

A youth vision for a liberal future



Approaching 2024, young liberal leaders came together in Vilnius, Lithuania, to show their collective desire to develop and co-create meaningful solutions to tackle a set of issues facing Europe. Throughout all these discussions, the national perspectives of the various participants were taken into account, thus allowing for a more informed debate powered by best practice sharing.



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Youth representation and participation in politics

Youth apathy is a major problem in many of the European countries, as young people choose to not participate in elections and political processes. This leaves out of the political sphere a crucial sector of our societies, as young people represent our future and their voice should be part of our political representation process. This does not mean that young people are not involved or do not care, instead we see that they choose other avenues outside politics to express their discontent and be catalysts of change, especially through activism and social media.

We believe that in order to make young people feel represented in politics, we need to do a better job at including them not only as voters or citizens, but also as political representatives, as mayors, national legislators and Members of the European Parliament. If we want our laws and politics to resonate with and address the issues that young people care about, they need to be included in the legislative process, not only as key stakeholders, but as policymakers. The “experience” argument is not valid anymore, as elected young representatives have proven themselves to be outstanding politicians all over Europe, willing to make things differently, more inclusively and effectively. Having younger figures and role models in front of you makes it easier to feel represented as a young person.

In that regard, the young liberal leaders of Europe believe that:

- Voting age should be lowered to 16 years at all EU Member States for the elections to the European Parliament;
- The education system should better communicate the advantages, opportunities, values, duties and responsibilities that the EU brings, for instance with European mock elections or “Models of the European Parliament” in every EU Member State;
- Funding should be improved for trans-European youth events;
- We should create a single market for non-profit entities and facilitate their work across the European Union without impediments;
- Youth councils should be promoted across the European Union, as they are a direct and useful way for young people to have a seat at the table and to have a direct say on policy related to young people;
- We should incentivise the presence of young people at electable spots in the European Parliament lists;
- We should empower the youth through role models and counter ageism.

Housing and emancipation

It is a longstanding problem that young people are unable to get a job that enables them to leave their parents' house at an early age, provide for themselves and sustain their life choices. The inflation in European economies, especially in the real estate sector, have made this even worse in recent years, making it practically impossible for a young person to buy a house, having then to rent again at unaffordable prices for a person that recently entered the job market, especially in urban areas where most employment is located.

Quite often, this is a result of government housing regulations and centralisation, while some European governments have not realised the scale of this problem and created programs to offer loans at low interest rates for young people or young couples. High youth unemployment, low credit scores for young people when trying to get a bank loan, and the "turistification" of some European countries are also important factors that need to be promptly addressed.

In that regard, the young liberal leaders of Europe believe that:

- Private developments should be incentivised to stimulate the housing market development;
- European states should offer realistic state-backed loans for first-time buyers and it should be made easier for young people and families to receive bank loans for buying property by allowing banks to take the value of the house into account, through the reform of Directive 2014/17/EU;
- Municipalities should be given the competence to promote affordable housing for students and young people;
- Ownership and property rights should be better safeguarded, so that people are incentivised to use their property more effectively;
- Neighbouring Member States should cooperate to ensure cross-border spatial planning;
- We should promote working-from-home schemes so that urban areas are decongested and thus help fight depopulation;
- Old public buildings with no architectural value should be transformed into apartments for young people;
- EU Member States should pay the climate dividend, i.e. the earnings of the ETS directly to their citizens.

Health and well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the forefront problems related to mental health and de-stigmatised discussions around the well-being and mental health of young people. Also, loneliness is no longer associated only to elderly people, but we have realised that there is a “loneliness epidemic” among young people as well, which needs comprehensive action to be dealt with. This not only relates to investment in psychological and psychiatric assistance, but also better planning for urban development, building a more inclusive education system and designing digital capitalism more wisely, as elaborated in the Lonely European publication by the European Liberal Youth.

Young people need to be encouraged to open up and talk about their mental health issues without this having a negative impact on their employment prospects, but instead normalising mental health support and promoting community engagement. Young people need to be better equipped to recognise the symptoms of certain mental health conditions, for which de-stigmatisation and open communication are key.

In that regard, the young liberal leaders of Europe believe that:

- A European-wide awareness campaign on mental health should be organised, to put the topic on the European agenda ahead, and to help fight the stigma associated with mental health issues that prevents young people from seeking adequate support;
- Enough resources should be provided to effectively take care of mental health issues;
- The European Commission should create a comprehensive guideline for diagnosis and treatment of youth mental health issues;
- We should create a European common mental health guarantee, so that if a Member States' waiting lists do not allow care within a reasonable framework, a young person is able to seek healthcare in another EU country without additional costs;
- The Ukrainian government should be adequately assisted to be able to deal with the mental health issues of its young population that have been a major force in the frontline against the Russian aggression, including the education of trained psychologists;
- The European Union should develop a framework that is setting minimum standards of care and mental health treatment with guidelines for Member states on how to achieve it and develop it,;
- Trained psychologists should be placed in all European public schools, who should also count with adequate educational programs on mental and sexual health and well-being for its students.