leaders Programme, the Young European Ambassadors, the U-Report Youth Ambassadors, the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub, and the Special Adviser on Youth to the Commissioner for International Partnerships.

When picturing what would make a successful YAP, the members of the youth networks have noted that overall YAP should be seen as a tool for more meaningful youth participation, that is inclusive and builds linkages and is relevant to issues of importance both at the national and local levels. YAP should be inclusive, provide a base for better reach out to young and engage young people across a variety of thematic and policy areas and use in this regard a structured consultation process that builds on evidence and needs of young people.

The main challenges identified by the members of youth networks are mostly related to poor and ineffective participatory approaches followed by limited information on a variety of issues, e.g. the scientific information needed to understand climate change, but also highly restricted access to the internet. Issues related to different age definitions/limits have been also mentioned as a major obstacle by the youth networks, as age limitation is too often encountered by young people when they want to engage in participation mechanisms and projects (one may be considered too young or too old). Last but not least, the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions was also mentioned as a challenge in terms of widening the existing inequalities.

Meeting participants further listed a number of thematic priority areas for the YAP, including Climate Change, Children and Adolescent Health and Well-being, Entrepreneurship, Human rights and other.

The report can be found as **Annex 5**.

#### **1.2.5. CONUN Working Party delegates recommendations for the YAP**

The United Nations Working Party (CONUN) of the Council of the EU develops common EU policy on UN issues of common interest to EU Member States. The working party provides recommendations and guidance on strategic EU policy objectives and thematic issues at the UN. It coordinates Member States' priorities, through which it contributes to the process of setting long-term policy goals.

At its meeting on 17 November 2021, CONUN included a point of discussion on the YAP. Contributions made by Member States at the meeting, as well as in writing, have been collected by the EEAS in the format of a



report including recommendations for the YAP at multilateral level.

Discussion in CONUN focused on three key issues related to the overall content of the YAP and its specific priorities. In CONUN's view, the YAP would be most successful if it can pave the way for a youth-centred approach, where youth are regularly consulted and can engage (including at the level of policy and decision-making) in areas that concern them and that are applied along the full spectrum of EU external action. It should bridge the gap between commitments and actions taken and contribute to achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. Great attention should be paid to the education-training-employment continuum, with a special focus on the most marginalised groups of young people. Youth focused actions should not only aim at empowering young people, but also at enabling dialogue with young people in third countries, with the aim of promoting European values, as in Art. 2 TEU. Mainstreaming the youth dimension across all sectors and policies is seen as an important outcome of the YAP, ensuring that the youth dimension and youth engagement are adequately taken into account in the ongoing discussion on the EU's strategic autonomy.

With regard to challenges in participation for young people, CONUN notes a lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of young people's participation in multilateral affairs and vice versa, that young people are not sufficiently informed about how the multilateral system works. CONUN believes that more innovative ways of cooperation and interaction are needed that offer real and pragmatic opportunities for young people to engage in multilateral fora. Youth organisations often lack the resources or platform to fully participate in and influence decision-making, so more needs to be invested in young people's capacity, leadership and agency to move beyond tokenism. Inclusivity, according to CONUN, should entail a complete package that enables young people not only to be heard but also to contribute effectively to the implementation of the UN agenda, including access to information and travel opportunities to participate in UN and other multilateral fora. Enhanced opportunities for exchange and sharing of best practises among young delegates are seen as crucial to learn about the reality and principles of the EU. As many of those values are largely related to UN principles and goals, this would also help bring the UN closer to youth. Last but not least, CONUN believes that the EU and its Member States should promote concrete actions to implement the recommendations of the UNSG's report *Our Common Agenda*, focusing on the main outcomes that could be presented at the 2023 Summit on Future Generations.

In terms of the overall priorities of the YAP, CONUN considers the achievement of the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda as among those being most important. High priority should be given to digitalisation, gender equality and the promotion of human rights and democratic values, while civic engagement, volunteering, international solidarity and social entrepreneurship, as well as learning about other cultures and ways of living and thinking should also be considered. After the COVID 19 pandemic, issues such as access to education, health (especially mental health) and employment opportunities have again become pressing concerns for young people, which need particular attention. Cross-cutting issues, especially with regard to marginalised youth, should be prioritised, also taking into account themes from the Conference on the Future of Europe and the Lisbon+21 Declaration.

The report can be found as **annex 6**.

#### **1.2.6. Workshop on YAP during the 5th Eastern Partnership Youth Forum**

A dedicated workshop on the YAP was held on 23 November in the framework of the 5<sup>th</sup> Eastern Partnership

Youth Forum (organised by the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU, the European Commission Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and SALTO Resource Centres).

The workshop was attended mostly by young people from Eastern Partnership countries and EU Member States.

The participants of the workshop stressed that the YAP will be successful if it is inclusive, builds on what has been achieved so far (evidence-based, covering existing gaps) and brings overall an added value to youth in relation to their "specific" situation of being young. Increased participation of young people across programmes and budget lines was mentioned as an important indicator of success, provided that young people are perceived as resources and can actively contribute to change and be part of decision-making processes.

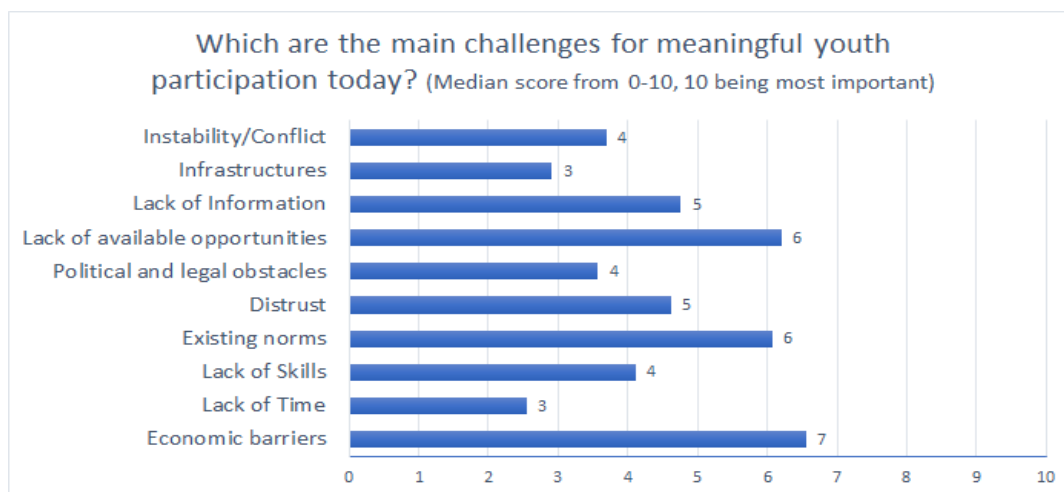
In terms of challenges to meaningful participation, participants felt that one of the biggest challenges was the inefficiency of communication channels/strategies, as well as inadequate 'packaging' of information about opportunities for participation. In this context, a variety of problems resulting from low efficiency of communication were mentioned. These included first and foremost a general mistrust of the impact of their participation (being used for other purposes), lack of skills and knowledge about 'appropriate' participation, tokenism & instrumentalisation (structures that pretend to promote youth participation, but in reality have no impact on them), and overall very limited mutual trust between young people and public institutions. In addition, unemployment was also mentioned, which seems to prevent many from participating due to lack of means.

The report includes finally a set of recommendations to address the challenges mentioned above. It can be found attached to this report as **annex 7**.

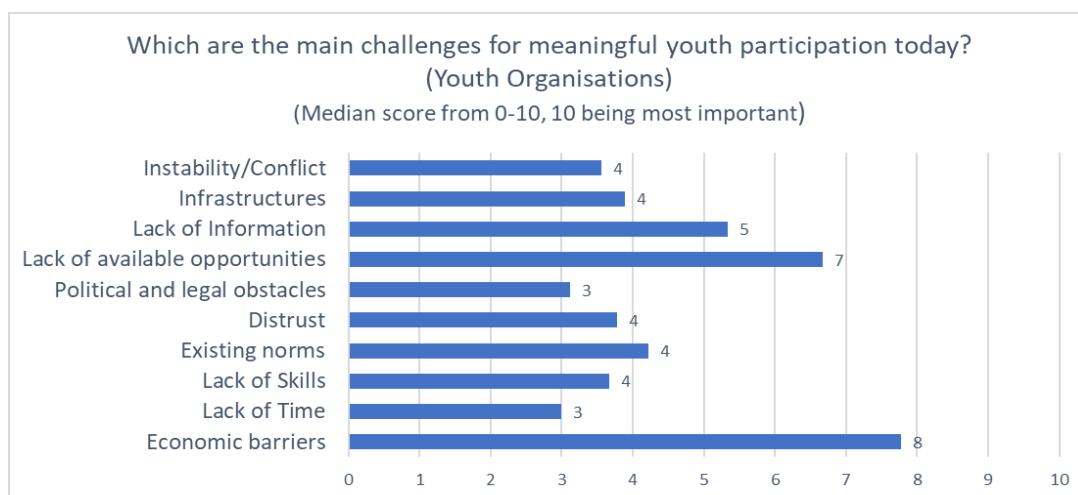
## 2. Overall analysis of the YAP targeted consultation

The analysis below begins with a brief overview of the responses received for each area/question via the online questionnaire closed questions. This is followed by a summary of the main issues raised either in the form of individual comments (via the online questionnaire), in the individual position papers or as input of one of the consultation activities carried out by the EC and EEAS and described in the previous section.

### 2.1. Main challenges for meaningful youth participation



The median score (from 0-10, 10 being the most important) given by all participants together shows that the three challenges **economic barriers** (7), **existing norms** (6) and **lack of opportunities** (6) clearly dominate the other areas on the first level. At the second level, the three challenges of **distrust** in public institutions, **lack of information** about participation opportunities and **lack of skills** to participate are listed at a medium level. Other areas, such as **lack of time** or problems related to the overall lack of adequate **infrastructures** enabling participation are not seen as key challenges, while the **instability/conflict** at country level and **political and legal obstacles** also are rated as not playing a major role. This picture changes when looking only at the challenges mentioned by those indicating to be youth-led organisations (9). In this case, **economic barriers** (8 on a median score of 0-10) largely outrank all areas, while all other areas are, except the lack of available opportunities (7) and information (5), more or less equally seen as mid-level challenges.

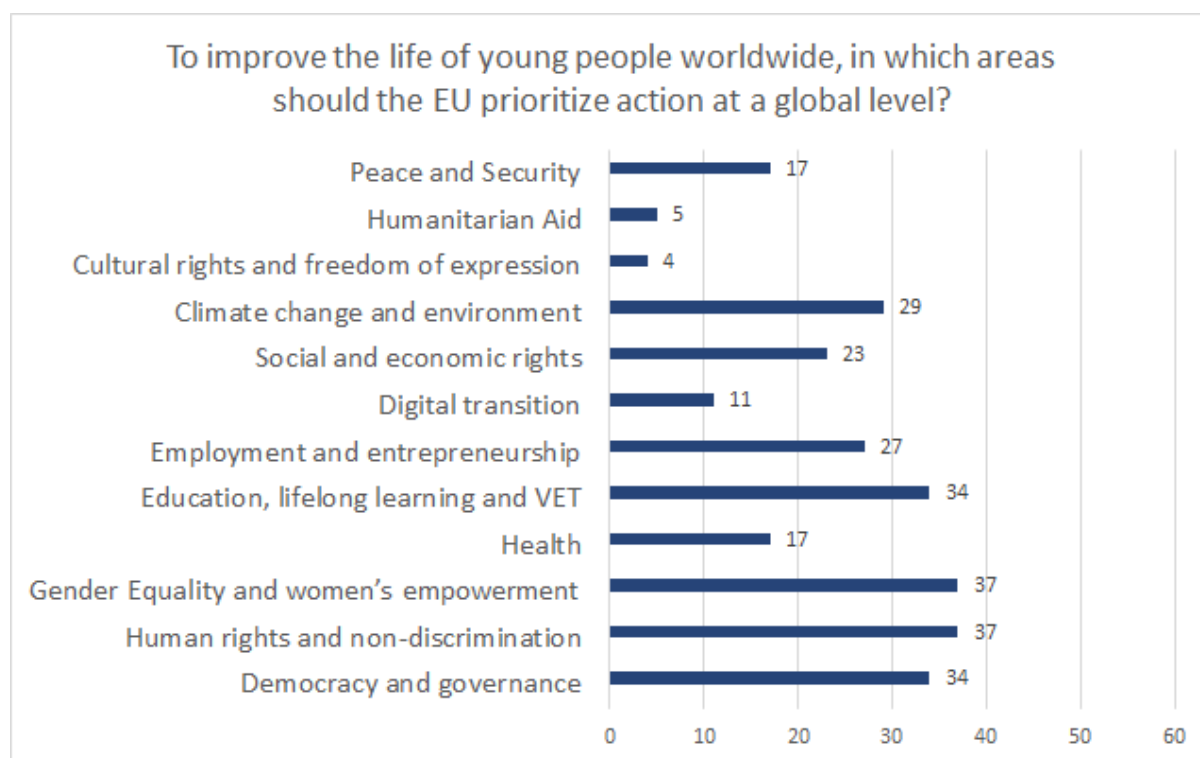


Most of the additional comments related to challenges for meaningful youth participation pertained to the **lack of available opportunities for youth participation** and related issues (lack of information, infrastructure and political obstacles to effective participation). **The high cost of consultations** (making youth participation meaningful) was noted as a possible obstacle, as was the fact that in countries/locations where public consultations and inclusion of non-governmental voices in policy-making is low, there is **less space for meaningful youth participation**. The **gender dimension** of consultations was highlighted as very important and the fact that gender-focused activities are more challenging. **Inclusion of minority and marginalised groups** was underlined as key to meaningful participation. Respondents further noted a number of **institutional obstacles to participation**, resulting from the governments and institutions lack of will and means to engage with youth. One respondent noted that some EU Member States are not eager to engage with youth and civil society consultations (both internally and in external action).

Some comments made in the online survey related to the issue of lack of confidence and skills, including the importance of youth skills and competences (e.g. language). In this respect young people's **capacities and opportunities to participate in consultations** are seen as equally important as the recognition of those competences.

Participants in the consultation activities highlight in particular three major challenges to meaningful participation: 1) insufficient awareness and understanding by public institutions of the importance of young people's participation, both locally and at national and international levels, 2) lack of skills and competences (leadership, agency) of young people with regard to their participation and, last but not least, 3) a general lack of structures and frameworks conducive to enabling and promoting young people's participation beyond tokenism. The latter, according to the consultation reports reviewed, also seems to have a lot to do with the ineffectiveness of communication channels that address young people as partners of change and not just targets of change, failing to use the right language and approach in mobilising young people. Another key issue repeatedly mentioned concerns the resources "for" participation, which are lacking, whether due to a generally problematic employment situation that prevents young people from investing (time, money. etc.) in their own participation or due to the low financial resources allocated by the public authorities for this purpose.

## 2.2. Improve the life of young people worldwide



Based on responses from over 50% of participants, **gender equality** (37) and **human rights and non-discrimination** (37) are clearly the areas that participants believe the EU should prioritise in its action, closely followed by **democracy and governance** (34) and **education, lifelong learning and VET** (34). **Climate change** was mentioned by almost half of the group (29) as an area that should be prioritised, on the same level as the other four areas, on par with employment and entrepreneurship (27). Around 25-30% of respondents identified **social and economic rights**, **health** and **peace and security** as relevant priorities. The area of **cultural rights and freedom of expression** (4) was selected as a priority by very few organisations, followed by the areas of **humanitarian aid** (5) and **digital transformation** (11), which were got slightly higher rates.

Numerous comments related to the **interrelations between the various priority areas** listed under the survey question, as well as to the transversal and holistic nature of youth policy.

Several respondents both through direct comments provided via the online survey and during the consultation meetings noted that as **all priorities listed in this consultation process are interconnected**; prioritising is not as important as finding different levers of applying them strategically to achieve broader transformation. It is mentioned that some of the issues are **contextual and local**, but many others, such as peace and security, climate, digitalisation are **'borderless' and global**. Respondents suggest that **a comprehensive approach** to increase youth participation is crucial, while an enabling environment and institutions to support and promote youth participation should be built in all areas in parallel. Improving the life of young people requires **looking outside the areas traditionally defined as 'youth-relevant'**, and looking at causes of problems/challenges and not only at symptoms. According to some respondents, **all areas require equal targeted intervention**, in line with local needs, and some of the areas listed should be **mainstreamed** within all youth approaches, e.g. gender or environment. According to them, **participation in itself can be key to improve the life of young people** in all areas listed, e.g. through support for youth councils and for young people to experience exchanges, cooperation, cultural and civic action in a European and international context.

Generally, it is considered most important to ensure that disregarding the focus on specific priorities, any intervention and programming is mindful of the diversity of youth groups, as youth is not a homogeneous group. Youth can identify with a range of identities, movements, and issues. They do not live single lives and often face interconnected forms of oppression and discrimination. Interventions that are cognizant of these complex realities are more responsive to and supportive of young people.

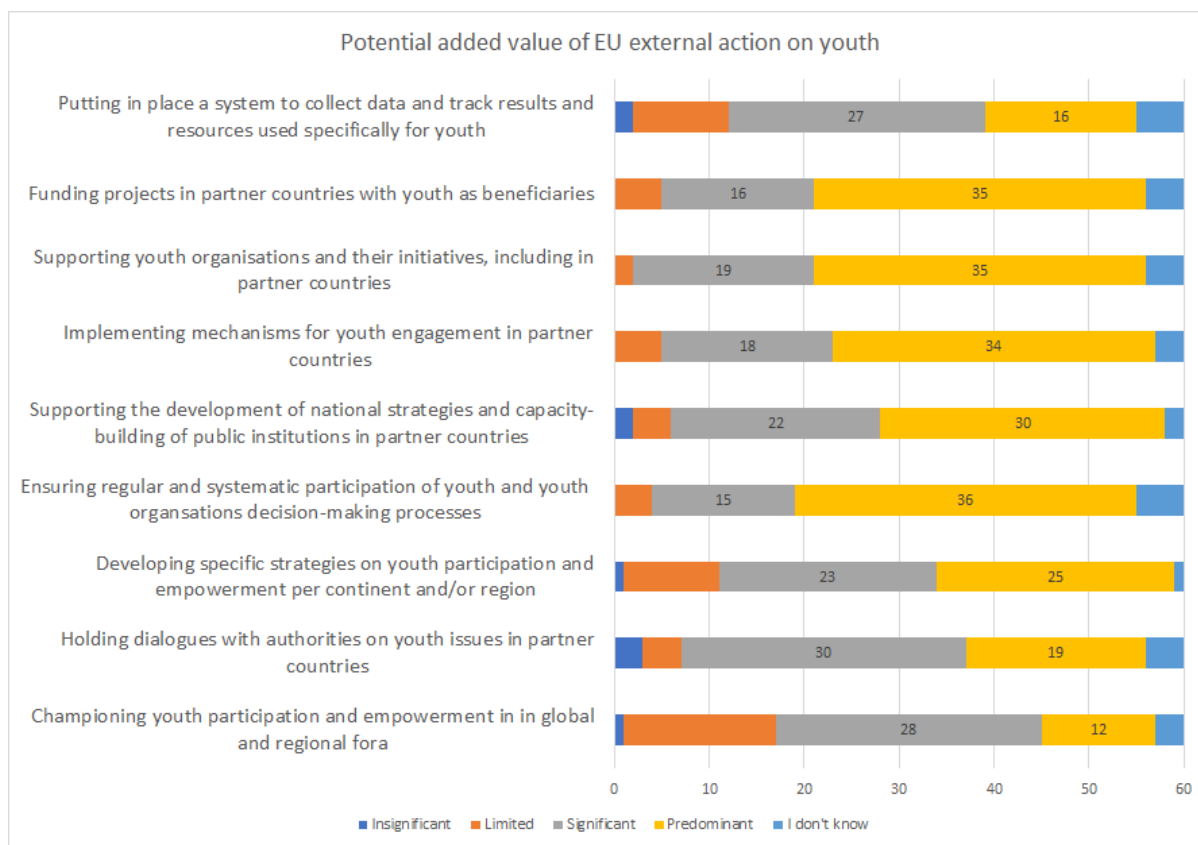
Some issues related to health have been noted by some respondents. **Long-term mental and physical health** is identified as a key priority but also an **impact factor on the opportunity to participate**. **Good health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**, is also noted as a prerequisite to all forms of participation and life improvement, notably in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Besides gender equality noted as a prerequisite for meaningful participation, a range of comments were made related to the importance of tackling **discrimination and human rights violations** and the need to promote **human rights** as central to EU youth action.

Issues of employment and **education were also highlighted**. A competence-based approach in education was suggested as particularly relevant to youth.

Finally, issues of **connectivity and Information and Communications Technology (ICT)** are listed among essential needs and characteristics of today's youth.

### 2.3. Potential added value of EU external action on youth



Almost all areas of potential added value have been graded as very relevant (with 80% and above voting for both categories of “predominant” and “significant” together). Five main areas, with slightly different weighting (between 85-90%) are graded to have high potential added value on youth. Above all, the area of **supporting youth organisations and their initiatives** is graded most relevant by 54 participants (counting “predominant” and “significant” together), followed by **implementing mechanisms for engagement** and **supporting the development of national strategies and capacity building of public institutions** with both being graded by 52 participants each. Still about 85% of all respondents (51) also graded both the areas of **funding projects with youth as their beneficiaries** and **ensuring regular and systematic participation of youth and youth organisations in policy making** very high, while the latter received the highest rating (36) as a predominant aspect. The other remaining areas have all been graded slightly less, the lowest being the area of **Championing youth participation and empowerment in global and regional fora**, with 40 out of 60 participants mentioning this area as significant (28) and predominant (12), though overall seen as rather less relevant compared to the other areas.

A number of comments received related to the added value of EU external action on youth focused on the need for the EU to **ensure that youth organisations and young people are regularly and systematically included in relevant consultations and decision-making processes on policies and programmes**. This was framed both in EU and global terms, as well as national and local context (i.e. EU working with partner countries on improving youth participation at national and community level). Some respondents suggested that the EU needs to work more closely with partner countries to **ensure that they are strictly adhering to the EU approaches in youth participation**. **Close collaboration between the EU and local civil society partners** and local youth organisations and networks was also indicated as key. The need to reach out beyond the usual

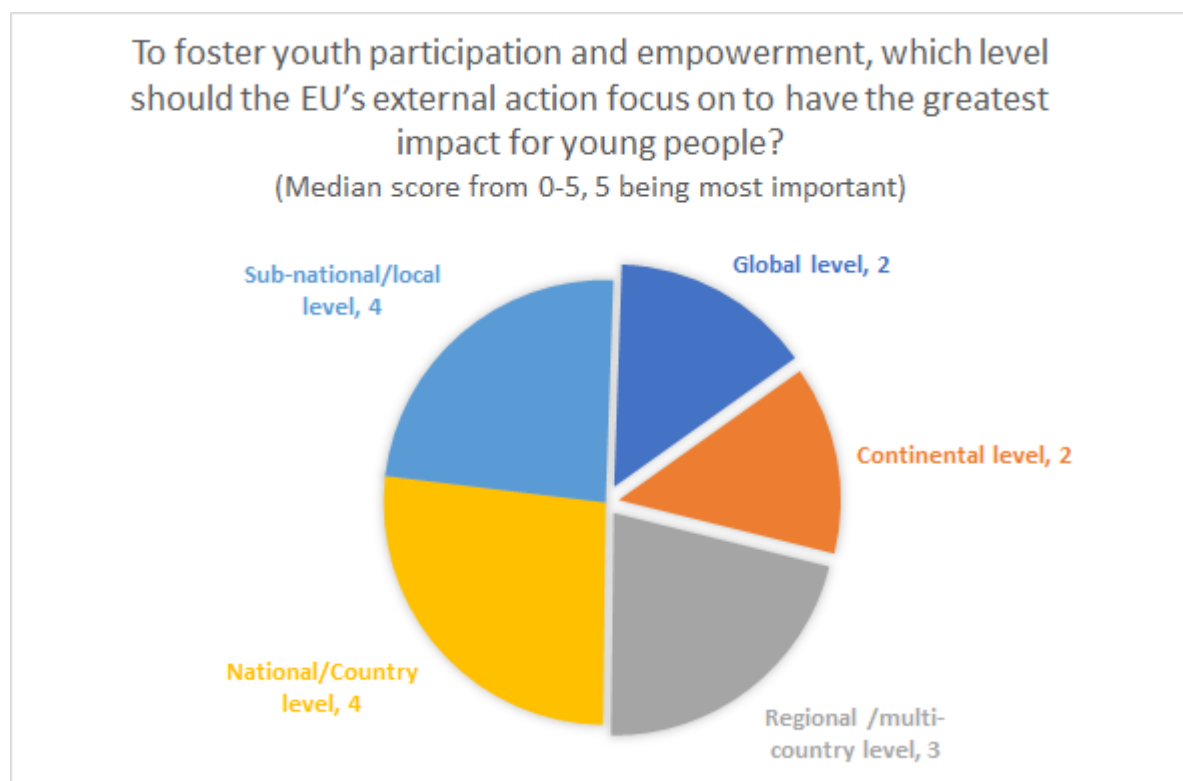
'youth bubble' of each country to assure **wider outreach** was also noted.

A number of comments related to the EU implementing mechanisms for youth engagement in their programmes and strategies and the EU funding projects in partner countries with youth as beneficiaries. Issues of economic development, including **convergence of multi-sectoral (PPP) approaches** in conducting consultations, and establishing mechanisms for **youth involvement** as well as **EU support for economic growth** were also outlined as essential. One respondent pointed out that the core task of the EU should not be generally to help youth directly in some concrete domains and in participation as whole, but to focus particularly on areas that discourage them from migrating.

Additional comments were received on the importance of **collecting data and tracking results** as well as committing more research related to youth and civic engagement.

From a horizontal perspective, respondents stressed that another important added value of the EU's external action in the youth field is mainly the EU's ability to provide relevant funding, set clear targets and apply standardised monitoring mechanisms (including targets, performance indicators and gender- and age-specific data collection), set up governance structures to monitor implementation and ensure regular, transparent and accessible communication. This could enable youth organisations in particular to operate more freely and carry out their activities more autonomously, while the YAP could help remove the obstacles and thresholds imposed on them in obtaining funding, including from foreign sources. In addition, experience in supporting capacity building was also mentioned as an important EU added value in the field of external action, as well as in ensuring improved youth engagement at grassroots level, the creation of grassroots bodies and platforms upstream, including the updating of youth maps in the local/national/regional context.

#### 2.4. Levels for fostering youth participation and empowerment



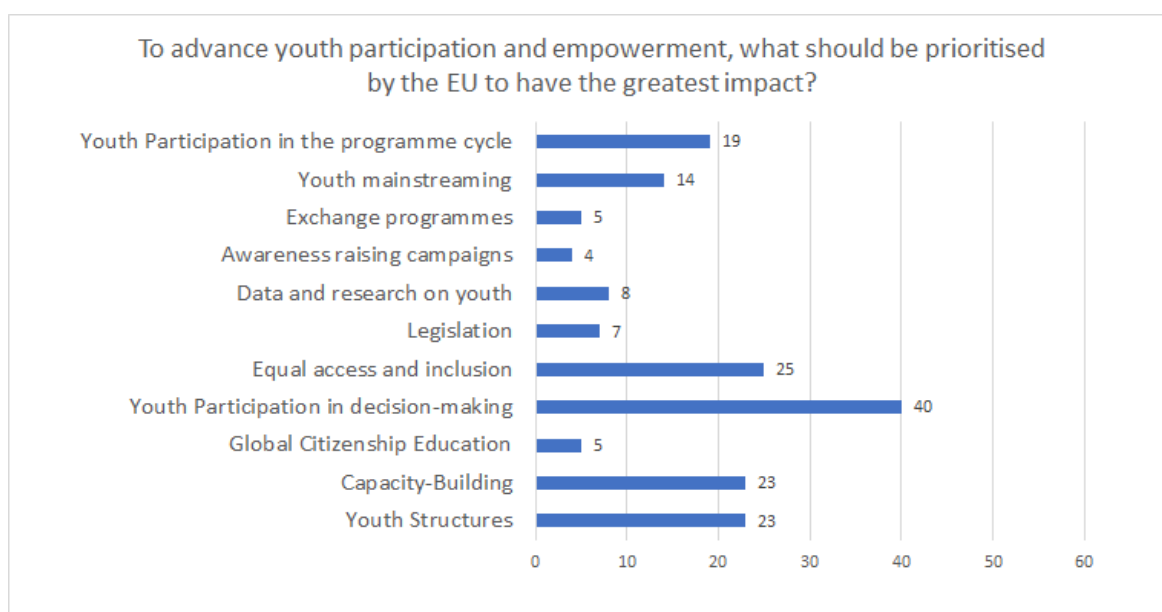
Most participants indicate that EU external action should mainly focus on the **national** and **sub-national levels**



when it comes to achieving the greatest impact for young people. On a scale of 1 to 5, these two levels were equally referred to as the main levels by over 50% of all participants (median score of 4 for each level), followed by the **regional level** with a median score of 3. The remaining levels **continental** and **global** each received a median score of 2.

Besides the above, no specific comments were made concerning EU focus at geographical level.

## 2.5. Priorities for youth participation and empowerment



When it comes to specific actions, frameworks or structures that promote youth participation and empowerment, participants overwhelmingly (66%) indicated that **youth participation in decision-making** is the priority area where the EU should have the greatest impact in promoting youth participation and empowerment. This is followed by four other areas mentioned by about 30-40% of the participants, namely: **equal access and inclusion**, **youth structures**, **capacity building** and **youth participation in the programme cycle**. **Youth mainstreaming** as a priority approach was mentioned by 23% of the participants, while the other areas were mentioned by only 10% or less of the participants.

Most additional comments under this area have gone **across the priority issues listed above**, suggesting that a joined-up approach is required. Issues of **youth participation in the programme cycle** were highlighted, as were youth structures and youth mainstreaming. **Existing EU mechanisms** for youth participation in external action, such as the Special Advisor on Youth and the Youth Sounding Boards were complimented as important contributions to the promotion of youth participation. Issues of **equal access and inclusion** were also referred to, in the context of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)-affected communities that should be structurally and meaningfully engaged in policy and decision-making, service provision and all relevant actions impacting them, provision of services in local languages and the need to eliminate potential barriers to youth participation with opportunities for engagement factoring in specific needs and backgrounds, especially the “hard-to-reach”.

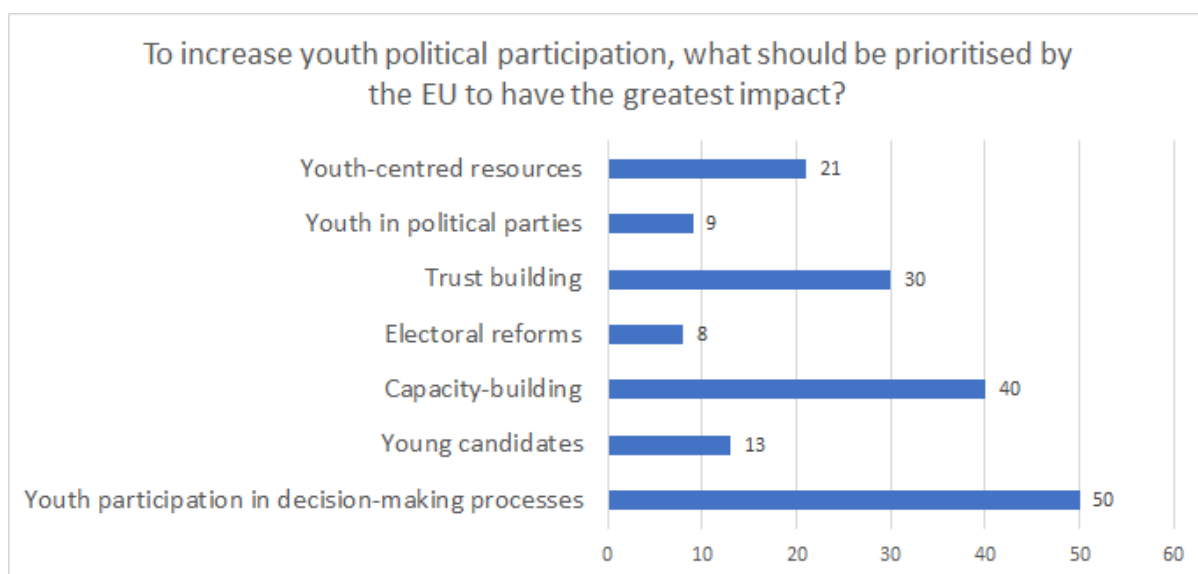
The issue of **capacity-building and youth participation in decision-making** were also referred to with suggestions that the EU should engage young people in decision-making spaces and recognise them as experts in their own lived experiences and that the EU should organise a regular interface between young people and decision-makers, including follow-up opportunities for young people to hear the rationale for why their

suggestions have or have not been followed. Beyond the list of priorities listed under the question, a number of comments related to economic development, **growth, incomes and employment, as well as the needs of other generations (other than youth) that need to be addressed.**

Meaningful participation is considered successful when young people (especially the vulnerable and young girls) have the opportunity to help shape agendas and processes, co-design safe spaces, and are engaged in intergenerational leadership across all policy processes through appropriate mechanisms. And where youth are not used as tokens or for legitimising processes in which they are not meaningfully involved. This requires creating mechanisms and strategies that ensure power dynamics in decision-making spaces do not prevent youth participation, keeping in mind that "mere" youth representation does not equate to meaningful participation and that youth groups (from diverse backgrounds) should always have the opportunity to continuously share feedback and engage in strategic dialogues.

To this end, respondents noted that youth issues and perspectives should be included in all issues/areas of work, not just those considered youth-specific. An inclusive plan should ensure coverage of broad age groups (i.e., children and youth), marginalised groups (i.e., people with disabilities, migrants, LGBTQI+), and people in vulnerable situations representing a diversity of backgrounds and geographic locations. A comprehensive YAP will therefore cover not only youth participation in policymaking, but also aspects of youth entrepreneurship and employment, culture and sport, and more, and will be open to involving young people in all policy cycles, including the monitoring and evaluation.

## 2.6. Youth political participation



In terms of increasing youth political participation, the vast majority of survey participants (50) believe that the EU should prioritise **youth participation in decision-making processes** to achieve the greatest impact. **Capacity-building** follows as the second priority, mentioned by 40 participants, and **building trust** as the third priority by half of the participants. **Youth-centred resources** were mentioned by about 20 participants. All other areas, mainly those related to active engagement in political structures, are considered less relevant by many, as they were mentioned by very few participants (between 8-12) as a priority area.

Under this area, issues of **equality, inclusion and diversity**, including gender equality, have received notable attention. Empowering those already politically active was noted by the respondents as less important than

empowering the socially excluded. According to a number of respondents, the EU should find ways to reach the socially excluded, engage them, and raise awareness of the EU's functions. Formal political processes should be designed with the objective of involving and making them accessible to young women and men, including with respect to how outcomes are communicated to youth audiences. It was also noted as essential for the EU to reinforce youth programmes' visibility and accessibility for marginalised youth – in particular, by active outreach and engagement strategies and campaigns. This may include designing youth-friendly, online and participatory political processes and/or investing in innovative approaches and incentives to address and encourage youth who are not already involved in the political or civic space.

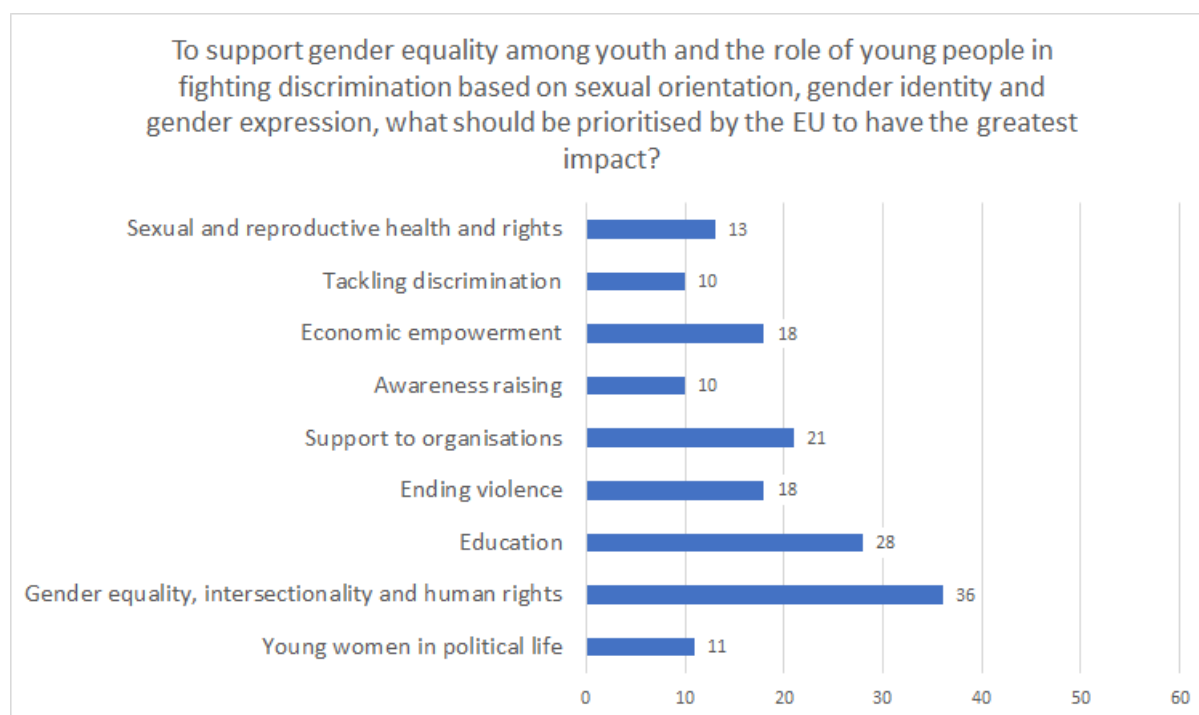
Previously stressed issues of **promoting various forms of participation of youth at all levels** were also present in the comments received, including the need to promoting EU dialogue with youth inside EU and in multilateral fora/bilateral relations, strengthening and modernising dialogue and cooperation with youth within the EU policy framework, and the need for the EU to cooperate with partner countries to make sure that all forms of youth engagement are considered in formal politics and decision-making. The idea of a youth quota (percentage) of reserved seats for youth participation in the political arena across the partner countries was also outlined.

Issues pertaining to **youth in political parties and youth candidates** were also addressed, including the notion that political parties often work as gatekeepers for youth inclusion. It was noted that political youth organisations should have more resources, parties should be reformed to increase inclusivity and the dialogues between youth and decision-makers should be strengthened.

Overall, it was noted that young people are underrepresented in formal avenues of political participation, whether for cultural or formal reasons (e.g. younger age is traditionally considered immature or not formally eligible to run for office) or lack of experience. This leaves them with only informal participation spaces, such as protest actions and external campaigns, to work for change. However, these spaces can be very unsafe, which is why it is important to ensure that they are adequately supported and protected in their civic (political) engagement. YAP should also ensure that intersectionality is a common thread running through all youth processes, especially in the context of youth political participation, in terms of youth influence, education, access to technology and safe digital spaces.

Other than issues on the priority list, two key areas of additional comments emerged, also highlighted in previous questions - **the issue of developing young people's capacity and skills to participate and that of information about participation**. Some respondents suggested that the EU should further support personal and professional development for young people in current and future leadership roles, and YAP should focus on volunteering to allow young people to acquire various skills, including soft and core skills, as these are developed through practice, and support related programmes. Education for democratic and political participation should start early in schools/universities. It was suggested that this should stress the importance of local politics (not just national and regional) and that it is crucial to develop a greater understanding of the role and purpose of the participation of young people in decision-making through training programmes provided to policy-makers at the European Commission and EU Delegations. It was also noted as key for the EU to provide youth with the knowledge and information needed to engage with the political space.

## 2.7. Gender equality and discrimination based on sexual orientation



**Gender equality, intersectionality and human rights** were identified by most survey respondents (36) as the main priority areas on which the EU should focus to support youth equality and its role in combating discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. This is followed by **education** (28) and **support for organisations** (21) as the second and third priorities mentioned by survey respondents. **Ending violence** and **economic empowerment** are considered equally important by 18 participants, while all other suggested areas were mentioned by 10-13 participants. In this regard, **awareness raising** was mentioned by 10 respondents in this framework, while **promoting change in a structural context** is obviously given much more importance.

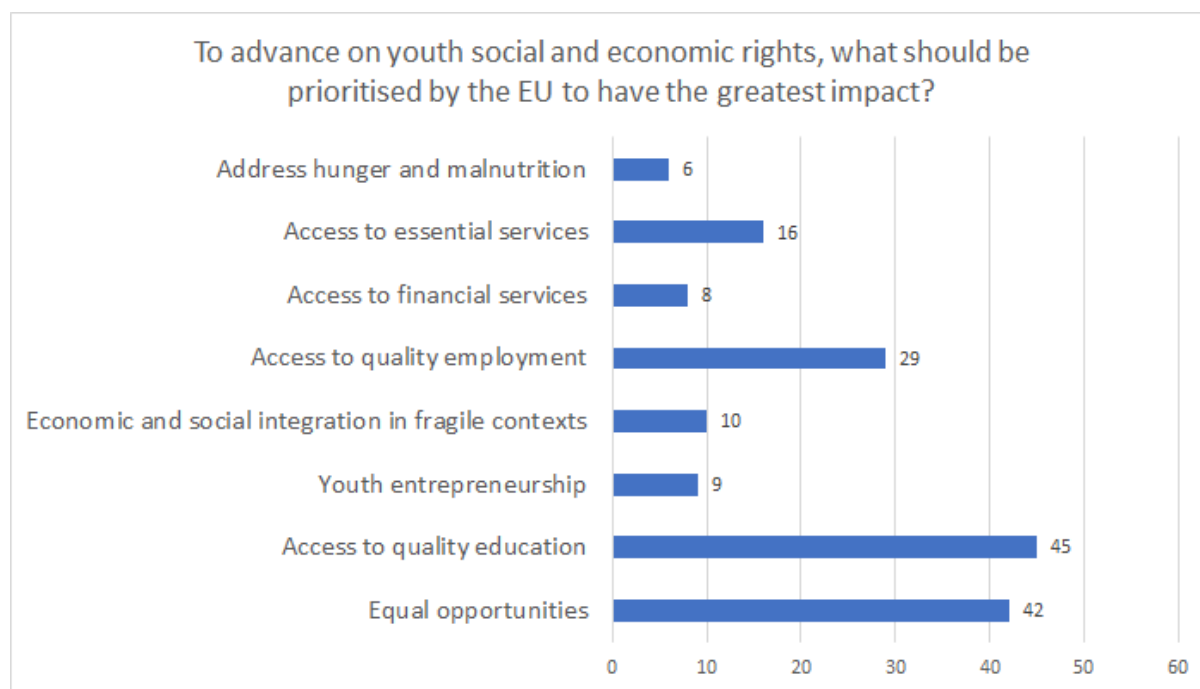
The majority of comments under this area run **across the priority areas** listed above, with most comments devoted to gender equality, intersectionality and human rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), tackling discrimination and young women in political life.

Numerous comments pointed to the interconnectedness issues, noting that **SRHR are human rights**, and a precondition to gender equality, that **youth are the most affected** by the negative consequences of a lack of access to quality SRHR services, and that safeguarding the rights and well-being of sexual and gender minorities requires **dedicated financial resources**. Some comments suggested direct ways of addressing the situation such as **supporting youth and youth-led organisations with feminist mandates**, provision of **comprehensive sexual education** and **supporting data and analysis of intersectionality for informed investments** toward youth.

A number of comments related to systemic support through **enabling environment** including at the institutional, legal, policy and community levels against discriminatory gender norms and practices and **gender transformative approach**, which goes beyond addressing “symptoms” to explicitly **tackle the root causes of gender inequality**, particularly unequal gender power relations.

**Education** received some attention in the comments, including the notion that education systems need to be fully inclusive and gender-transformative, and that **inclusive education** plays a significant role in bridging gender gaps, raising awareness on discriminations as well as offering opportunities and safe spaces to otherwise vulnerable young people.

## 2.8. Youth social and economic rights



In order to promote the social and economic rights of young people, the vast majority of respondents believe that the EU should support **access to quality education** (45) and **equal opportunities** (42). **Access to quality employment** was also mentioned as a priority area by almost half of the respondents, followed by access to **essential services**, mentioned by 16 respondents. All other suggested areas were mentioned by only 6-10 respondents, with **tackling hunger and malnutrition** mentioned by only 6 respondents.

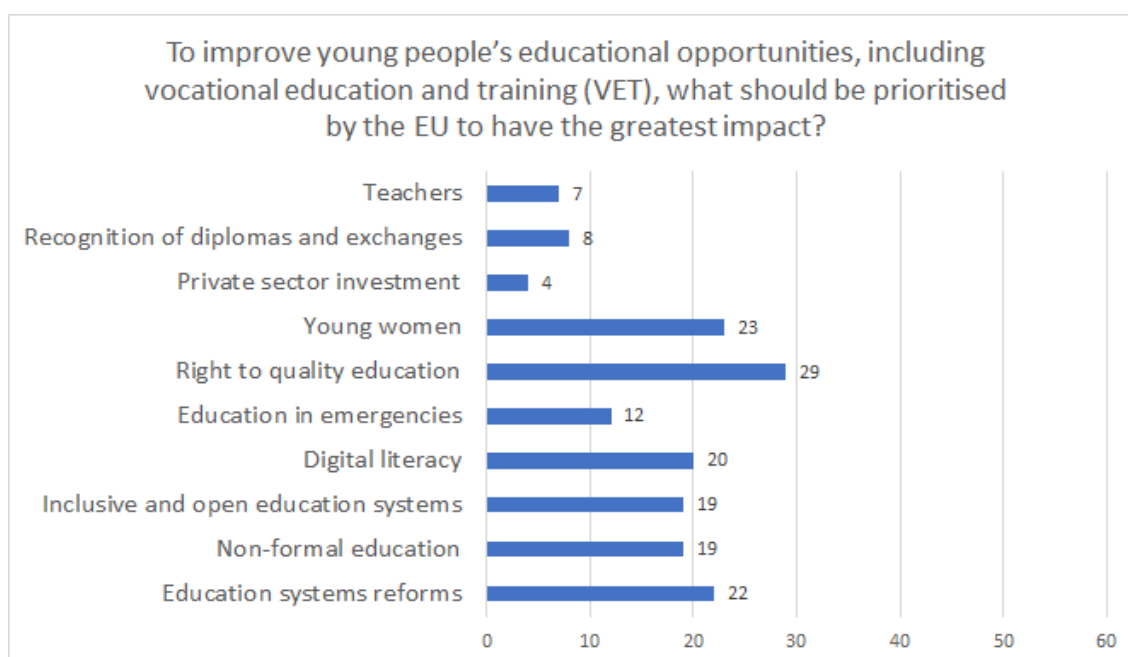
Most comments related to youth and social rights pertained to a wide range of **aspects of economic and social rights running across the priority areas**.

Overall, it is noted that in the face of global economic uncertainty and the complexity of the modern labour market, financial stability is steadily declining. This goes hand in hand with the deterioration of school systems in many developing countries where education policies are outdated or even on the verge of collapse.

Some comments related to the holistic nature of economic and social rights, noting that mainstreaming young people's social and economic rights across EU international engagement, as with any human right, is crucial. Some comments related to specific forms of support such as **youth entrepreneurship and skills development opportunities, employment creation, social protection, rights at work, minimum wage and social dialogue**. Connections between education and skill were noted - i.e. **quality education that is inclusive leading to decent jobs, technical, entrepreneurial and life skills** and **life-long and childhood development through inclusive quality education** all contribute to social and economic rights. Furthermore, issues of anti-discrimination and **equal opportunities** were noted, especially **tackling economic and wealth inequalities** and changing systems such as **credit scores** that may discriminate against young people.

In addition, issues of health, such as **access to high quality, affordable, accessible essential healthcare services**, including sexual and reproductive health services, as well as the importance of working with **marginalized groups** were outlined. **Lack of connectivity** was also highlighted as cause for exclusion - closing the digital divide requires global cooperation and leadership that the YAP can provide.

## 2.9. Education and vocational education and training (VET)



The **right to quality education** is seen by almost half of respondents (29) as the most important EU priority area for improving educational opportunities for young people, including vocational education and training (VET). Five priority areas, including **young women**, **education system reforms**, **digital literacy**, **non-formal education (NFE)** and **inclusive and open education systems**, were mentioned by around 30% of respondents in almost equal numbers (between 19 and 23). Other areas were mentioned by only 7-12 respondents, while the area of **private sector investment** does not seem to be considered a priority for improving young people's educational opportunities by the vast majority (only 4).

Questions related to **education systems reform** were addressed by a number of respondents. Some noted that in many countries there is an **urgent need for education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems reforms** and that **multiple and Flexible learning Pathways (MFPs)** are required to enable young people to complete secondary education and transition to further education. Disparities between **young people's lives in the Global North** and those in the **Global South were noted**, as was **scarcity in higher education in the Global South**, together with the need to secure **the right to free and quality education** and contemporary forms of **digital literacy**. **Teacher development** needs to be integrated into the reforms of education systems, as does inclusion in education.

While educational opportunities cannot always provide a quick fix (much needed, in many cases), additional pragmatic approaches are required. To better promote economically empowering opportunities, different segments of youth should be reached through the use of targeted and youth-friendly languages/approaches. In this regard, especially in terms of education and skills, more attention needs to be paid to entrepreneurship and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) as promising opportunities, according to

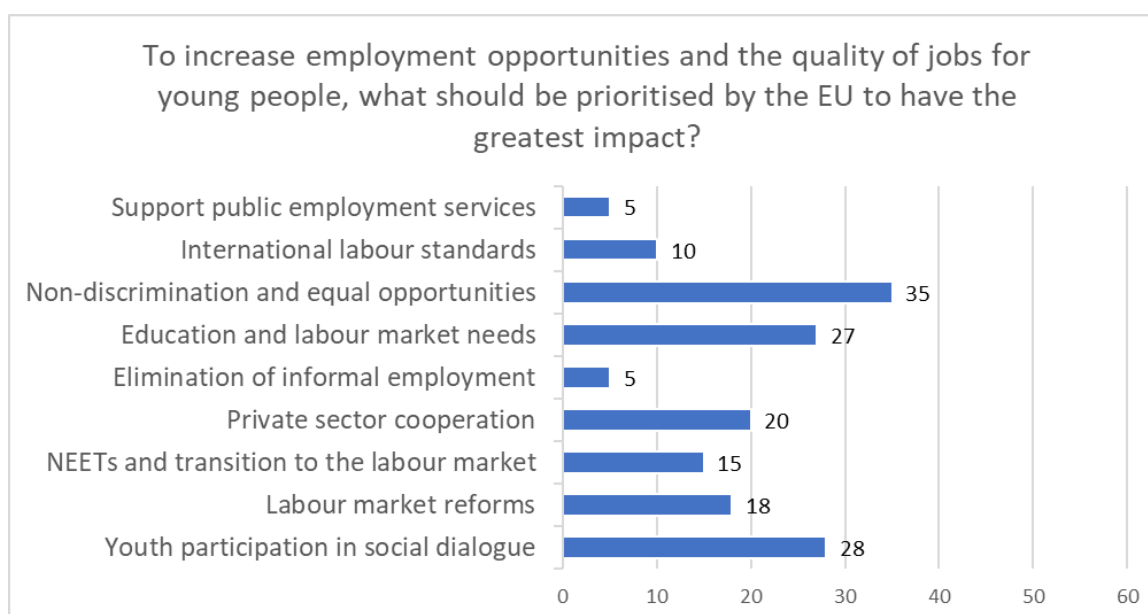
respondents.

Furthermore, issues of **gender equality**, especially **education of young women** were noted by a number of respondents. The need for embedding a **gender-transformative education approach** throughout education systems and the need to focus on **empowering young women** and ensuring their participation in the political and social life at community, local and national levels was noted together with the need to provide **education on gender equality** from an early age, allowing children and young people to challenge gender norms, and the promotion of **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)** needed to equip young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to realise their health. In the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, respondents noted that **sexual and reproductive health issues** are to be addressed.

When it comes to **education in emergencies**, comments on the need for **formal and informal educational institutions to incorporate mediation and conflict resolution training** already at a young age and the need to support **quality education in development and fragile contexts** were also received.

Finally, the **recognition of diplomas and qualifications** was noted as particularly affecting migrant youth and young adults from third countries for which often the educational standards do not comply or align with EU educational standards; leading often to the underemployment of young migrants. It would be important for the EU to promote qualification alignment programmes.

## 2.10. Employment and quality of jobs



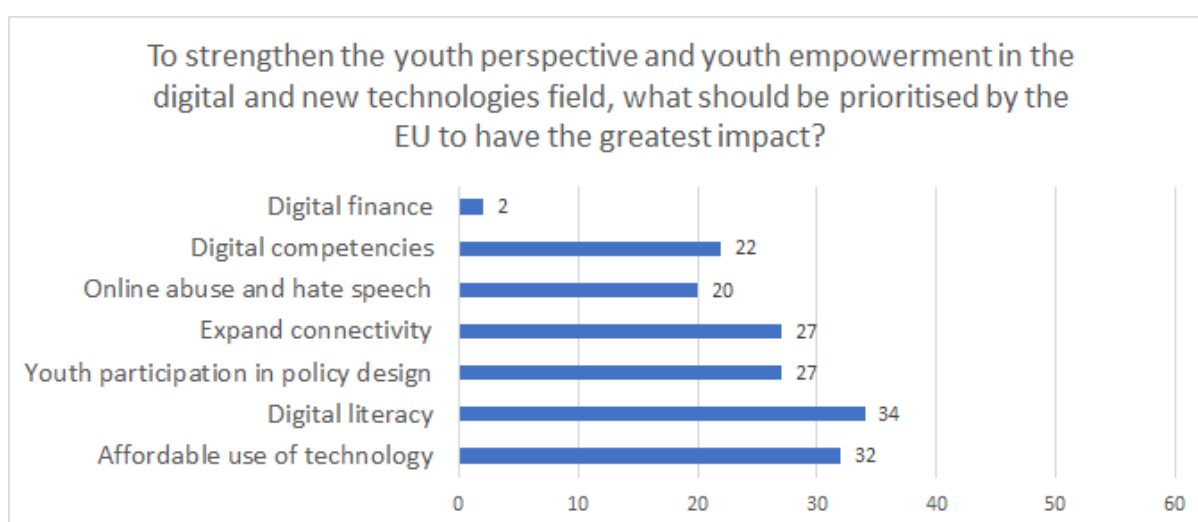
The area of **non-discrimination and equal opportunities** was mentioned by slightly more than half of the respondents (35) as the priority with the greatest impact on improving employment opportunities and job quality for young people. This was followed by almost half of the respondents citing **youth participation in social dialogue** (28) and **education and labour market needs** (27) as related priority areas with the greatest impact. **Cooperation with the private sector, labour market reforms**, and those not in education, employment or training (**NEETs**) and the **labour market transition** were selected as priority areas by 15-20 respondents, respectively. The other suggested areas were rarely mentioned, with **international labour standards** mentioned by 10 and the **elimination of informal employment** and **support for public employment services** mentioned by 5 each.

Comments received were either related to the **comprehensive nature of the support young people need in quality employment**, or to specific issues and suggested solutions, mostly in relations with the respondents' working areas.

The importance of **educational requirements and systems** should be aligned with the market needs and opportunities and an **integrated approach** including demand side and supply as well as **private sector cooperation** were noted.

Specific solutions to address youth quality employment suggested include **eliminating unpaid internships**, **payment of decent wages**, support for **cooperatives** and provision of youth-friendly **SRHR services**, including but not limited to family planning and to comprehensive sexuality education, as well as **equipping communities** to monitor vulnerable children and keep them out of hazardous work.

### 2.11. Digital and new technologies



**Digital literacy** (34) and **affordable use of technology** (32) were identified by over 50% of all respondents as priorities through which the EU can have the greatest impact on strengthening the perspective and empowering youth in the field of digital and new technologies. Apart from **digital financing**, which was mentioned by two respondents only, all other areas rank more or less equally in the second priority level.

Comments related to digital and new technologies pertained mostly to **specific issues** that respondents think may help youth empowerment in digital technologies.

**Intersectional inclusive digital and new technologies** were noted as critical to increase access and inclusion, including the need to **amplify the voices, stories and narratives on young people's** realities and contributions. There needs to be **strengthening of digital rights and privacy** and banning of exploitative and other harmful practises by social media companies was identified by respondents. The latter also outlined that the EU needs to **support young people to have an increasing role in culture** and diverse media, to narrate their own stories. Concretely, this could mean **expanding available platforms for young people**, creating space at decision-making tables and providing resources to support young people to access spaces of culture and media.

The issue of **affordability of technology**, access to connectivity and digital literacy were noted as key elements in reducing the digital divide faced by migrants; including migrant youth. Respondents also stressed the need to **leverage digitalisation to enhance migrants' wellbeing** and facilitate their contributions to sustainable



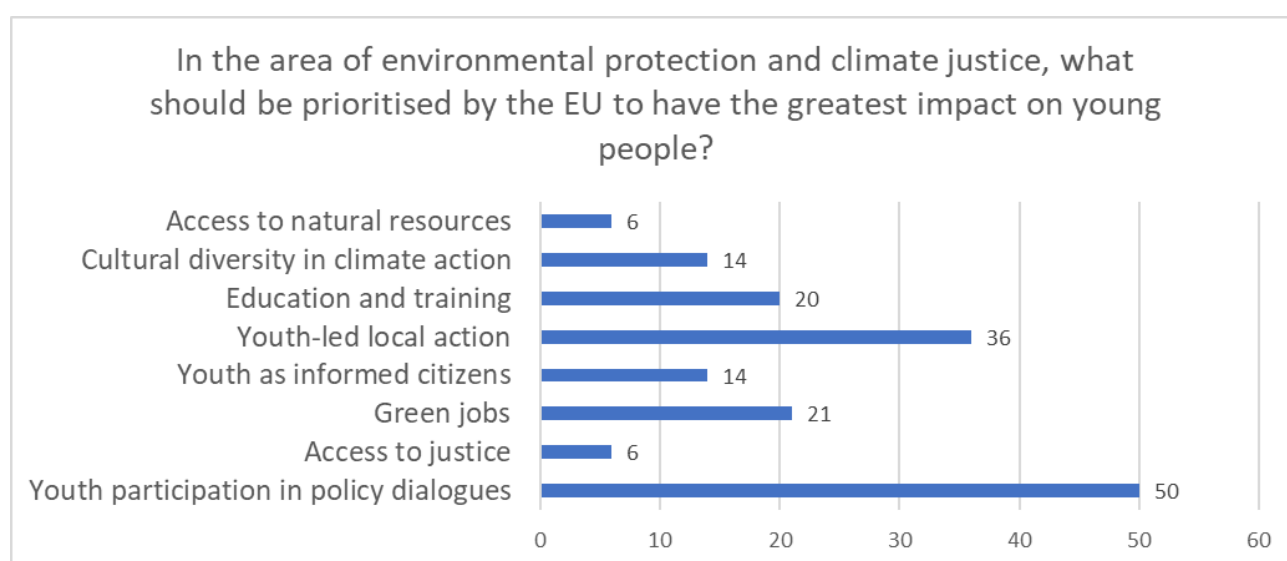
development. They outlined that **migrants should be empowered to act** as ambassadors for a more evidence-based discourse on migration and to counteract hate-speech online.

Issues of **gender and human rights** were also mentioned. In order to maximise the impact of the digital transformation, respondents contend that the EU should **ensure no one is left behind, especially women and girls** and that **internet access, and safety online, is a human rights issue** and an important indicator of gender equality. Respondents further noted that the **digital gender divide** must be bridged to make sure girls and young women equally participate in our ever more digital societies, especially since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some additional comments pointed to the complex nature of youth empowerment and participation in the digital and technological realm, stating that **all options presented in the relevant survey question (Q11) are interlinked** and that connectivity and affordable use are crucial.

One respondent expressed their **doubt as to the influence of donors, as well as governments and their influence in this field** and suggested leaving the digital agenda to the private sector.

## 2.12. Environmental protection and climate justice



**Involving young people in policy dialogues** related to environmental protection and climate justice is seen by the vast majority of respondents (50) as a top priority to achieve the greatest impact, while **youth-led local action** (38) on the environment is strongly supported by no less than half of respondents. Both **green jobs** and **education and training** related to environmental protection and climate justice are cited as equally important priorities by 20 respondents. **Cultural diversity in climate action** and **youth as informed citizens** form another level of priority, as both are considered important by 15 respondents. Although the question refers to climate justice priorities, most respondents do not consider **access to justice** (6) or **access to natural resources** (6) as a top priority.

First and foremost, there is a consensus among the respondents, that the climate crisis is an emergency, and a cross-cutting challenge that is linked to a number of other policy areas related to young people.

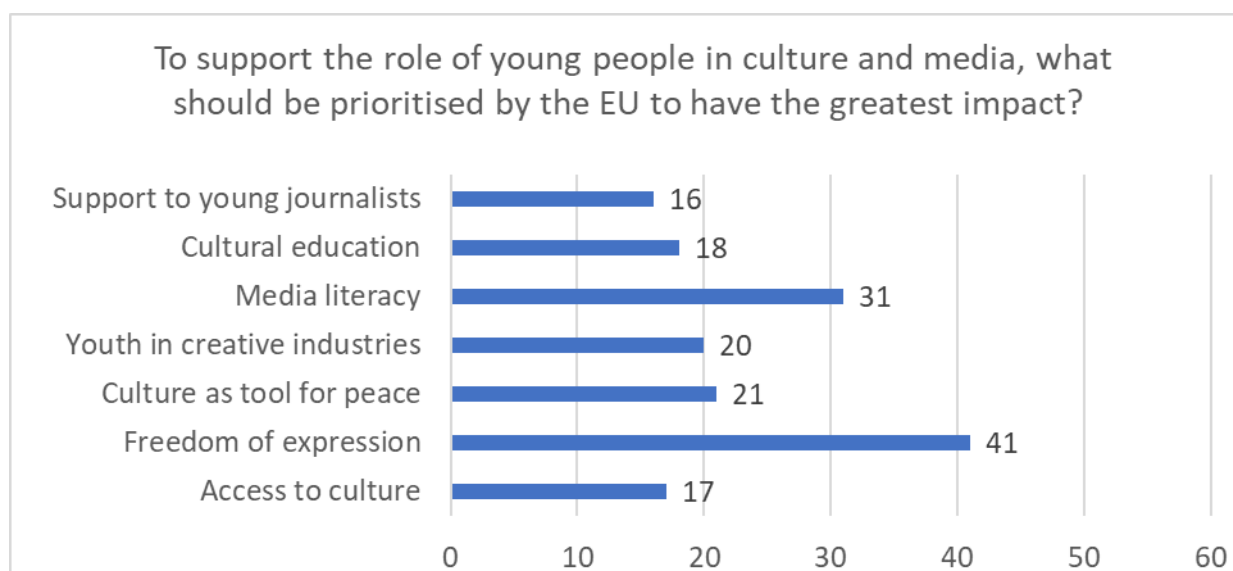
Due to this emergency, so the respondents, social justice must be placed at the heart of climate policy, as today's youth (and children) are the ones who will suffer the most from this policy if it fails, but also benefit

the most from it in case of success.

Numerous comments received also related to the **role of youth participation and youth leadership in climate change**. Respondents noted that the EU needs to **do what the young people are proposing** (i.e. ambitious, science-based policies that enable keeping global warming below the 1,5 C target), to go **beyond "participation" in dialogues** and support **youth leadership in dialogues**, by **putting youth at the heart of the process**, creating safe spaces for meaningful youth engagement, and building on the knowledge of youth-led local grassroots organisations or indigenous communities is crucial to tackle environmental protection and climate justice. On the last point, the EU is called to address the so-called **inequality amplifiers such as gender** (young women and girls are disproportionately affected by the results of the climate crisis and environmental degradation, due to gender discrimination and socially constructed roles)

A number of comments related to the **EU's global role** as a climate action champion - as one respondent put it - the EU needs to be a **driving force in climate policy globally**, showing example and pushing other States as well as the private sector to change. To this end, the EU could use policies such as trade as leverage to show that political leadership on climate justice is not strong enough and that young people need to be empowered to take the lead in this process. Some comments related to specific areas of EU activity in support of youth and climate action, such as a **commitment to financially support youth-led action**, involving youth in **mitigation and adaptation work** and **promoting eco-friendly activities all over the globe**, including tackling **e-waste**, Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE).

### 2.13. Culture and media



**Freedom of expression** (41) and **media literacy** (31) clearly rank first among all responses received as areas that should be prioritised by the EU to support the role of young people in culture and media. All other areas were mentioned by roughly 15 to 20 respondents and therefore do not differ significantly in importance, as none was mentioned by less than a quarter of all respondents.

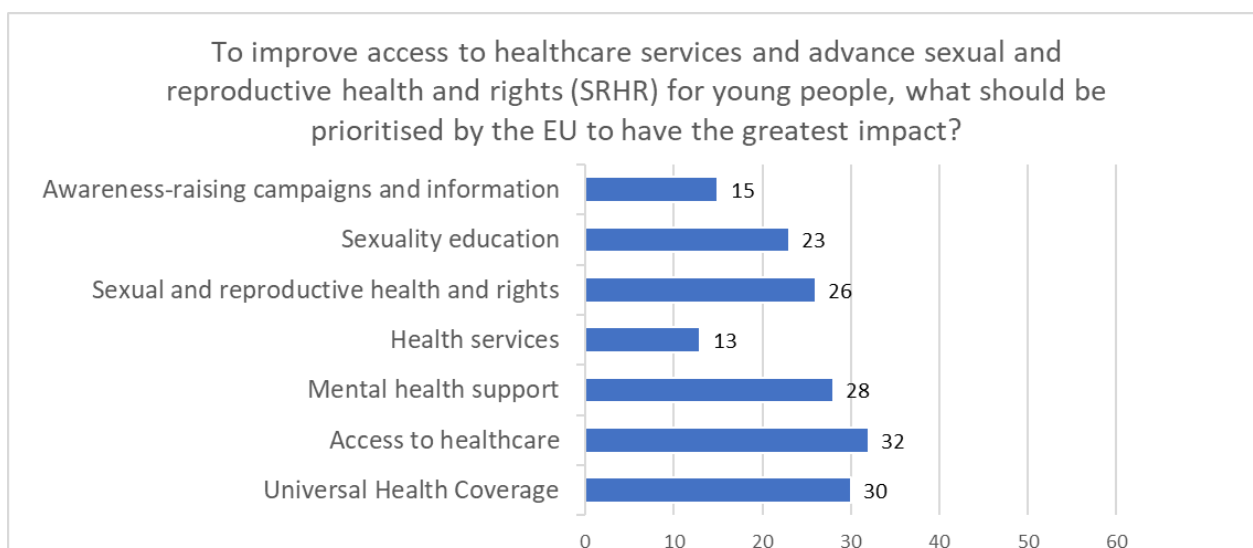
Comments received covered **all issues listed in the closed part of the question**.

Respondents noted that youth are often particularly well positioned to **bridge divides in the cultural and media space**, often being more connected across divides than their elders, and that **culture is a way to convey**

**emotions and discover skills**, including **local language and inclusion of youth from indigenous cultures** that should be prioritised in EU consultation mechanisms.

When it comes to **culture and youth participation**, respondents suggested that the EU should **recognise the importance of hearing young people's voices and seeing their images in the media** and help to **convey positive messages about youth**, gender equality and non-discrimination. Respondents also noted that the EU should support the **development of media programmes, which can help shaping a positive narrative around youth empowerment and non-discrimination** and use media to provide youth information, including **reaching out to youth with essential information on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**.

#### 2.14. Health and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)



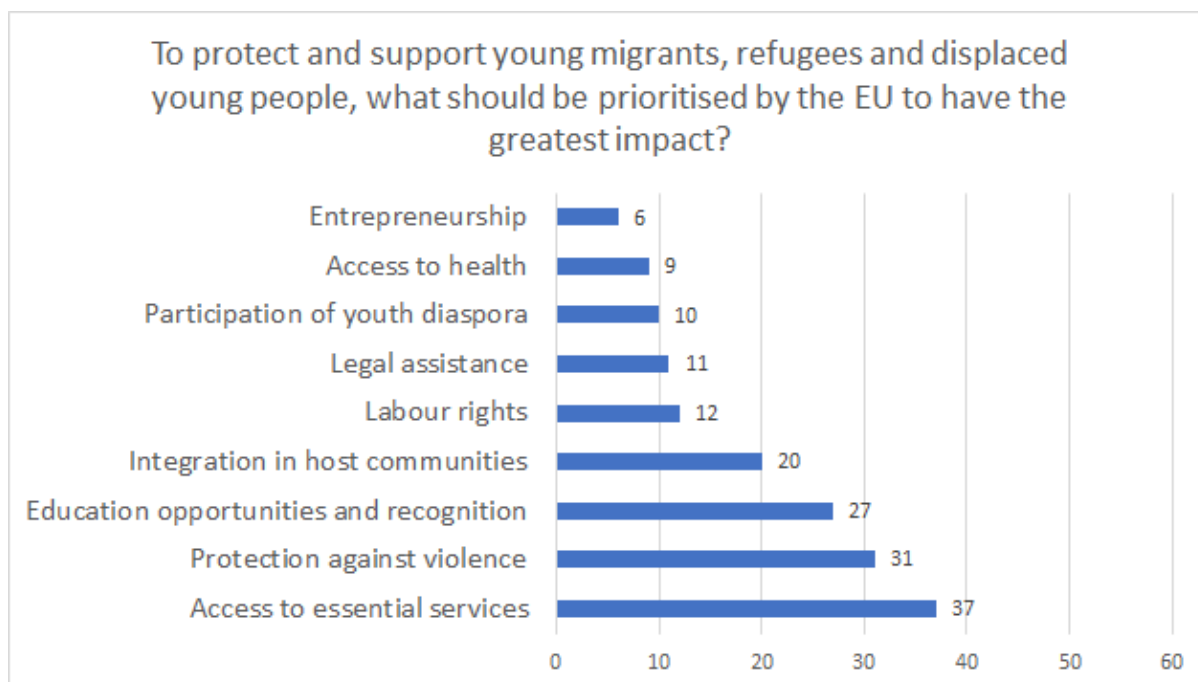
In order to improve access to healthcare and promote young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), participants identified three areas in particular where the EU should focus most to have the greatest impact: **Access to healthcare** (32), **universal healthcare** (30) and **mental health support** (28). **Sexual and reproductive health and rights** (26) and **sexuality education** (23) are also most frequently mentioned. External structures such as **awareness and information campaigns** and **health services** are mentioned by no less than 25% of respondents.

According to the respondents, the COVID-19 pandemic has proved that sustainable development is not possible if human health is not prioritised. The pandemic had a profound impact on the health of young people, especially their mental health. This has underscored the urgency of addressing the health needs of adolescents and young adults during the pandemic and beyond. In this context, it is also noted that newly introduced restrictions related to COVID-19 countermeasures (inequality in vaccines, public meetings, etc.) strongly hinder young people from accessing opportunities and participating in places and events where they could otherwise be given a platform to be heard.

Also the important role of **universal access for adolescents to youth-friendly SRHR** and **comprehensive sexuality education** with a key focus on **girls and young women's access to separate and hygienic sanitary facilities** and **engagement and sensitization activities** have been noted by the respondents. Finally, issues of **digital health** were considered key to youth participation and health as offering opportunities for more comprehensive and inclusive health services for youth.

Overall, integrating evidence-based data on the most common health issues affecting young people has been noted as essential to promote the meaningful engagement of young people in policy-making that addresses the health of current and future generations.

### 2.15. Young migrants, refugees and displaced young people



When it comes to protecting and supporting young migrants, refugees and displaced young people, meeting immediate and basic needs is the most important issue for the majority of respondents. To have the greatest impact in this area, respondents believe that the EU should focus primarily on **access to essential services** (37), followed by **protection from violence** (31). Also considered very important are the two areas of **education opportunities and recognition** (27) and **integration in host communities** (20), as these would enable seamless continuation of educational careers and smooth integration into the labour market. Other areas including those related to general rights and legal support or access to health, were mentioned by less than 25% of all respondents. Last but not least, **entrepreneurship**, which is perhaps a key area where young people with limited language skills and educational background could actually create a good livelihood, was mentioned as a priority area by only six respondents.

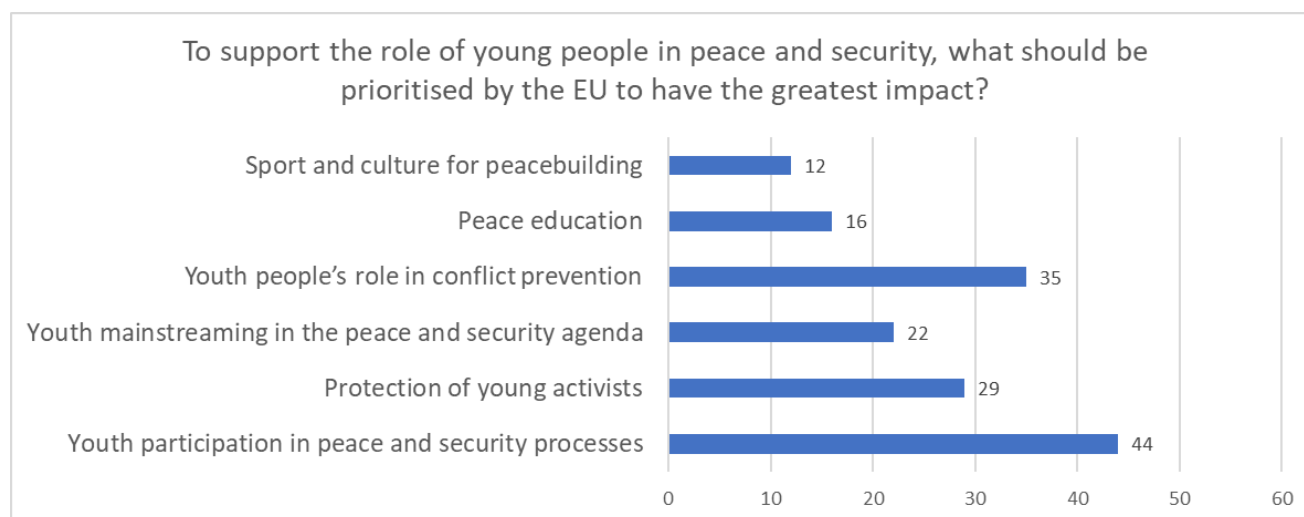
Comments received focus on a selected number of priority areas. The first one is peace and violence and essential services, in line with the funnel answers described above. Respondents noted that **peacebuilding approaches** have proven effective and that young migrants, refugees and displaced young people need **protection against violence, essential services and education opportunities**, that requires **progressive demilitarisation of border and migration management**, and working with **partner countries to provide full and effective rights to people on the move**. Other systemic comments pertained to the need for the EU and EU Member States to adopt **efficient policies that abolish systemic discrimination and racism in all sectors**.

Other issues outlined in the funnel above, such as **education, presenting scalable and adaptable solutions** including the promotion of **entrepreneurial skills sharing among young migrants** to meet the specific needs of youth on the move as well as securing **access to essential healthcare services** were also noted as key.

Specific EU initiatives such as the EU's Human Rights Environmental Due Diligence (HREDD) legislative and policy developments were noted as helping to ensure **investments are made to tackle the root causes of human rights violations** and **recognise young migrants' experiences and resilience**.

A number of comments related also to gender equality issues, notably that **gender shapes migration** warranting a **gender and age sensitive response** which recognizes and meets varied needs of different youth groups, also addressing **multiple discrimination**.

## 2.16. Youth, peace and security



In accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, young people are seen as key actors in ensuring peace and security, not least because their lives are most affected by the impact of conflicts and insecurity. In line with the above, the area of **young people's participation in the peace and security processes** was identified by the vast majority (44) of respondents, together with the **role of young people in conflict prevention** (35), as the two key areas on which the EU should focus in order to have the greatest impact in supporting the role of young people in peace and security. The area of **peace education** (16) and **sports and culture of peacebuilding** (12) have been mentioned as a priority area by rather few, although almost half of the respondents (29) believe that it would be more important to prioritise **protection of young activists** in this area. Even though the Resolution 2250 puts particular emphasis on the role of youth in peace and security, this does not fully mirror the opinion of the respondents with about 22 of them considering **youth mainstreaming in the peace and security agenda** to be a priority area for the EU to have the greatest impact.

Peace, security and humanitarian actions are considered by the respondents as cornerstones of youth engagement around the world, while to them there is an unprecedented number of youth organisations dedicated to helping young people or involving them in creating peaceful and just societies. It is therefore important, according to the respondents, to ensure that young people engaged in youth-led humanitarian assistance and the promotion of peace and security are effectively protected and meaningfully supported. This requires not only better representation of both young people and their organisations at the institutional level, both in conflict resolution, security dialogues and high-level humanitarian decision-making at the local, national and international levels. The existing lack of funding faced by youth organisations, combined with a lack of recognition, can further lead to a stalemate that prevents concrete action.

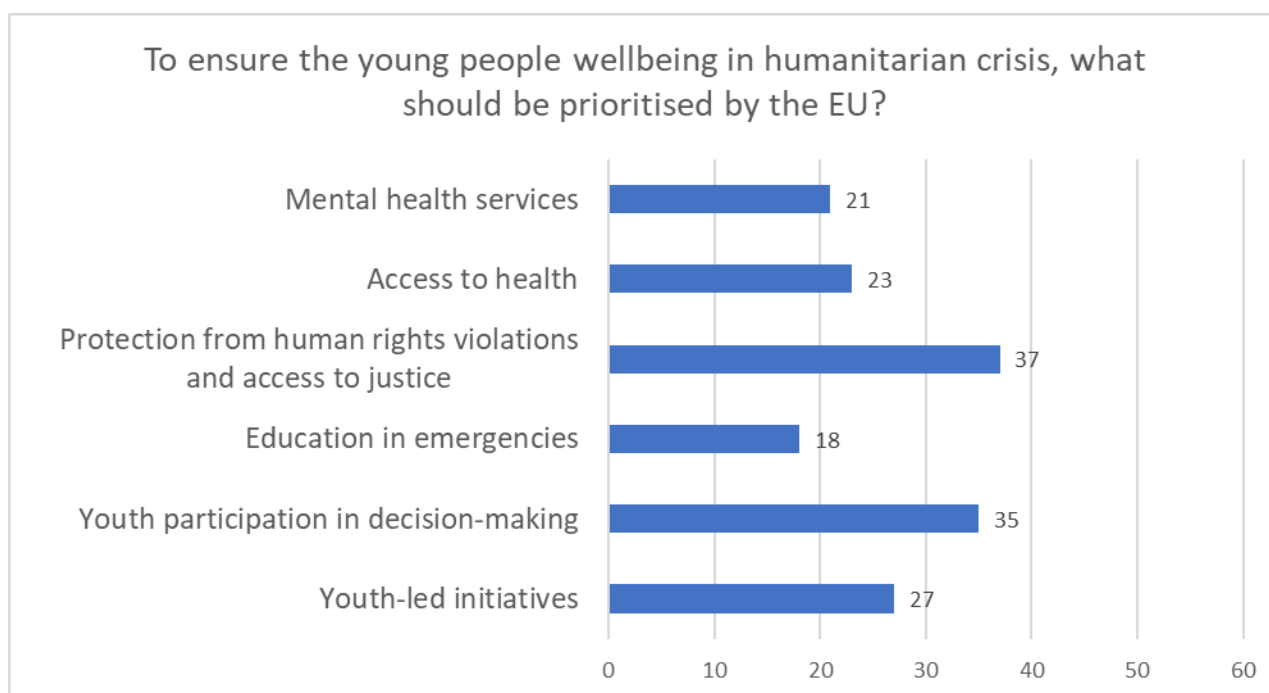
Respondents also outlined the substantial **potential for the EU in the field of youth, peace and security** and

contend that **peace and security action should engage young people** also noting that this will require considerable EU effort in **addressing resistance from power-holders, adapted funding modalities** that allow for **real partnership with youth working for peace**, and particular attention to the **safety of these youth working in high-risk contexts**.

In order to ensure youth participation in peace and security, EU Member States should formulate their own **national action plans to implement the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (Youth, Peace and Security)** and **trust in the agency of youth in peace-building** - youth should be seen as **agents of change** thus **protective systems at multiple levels have to be strengthened** and **prioritise women and young girls in the field of peace and security**.

**Some respondents are critical of the Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) approach as perceived as biased by some parties and communities** in affected areas, jeopardizing acceptance within communities, young people's safety and, potentially, the safety and security of staff and assets.

### 2.17. Humanitarian crisis



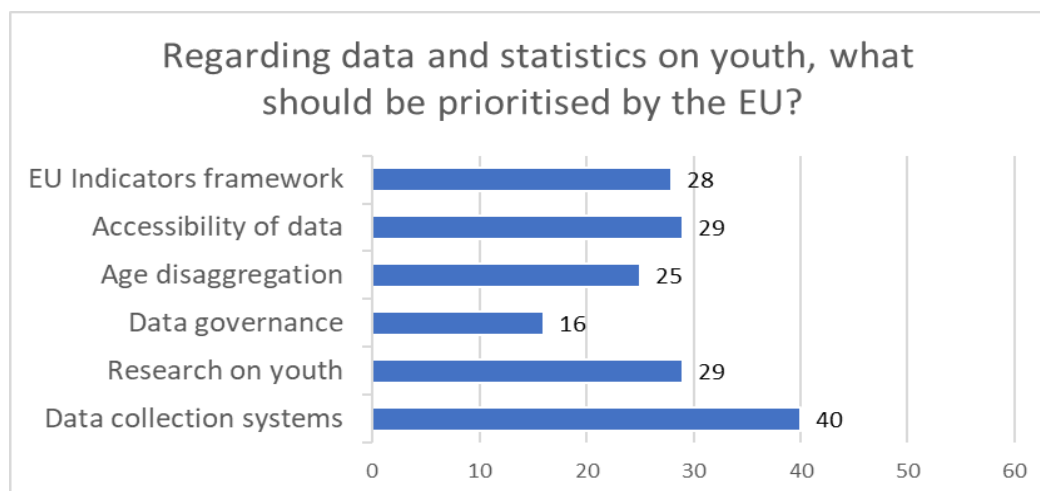
To ensure well-being in humanitarian crises, **protection from human rights violations and access to justice** were mentioned as potential EU priorities by a narrow majority of respondents (37), followed by **youth participation in decision-making** (35). **Youth-led initiatives** and **access to health services** and **mental health care** are mentioned by 27, 23 and 21 respondents respectively. **Education in emergency** situations was mentioned by a quarter of respondents.

Respondents noted the need to respond to the **varying needs of young people and especially young women** in crisis, with a focus on **education and youth participation in emergencies** and a **rights-based approach to gender equality** and recognising **female genital mutilation (FGM) as a humanitarian issue**. Respondents also pointed out that humanitarian emergencies, including conflict, natural disasters, and forced displacement, young people need well adapted **psychological support and continued access to education and training** and that crises have a devastating impact on **sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**, in particular for

young women and girls.

Respondents also noted the need for a **disaster-resilient (information and communication technologies) ICT infrastructure** to save lives and reduce damage to young people's well-being.

## 2.18. Data and statistics on youth



Overall, all but two of the suggested areas that the EU should prioritise in terms of improving information on youth through data and statistics were mentioned as equally important. To this end, supporting the development of **data collection systems** was mentioned as a priority area by the vast majority of respondents, while **data governance** was mentioned by only 16, making over 25% of all respondents. All other areas, **accessibility of data, research on youth, EU indicators framework or age disaggregation**, have been mentioned by nearly half of all respondents (25-29 respondents).

The EU is called to promote **youth-led research on youth**. **Young people should play a role in collecting the data** and to **commit to and adequately disaggregated resource data collection** including age, sex, ethnicity, religion, disability, location, wealth, marital status, sexual orientation and gender identity, and migratory status with due protections for privacy and human rights. The final data sets should be available to young people as **open-source information**. It is important to ensure that all marginalized groups are made visible through disaggregated data, including young people living with disabilities, in poor households and in rural areas, from ethnic minorities and indigenous groups, in fragile and conflict settings and those who may be marginalized due to sexual orientation or gender identity as well as displaced and/or refugees.

Respondents also call on the EU to **share data, including personal data**, more efficiently and effectively, and to develop a **framework of indicators to monitor the impact of EU external action** policies and programmes on young people. In this regard YAP should aim to support data collection agencies to work closely with civil society organisations to collect more relevant, disaggregated and inclusive data on youth progress. While, based on respondents' comments, existing indicators of e.g. the Youth Progress Index can serve as a basis for the development, implementation and evaluation of YAP.

### **3. Conclusions**

The tone of most of the inputs received in the consultation process is that all issues to be highlighted in the Youth Action Plan and beyond need to be seen as interconnected and therefore be considered holistically. A holistic approach to youth policies should hence be based on a variety of youth-relevant concepts duly considering inclusion, accessibility and equality, and take into account the specific and urgent needs of young people in each particular region/context.

Depending on the specific geographical, social or political context, the approach may further include challenges related to conflict, unemployment, disinformation, or difficulties in accessing educational opportunities and health, etc. In this way, it is proposed to mainstream youth participation across all policy-making processes and programmes of the Youth Action Plan.

The results of the consultation process clearly show that the Youth Action Plan needs to focus on meaningful youth participation in all themes and policy areas and, in this respect, pay particular attention to an inclusive approach especially at local and country levels.

Therefore, a comprehensive approach is crucial to:

- Create inclusive spaces for genuine and regular input from young people into policy and decision-making.
- Recognise the role of young people and support their capacity to contribute to solutions and raise their concerns.
- Strengthen enabling environments and institutions that promote and mainstream meaningful participation in all thematic and policy areas, not just those traditionally defined as 'youth relevant'.
- Develop and support real and pragmatic opportunities for young people to engage; addressing young people from different backgrounds while taking into account the diversity of youth groups, which are neither homogeneous nor static and can flexibly identify with a range of identities, movements and issues.

Inclusion, equality and accessibility are considered prerequisites for genuine participation and as such need to be prominently addressed by the YAP. To this end, addressing human rights violations, combating discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, ending racism, ensuring diversity, and addressing intersectionality are just a few aspects that need to be integrated into the YAP to better serve and support young people. In this regard, specific attention should be given to the most marginalised youth groups among others youth in conflicts, youth in poverty, youth from ethnic/religious/social and other minority groups, as well as LGBTIQ+ youth.

To summarise, three major challenges to meaningful participation emerge from the consultation:

- 1) insufficient awareness and understanding by public institutions of the importance of young people's participation, both locally and at national and international levels,
- 2) lack of skills and competences (leadership, agency) of young people with regard to their participation and, last but not least,
- 3) a general lack of structures and frameworks conducive to enabling and promoting young people's participation beyond tokenism.

A key horizontal challenge repeatedly mentioned concerns the resources and means (time, funds, agency etc.)



needed "for" participation, which are constantly lacking for many reasons preventing young people from meaningful participation.

There is general agreement across groups and institutions consulted that meaningful participation is when young people can shape agendas and processes, co-design safe spaces, and are engaged in intergenerational leadership across all policy processes through appropriate mechanisms. Such mechanisms and strategies should ensure power dynamics in decision-making spaces do not prevent but enable youth participation, and that youth groups should always have the opportunity to continuously share feedback and engage in strategic dialogues. Furthermore, informal participation spaces, such as protest actions and external campaigns, are seen for many partner countries as only spaces for young people to work for change. But as they are often rather unsafe, it is important to ensure through YAP that they are adequately supported and protected in their civic (political) engagement.

Following the above, the biggest added value of EU external action is seen in supporting youth organisations with capacity, knowledge sharing opportunities and funding; implementing mechanisms for engagement; supporting development of national strategies and capacity building of public institutions; funding youth-led projects; and ensuring regular and systematic monitoring of participation of youth and youth organisations in policy making.

A successful YAP hence requires, among others, a dedicated funding, clear objectives and monitoring mechanisms, gender-and-age specific data collection, adequate governance structures to monitor implementation, as well as regular, transparent and accessible (youth friendly) communication, and commitment to more research.



**ANNEXES**

Annex 1. List of organisations replying to the online survey (EUSurvey)

Annex 2. Questionnaire of the online consultation of the YAP (EUSurvey)

Annex 3. Report of the consultation activities led by the Youth Sounding Board (YSB) for International Partnerships.

Annex 4. Report: CSO-LA Consultation in the framework of the Policy Forum on Development (PFD)

Annex 5. Input from the CONUN Working Party to the Youth Action Plan

Annex 6. Report: EU Youth networks meeting

Annex 7. Report: Workshop on the YAP during the 5<sup>th</sup> Eastern Partnership Youth Forum

Annex 8. List of different entities involved in the process of consultation.