



EUROPEAN YOUTH VOICES:

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES
IN CONTEXT OF EU YOUTH STRATEGY
AND OVERVIEW OF 11 YOUTH GOALS



Polska Rada
Organizacji
Młodzieżowych



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European Youth Voices:
Comparative analysis of national youth policies in context
of EU Youth Strategy and overview of 11 youth goals

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Belgrade
2023

Club for Youth Empowerment 018 (KOM 018) from Serbia in cooperation with organizations: Beyond Borders ETS – Italy, Association for Active Life and Education (ACTIVE) – Austria, Idea4Life – Poland, Piedzīvojuma gars (PG) – Latvia and national youth councils: National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) – Serbia, Consiglio Nazionale dei Giovani (CNG) – Italy, Polska Rada Organizacji Młodzieżowych (PROM) – Poland, and National Youth Council of Latvia (LJP) – Latvia implements “European Youth Voices” project to address major youth issues and key priorities of young people in 5 participating countries: Serbia, Italy, Austria, Latvia and Poland as stated in EU Youth Strategy and 11 Youth Goals. The project focuses on mainstreaming youth policies on national and European level through development of comparative analysis and set of recommendations for bringing EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 on national levels while also creating European network of young people, youth workers, activists and other relevant stakeholders who will contribute to more opportunities and initiatives for achievement of defined 11 European Youth Goals. Project “European Youth Voices” is implemented in the period 01.12.2022 to 30.11.2024. and is co-financed by the European Union through Erasmus + European Youth Together.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Youth Goals are presented in the Annex 3 of The EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 to serve as inspiration and provide an orientation for the EU, its Member States and their relevant stakeholders and authorities. The aim of this research was to assess and compare the implementation of 11 European Youth Goals in four EU Member States – Austria, Italy, Latvia and Poland, as well as one EU candidate country – Serbia.

The research was implemented from April to July 2023. It consisted of three parts: 1. Desk analysis; 2. Online survey and 3. Focus groups. Desk analysis consisted of gathering the available data compiled and published by the EU institutions, national institutions, sub-national institutions and non-governmental organizations. The questions in the online survey, as well as the guidelines for the focus groups, were designed to gather the opinions and experiences of young people indicative for the state of implementation of all 11 EU Youth Goals in the respective countries.

Latvia and Serbia have the most centralized system for implementing youth policy, with comprehensive laws regulating this area and standalone multi-annual strategic documents. They also have ministries responsible for youth policy, as well as advisory bodies containing representatives of public administration and youth organizations. Austria, Italy and Poland implement youth policy in a more decentralised manner.

Youth Goal #1: Connecting EU with Youth is the goal that is least included in the national policy documents. The

survey shows that, with the exception of Serbia, young people have a generally positive view of the European Union. However, the turnout in the EU elections among the youth is lower than among the total population, and the focus groups concluded that for many young people, both in the EU and outside of it, the Union remains abstract and the information about its functioning and values are lacking.

Youth Goal #2: Equality of All Genders is among the goals with the lowest level of inclusion in national policy documents. Survey results show that young people believe that inequality between men and women still exists in some areas, including the job market and family life. The focus groups also supported this conclusion and expressed an opinion that the national governments should do more to tackle these issues.

Youth Goal #3: Inclusive Societies is one of the goals with a higher level of inclusion in the national policy documents. Young people across Europe still face significant amounts of violence and discrimination, as shown by the survey. The research also shows that they highly value personal freedom and inclusion, which is particularly relevant in the context of this goal. Focus groups concluded that LG-BTQ+ community remains vulnerable to societal discrimination, together with other groups such as migrant workers, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities. The role of school as the place in which discrimination first starts to take place has been emphasized.

Youth Goal #4: Information and Constructive Dialogue is among the less included goals in the national policy documents. While young people believe they often encounter fake news and misinformation, many of them are not confi-

dent in their ability to recognize them, as the results of both the survey and the focus groups demonstrate.

Youth Goal #5: Mental Health & Wellbeing is moderately well included in the national policy documents. According to the survey results, young people generally do not feel that professional help for mental health issues is available in their country, while significant percentages of them face stress, anxiety and depression. Focus groups concluded that, in multiple countries, discussing and asking for help regarding one's mental health problems is still a taboo and that educational system is the first area in which the improvements should be made.

Youth Goal #6: Moving Rural Youth Forward is among the goals that is included in the national policy documents to a larger degree. Survey results show that young people lean towards disagreeing with the statements that living conditions in rural areas are good. Focus groups concluded that young people face the problems of underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of sufficient educational and employment opportunities, as well as insufficient participation in the decision-making processes, and that majority of those residing in rural areas would consider leaving them.

Youth Goal #7: Quality Employment for All is the goal with the highest level of inclusion in the national policy documents. Youth unemployment remains significantly higher than total unemployment in each of the five countries. Young people see formal, informal education and personal connections as the most important factors for finding a job. Focus groups concluded that young people require further opportunities to acquire skills in order to be competitive in the job market. The main elements of job quality are decent wages and social protection, which are often not fulfilled.

Youth Goal #8: Quality Learning is only moderately included in the national policy documents. Survey results show that both the satisfaction with the educational program and its usefulness for finding a job is above 3 (on a scale from 1 to 5) in all countries except Serbia. In focus groups, young people proposed a wide range of actions to improve their national educational systems, which include increasing flexibility for students to tailor their own curricula, introducing more practical experience and recognizing knowledge and skills gained through non-formal education.

Youth Goal #9: Space and Participation for All is among youth goals that have a higher degree of inclusion in the national policy documents. Survey results show that respondents lean towards disagreeing that political institutions in their countries allow them to influence decision making. Young people in Austria have a high level of trust in the national political institutions, while the trust among young people in Serbia is low. Other countries are somewhere in between. Focus groups concluded that young people often lack opportunities, interest and, sometimes, self-confidence to participate in decision-making processes.

Youth Goal #10: Sustainable Green Europe is moderately included in the national policy documents. The results of the survey show that young people in Austria and Latvia are generally satisfied with the quality of the environment; young people in Poland rate the quality of environment as neither good nor bad; and the young people in Italy and Serbia generally believe that the quality is poor. Focus groups made several proposals to promote eco-friendly practices: include sharing personal experiences on social networks, including them in education system and creating professionals with skills in sustainability and innovation.

Youth Goal #11: Youth Organisations & European Programmes is moderately included in the national policy documents. Most of the young people, with the exception of Poland, either have not participated in an EU program or do not know if they have. Focus groups concluded that young people find European Programmes useful and are mostly interested in participating in them. However, lack of awareness and information remains a problem.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to assess and compare the implementation of 11 European Youth Goals in four EU Member States – Austria, Italy, Latvia and Poland, as well as one EU candidate country – Serbia.

The European Youth Goals are the outcome of the 6th cycle of the Structured Dialogue (now known as EU Youth Dialogue) with young people, decision makers, researchers and other stakeholders that took place under the title ‘Youth in Europe: What’s next?’. The aim of this cycle was to collect voices of young people and contribute together to creating the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027. They summarise the issues that affect young people in Europe and the political priorities that are important to them.

All EU countries support the goals and, through the adoption of the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, have made a political commitment to implement them. These are the reasons why the implementation of European Youth Goals should be analyzed to determine its successes and challenges and provide recommendations for the future.

The relatively wide range of the countries included in this research, which involves both old and new EU members, as well as a country aspiring to become a member, with an obligation of gradual alignment with all EU regulations and policies, will enable effective comparison and significantly contribute to the currently available knowledge on this topic.

According to the Treaty on the Functioning of European Union (Article 6), the Union shall have competence to carry

out actions to *support, coordinate or supplement* the actions of the Member States in the area of youth (among others). This means that legally binding acts of the Union adopted on the basis of the provisions of the Treaties relating to youth policy do not entail harmonisation of Member States' laws or regulations. In practice, **Member States are encouraged to coordinate their youth policy but retain a large degree of autonomy in this area.**

Nevertheless, EU Members have been coordinating their youth policies for more than 20 years. In its June 2002 resolution, the Council of the European Union invited the Member States to use the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in youth policy, particularly in four priority areas: participation, information, voluntary activities among young people and greater understanding and knowledge of youth. The OMC does not result in EU legislation; it is a method of soft governance which aims to spread best practice and achieve convergence towards EU goals in those policy areas which fall under the partial or full competence of Member States.¹

In 2009, the Council adopted a resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010–2018). It stated that, in the period up to and including 2018, the overall objectives of European cooperation in the youth field should be to: (i) create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market; and to (ii) promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people. It acknowledged the voluntary nature of European cooperation in the youth field, but also outlined the dual approach involving the de-

1 European Parliament. 2014. "At a Glance: The Open Method of Coordination"; <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-AaG-542142-Open-Method-of-Coordination-FINAL.pdf>

velopment and promotion of both: specific initiatives in the youth field and mainstreaming initiatives – i.e. initiatives to enable a cross-sectoral approach.

In its May 2018 Communication, the European Commission proposed a new EU Youth Strategy to mark the joint commitment between the Commission and Member States to this policy in full respect of subsidiarity. The Communication stressed that important challenges in youth policy remain open, such as involving more young people from a more diverse range of backgrounds, including those with fewer opportunities, and a better outreach at grassroots level. To align youth policy even more effectively with EU funding supporting its objectives, the strategy should run until the end of the next Multiannual Financial Framework. **The EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027** was therefore adopted in November 2018 as another Resolution of the Council.

The EU Youth Strategy focuses on three main areas of action: **1. Involvement** – meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political participation of young people in EU life, in order to have a voice in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies that affect them; **2. Connecting** – various forms of mobility, which are supported through various EU youth programmes; **3. Empowerment** – The youth sector is (for the first time) put in focus by the new strategy, as a catalyst for the empowerment of young people across Europe who face different challenges. The institution responsible for monitoring and implementation is the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture.

For the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy for the period from 2019 to 2027, specific programmes at the EU level have been defined, which contain measures for imple-

mentation: Erasmus+ programme, CEEPUS programme, European Solidarity Initiative, European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, Creative Europe and others. In addition to EU programmes, the Strategy envisages a number of new or updated instruments for implementation and monitoring, such as the Youth Wiki – a platform for monitoring the development of national youth policies in Member States, the EU Youth Strategy Platform, the EU Youth Indicator.

The European Youth Goals, formulated during the course of the 6th cycle of the Structured Dialogue are presented in the Annex 3 of The EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 to serve — with due respect for the principle of subsidiarity, national competence and the freedom of association — **as inspiration and provide an orientation for the EU, its Member States and their relevant stakeholders and authorities.**

Table 1. presents Eleven European goals and background information, as described in the EU Youth Strategy:

Table 1. European Youth Goals overview

#	Goal	Description
1	Connecting EU with Youth	Foster the sense of youth belonging to the European project and build a bridge between the EU and young people to regain trust and increase participation
2	Equality of All Genders	Ensure equality of all genders and gender-sensitive approaches in all areas of life of a young person
3	Inclusive Societies	Enable and ensure the inclusion of all young people in society
4	Information and Constructive Dialogue	Ensure young people have better access to reliable information, support their ability to evaluate information critically and engage in participatory and constructive dialogue
5	Mental Health and Wellbeing	Achieve better mental wellbeing and end stigmatisation of mental health issues, thus promoting social inclusion of all young people
6	Moving Rural Youth Forward	Create conditions which enable young people to fulfil their potential in rural areas
7	Quality Employment for All	Guarantee an accessible labour market with opportunities that lead to quality jobs for all young people
8	Quality Learning	Integrate and improve different forms of learning, equipping young people for the challenges of an ever changing life in the 21st century
9	Space and Participation for All	Strengthen young people's democratic participation and autonomy as well as provide dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society
10	Sustainable Green Europe	Achieve a society in which all young people are environmentally active, educated and able to make a difference in their everyday lives
11	Youth Organizations and European Programmes	Ensure equal access for all young people to youth organisations and European youth programmes, building a society based on European values and identity

Each Goal contains several targets that further specify their aims. According to the EU Youth Strategy, the European Youth Goals should be treated in accordance with the national and Union legislation and national circumstances. They do not represent legally binding goals.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research was implemented from April to July 2023. It consisted of three parts:

2.1. Desk analysis

This part of the research was primarily used to gather the data on normative and institutional framework in which the youth policy is implemented in Austria, Italy, Latvia, Poland and Serbia. It consisted of gathering the available data compiled and published by the EU institutions, national institutions, sub-national institutions and non-governmental organizations. Legal and strategic/policy documents were also analysed, as well as evaluations of their implementation, where available.

Chapter 3.: Overview of the national implementation of youth policy was primarily written based on the desk analysis. Selected national statistical data, as well as the analysis of the inclusion of EU Youth Goals in the national policy documents, which were also gathered through the desk analysis, are presented in Chapter 4.

One of the crucial parts of the research was the assessments of the formal inclusion of 11 EU Youth Goals in the national policy-making. For this purpose, in each country main national youth legal and policy documents were selected. For each target of the 11 EU Youth Goals (which are presented in Chapter 4), one of the numbers from scale from 1 to 4 was assigned: 1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic documents of the country; 2 – this target is somewhat included;

3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic documents of the country.

Table 2. presents the policy documents analysed for the assessment of inclusion of youth targets. As Italy and Poland do not have a binding national policy document (see Chapter 3.), substitutes representative for the youth policy in the country were analysed instead.

Table 2. National policy documents analyzed for the assessment of the inclusion of targets

Country	Legal and policy document(s)
Austria	Austrian Youth Strategy
Italy	Guidelines of the Universal Civil Service
Latvia	Various documents, including Child, Youth and Family Development Guidelines for 2022–2027, State Program of Youth Policy for 2023–2025, Youth Policy Implementation Plan for 2023–2024
Poland	Various documents, including Convention on the Rights of the Child, Education Law, Law on Health Care and Students, Law on Higher Education, Family and Guardianship Code
Serbia	National Strategy for Youth in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2023 to 2030

2.2. Online survey

An online survey was conducted in each country in April (Serbia) and from May to July 2023. (for other countries). Its target audience were young people in Austria (ages 15 to 29), Italy (ages 15 to 35), Latvia (ages 13 to 25), Poland (ages 15 to 30) and Serbia (ages 15 to 30). The age groups were chosen based on the official definition of young people in each country. Survey questions were translated to the local language.

The questions were designed to gather the opinions and experiences of young people indicative for the state of implementation of all 11 EU Youth Goals in the respective countries. The survey consisted of 30 questions in total. All questions were closed type and non-binding. Nominal, ordinal and scale responses were combined.

The total number of respondents by country was as follows: Austria – 504; Italy – 417; Latvia – 540; Poland – 325 and Serbia 1210. The sample met the characteristics of respondents in the states by age and gender. The survey consisted of a total of 12 groups of questions (socio-economic characteristics of respondents and 11 EU Youth Goals).

2.3. Focus groups

In each country, between 8 and 14 focus groups were organized from May to July 2023. Their aim was to gather further information on the opinions and experiences of young people in the areas covered by the European Youth Goals using qualitative means. The purpose of the focus groups was to shed light on the situation in certain areas, in particular the challenges and potential solutions that could not be covered by the survey. There was a large degree of flexibility when it came to the structure of the focus groups and the specific questions that were asked, as the situation in each individual country differed.

13 focus groups were held in Austria; 8 were held in Italy; 10 were held in Latvia; 13 were held in Poland and 14 were held in Serbia. Focus groups in each country covered all Youth Goals, except for Latvia, where Goal #11 was not covered. In Austria, Poland and Serbia, multiple focus groups were held on the topic of the same Goal. In Italy, individual focus groups covered more than one Youth Goal.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF YOUTH POLICY

This chapter presents an overview of the implementation of youth policy in the countries included in this research by analyzing their normative and institutional frameworks. It contextualizes the environment in which the 11 European Youth Goals are supposed to be implemented. A comparative summary of the chapter is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparative overview of youth policy implementation

	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
National regulation	No comprehensive youth law	No comprehensive youth law; 16 regional laws	Youth Law (2008)	No comprehensive youth law	Law on Youth (2011)
National strategic documents	Austrian Youth Strategy (in the government program 2020–2024)	Three-year plan for Universal Civil Service; no comprehensive documents	State Program of Youth Policy for 2023–2025	Government Youth Fund Program; no comprehensive documents	National Strategy 2023–2030
EYG taken into account in strategic documents	Yes, directly	/	Yes, indirectly.	/	Yes, indirectly
Government institutions	State Secretariat for Youth	Minister without portfolio for Sport and Youth Affairs Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service National Agency for Young People	Ministry of Education and Science	Various ministries: Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Health	Ministry of Tourism and Youth
Advisory bodies	Austrian National Youth Council	National Youth Council	Youth Advisory Council	Commission for Civil Dialogue on Youth National Youth Council	Youth Council

Latvia and Serbia have the most centralized system for implementing youth policy, with comprehensive laws regulating this area and standalone multi-annual strategic documents. They also have ministries responsible for youth policy, as well as advisory bodies containing representatives of public administration and youth organizations. In terms of resources, Latvia, as an EU Member State, provides a significantly larger amount of money for youth policy: in 2021, the budget for youth policy in Latvia was almost EUR 13 million, while in Serbia, a country more than three times bigger in terms of population, it was less than EUR 4 million.

Austria, Italy and Poland do not have a law comprehensively covering youth policy. In Austria and Poland, youth-related issues are regulated through multiple laws, while in Italy, 16 out of 20 regions have regional laws on youth. Austria's Youth Strategy is a part of the current Government Program, while in Italy and Poland there are no comprehensive strategic policy documents on the national level. Three-year plan for the Universal Civil Service in Italy and Government Youth Fund in Poland partially address the issues of youth.

When it comes to the government institutions charged with the implementation of the youth policy, Poland is the most regionalized and decentralized among the five countries, having no ministry specifically responsible for youth policy. In Italy, the Minister for Sport and Youth Affairs is without portfolio, while in Austria Secretariat for Youth is within the Federal Chancellery. All three countries have established youth advisory bodies.

Austrian Youth Goals directly reference European Youth Goals for each measure planned in the government program. Latvian and Serbian strategic documents have taken EYG into account while planning measures. In Italy and Po-

land, due to the lack of national laws and comprehensive strategic documents, EYG are only indirectly addressed on the national level.

3.1. AUSTRIA

Normative framework

In Austria, youth-related matters are regulated through **multiple laws rather than a single comprehensive youth law**. There is currently no ongoing discourse regarding the adoption of a unified comprehensive youth law.

The legal framework in Austria is structured to safeguard young people by offering a range of protective provisions and rights based on their age, known as “Jugendrechte” or youth rights. These laws have a substantial impact on various aspects of youth policy, encompassing the following regulations: *the Federal Youth Representation Act*, which focuses on representing the interests of young people and ensuring their active participation in political decision-making processes, *the Federal Youth Promotion Act*, which provides financial support for youth organizations and initiatives, *the Regulation on the Assessment of Impacts on Young People*, *the Juvenile Justice Act*, *the Child and Youth Employment Act*, *the Federal Child and Welfare Act* and the provincial youth protection laws.

The Austrian Youth Strategy is currently anchored in the government program 2020–2024. It is a comprehensive process aimed at strengthening and advancing youth policy across Austria. While the primary focus lies on the 14 to 24-year-old age group, the strategy also extends to encompass individuals up to 30 years of age.

The **Austrian Youth Goals**, as a part of the Austrian Youth Strategy, are **aligned with the European Youth Goals** outlined in the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027. This linkage allows the Austrian Youth Goals to contribute to the implementation of the European Youth Goals. Through a process known as “reality checks,” young people have the opportunity to provide feedback on the developed youth goals and engage in discussions with experts from individual federal ministries.

The Austrian Youth Goals are categorized according to the **four fields of action** outlined in the Austrian Youth Strategy: 1) Education and employment; 2) Participation and engagement; 3) Quality of life and togetherness; 4) Media and information. Each field of action contains a number of measures, and each measure includes a list of European Youth Goals it contributes to. For example, field of action Education and employment contains a measure of “Helping young people acquire financial literacy”, which contributes to the following youth goals, according to the official document: #2 Equality of All Genders, #3 Inclusive Societies, #4 Information & Constructive Dialogue, #7 Quality Employment for All, #8 Quality Learning.

The Federal Chancellery plays a pivotal role as the driving force behind this initiative. The Youth Competence Centre, located within the Federal Chancellery and established in May 2013, serves as the operational unit for the Youth Strategy. It assumes the role of coordinating the overall process, providing expertise and resources, and facilitating connections with experts in the field.

Since the inception of the Youth Strategy, a development group was formed in February 2012 to guide its implementation. This group aims to integrate the perspectives and

contributions of the Youth Council and extracurricular youth work, ensuring their expertise and support are effectively incorporated into the strategy's framework. The Youth Strategy development group has monthly meetings and includes the National Youth Council, the Centre of Competence for Open Youth work in Austria, the Austrian Youth Information Centres, the National Correspondent to the European research network, the National agency Erasmus+: Youth in Action and Employees of the Youth Policy Department and the Youth Competence Centre in the Federal Chancellery.

Institutional framework

Youth policy-making in Austria is the responsibility of the national government. At the federal level, the Department for Family and Youth within the Federal Chancellery has traditionally been primarily responsible for youth policy matters. However, since December 2021, the newly established **State Secretariat for Youth** has assumed responsibility for youth policy agendas. The State Secretariat for Youth is located within the Federal Chancellery and is tasked with overseeing and advancing youth policy initiatives. Claudia Plakolm has been the State Secretary for Youth and Generations since 2021.

Based on information published by the Ministry of Finance, in 2022 the budget allocated to the department of family and youth was at the amount of 7.687,1 million. For the year 2023, according to the published plan, it should be increased to 8.122,6 million.

Austrian National Youth Council was established in 2001 when the Federal Youth Representation Act came into force. Regarding youth issues, Youth Council has social partnership status, meaning that, when it comes to political issues that

affect young people, it is directly included in the matter. The board of the Youth Council consists of 12 people from different member organizations (such as the Student Union, Rural Youth of Austria, Catholic Youth, as well as representatives of political parties' youth wings). It implements multiple projects, including the ones related to youth employment and volunteering.

Meanwhile, youth promotion and youth work outside the school sector primarily fall under the jurisdiction of the federal states. The **Provincial Youth Departments**, situated within the provincial governments, play a crucial role in implementing youth policy measures specific to their respective provinces in the realm of youth work outside the school sector. These departments work to support and promote youth activities and initiatives at the regional level.

Currently, there are 28 Youth Information Centres in Austria, in all federal states that provide young people aged 12–26 with nationwide services. YICs are coordinated by Federal Network of Austrian Youth Information Centres, which was founded in 2004. Every year, Youth Centres respond to around 160,000 inquiries on various youth-related subjects, covering areas such as employment and training, housing and transportation, as well as compulsory military or community service.

3.2. ITALY

Normative framework

In Italy, legislative power over youth policy matters is attributed both to the central government and to the regions and autonomous provinces; the determination of fun-

damental principles is instead reserved for State law. **At the national level, a framework law on youth has not yet been approved.**

Of the 20 Italian Regions, **16 have adopted legislation** on youth policies. As of 2020, there are no framework laws in the following regions: Abruzzo, Calabria, Lombardy and Molise. Therefore, at present, Italian youth policies are based on a **bottom-up approach**. The most frequent goals of youth policy mentioned in the regional laws are participation, active citizenship, volunteering, access to housing, access to labor market, mobility, entrepreneurship, access to information and formal and non-formal education.

Universal Civil Service is a youth policy that is implemented nationally. From 2017, the Civil Service, which has served as an alternative to military service, is universal. It is addressed to young people aged between 18 and 29. The sectors of intervention in Italy and abroad in which the organisations propose projects involving volunteer operators are as follows: a) assistance; b) civil protection; c) environmental heritage and urban regeneration; d) historical, artistic and cultural heritage; e) education and cultural, landscape, environmental, sport, sustainable and social tourism promotion; f) agriculture in mountain areas, social agriculture and biodiversity; g) promotion of peace among peoples, nonviolence and unarmed defence; promotion and protection of human rights; h) development cooperation; i) promotion of Italian culture abroad and support to communities of Italians abroad.

The programming of the Universal Civil Service is defined by the **Three-Year Plan** that can be updated annually. It is implemented through intervention programmes proposed by the Universal Civil Service organisations within one or

more of the areas. This Three-Year Plan is approved in continuity with the previous one covering the three-year period 2020–2022.

The Plan, covering the period 2023–2025, provides the framework of the general guidelines, ranging from developments linked to ongoing experiments, to priorities, such as sustainability and digitalisation, also in the context of the Next Generation EU Plan up to the system's responses to emergency situations. It defines the criteria for funding intervention programmes, the relationship with the 2030 Agenda Goals, the guidelines for the formulation of intervention programmes, for Italy and abroad, as well as the quality standards for the activities of volunteers.

Institutional framework

Minister for Sport and Youth Affairs is a Minister without portfolio. In the Italian government, it is nominated by the President of the Council of Ministers and formally appointed by the President of the Republic to lead particular departments directly under the Presidency (or Presidium) of the Council of Ministers. The current minister, Andrea Abodi, has held the position since 2022.

The Department for Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service is the support structure for the President of the Council of Ministers for the promotion and coordination of Government actions in these areas. Some examples of its activities include financing youth entrepreneurship projects, young talents and initiatives to prevent and combat youth discomfort, as well as work on the National Youth Card. The Department is divided into three Offices of general management level – Youth Policy Office, Office for Universal Civil Service and Organization, Resources and Com-

munication Office – as well as six Services of non-general management level.

Within the Youth Policy Office, there is a Service for the Management of Actions of National Importance, as well as the Service for the Management of Actions of European Significance, tasks of which include using European funds within the framework of the Community cohesion policies. Office for Universal Civil Service consists of the Intervention planning and register management service and the Volunteer worker management and training service. The former carries out and evaluates the three-year Plan (see above) and intervention programmes, while the latter selects volunteer operators to be employed in the universal civil service, defines training activities.

Since 2006, youth policies have been financed mainly by the **National Fund for Youth Policies**. The Fund is financed each year through the State Budget Law. For interventions of national, regional and local relevance, more than EUR 37 million has been allocated for 2019 (Law 145/2018), approximately EUR 36 million for 2020 (Law 160/2019) and for 2021, an additional EUR 35 million is added to the EUR 36 million initially allocated (Law 178/2020) following the registration of the Ministerial Decree of 13 August 2021. In addition to the activities financed by the National Fund for Youth Policies, there is also the **Action and Cohesion Plan**, the expenditure reprogramming tool, launched in 2011 by the government and constantly updated, with the commitment to better and faster spending of EU funds, co-financed with national funds and allocated to Southern Italy (Convergence Objective Regions).

The National Agency for Young People is a government body, supervised by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the European Commission, established in 2007.

It is financed by the National Fund for Youth Policies. The current extraordinary Special Commissioner of the National Youth Agency, since 2023, is Federica Celestini Campanari. From 2019 to 2022 she was Secretary General of the National Youth Council. The National Youth Agency manages the European programmes Erasmus+: Youth and Sport and European Solidarity Corps in Italy and, through their implementation in Italy, implements the European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027.

The National Youth Council is the consultative body entrusted with the representation of young people in the interlocution with the Institutions for any discussion on policies affecting the world of youth. The Department for Youth Policies and Civil Service represents the primary interlocutor of the National Youth Council and follows its activities. The National Youth Council is composed of the most representative Italian youth associations. Since 2019, its President has been Maria Cristina Rosaria Pisani, formerly a Spokesperson of the National Youth Forum.

3.3. LATVIA

Normative framework

The current **Youth Law** was adopted in 2008 and came into force on 1 January 2009. The purpose of the Law is to improve the quality of life of young people – persons from 13 to 25 years of age – by promoting their initiatives, work ethic, patriotism, and participation in decision-making and social life, and also by supporting youth work.

The Law states that the ministry responsible for the development of a single national policy in the area of youth

policy and coordinated implementation is the Ministry of Education and Science. Furthermore, the Ministry approves the annual State programme for youth policy which sets out the priorities for the annual youth policy according to the youth policy planning documents. At the local level, the main players involved in youth policy are municipalities and municipalities subordinate institutions, as well as institutions subordinate to sectoral ministries and their local departments.

In 2022, the **Child, Youth and Family Development Guidelines for 2022–2027** (hereinafter referred to as the CYFDG) were approved. The following courses of action concerning youth policy are defined in the CYFDG: 1) creation and development of a high-quality and sustainable system of work with youth; 2) promotion of wider and more active participation of young people; 3) promoting the acquisition of skills and abilities necessary for the labor market and independent life; 4) promoting the inclusion of young people with limited opportunities. The Ministry of Welfare, the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre and the MoES is the responsible institutions for the implementation of the CYFDG and coordinating the execution of tasks. The public discussion of the draft guidelines took place in July and August 2021. Along with the public consultation, the draft guidelines were discussed in various forums, including think tanks, involving a wide range of NGOs.

The State Program of Youth Policy for 2023–2025 (hereinafter referred to as the Program) has been developed to ensure effective and coordinated implementation of youth policy in Latvia and ensure the task specified in the long-term and medium-term development planning documents implementation and achievement of performance indicators in the field of youth. The measures included in the Program have been put forward in compliance with the EU and

national-level development planning documents, which determine the priorities of the youth policy sector.

The measures included in the Program are subordinate to the CYFDG for the purpose defined for the year, action directions and tasks. The Program includes those measures which, according to the law “On the state budget for 2023” and in accordance with the law “On the medium-term budget framework for 2023, 2024 and 2025” funding is planned in the budget program 21.00.00 “Youth policy state program”. In the period from 2023–2025 the estimated amount is approximately EUR 1.3 million. The Program measures are implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science, Agency for International Youth Programs and the National Centre for Education.

The Youth Policy Implementation Plan for 2023–2024 is a short-term policy planning document for the implementation of the Youth Policy Objectives and proposed directions of action for the next 3 years of the CYFDG. The measures included in the Plan are subordinated to the youth policy goal, action directions and tasks defined in the CYFDG. The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the implementation of the Plan. In the development of the State Program of Youth Policy for 2023–2025 and the Youth Policy Implementation Plan for 2022–2024 the **11 European Youth Goals have also been taken into account.**

Institutional framework

According to the Youth Law, the **Ministry of Education and Science** (MoES) ensures the development of a single national policy in the youth field and its coordinated implementation, including the cooperation of involved institutions in the implementation of the youth policy. The Minister of Education and Science is the highest official in the MoES. The Parliamen-

tary Secretary reports directly to the Minister. The administrative management of the Ministry is carried out by the State Secretary, who is directly subordinate to the Minister.

The **Department of Policy Initiatives and Development** within the MoES is primarily responsible for youth policies and issues. Its major tasks include promoting cooperation, implementing youth measures, organizing training for youth workers, and enabling access to information. The Department of Policy Initiatives and Development employs 5 people. The Deputy director of the department in the field of youth comes from the youth sector and has a long-standing experience in the field of youth.

The implementation of Latvian, the EU and other international programmes, projects and initiatives for youth work is provided by the **Agency for the International Programmes for Youth** (under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Science). The AIYP gives young people the opportunity to elaborate projects, disseminates interesting and useful information to young people about their opportunities, facilitates exchanges of experience and provides advice on project writing. At the end of 2022, the AIYP had 50 employees. The work of the agency is managed by the director of the agency, who is appointed and dismissed by the Minister of Education and Science.

According to the 2021 state budget, a total of EUR 12.856.848 was approved for the implementation of youth policy, of which 5.124.637 was realized. 946.446 was allocated for the State Program of Youth Policy; EUR 2.563.200 was allocated for the Agency for the International Programmes for Youth; EUR 2.412.476 was allocated for the Implementation of European Community program projects and 6.934.726 was allocated for the Implementation of EU program Erasmus+ projects.

The everyday practical work with young people is carried out by local governments, setting up an institutional framework for the youth work at local level – appointing a responsible institution, recruiting youth affairs specialists and other employees, establishing a youth centre and performing other activities.

The development and the implementation of the coherent youth policy is facilitated by the **Youth Advisory Council** – an advisory body established by the Cabinet of Ministers, comprising delegated representatives of public administration, local governments and youth organisations. Delegated representatives of youth organisations form at least half of the composition of the Youth Advisory Council. The Council has the following tasks: participate in the development of youth policy planning documents and regulatory acts; to monitor and assess the implementation of youth policy; to provide recommendations to state administrative institutions for ensuring the effective implementation of youth policy; to provide municipalities with recommendations for the implementation of youth policy at the municipal level; to provide NGOs, whose target group is young people, with recommendations for work with young people. From 2014 to 2022 there have been 16 meetings of the Council.

3.4. POLAND

Normative framework

It is important to acknowledge that Poland's youth policy is still in the development phase. Many municipalities and regions create their own policy documents concerning youth issues due to the **absence of a binding national strategy**.

These local approaches often draw inspiration from European traditions, practices of youth organizations, movements, and formats provided by EU programs. It is also worth noting that **Polish youth policy is developing mainly at the regional level.**

One of the challenges that arise from this situation is the lack of formal recognition of youth work and the requirements and standards for youth workers. Without an integrated approach and formal recognition, the youth work field becomes trapped in a “grey zone” between social, educational, sports, and cultural policies at various levels of administration. Another challenge is the fragmentation of youth policies and programs, lack of coordination and cooperation between different sectors. The final challenge category relates to financial stability, sustainability, and continuity.

Polish legal framework includes **several specific laws** and regulations that directly address youth issues. *The Law on the Education System* lays the foundation for educational policies and programs aimed at equipping young people with the knowledge and skills necessary for personal and professional development. Other provisions: *Family and Guardianship Code, Labour Code, Act on support and rehabilitation of minors, Education Law, Act on Higher Education, Post-graduate Placements Act, Act on health care for pupils, or the Associations Act.*

Between 2003 and 2012, the State Strategy for Youth for 2003–2012 was formulated in Poland as the guiding document for youth policy. However, this strategy was prepared before Poland’s accession to the European Union. Between 2018 and 2019, the Association for Establishing the Youth Council of the Republic of Poland collaborated with 600 young individuals to develop *The Assumptions for the National Youth Strategy for 2020–2030*. This was supposed to

mark a milestone in the progression of youth policy in Poland, outlining strategic areas such as the labor market, civic activity, sport, health, tourism, innovation, internet, digitization, culture, and education. **To date, the document has not been published.**

Nationwide public consultation on youth policy in Poland was held from February to November 2021, organized by the Council of Dialogue with the Young Generation and the Government Plenipotentiary for Youth Policy. About 30 000 young people from different regions of the country, including representatives of Polish youth living and studying abroad, took part in these consultations. The result of the consultations was the development of a draft Strategy of the Republic of Poland for the Young Generation for 2022–2033, taking into account the needs and problems raised by young people. As a consequence of these actions, a new initiative was launched. The Government’s **Youth Fund Program for 2022–2033** was a new program to support socially active youth activities. The program was inspired by the document called Polish Order, which envisioned the creation of a grant program for young people working with local councils to design attractive solutions to engage youth. The program’s budget for 2022–2033 is PLN 230 million (around EUR 51 million).

The program has three specific goals, which include: increasing youth involvement in public life, increasing the importance of youth initiatives in the public sphere, and institutional strengthening of these initiatives. The program not only responded to the goals set by the initiatives and strategies, but also implemented the provisions of the Revised European Charter for the Participation of Young People in Local Life. **In the context of the European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027**, the program was significant because

one of its main goals was to encourage young people to be active citizens and provide them with pathways for participation in various spheres of social, economic, cultural and political life.

As was already mentioned, Polish youth policy is developing mainly at the regional level. Hence, it is useful to mention several regional policy documents. *The Young Warsaw. Youth Policy of the City of Warsaw* is a comprehensive document that provides guidance and direction for engaging with young people. It encompasses the values and attitudes that are crucial in all aspects of youth work. Another example is the *Policy for Young People of the City of Poznań for 2019–2025*, which was a collaborative document that served as a social contract between the city and its young residents. It outlined five key priorities: the City of Active, City of Ecomobility, City of Friendly Space, Open City, and City of Talents.

Institutional framework

In Poland, **several Ministries are responsible for the implementation of youth policies** and addressing the needs and concerns of young people. The *Ministry of National Education* undertakes various activities and initiatives related to youth policies, with the primary focus on education and educational reforms. The *Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy* plays a significant role in formulating and implementing youth policies that focus on social welfare, labor market participation, and family support. The ministry focuses on facilitating youth employment through labor market policies, vocational training programs, and initiatives that encourage entrepreneurship and skill development. The *Ministry of Health* also addresses various aspects related to youth health and well-being.

The Government of Poland also includes **Commission for Civil Dialogue on Youth**, which is a body responsible for promoting dialogue between the government and youth in Poland. Its goal is to provide young people with the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and influence youth policies. The **Government Spokesperson for Youth Affairs** is a government official in Poland responsible for representing and acting on behalf of the interests of young people. He acts as an intermediary between the government and youth organizations, promoting dialogue and consultation on youth policy.

National Youth Council is an advisory body that aims to represent the interests of young people in Poland and contribute to the development and implementation of youth policies. It serves as a platform for youth organizations and young individuals to engage in dialogue with governmental institutions, express their opinions, and participate in decision-making processes. Some of the common activities of a national youth council may include policy advocacy, enhancing youth participation in decision-making processes, capacity building, networking and collaboration, information and awareness.

Other advisory bodies relevant for youth policy are the Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland is another advisory body, which operates under the authority of the Minister of Education and Science, the Youth Sports Council, which is a subsidiary body of the Minister of Sport and Tourism and the Dialogue Council with the Young Generation, which is an advisory body of the Chairman of the Public Benefit Committee. The National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme is an institution responsible for the coordination and implementation of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes in Poland.

The Youth Council is an organizational structure of young people who have the opportunity to co-determine and express their opinions on issues affecting young people. It is often established at the local, school, regional or national level and aim to push for the active participation of young people in social and democratic life. It represents a forum where young people can express their needs, ideas and problems, and take initiatives concerning their environment, education, culture, health and other areas relevant to youth. The Parliamentary Group Supporting Youth Councils Operating within Local Government Units is composed of 26 MPs. It cooperates with the Polish Council of Youth Organisations and with the Children and Youth Council of the Republic of Poland.

3.5. SERBIA

Normative framework

The **Law on Youth** was adopted in 2011. Its goal is the establishment of the conditions for support to the youth in its organization, social activities, development, and fulfilment of their potential. The Law defines youth policy as all measures and activities of the subjects of youth policy – state bodies, institutions, associations, and other entities – aimed at improving and improving the position of young people. It stipulates that there is a Ministry tasked with the implementation of youth policy, together with other subjects of youth policy.

The Law on Youth also regulates the adoption and implementation of the National Youth Strategy, the establishment of youth councils on national, provincial and local levels as

consultative bodies for the implementation of youth policy; the establishment of local youth offices; founding and registration of associations of youth and for youth; and public financing and co-financing of programmes and projects within the field of youth policy. After 12 years of implementation, the Government is currently working on a proposal for a new Law on Youth.

The current **National Strategy for Youth in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2023 to 2030** was adopted by the Government of Serbia in January 2023. It is the main strategic document for the youth policy in Serbia. The work on the new National Strategy for Youth started in July 2021 and it was generally inclusive and transparent. The **Action Plan for the period from 2023 to 2025** for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy was adopted in July 2023; the process of adoption lasted longer than the 90-day time frame stipulated by the Law on Planning System. Ministry responsible for youth policy is charged with monitoring the implementation of both the National Strategy and the Action Plan and reporting on the progress no later than 120 days after each year of their adoption passes.

The National Youth Strategy **references the EU Youth Strategy and 11 Youth Goals** as one of the international documents that served as a framework for its writing. There is one general goal and five specific goals contained in the current National Youth Strategy. The general goal is the increase of the quality of life of youth in Serbia. The five specific goals are: 1) the standardization and continuous implementation of youth work in the system of informal education; 2) the improvement of the space and service capacities for the implementation of youth policy in all local self-government units; 3) making young people active participants of the society on all levels; 4) young people have equal opportunities

and incentives to develop their potentials and competences which lead to economic independence; 5) establish conditions for a healthy and safe environment and social welfare of the youth.

Institutional framework

From 2007 to 2022 youth policy in Serbia was primarily implemented by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Following the 2022 parliamentary election, the Government was reorganized by the adoption of the amendments to the Law on Ministries, which established a **new Ministry of Tourism and Youth**. Youth representatives in Serbia have been advocating for years for an independent ministry that would solely be responsible for youth policy, but this has not taken place so far.

The Sector for Youth within the Ministry of Tourism and Youth is charged with the representation of the interests of youth in Serbia; development and implementation of youth policy, including the National Strategy on Youth and the Action Plan; carrying out the registry of youth associations; enabling and facilitating international cooperation in the field of youth; supporting the development of mechanisms of youth policy on the local level. Since October 2022, the Minister of Tourism and Youth has been Husein Memić, for whom this is the first ministerial post in his career. A total of 17 employees in the ministry are charged with youth policy (which is a slight increase from the time of the Ministry for Youth and Sport), including an Assistant Minister.

For years, **Sector for Youth** within the previous Ministry of Youth and Sport and the current Ministry of Tourism and Youth has been receiving less than 0.1% of the entire state budget of the Republic of Serbia, with the represent-

atives of youth associations, in particular National Youth Council, recommending that this amount is increased. The current revenues of the Sector for Youth are financing five projects: 1) support to units of local self-government in the implementation of youth policy; 2) development and implementation of youth policy; 3) programmes and projects of support to youth in education, training, security, health and participation; 4) programmes and projects of support to youth in finding employment; 5) international cooperation in the field of youth. Each year, the Ministry publishes open calls for financing and co-financing of projects carried out by civil society organizations; these projects are short-term and only last for several months.

Youth Council is a consultative body established in 2014 by the Government of Serbia. Its goals are to encourage and coordinate the implementation of youth policy across and propose new measures. The president of the Youth Council is the Minister of Tourism and Youth (currently Husein Memić) and the Assistant of the Minister in charge of youth. In addition to them, the Council has 33 members, 17 of whom represent state institutions and 16 of whom represent youth associations. From 2014 to 2023, the Youth Council held 20 sessions, with the frequency of meetings reducing as the years passed.

The Ministry of Tourism and Youth and the Youth Council are the main institutions charged with the implementation of youth policy on the national level. A majority of other government ministries are also represented in the Youth Council, indicating their partial role in the implementation of youth policy. On the level of the Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the main institution in charge of youth policy is the Provincial Secretariat for Sport and Youth. On the local level, the main instru-

ments of youth policy are youth offices, local youth council and local youth action plans; according to the government, by the end of 2021, out of 145 units of local self-government (cities and municipalities), 140 of them have youth offices, 78 of them have youth councils and 43 of them had local action plans.

4. THE CURRENT STATE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF EU YOUTH GOALS

This chapter presents the main findings of the research for each of the 11 Youth Goals. Each section begins with the assessment of the degree of the inclusion of each chapter in national policy documents. It is then followed by the results of surveys and focus groups which gathered opinions and experiences of young people in each area covered by a goal, so that a sense of its implementation in each country can be formed.

#1 Connecting EU with Youth

Table 4. presents the degree of inclusion of each target of the Youth Goal #1 in the national policy documents (see the Chapter on methodology). Several targets within Goal #1 are not applicable to Serbia since it is not an EU Member State. None of the targets is included to a large degree (grades 3 and 4) in a majority of the countries in the research. Latvia has the highest degree of inclusion of the goal among the five countries.

Table 4. Inclusion of Youth Goal #1 in national policy documents

Youth Goal	Targets	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
#1 Connecting EU with Youth	Guarantee meaningful youth involvement and dialogue in all stages of EU decision making by improving existing participatory mechanisms and creating new ones	3	2	4	2	N/A
	Ensure equal access to quality impartial and youth-friendly information about how the EU works, how to engage in it and what opportunities it offers	3	3	2	2	2
	Introduce and increase education about Europe and the EU in formal and non-formal settings	2	2	4	2	2
	Guarantee fair representation of all member states in political and administrative EU bodies, in line with the principle of equal citizenship	1	2	4	2	N/A
	Increase the budget and the impact of the EU youth programmes	1	3	4	2	N/A
	Build young people's trust in the EU project by addressing the democratic deficit, lack of transparency and visibility	2	3	3	2	N/A
	Institutionalise the assessment of youth-friendliness, impact and effect of EU policies	1	3	4	2	N/A

1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic document; 2 – this target is somewhat included; 3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic document

One of the indicators from which we can infer the level of connection between the young people and the European Union is the turnout in European Parliament elections. As can be seen from the table, in 2019, only in Italy did the turnout among people aged 25 to 39 exceed the turnout of the total population. The turnout among the young people aged 18 to 24 was significantly lower than the total turnout.

Table 5. Turnout in 2019 EU elections

Turnout in 2019 EU elections ²	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
18–24	47.5%	43.6%	16.4%	35.4%	N/A
25–39	56.4%	57.3%	19.8%	40.2%	N/A
Total population	58.8%	54.5%	33.5%	45.7%	N/A

Survey results

Figure 1. shows the first reaction of the young people to the term “European Union”. Positive reaction is dominant among all EU member states, while the percentages of those who have a negative reaction is low. In Serbia, on the other hand, neutral reaction is the most present, closely followed by a negative reaction.

2 European Parliament. 2019. “Review of European and national election results” https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/beheard/eurobarometer/2019/review_of_european_and_national_election_results_2019/incoming_ep_2019.pdf

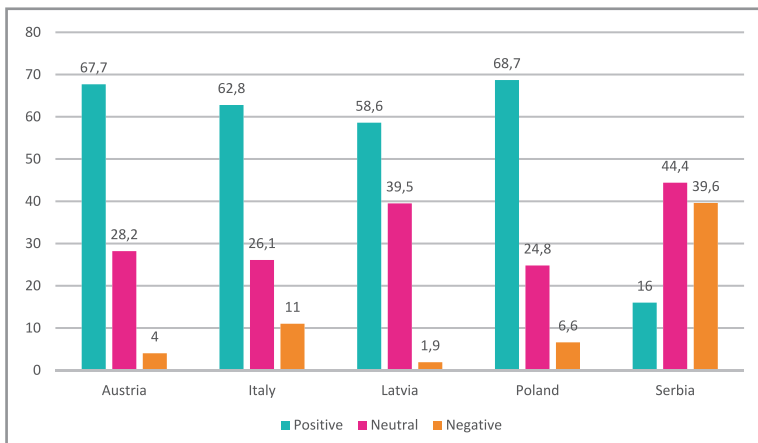
Figure 1. First reaction to the term “European Union”

Figure 2. and Figure 3. present the level of agreement young people in each country has with various statements concerning the EU on a scale from 1 to 5. Once again, young people in Serbia have a significantly more Eurosceptic world-view. Young people in Italy show significant disagreement with the statement that EU provides peace and stability. On almost all other statements, expect the one on the disintegration of the EU in the future, young people from the EU show more agreement than disagreement (statements are graded higher than 3).

*Figure 2. Statements about the EU pt. 1
(1 – I disagree completely; 5 – I agree completely)*

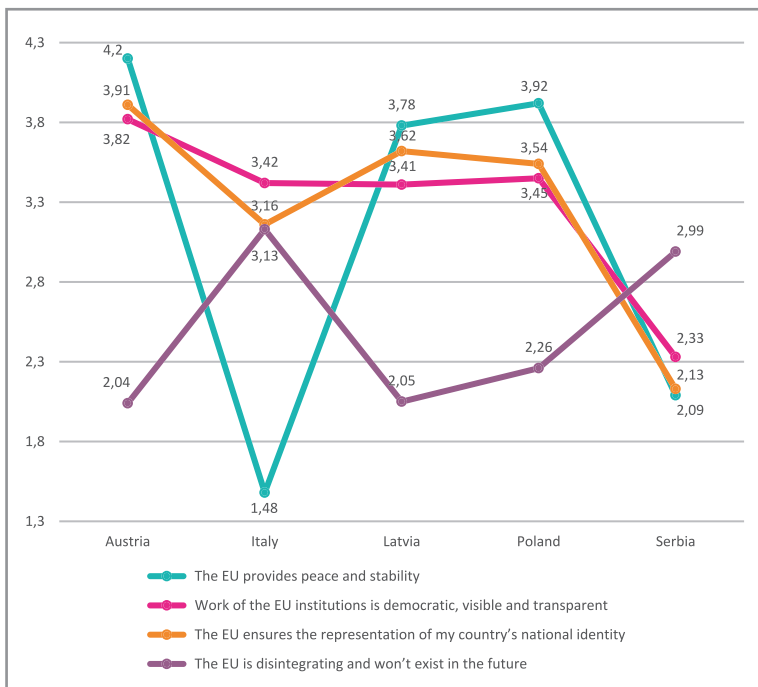
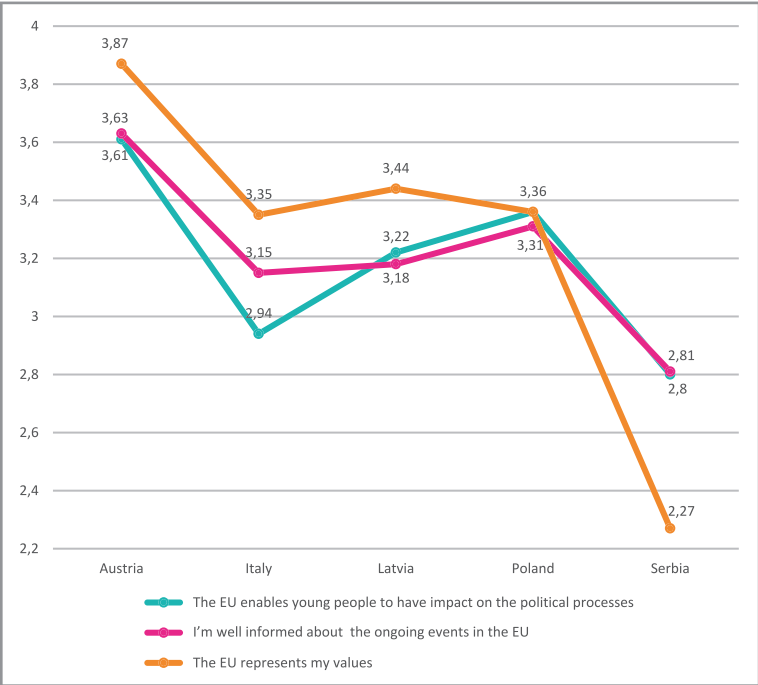


Figure 3. Statements about the EU pt. 2
(1 – I disagree completely; 5 – I agree completely)



*Table 6. Statements about the EU –
level of agreement*

Statements about the EU (1 – I disagree completely; 5 – I agree completely)	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
The EU provides peace and stability	4.2	1.48	3.78	3.92	2.09
Work of the EU institutions is democratic, visible and transparent	3.82	3.42	3.41	3.45	2.33
The EU ensures the representation of my country's national identity	3.91	3.16	3.62	3.54	2.13
The EU is disintegrating and won't exist in the future	2.04	3.13	2.04	2.26	2.99
The EU enables young people to have impact on the political processes	3.61	2.94	3.22	3.36	2.8
I'm well informed about the ongoing events in the EU	3.63	3.15	3.18	3.31	2.81
The EU represents my values	3.87	3.35	3.44	3.36	2.77

Reports from focus groups

Focus groups on Youth Goal #1: Connecting EU with Youth concluded that for many young people, both in the EU and outside of it, the Union remains abstract and the information about its functioning and values are lacking. The situation can be improved, however, by programs such as Erasmus and other initiatives, particularly those supporting youth mobility and activity.

In **Austria**, focus group has concluded that there is a lack of debate about what the EU means in real life for young people. Some participants described as “taking it for granted” the lifestyle within the EU – not as a “benefit” but something expected. The participants highlight that the EU structures are very complex; for regular young people from a small village in Hungary, Portugal or Poland, the “EU level” is very abstract. All young people have heard about Erasmus+, but they agreed that the program is promoted enough. Somebody underlined that the focus of the EU is on connecting with young people from the future potential member countries, not within. A potential vote on staying or leaving the EU would result in a poor turnout and close results among the youth.

Young people are highly underrepresented in the EU decision-making process. The fact that “more people named Martin in the EU Parliament than people under 30” has been used to picture the owner of the EU for young people. After a short presentation of the EYG, participants agreed that it is a very well-put-together platform. Nobody before had heard about EYG, but they all agree it can only benefit young people. Yet, participants do not think the Thematic report about this goal or the whole platform can actively contribute to the connection between young people and the EU.

Focus group in **Italy** shows that young people’s perception of the EU is still very far from what the EU actually is. Often, the idea is that it is an institution that places incomprehensible rules and external constraints on national politics. Policies such as those that are applied under the filter of the Regions, traineeships, as well as the Structured Dialogue, facilitate the connection between young people and supranational institutions.

Beyond the universities, it is mainly non-state actors that promote a European culture: organizations that deal with Erasmus projects, volunteer experiences, youth exchanges. Italy is full of ETS and youth organizations that act as a bridge between the EU and young people.

The European portal exists in Italy but it is connected with the national bodies for gathering information and for translation. The goal is to inform citizens (young and old) about the generic impact of the EU (and therefore cascading on the issues mentioned) on the lives of citizens, increasing awareness of how we are connected to the EU.

The discussion in **Latvia** began with the question to the participants of how European they felt on a scale of 1 to 10. They divided their responses into two concepts: personal European identity and societal European identity. While most participants rated their personal sense of European identity higher, they expressed concerns about a high level of misinformation and societal stagnation in the region where they lived. They felt that people lacked a clear understanding of the values necessary to build a better and more democratic future. However, the participants acknowledged that informed education about the European Union, facilitated by programs such as the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+, played a significant role in their knowledge about European opportunities.

The discussion also touched upon the issue of young people being more interested in exploring Europe than their homeland, Latvia, which may contribute to demographic challenges in the country. Financial constraints were mentioned as a significant hindrance to utilizing European opportunities.

In **Poland**, efforts have been made to increase youth participation in decision-making, encourage youth employment and promote social inclusion. There have been initiatives to

support education and training, including vocational opportunities, to equip young people with the skills they need for their future careers. In addition, Poland, like many other EU countries, has focused on addressing specific youth-related issues, such as mental health, substance abuse and environmental issues. The EU's emphasis on promoting digital inclusion may also have translated into efforts to close the digital and social divide among young people in Poland.

Poland has traditionally been an active participant in EU exchange programs, and initiatives that promote youth mobility and international experiences, such as Erasmus+, could continue to provide valuable opportunities for Poland's young citizens. In addition, Poland is at the forefront of countries to which students from other countries travel, allowing young Poles to integrate with representatives of different cultures.

Young people in **Serbia** see European Union neutrally, know little about it and its functioning, and inform insufficiently about happenings in the EU. Their engagement is on a modest rise, speaking of the EU-Serbia relations, but informing stays low.

The young are aware of many differences inside the EU itself but still believe that their peers from the EU live better, have more possibilities and can participate more in political processes. It is significant to underline that young people do not know accurately what EU values are. Yet, they claim not to share the same values with the EU and that the EU is not consistent in implementing those values.

Conclusion

Youth Goal #1: Connecting EU with Youth is the Goal that is included in the national policy documents the least. The survey shows that, with the exception of Serbia, young

people have a generally positive view of the European Union. However, the turnout in the EU elections among the youth is lower than among the total population, and the focus groups concluded that for many young people, both in the EU and outside of it, the Union remains abstract and the information about its functioning and values are lacking.

#2 Equality of all Genders

Table 7. presents the degree of inclusion of each target of the Youth Goal #2 in the national policy documents (see the Chapter on methodology). Only the first target – “Tackle discrimination and ensure equal rights for all genders in cultural, political and socio-economical life” is included to a large degree (grades 3 and 4) in a majority of the countries in the research. Latvia, once again, has the highest degree of inclusion of the goal among the five countries.

Table 7. Inclusion of Youth Goal #2 in national policy documents

Youth Goal	Target	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
#2 Equality of All Genders	Tackle discrimination and ensure equal rights for all genders in cultural, political and socio-economical life	4	2	4	2	3
	Achieve universal awareness of gender-based inequality and discrimination, particularly in the media	2	2	2	1	2
	End gender-based violence by addressing and tackling it effectively in all its form	2	2	4	1	3
	Eliminate stereotypical gender roles and embrace diverse gender identities in education systems, family life, the workplace, and other areas of life	1	2	4	1	3
	End gender-based structural discrimination in the labour market and ensure equal rights, access and opportunities	3	2	4	1	1
	Ensure equal pay for equal work and the equal sharing of the responsibilities of care work	3	2	4	1	1
	Ensure equal access to formal and non-formal education, and that the design of education systems follows gender-sensitive approaches	2	2	4	1	2

1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic document; 2 – this target is somewhat included; 3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic document

Survey results

Figures 4. to 6. show levels of agreement, on a scale from 1 to 5, that young people have with the claims on the position of women in a society. The results show that, in general, respondents agree that it is still harder to get employed for young women than for young men and that house chores and raising of the children is still not equally divided between men and women (answers almost always have values larger than 3). When it comes to the media representation of women, most respondents agree that it is equal.

Figure 4. "It is harder to get employed for young women than for young men"
(1 – I disagree completely; 5 – I agree completely)

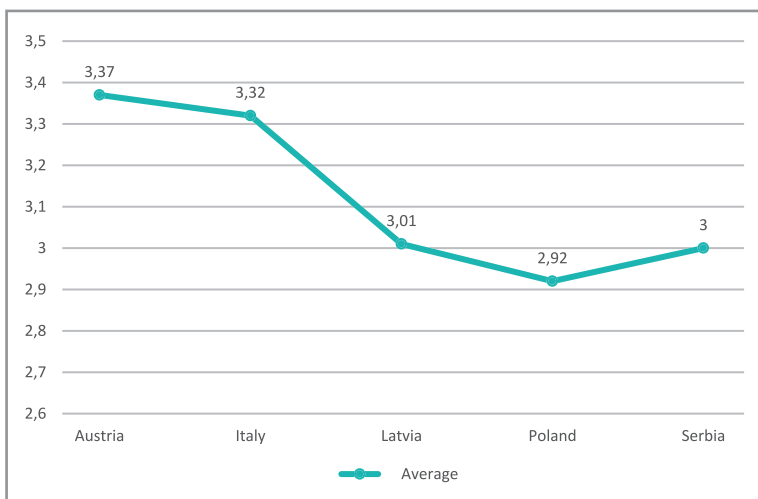
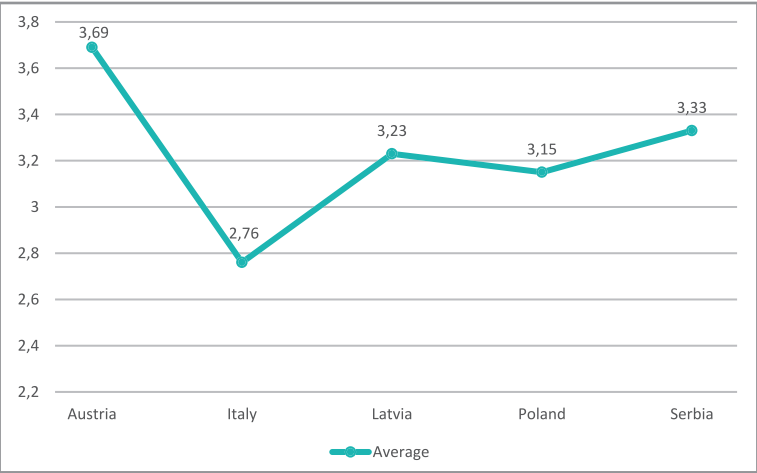


Figure 5. “House chores and raising of the children is still not equally divided between men and women”
(1 – I disagree completely; 5 – I agree completely)



Figure 6. “Women have the equal coverage in media as men have”
(1 – I disagree completely; 5 – I agree completely)



Reports from focus groups

Focus groups on Youth Goal #2: Equality of All Genders concluded that, while the situation in some areas, such as the job market, is improving in some countries, there are still many areas of society where gender inequality persists. These include education, politics, the media and the family. There is a general sense among the young people that national governments should do more to improve the situation.

In the focus group carried out in **Austria**, it was underlined that the crucial challenge on this topic is the role of the traditional male: “Not accepting that there is a problem or mansplaining it. I don’t know what is worse”. The group agreed that young people especially run away from debating this topic, as they have accepted it. Other listed issues were gender-based violence in public spaces, increasing GBV in school or spaces for young people, the fact that young women are the prime focus of sexual exploitation and human trafficking, forcing traditional roles in the school system, a growing number of femicides in Europe.

The participants said that the institutions and policies must constantly be reevaluated, and “that is a journey, not a destination.” Also, this evaluation process has to bring conclusions such as “bad legislation” or “bad implementation of good legislation” and that without this distinction, it’s impossible to fix something if you don’t know where it is broken. Gender mainstreaming is one of the critical postulates and tasks of the EU decision-makers, but also on the national level. One of the ideas one of the participants offered as “revolutionary” was the legal expulsion of the “Tell us your gender” question in so many forms. Except for statistical purposes, in many cases, the question is irrelevant.

In **Italy**, on the topic of job opportunities for young women, the group expresses itself confirming what the data projections confirm, namely that lately this situation in Italy has been improving a lot. There are many women-owned businesses and access to STEM is gradually growing. One of the issues that is raised, in terms of opportunities, is the equal wage between men and women, not yet equal in Italy for all professions.

Unlike the near equality in terms of job opportunities, there is still a serious social disparity in terms of family management and education of unequally divided children. From a spontaneous reflection it emerges that there are more and more fathers who take care of the house, but who in any case find, in the education of their children, especially for women, a limit to access to work and a career. Italy is trying to improve on this, also through the increase of kindergartens, foreseen in the Italian Next Gen EU.

On the subject of media visibility, the data that emerges in the discussion demonstrates how the female image, especially in television contexts, is still too closely associated with the themes of beauty and the sexualisation of bodies. What is highlighted is the need for a different narration of the role of women in society that can increase her presence also in media contexts.

The participants in **Latvia** addressed the issue of the country not being a safe place for expressing non-traditional gender identities. They mentioned that societal expectations and norms place pressure on women to be attractive to men, even within the queer community. They also discussed toxic masculinity and the lack of healthy alternatives for young men. The participants highlighted the need for more comprehensive mental health services, as well as the challenges of touch deprivation and the absence of deep relationships.

In terms of employment, they recognized that gender inequalities exist in certain industries and regions, noting surplus of female representation in NGOs.

The discussion also touched upon gender roles within families, with the participants sharing experiences of different expectations placed on girls and boys. They emphasized that girls are often expected to excel academically, engage in household chores, participate in extracurricular activities, and maintain a good appearance, which can provide them with advantages in life but also create additional pressure. The participants highlighted the intersection of queer identities and gender equality, discussing the dominance of trans men in public visibility compared to trans women in Latvia and the stigmatization and infantilization faced by trans individuals.

Representation in media and culture was also a topic of discussion. The participants acknowledged that they consume Latvian media to a limited extent but stressed that the quantity of representation is less important than the content and context. The participants observed that gender equality and violence against women become topical issues in waves when negative events occur.

In **Poland**, the focus group concluded there are serious problems of gender equality that continue to challenge society and require immediate attention. The first problem is inequality in the labor market. Women often face lower wages for the same work or are marginalized in managerial jobs. Although women have equal knowledge and skills, their career advancement is often hindered by gender stereotypes and unequal access to training and professional development.

The second problem is violence against women. There are still high levels of domestic and sexual violence against women in Poland. Inadequate support for victims and the lack of effective measures to protect and punish perpetra-

tors of violence leave many women helpless and unable to escape violent situations.

The third problem is the lack of equality in political and decision-making life. Women continue to be underrepresented in politics, both at the government and local levels. The lack of equal participation of women in the decision-making process leads to a lack of consideration of gender perspectives and neglect of issues important to women in politics and legislation.

In addition, education in Poland also brings some concerns. There is still a division between traditional gender roles, which contributes to prejudice and stereotyping. Also, sex education is often inadequate or not covered in the curriculum, leading to a lack of knowledge and awareness among young people about gender equality, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Coordinated action at multiple levels is needed to address these problems. Authorities should enact effective laws that guarantee gender equality in the workplace, provide appropriate sanctions for violence against women, and promote equal representation of women in political life. Education, too, should be tailored to the needs and rights of youth to promote awareness and respect for all genders.

The participants of the focus group in **Serbia** concluded that men and women are not equal in the country. Women are still sometimes required to do the same job for less money and have to put additional effort to earn respect in the workplace. In terms of education, one participant remarked that girls are still discouraged to pursue career in STEM fields.

The participants almost unanimously stated that it is much more difficult for young women to engage in politics. One participant mentioned Serbian Prime Minister Ana

Brnabić as an example of a woman and an open member of the LGBT+ community in politics. As he stated, Brnabić is in the position of Prime Minister precisely because she operates according to “men’s rules” in politics, and does nothing for her community, nor does she emphasize that part of her identity.

Gender (in)equality also finds its place in the families of the participants. Namely, a good part of them agreed that the division of housework and raising children should be equally distributed between women and men, but that this is largely not the case. They were divided over the question of whether housework should be payed, but agreed that this would be difficult to implement in Serbia.

When it comes to the media, a large part of the participants believe that women and men are represented in a balanced way in the media, but that the narrative about women is more often negative. They are portrayed stereotypically and are rarely seen when discussing important political and social issues. Part of the participants claimed that members of the LGBT+ community have been getting more and more space in the media lately, but that it is usually about some “problematic” people.

Conclusion

Youth Goal #2: Equality of All Genders is among the Goals with the lowest level of inclusion in national policy documents. Survey results show that young people believe that inequality between men and women still exists in some areas, including the job market and family life. The focus groups also supported this conclusion and expressed an opinion that the national governments should do more to tackle these issues.

#3 Inclusive Societies

Table 8. presents the degree of inclusion of each target of the Youth Goal #3 in the national policy documents (see the Chapter on methodology). This time, five out of seven targets are included to a large degree (grades 3 and 4) in a majority of the countries in the research. Targets that are not included are the one on providing legal protection and legal instruments to fight against discrimination and the one on strengthening social support by guaranteeing social rights. Italy has the highest degree of inclusion of the goal among the five countries.

Table 8. Inclusion of Youth Goal #3 in national policy documents

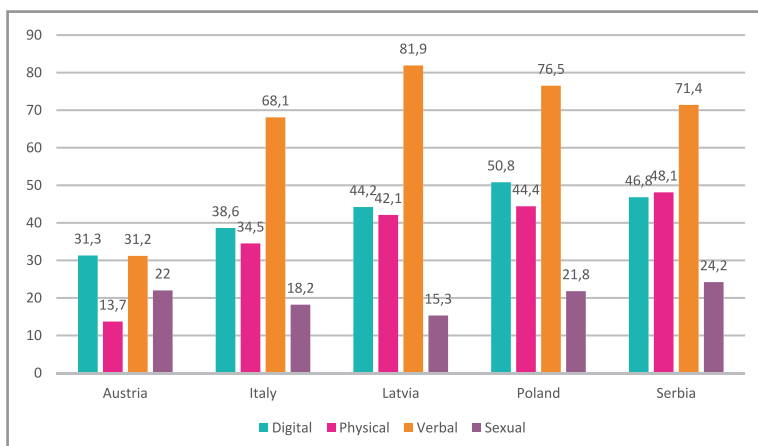
Youth Goal	Targets	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
#3 Inclusive Societies	Provide legal protection and enforce international legal instruments to fight against all kinds of discrimination and hate speech, recognising that young people are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination	2	2	3	2	3
	Strengthen outreach of information to marginalised young people, to ensure they are aware of spaces, opportunities and experiences available to them	3	4	3	2	2
	Ensure that all marginalised young people have equal access to formal and non-formal learning environments, addressing all the dimensions of inclusion	4	4	3	2	3
	Strengthen the capacities of educators to work with marginalised young people	1	4	3	1	3
	Provide more spaces, opportunities, resources and programmes to foster dialogue and social cohesion, and combat discrimination and segregation	4	4	4	2	3
	Strengthen social support by implementing the right to a living wage, fair work condition, universal access to quality health care, and ensure specific measures for marginalised young people	2	4	3	2	2
	Ensure that marginalised young people are participating in all decision-making processes and are key players, particularly in processes concerning their own rights, wellbeing and interests	3	4	4	1	3

1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic document; 2 – this target is somewhat included; 3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic document

Survey results

The survey asked the young people whether they have experienced certain types of violence. The results are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Percentage (%) of young people experienced certain type of violence



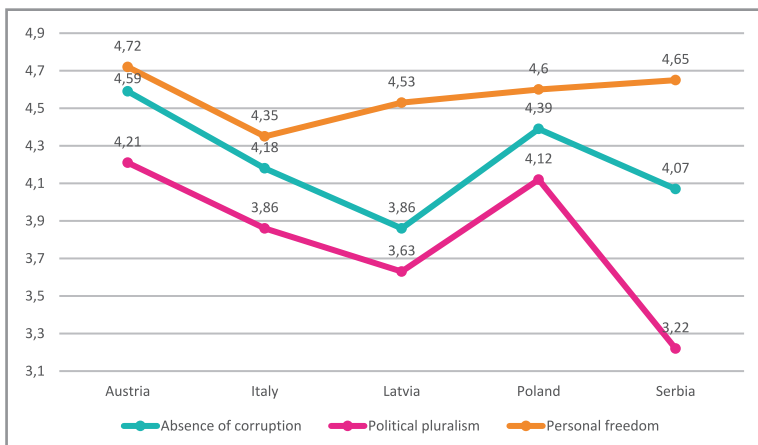
The survey also asked young people whether they have experienced certain types of discrimination and the results are presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Percentage (%) of young people experienced certain type of discrimination

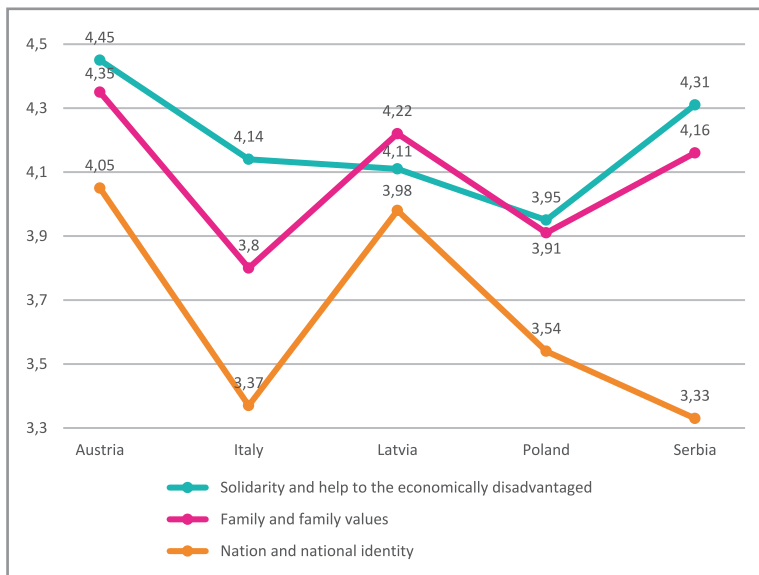


Young people were also asked, on a scale from 1 to 5, how important certain values in a society are to them. The results are presented in Figures 9 to 11, as well as Table 9. Personal freedom and inclusion and non-discrimination were the values that received the highest grades across five countries.

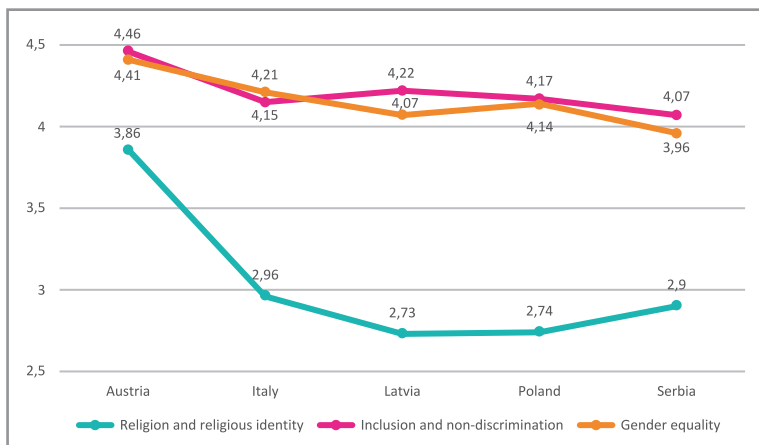
*Figure 9. “How much are the following values in the society important to you?” (pt. 1)
(1 – not important at all; 5 – very important)*



*Figure 10. How much are the following values in the society important to you? (pt. 2)
(1 – not important at all; 5 – very important)*



*Figure 11. “How much are the following values in the society important to you?” (pt. 3)
(1 – not important at all; 5 – very important)*



*Table 9. Importance of values in a society
(1 – not important at all; 5 – very important)*

	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
Absence of corruption	4.59	4.18	3.86	4.39	4.07
Political pluralism	4.21	3.86	3.63	4.12	3.22
Personal freedom	4.72	4.35	4.53	4.6	4.65
Solidarity and help to the economically disadvantaged	4.45	4.14	4.11	3.95	4.31
Family and family values	4.35	3.80	4.22	3.91	4.16
Nation and national identity	4.05	3.37	3.98	3.54	3.33
Religion and religious identity	3.86	2.96	2.73	2.74	2.9
Inclusion and non-discrimination	4.46	4.15	4.22	4.17	4.07
Gender equality	4.41	4.21	4.07	4.14	3.96

Reports from focus groups

Focus groups on Youth Goal #3: Inclusive Societies concluded that LGBTQ+ community remains vulnerable to societal discrimination, together with other groups such as migrant workers, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities. The role of school as the place in which discrimination first starts to take place has been emphasized. The responsibility of the government to improve the situation was particularly stressed in Poland.

The focus group in **Austria** was held in Vienna amongst young people with migrant backgrounds. During the event

– which involved small-group walks and discussions – participants recounted feeling unfairly treated due to their ageism in public spaces. Moreover, many employers are reluctant to employ inexperienced yet youthful workers; this reluctance appears rooted within an assumption that such individuals lack appropriate proficiency for success. On the other hand, these same migrants desire equitable societies exempt from corruption as is common back home: ones where accountability and justice prevail through punishing corruptive behaviors when necessary.

Within the panel held in **Italy**, the participants identified themselves with the topics covered by opening up to their own personal experiences on the subject of bullying related to the world of sport, school and the community in which they live in general. This personal and emotional information led the rest of the group to discuss and implement ideas and considerations on the need to define common guidelines for action.

It emerges that the school environment is the main source of discomfort among the youngest, who even following the pandemic have not found support in the educational community understood as school, parish, parents. There is a common thought in believing that this community has attempted to minimize the problems and the relative approach towards the figure of the psychologist.

The discussion in **Latvia** covered several important points. It was noted that older millennials and Gen X tend to be the least inclusive, making it harder to have conversations about sexuality with parents rather than grandparents. The influence of internet echo chambers was also highlighted. It was recognized that we all live in social bubbles.

The discussion also revealed that it's easier to talk about LGBTQ+ issues and mental health than it is to address violence. The prevalence of domestic violence and high rates of alcoholism in Europe indicated a concerning level of tolerance towards violence within society. While some participants had a positive outlook and acknowledged progress, others stressed the need for change. They pointed out that families themselves are not always inclusive, disregarding the opinions of young people. However, when young individuals form their own supportive communities, they become more willing to engage with their families. Spreading awareness and the role of popular culture were identified as crucial steps, emphasizing the importance of positive examples. Ultimately, the need for generational change was emphasized throughout the discussion.

In **Poland**, lack of respect for the rights of LGBTQ+ people has a negative impact on their daily lives. Many members of this community experience acts of violence, intimidation and intolerance both in public places and in the workplace. Such mistreatment can lead to deteriorating mental health, anxiety and depression. In addition, authorities do not provide sufficient support and access to adequate health services for LGBTQ+ people. There is also a lack of education about LGBTQ+ issues in health care.

To improve the situation of LGBTQ+ people, effective legal protections are needed to ensure that they are treated equally and protected from violence and discrimination. Government should also invest in educational programs that will raise public awareness of LGBTQ+ issues and train healthcare professionals to provide adequate support and medical care. Ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities are also vulnerable.

To effectively counteract these problems, decisive action is needed at both the societal and institutional levels. Educating the public about tolerance, respect and understanding of diversity is crucial. Schools and educational institutions should promote a culture that respects differences and encourages dialogue between different social groups. The government and NGOs should introduce anti-discrimination and hate speech programs that emphasize education and the promotion of positive behavior patterns.

Participants of the focus group in **Serbia** recognize all forms of violence and discrimination and are witnesses of at least some of those forms daily. They all agree that, if not themselves, they are familiar with someone from their community exposed to violence or discrimination.

The line between making jokes and offending someone is hard to acknowledge sometimes, especially speaking of verbal violence. It is the most common and usually follows other forms of violence. The digital era brought further reproduction of violence from real time and space.

Simultaneous exposure to different kinds of discrimination is clear to the young. That is why they think it is essential for them to have safe spaces such as youth centres. There they can foster values of personal liberties, inclusion and non-discrimination, and gender equality, which they find significant.

Conclusion

Youth Goal #3: Inclusive Societies is one of the goals with a higher level of inclusion in the national policy documents. Young people across Europe still face significant amounts of violence and discrimination, as shown by the survey. The re-

search also shows that they highly value personal freedom and inclusion, which is particularly relevant in the context of this goal. Focus groups concluded that LGBTQ+ community remains vulnerable to societal discrimination, together with other groups such as migrant workers, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities. The role of school as the place in which discrimination first starts to take place has been emphasized.

#4 Information & Constructive Dialogue

Table 10. presents the degree of inclusion of each target of the Youth Goal #4 in the national policy documents (see the Chapter on methodology). Two out of six targets are included to a large degree (grades 3 and 4) in a majority of the countries in the research: “Empower young people to be critical and responsible users and producers of information” and “Ensure young people have the ability to recognise and report repeatedly misleading news and verify the accuracy of news sources used”. Austria and Serbia the highest degree of inclusion of the goal among the five countries.

Table 10. Inclusion of Youth Goal #4 in national policy documents

Youth Goal	Targets	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
#4 Information & Constructive Dialogue	Empower young people to be critical and responsible users and producers of information	4	3	3	1	4
	Ensure young people have the ability to recognize and report repeatedly misleading news and verify the accuracy of news sources used	4	2	3	1	3
	Ensure young people have the ability to recognize and report hate speech and discrimination online and offline	2	2	3	2	4
	Ensure young people can engage in respectful, tolerant and non-violent dialogue, online and offline	2	2	3	1	3
	Ensure easy access to understandable youth-friendly information that follows codes of ethics and quality standards	3	2	3	1	2
	Ensure parents and carers, and all those involved with educating and training young people are equipped with media and digital literacy skills and that they are reliable information sources for young people	2	2	3	1	1

1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic document; 2 – this target is somewhat included; 3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic document

Survey results

Figure 12. presents answers to the question of whether young people encounter news and information they consider fake through the media and the Internet. Large majorities consider they receive them often or sometimes. As Figure 13. shows, however, not all young people are equally confident in their ability to identify fake news – majorities in Austria, Italy and Poland believe they are not able to so.

Figure 12. When receiving information (press, TV, Internet, social networks), do you encounter news and information that you consider fake?

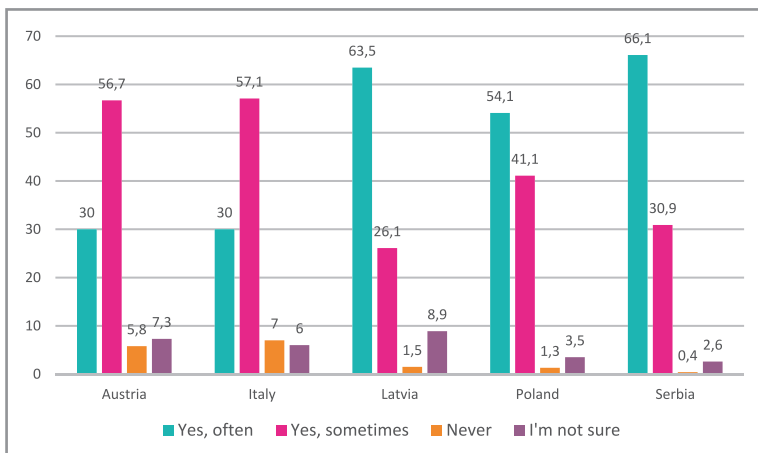
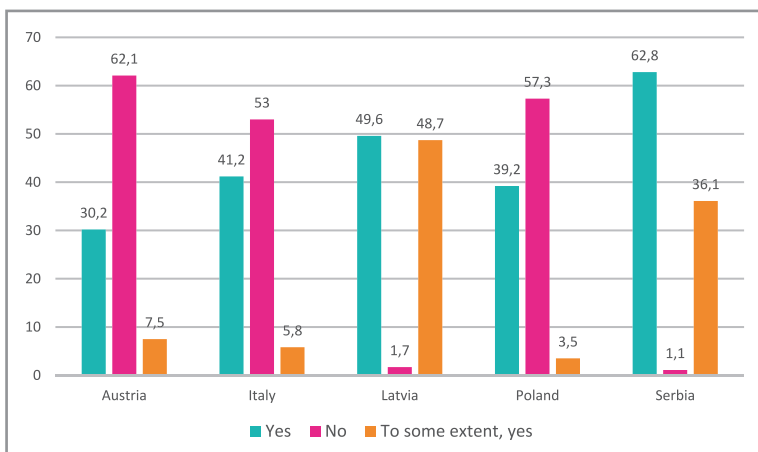


Figure 13. Do you think that you can identify fake news?



Reports from focus groups

Focus groups on Youth Goal #4: Information and Constructive Dialogue concluded that young people still lack tools for recognizing misinformation and participation in constructive discussion. In order to improve the situation, in almost every country a reform of the education system was mentioned as a part of the solution. Tailoring media content for young people was also discussed, and some examples of how this could be done were provided.

The group in **Austria** agreed that all the topics or questions included in the 11 European Youth Goals are important to young people and that young people should discuss them. Still, the group could not unanimously agree about any of the topics or questions that young people willingly and actively talk about. This raised the question of why. Participants agreed that “debating” requires knowledge, and skills. Young people may “talk” or “share their opinions” about

something close to them. The conclusion is that young people do not have patience.

Still, platforms or chances to develop skills to communicate to others “on a more serious topic...which is a pity because I do have something to say. I just don’t,” said one of the participants. The participants agreed that young people (mostly under 25) get all the information on social media but do not trust it. The key source of information for young people include television, a peer or a role model, parents, and then something they see online.

On the other hand, participants agree with no doubt that young people do not receive enough (credible) information and do not know where to search for them. Also, they don’t know how to fact-check information, and they take it for granted and often just post it and re-share it. Fake news is not seen as a problem for young people. “It’s often their best-selling and most fun product,” said one of the participants.

Within the group in **Italy** it was possible to note the particular attention paid to the theme of a correct communication, always an element of involvement and debate in relation to the “tones of voice” and the communication tools that are used.

Communication must intrigue but also lead to a slower and more in-depth content. On this issue there has been much talk of the tendency of generation Z to “engulf” content rather than fully understand it. This generates malaise and therefore fuels hatred between the parties. An “educational” approach to communication is therefore needed, as well as the use of forms other than texts: use of images and videos to convey messages. The communication should be based on concrete cases, in such a way that one can be reflected in the content. Social networks should be used

first of all, but other communication channels should not be abandoned, based on the audience you want to reach.

Youth in **Latvia** acknowledge the rapid spread of information in today's digital age and express concerns about the reliability of online sources, often encountering fake news on social media platforms. They emphasize the need for more critical thinking education in schools to empower young people with the skills to evaluate information critically.

Regarding news outlets, the youth believe that Latvian public media, such as Delfi, LTV, TV3, and LSM, are relatively reliable sources. However, they mention instances where some media outlets faced consequences for propagating misleading information, particularly regarding the Russian war in Ukraine. Although the youth themselves do not encounter propaganda on a daily basis, they have seen videos from Russian state media that spread false information about Latvia. Integration of Russian-speaking individuals into a trustworthy information environment is seen as a challenge, and the youth appreciate efforts to promote reliable information, such as enforcing the use of the Latvian language in TV broadcasts.

The young people stress the importance of creating more constructive dialogue on various topics that are not discussed enough in their daily lives. They highlight the democracy festival LAMPA as a positive example, providing a platform for discussing and addressing societal issues and enabling them to hear opinions from different perspectives, including those of politicians. They also emphasize the need for news outlets to focus on relevant topics, especially those that matter to the youth.

In **Poland**, there is a need to strengthen education that focuses on developing the ability to approach information

sources analytically, assess the reliability of data and make informed decisions. Young people should be equipped with the tools to process information effectively, distinguish facts from manipulation, and understand different perspectives. Critical thinking and responsibility play a key role in shaping young people's moral and ethical values. By supporting them in developing these skills, we are helping to build a society that prioritizes integrity, honesty and respect in interpersonal relationships.

There is a need to reform the education system to provide young people with the right tools and environment to develop critical thinking. Teachers should be adequately prepared to impart these skills, and curricula should be adapted to the demands of the modern information world. Critical thinking and responsibility not only develop young people's individual skills, but also contribute to building a better future for society as a whole.

Social networks, especially Instagram and Twitter, are their primary source of information for the participants of focus group in **Serbia**, but the content they follow on them is different. If they find information on a topic they are interested in on social networks, they do further research on online portals. They follow traditional media to a significantly lesser extent, but they are still informed about important and current events through television, which provides them with live broadcasts.

They believe that there is not enough content for young people and that youth media is an excellent model that needs to be further developed, as well as creating some new ones. In addition to content, they also lack young interlocutors in the media, primarily professional young people and politicians. They point out that age is by no means a measure of expertise.

They manage to defend themselves against a large amount of false information from their media environment, which they do not consider to be the case with their environment. They point out that this problem can be solved by introducing media literacy into the education system. They also see cyber violence as a big challenge and believe that despite all the protection mechanisms, the Internet encourages more violence than suppresses it.

Conclusion

Youth Goal #4: Information and Constructive Dialogue is among the less included goals in the national policy documents. While young people believe they often encounter fake news and misinformation, many of them are not confident in their ability to recognize them, as the results of both the survey and the focus groups demonstrate.

#5 Mental Health & Wellbeing

Table 11. presents the degree of inclusion of each target of the Youth Goal #5 in the national policy documents (see the chapter on methodology). Four out of seven targets are included to a large degree (grades 3 and 4) in a majority of the countries in the research. Austria has the highest degree of inclusion of the goal among the five countries.

Table 11. Inclusion of Youth Goal #5 in national policy documents

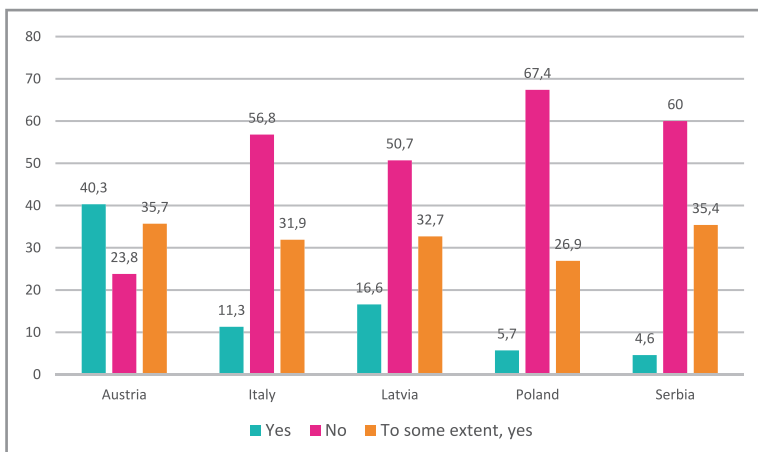
Youth Goal	Targets	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
#5 Mental Health & Wellbeing	Encourage the development of self-awareness and less competitive mindsets by fostering appreciation for individual skills and strengths	2	3	3	1	1
	Safeguard the rights to work and to study of people with mental health issues both during and after illness to ensure their ability to pursue their own ambitions	2	3	3	1	2
	Develop an inclusive intersectional approach to mental health provision for all, especially marginalised groups	3	3	3	2	3
	Provide all professionals working with young people as well as family and friends with quality mental health first aid training	2	2	3	1	1
	Provide inclusive, respectful and well-funded treatment by incorporating high quality mental health provision across all medical institutions	4	2	3	1	3
	Focus on prevention measures that ensure young people are equipped with the knowledge and the skills required for better mental wellbeing	4	2	3	1	4
	Fight stigma about mental health issues by developing awareness programmes	3	2	3	1	4

1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic document; 2 – this target is somewhat included; 3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic document

Survey results

Young people were asked whether they think professional help for mental health problems is sufficiently available in their country. Figure 14. shows that only in Austria the majority answer is yes, while in all other countries more than half of the respondents believe professional help is not available.

Figure 14. Do you think that professional help for mental health problems is sufficiently available to young people in your country?



Young people were also asked whether they faced stress, anxiety and depression in the past year. The results are presented in Figures 15. to 17. The results for each category are the highest in Serbia.

Figure 15. In the past year, have you been faced with stress?

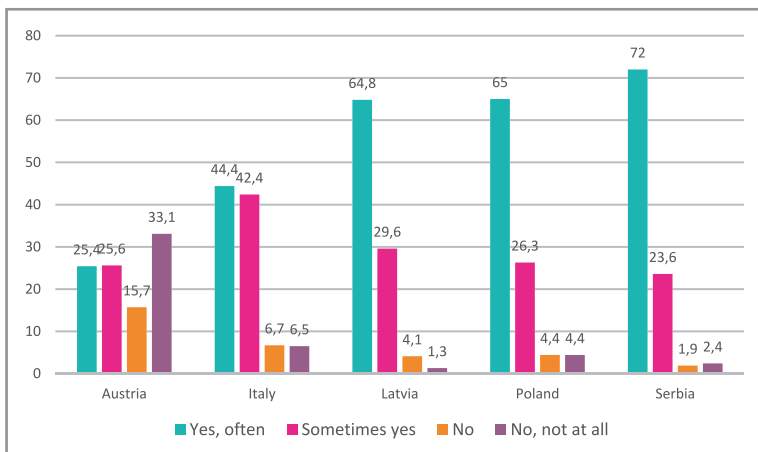


Figure 16. In the past year, have you been faced with anxiety?

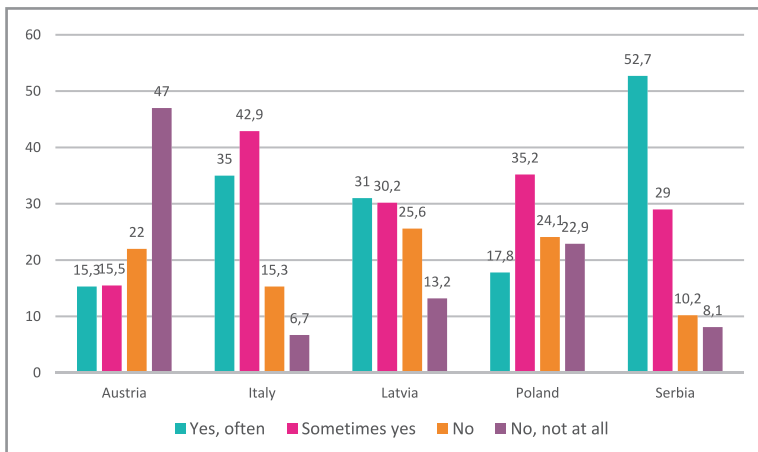
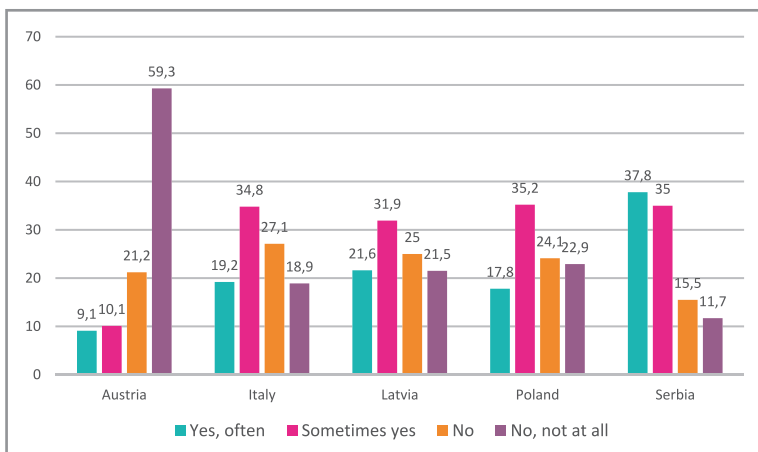


Figure 17. In the past year, have you been faced with depression?



Reports from focus groups

Focus groups on Youth Goal #5: Mental Health and Wellbeing concluded that, in multiple countries, discussing and asking for help regarding one's mental health problems is still a taboo. Educational system is the first area in which the improvements should be made, both in terms of providing young people with information about mental health, as well as with necessary services. Lack of personnel and even trust in institutions in some countries is another problem that needs to be addressed.

The participants of the focus group in **Austria** primarily consisted of migrants from various European countries and beyond, who were living in Vienna for educational or work purposes. When asked about their daily struggles, the majority mentioned stress as a significant challenge and discussed how they cope with it. However, they expressed

overall satisfaction with their lives in Vienna and observed that the city's population appeared to be relatively relaxed.

When discussing coping mechanisms for stress and mental health issues, all participants shared their strategies for maintaining calm and taking care of their mental well-being. Common responses included engaging in exercise, practicing yoga, spending time outdoors, socializing with friends, and practicing breathing exercises. Interestingly, seeking professional help or therapy was not mentioned voluntarily by any participant in the focus group. The discussion did not delve into more severe mental health issues, as individuals facing such challenges often prefer anonymity and may find it difficult to share their struggles with less familiar individuals.

The theme “school” stood out as central to the debate in **Italy**. It is perceived that the taboo of accessing the psychological desk at school is still strong and some points are defined together. The group elaborated the proposals as points to be dealt with in a regulatory system aimed at overcoming the phenomenon of youth discomfort.

The proposals included regulatory modification of school orientation courses and PCTOs, with the aim of reducing the stress generated within the school world, as well as counteracting the feeling of defeat and disillusionment due to a working future that does not correspond to one's ambitions; introduction of orientation courses on the topics covered already in the course of higher education, through a system that is more “dual” and which therefore gives the young person the opportunity to carry out theoretical studies; modification and integration to the training plans of the teachers responsible for the orientation of school students; introduction and/or strengthening of figures specialized in psychological support, both for children, but also for teachers and

school staff; dialogue with employers to ensure concrete training experiences for the students involved; investing in culture, art and beauty to nurture a sense of well-being in living spaces, thus countering the anxieties and fears that this generates.

It is necessary to start a process between young people and institutions that allows healthcare, especially in the age of its digitization, to remain “human”, guaranteeing a fair and inclusive approach in access to treatment and prevention systems, eliminating the dogmas of fear and of fear. We would like health, in the Europe of the future, to be unique and ethical, close to the values of gratuitousness, volunteering and anonymity.

During a focus group in Liepāja, **Latvia**, youth highlighted that they are generally well-informed about mental health issues but lack knowledge about available support options. Only a few were aware of where to get free professional help for mental health challenges. Suggestions to address the issue include providing basic mental health education in schools, training teachers to understand mental health issues, and conducting awareness campaigns through media and the internet. Having mentors at youth centers was seen as more beneficial than school psychologists.

Participants also stressed the importance of organizing informal educational sessions about mental health for young people and their parents. They appreciated the presence of the non-governmental organization YOU+, which offers mentor support, helping young people navigate challenges and seek professional help when needed. Expanding such services throughout Latvia and increasing the capacity of mental health support were identified as essential improvements.

Overall, addressing mental health challenges among young people requires better education, accessible support

systems, and the involvement of mentors to create a supportive environment and promote their well-being and social integration.

Currently, in **Poland**, there is a serious shortage of specialists, programs and extensive efforts to face this problem. Lack of adequate access to psychological care poses a serious threat to the mental health of young people. Many people in this age group struggle with various emotional problems, such as depression, anxiety and eating disorders. However, there are not enough specialists to help diagnose and treat these conditions.

In addition, the scarcity of mental health prevention and education programs makes the situation worse. Many young people lack access to the information and tools they need to understand and deal with their own emotional problems. The lack of preventive measures can lead to the deterioration of youth mental health in the long run.

To improve this situation, comprehensive measures are needed. It is necessary to increase the number of professionals working in the field of youth mental health through educational programs and to create incentives for young people to take up a career in this field. In addition, governments and health institutions should invest in developing prevention programs that reach out to youth in schools and communities.

The participants of the focus group in **Serbia** have a highly developed awareness of the importance of mental health, and the merit can be attributed to the fact that they are part of the non-governmental sector where they had the opportunity to go through various workshops. However, their awareness of its importance is in direct contrast to their concern for their mental health, as most of them actually totally neglect it.

They do not trust the institutions and that systemic care for the mental health of young people in Serbia exists, so they do not use the free services offered by these institutions. Only one participant goes to psychotherapy, which is reflected in the fact that her daily life causes less stress.

Taking care of mental health and talking about it is still taboo in our society, so the environment does not listen enough to the problems of young people. They perceive their challenges in life as small and unimportant compared to the challenges of their elders, so friends are the only address they confide in because psychotherapy is not financially affordable for them, and they cannot talk to their parents.

They see the free psychological counseling center for young people as one of the good models that should be further developed and made more accessible to young people, because they think that it is much more pleasant for young psychologists to talk to other young people. Establishing more such counseling centers at universities, as well as increasing their capacities, would be a recommendation for decision makers.

Conclusions

Youth Goal #5: Mental Health & Wellbeing is moderately well included in the national policy documents. According to the survey results, young people generally do not feel that professional help for mental health issues is available in their country, while significant percentages of them face stress, anxiety and depression. Focus groups concluded that, in multiple countries, discussing and asking for help regarding one's mental health problems is still a taboo and that educational system is the first area in which the improvements should be made.

#6 Moving Rural Youth Forward

Table 12. presents the degree of inclusion of each target of the Youth Goal #6 in the national policy documents (see the chapter on methodology). Five out of seven targets are included to a large degree (grades 3 and 4) in a majority of the countries in the research. Latvia has the highest degree of inclusion of the goal among the five countries.

Table 12. Inclusion of Youth Goal #6 in national policy documents

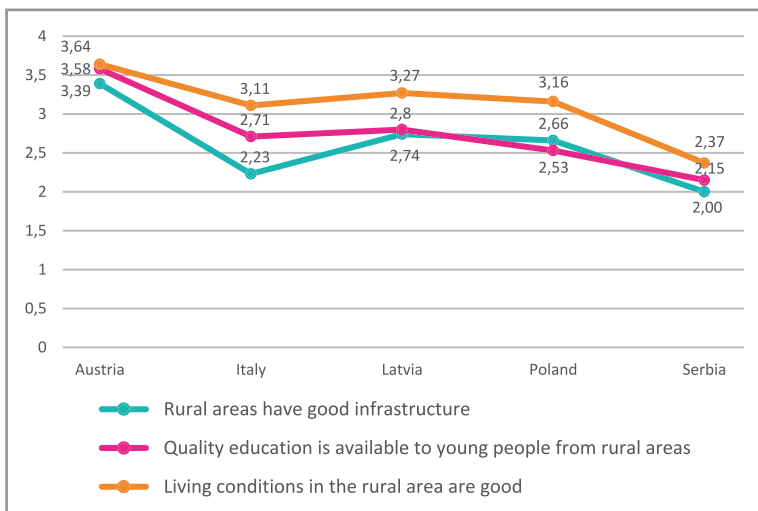
Youth Goal	Targets	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
#6 Moving Rural Youth Forward	Ensure appropriate infrastructure in rural areas in order to provide equitable delivery of public services, data connectivity and housing opportunities for young people	3	3	3	2	3
	Ensure that sustainable, high quality jobs, accessible to young people are created in rural areas	2	3	3	2	3
	Ensure the decentralisation of different activities by, for and with young people in order to support their inclusion and to benefit local communities	2	4	4	2	1
	Ensure that young people in rural areas are actively participating in decision-making processes	2	3	4	1	3
	Ensure equal access to high quality education for young people in rural areas	3	4	3	1	2
	Establish a positive image of rural areas	3	3	4	2	1
	Ensure the protection of rural traditions	1	3	3	2	1

1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic document; 2 – this target is somewhat included; 3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic document

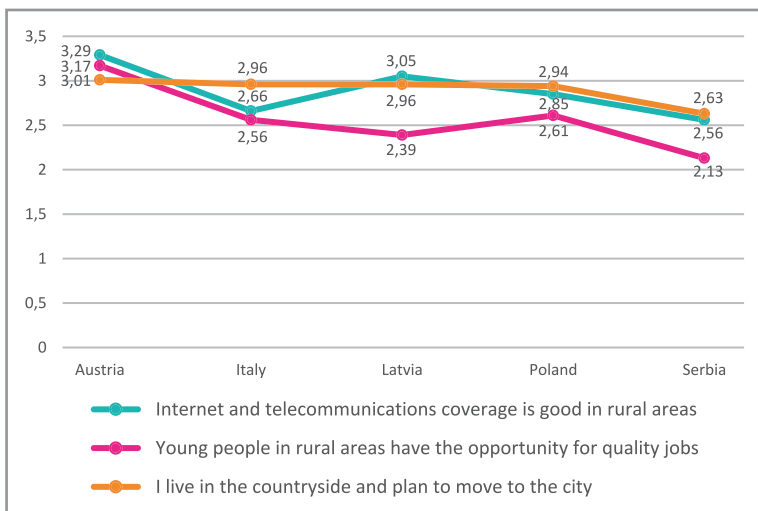
Survey results

Within this Youth Goal, the survey once again assessed the level of agreement of young people with certain statements on a scale from 1 to 5. Results can be seen in Figures 18. and 19. Only in Austria the young people lean towards agreeing that the living conditions in rural areas are good, while in other countries they lean towards disagreeing.

*Figure 18. Statements about rural development (pt. 1)
(1 – I disagree completely; 5 – I agree completely)*



*Figure 19. Statements about rural development (pt. 2)
(1 – I disagree completely; 5 – I agree completely)*



Reports from focus groups

Focus groups on Youth Goal #6: Moving Rural Youth Forward concluded that young people in rural areas face the problems of underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of sufficient educational and employment opportunities, as well as insufficient participation in the decision-making processes. Majority of participants in several countries do not see their future in rural areas; there are some, however, who wish to stay and require further support to improve the quality of living.

Participants of the focus groups in **Austria** agreed that there are more downsides than upsides of living in rural areas. They can be seen in the opportunities for studying, active social life, traveling, digital infrastructure, and health services. Good sides of living in rural areas for young peo-

ple include proximity to nature, self-reflection, better mental health, and fewer distractions. Following the conversation, it was interesting that participants had no opinion about the young people interested in farming and agriculture. Also, in the scenario where all the listed downsides were mitigated, only 2 out of 12 people “would consider” living in rural area.

Participants agree that the youth from the urban area has more decision-making power than those from the rural area but are unsure how to change that. One of the student group participants underlined that there are equal opportunities for all and believed that young people who live in rural areas do not have time or motivation to do politics since they have probably chosen to live a traditional rural lifestyle. On the other side, participants agree that politicians and other decision-makers should (if they wanted to) make an additional effort to reach young people outside the city. Participants are not familiar with the model or participation mechanisms that are more inclusive. They agree that in a digitally advanced age, these kinds of mechanisms must be already available. They also agree that the ERASMUS program is not well enough promoted and offered to young people from the rural area.

In reflecting on the topic, participants from **Italy** started from the projection data which highlights a tendency on the part of the young people interviewed to consider the quality of life in rural areas to be good. In fact, with respect to the country’s sustainable development, the theme of rural areas is relevant, which in Italy represent over 90% of the national territorial surface and contribute to the formation of the national added value to the extent of approximately 50%.

The socio-economic fabric of rural areas is rapidly evolving, as a result of various aspects: from rapid changes in the economy, to the new objectives of agriculture no longer

aimed only at production, but also at environmental protection, passing through the changes climate change and the growing importance of bioenergy. In this context, services play a key role and policies must adapt by trying to respond to the primary needs of rural areas and develop their potential.

In fact, the most critical fact that emerges is a lack of attention to rural infrastructure. Especially mobility is affected by this, as there are no intermodal solutions capable of facilitating the transfer of young people's lives from an urban to a rural context.

Rural youth in **Latvia** encounter various challenges, including the lack of clubs and opportunities to attend music or art schools, as well as insufficient resources to support smaller groups of children in comparison to youth who are able to attend youth centers in cities as an after school activity. After completing primary school, they often find themselves at a crossroads, contemplating their path to secondary education or vocational training. While certain regions do offer opportunities for young people to pursue their initiatives, overall, there are limited places for them to spend their free time after school. Additionally, some children face early mornings and long commutes just to reach their schools.

Despite these difficulties, there are resilient young individuals who take immense pride in their local communities and actively strive to enhance the rural environment. To improve the situation, these passionate youths propose strengthening the sense of belonging to their communities, encouraging volunteerism, and instilling a sense of pride in the positive impact they can create. They also emphasize the importance of engaging with local authorities and maintaining an optimistic outlook, while advocating for the preservation of schools in rural areas.

Young people living in rural areas of **Poland** often face numerous challenges in accessing quality education and decent employment conditions. Limited access to schools, lack of adequate infrastructure and fewer opportunities for vocational training result in limited career prospects for rural youth.

It is necessary to take effective measures to equalize educational opportunities and create programs to support professional development in rural areas. It is important to ensure equal access to quality education so that young people in rural areas have the same opportunities for development as their urban peers. It is necessary to invest in the development of educational infrastructure in rural areas, creating modern schools equipped with appropriate equipment and teaching materials.

In addition, it is important to promote entrepreneurship among young people in the countryside, encouraging them to start their own businesses and develop the local economy. Support programs for young entrepreneurs and the opportunity to raise capital to start their own business are key to creating attractive career prospects for rural youth.

Young people living in rural areas in **Serbia** believe that they do not participate enough in the decision-making process, while some of them are not informed about the very ways of participation. They believe that a change is needed and a greater space for the real engagement of young people, which would motivate them to get started and participate. The conditions for education and work in the villages are difficult, but part of the participants who work themselves believe that it is most important to adapt their profession to the jobs that are dominant in the countryside. Those businesses, such as agriculture and tourism, are accompanied by numerous additional problems that the participants themselves recognize, such as expensive mechanization and low final profit.

The participants of this focus group believe that they are not well connected with the city, they do not have regular bus lines, nor high-quality road maintenance. Due to the decreasing number of young people in the countryside, cultural content is very scarce, and other forms of mutual communication are hampered by the weak telecommunications network and the Internet. Although two of the respondents decided to stay and live in the countryside despite all the disadvantages, those who are younger and getting an education do not plan to return, they want to live and work in big cities.

Conclusion

Youth Goal #6: Moving Rural Youth Forward is among the goals that is included in the national policy documents to a larger degree. Survey results show that young people lean towards disagreeing with the statements that living conditions in rural areas are good. Focus groups concluded that young people face the problems of underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of sufficient educational and employment opportunities, as well as insufficient participation in the decision-making processes, and that majority of those residing in rural areas would consider leaving them.

#7 Quality Employment for All

Table 13. presents the degree of inclusion of each target of the Youth Goal #7 in the national policy documents (see the Chapter on methodology). *All seven* targets are included to a large degree (grades 3 and 4) in a majority of the countries in the research. Italy has the highest degree of inclusion of the goal among the five countries.

Table 13. Inclusion of Youth Goal #7 in national policy documents

Youth Goal	Targets	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
#7 Quality Employment for All	Create quality jobs which guarantee fair working conditions, working rights and the right of living wage for all young people	3	3	3	3	3
	Safeguard social protection and healthcare for all young workers	4	3	3	3	2
	Guarantee fair treatment and equal opportunities for all young people in order to end discrimination in the labour market	3	4	4	2	2
	Ensure equal opportunities for all young people to develop the necessary skills and gain practical experience in order to smoothen the transition from education to the labour market	4	4	3	2	4
	Guarantee the recognition and validation of competencies acquired through internships, apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning, as well as volunteering and non-formal education	4	3	3	2	3
	Ensure involvement of young people and youth organisations as equal partners in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of employment policies at all levels	2	3	3	2	4
	Ensure equal access to quality information and adequate support mechanisms to prepare young people for the changing labour market and future of work	3	4	3	2	3

1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic document; 2 – this target is somewhat included; 3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic document

Table 14. shows that youth unemployment in all five countries is still significantly higher than the level of unemployment in total population.

Table 14. Unemployment figures (2022)

Unemployment figures (2022 ³)	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
15–29 year olds	7.5%	18%	11.1%	6.8%	17.1%
Total population	4.8%	8.1%	6.9%	2.9%	9.4%

One of the indicators of the quality employment opportunities is the percentage of young people living with their parents (though this phenomenon is also influenced by other factors). While in Austria and Latvia majority of 18 to 34 year olds do not live with their parents, in Italy, Poland and Serbia the situation is reverse.

Table 15. Percentage of young people living with their parents

Percentage of young people living with their parents (2021 ⁴)	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
18–34 year olds	37.7%	70.5%	49.9%	64.2%	71.3%

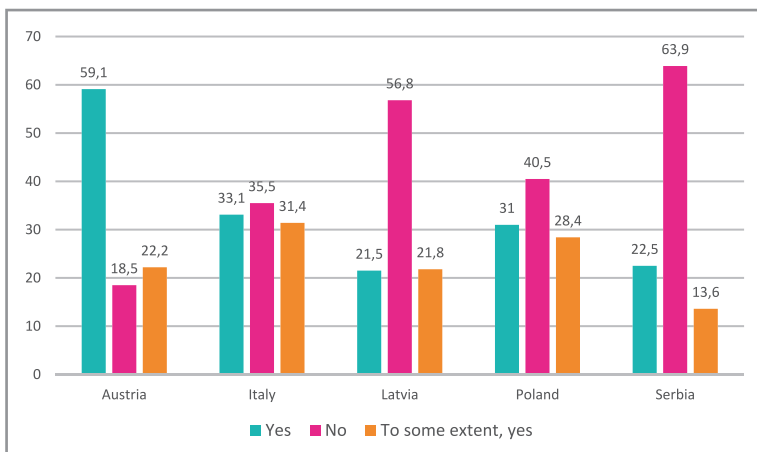
3 Eurostat; https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/UNE_RT_A_custom_7110005/default/table?lang=en

4 Pew Research Center. 2023. “Young adults in the U.S. are less likely than those in most of Europe to live in their parents’ home”[https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/03/in-the-u-s-and-abroad-more-young-adults-are-living-with-their-parents/#:~:text=In%2024%20of%20the%2029,%25\)%20and%20Italy%20\(71%25\)](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/03/in-the-u-s-and-abroad-more-young-adults-are-living-with-their-parents/#:~:text=In%2024%20of%20the%2029,%25)%20and%20Italy%20(71%25))

Survey results

Within this youth goal, young people were asked whether they worked in a position for which they received their formal qualifications. Figure 20. shows that this is not the case for a majority of young people in Latvia and Serbia.

Figure 20. If you are employed, is it in a position you received your formal qualifications for (from high school / university)?



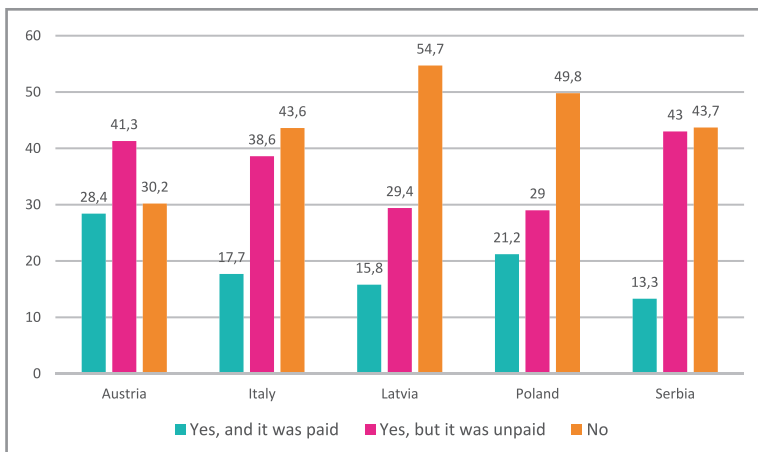
Job satisfaction, on the scale from 1 to 5, is highest in Austria, but in all five countries young people lean towards being satisfied, as seen in Figure 21.

Figure 21. If you are employed – how much are you satisfied with your current job?



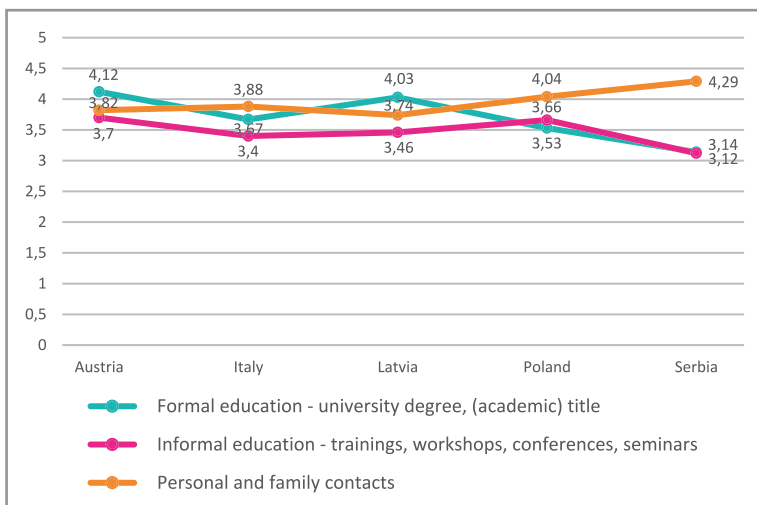
Young people were also asked whether they have done a paid or an unpaid internship and the results are presented in Figure 22.

Figure 22. Have you ever done an internship?

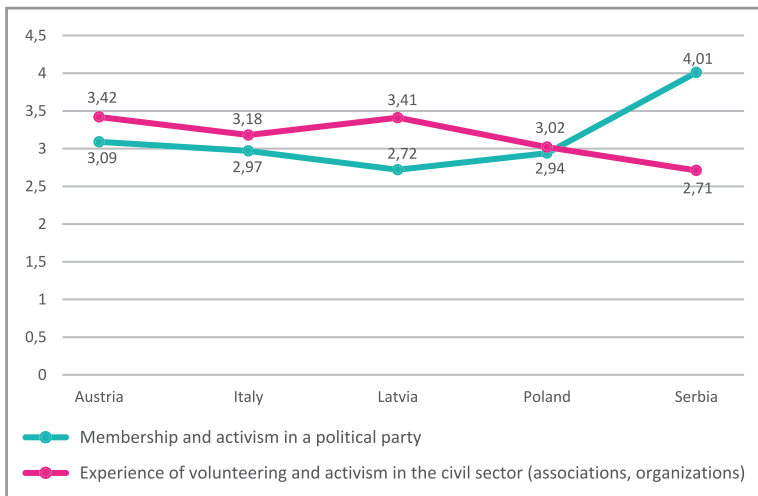


Figures 23. and 24. show that young people find that formal and informal education, as well as family connections, are important for finding a job. In Serbia, there is a high level of agreement with a statement that membership in the political party is important for finding a job, while this is not the case in other countries.

*Figure 23. How much are the following things important to get a job in your country? (pt. 1)
(1 – not important at all; 5 – very important)*



*Figure 24. How much are the following things important to get a job in your country? (pt. 2)
(1 – not important at all; 5 – very important)*



Reports from focus groups

Focus groups on Youth Goal #7: Quality Employment for All concluded that young people require further opportunities to acquire skills in order to be competitive in the job market. The role of internships, training and volunteering was highlighted as important in this regard, though there were differing views about the value of unpaid internships. The main elements of job quality are decent wages and social protection, which are often not fulfilled for young people. The focus group in Serbia shows that many young people consider emigrating to find jobs abroad, while the focus group in Austria shows that immigrants often face disadvantages while finding a job.

Both groups in **Austria** agree that the internship could be a valuable way to progress. The emphasis is on the quality of the internship. Participants have highlighted the chance to learn, meet people, understand real work, and try something. Even if the internship were unpaid, some participants would accept it if it included the above mentioned criteria and a chance to get full employment. They all believed that everybody has equal opportunities for the internship regardless of personal characteristics.

In opposition to this, selection inequality is one of the most common problems for Uni students, as they believe that Austrians will always have an advantage. Students highlight inequality on two levels: one is during the selection process in the company, and the second is related to the governmental administration, such as work permits, visa issues, and similar. They believe it is fixable but that this topic has been left to industry to solve, as the government is just “going with the flow.” The participants unanimously agreed that the whole area of the internship should be more regulated, and they showed interest in following the other activities of EYG on this topic.

Employment in Graz in the form of a student or part time job is seen as accessible, but the full time, dream job employment often requires strong motivation, determination, but also support that is not available or not well promoted and offered to young people. Also, local people are seen as in an advanced position since they understand the system and its functionalities. Young people do use websites in order to search for jobs and opportunities and they do not believe that a Job Fair or Open door event is something young people are going to use in a maximal sense. Should the companies then adapt to young people, or should young people adapt to the companies, the answers varied.

In **Italy**, social protection and the quality of work depend a lot on the types of contracts. As young people are subject to fixed-term or atypical contracts, their situation is not always adequate. The theme of the protection of business risk for young entrepreneurs is missing.

An important role of non-formal education and transversal skills emerges, despite the lack of certification of skills in the country and in the hands of the Regions. A national skills plan (or at least guidelines) is needed. There is also a need for training courses to be designed in line with this strategy. Introducing, at a regulatory level, the question of the skills that will be acquired within the training agreements.

Even today in the country, job intermediation is still mostly made up of personal contacts and, in addition to being a statistic, it is also a belief of the people. Small businesses are often unable to make adequate demands on the workforce. The youth needs training to bring together job supply and demand (training for entrepreneurs and workers).

Latvian youth express concerns about the existing situation regarding quality employment opportunities for everyone. Some young people feel unsure about choosing their field of work because the available options do not align with their interests or may not meet their expectations. In-demand sectors often offer plenty of internship opportunities, but finding paid work can be challenging. Many resort to informal jobs like seasonal work in greenhouses or other non-official roles, which may provide valuable experience but cannot be included in their resumes.

Moreover, securing a paid job is difficult, and it heavily depends on the industry. Most job listings require prior experience, making it challenging for young candidates without a work history to compete with more experienced applicants. Some young workers also feel that they are not given enough responsibility or are burdened with tasks outside their job

description simply because they are younger and less experienced. In contrast, these youths value their volunteer work experience, but employers often overlook it. To improve the situation, young people suggest elevating the prestige of volunteer work and providing more opportunities for internships in government institutions with remuneration.

In **Poland**, young people often face difficulties related to the lack of stable and adequately remunerated jobs. Rising youth unemployment rates, as well as inadequate employment conditions, have a negative impact on their career prospects and economic situation.

To tackle these problems, it is crucial to create a favorable environment for the development of young talents. The government and institutions should support entrepreneurship and innovation among young people, encourage the development of startups and new ventures, which can generate new jobs and make the labor market more attractive to young students.

It is also important to strive to create fair and stable employment conditions for all young workers. Offering decent wages, adequate social benefits and opportunities for career development and advancement will attract young people to actively participate in professional life. In addition, developing support and training systems for young workers can increase their chances in the labor market and adapt to the changing demands of the economy.

Cooperation between the public, private and educational sectors can create synergistic solutions, helping young people find their way in the world of work. Long-term investment in developing competencies, improving skills and promoting entrepreneurship among the younger generation will benefit both them and society as a whole, building a more stable and dynamic economy.

Participants of the focus groups in **Serbia** believe it is difficult to find a job where workers would be satisfied with the conditions. The main problems they notice are low salary, inadequate treatment of employees, and finding work in their field of study. They feel that the education system in Serbia has provided them with work habits and some skills but has not prepared them for the labor market and future adaptability. They believe that formal education is outdated and that informal education has an advantage in employment, as it is more important to acquire skills, abilities, and network with different people. They see the internships they perform during high school as important, but they also clearly recognize the shortcomings in the form of the lack of monetary compensation, as well as the fact that later employers ask them for work experience, which this type of practical work does not offer them.

The focus group participants believe that using family/personal connections to get a job play a significant role in employment in Serbia, stating that they themselves found their current jobs through such means. They believe that the consequence of such employment practices is the emigration of young people, a lack of qualified personnel, and demotivation among those who easily obtain jobs and therefore do not strive for education, as well as those who work hard to acquire qualifications but are aware that unqualified individuals occupy their positions.

When asked about their feelings regarding the employment situation in Serbia, the young participants expressed fear, panic, and unrest, even those who are still in high school. As a result, they are willing to leave Serbia for better job opportunities abroad, and some of them, despite being very young, are already contemplating this option.

Conclusion

Youth Goal #7: Quality Employment for All is the goal with the highest level of inclusion in the national policy documents. Youth unemployment remains significantly higher than total unemployment in each of the five countries. Survey results show that not in all countries are young people predominantly working in the fields for which they received their formal qualifications, but the job satisfaction is relatively high. Young people see formal, informal education and personal connections as the most important factors for finding a job. Focus groups concluded that young people require further opportunities to acquire skills in order to be competitive in the job market. The main elements of job quality are decent wages and social protection, which are often not fulfilled.

#8 Quality Learning

Table 16. presents the degree of inclusion of each target of the Youth Goal #8 in the national policy documents (see the Chapter on methodology). Three out of seven targets are included to a large degree (grades 3 and 4) in a majority of the countries in the research: “Guarantee universal and equal access to quality education and life-long learning”; “Incorporate methods within formal and non-formal education settings that enable the learner to develop personal skills including critical and analytical thinking, creativity and learning” and “Ensure that young people have access to citizenship education to provide them with solid knowledge on political systems, democracy and human rights, attained also through community-based experiences in order to promote active civil participation”. Austria has the highest degree of inclusion of the goal among the five countries.

Table 16. Inclusion of Youth Goal #8 in national policy documents

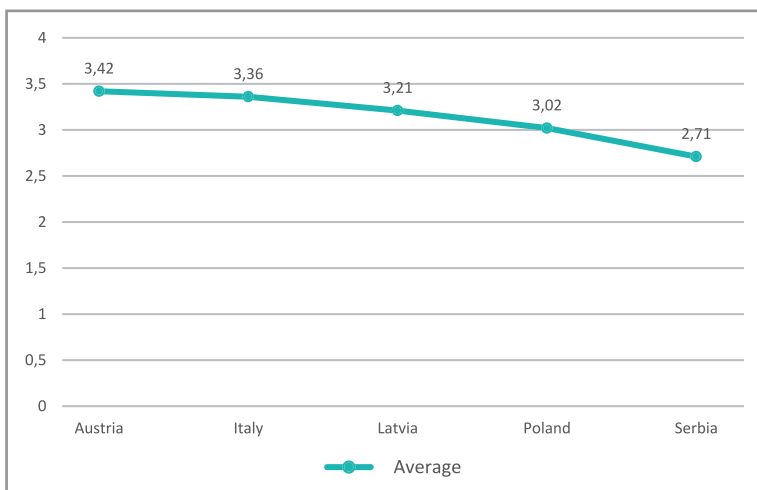
Youth Goal	Targets	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
#8 Quality Learning	Guarantee universal and equal access to quality education and life-long learning	4	3	4	2	2
	Ensure that all young people have access to adequately funded non-formal education at all levels, that is recognised and validated	3	2	2	1	3
	Promote open-mindedness and support the development of interpersonal and intercultural skills	2	3	4	1	2
	Create and implement more personalised, participative, and cooperative learner-centered methods in every step of the education process	2	3	4	1	1
	Guarantee that education equips all young people with life skills such as money management and health education including sexual and reproductive health	4	2	2	1	4
	Incorporate methods within formal and non-formal education settings that enable the learner to develop personal skills including critical and analytical thinking, creativity and learning	3	2	3	1	3
	Ensure that young people have access to citizenship education to provide them with solid knowledge on political systems, democracy and human rights, attained also through community-based experiences in order to promote active civil participation	3	4	2	2	3

1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic document; 2 – this target is somewhat included; 3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic document

Survey results

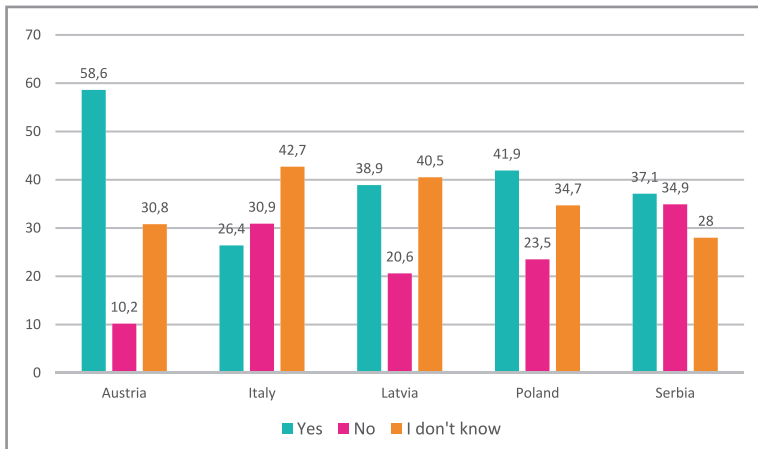
Young people were asked how satisfied they were with their educational program on a scale from 1 to 5. As seen in Figure 25., respondents from the EU lean toward being satisfied, while the level of satisfaction is lower in Serbia.

Figure 25. Are/Were you satisfied with the educational program that you are enrolled in/have finished? (1 – I am completely dissatisfied; 5 – I am completely satisfied)



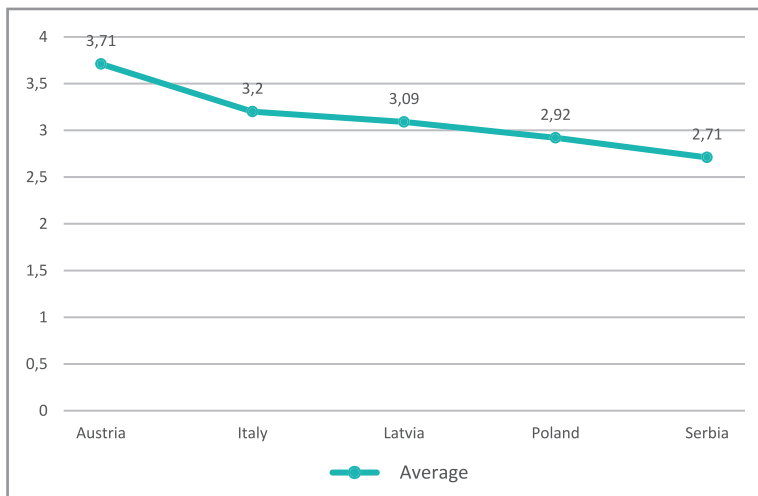
Young people in Austria are optimistic that they will quickly get a job on the market after finishing their education, while views in other countries are mixed, as per Figure 26.

Figure 26. If you are in the process of education – do you think you will quickly get a job on the market after finishing school/studies?



Young people in Austria, also, give the highest rating to their education program in terms of its usefulness for finding a job on a scale from 1 to 5. Rating is higher than 3 also in Italy and Latvia and somewhat lower in Poland and Serbia.

Figure 27. “On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate the usefulness of what you learn at school/college for finding a job?”



Reports from focus groups

Focus groups on Youth Goal #8: Quality Learning mostly focused on pre-university education. Young people see positive aspects – such as thoroughness and opportunity to explore their interests – as well as the negative ones – such as lack of practical education and coverage of multiple areas relevant for today’s life (civic education, reproductive and mental health etc.). They proposed a wide range of actions to improve their national educational systems, which include increasing flexibility for students to tailor their own curricula, introducing more practical experience and recognizing knowledge and skills gained through non-formal education.

When asked to rate a school from 1–10 (where 1 is the lowest grade) by show of hands, the average answer among participants in **Austria** was between 4 and 8. This gave each participant a floor to think deeper about the positive and negative sides. Positives are: a chance to meet new people; learning how to communicate and solve (communication) problems; learning new things (school subjects). Negatives are: demanding tempo; the fact that “school needs students, but not all students need school”; not useful for life, not safe.

The participants were asked to share one thing that they have learned in school. As several started naming subjects, there were good in and enjoyed; one of the participants said that he learned how to learn and plan his time, which raised the interest of the previous participants to give another answer from a wider angle. Except for the subjects (math, technical drawing, and language class...), the focus was on the problem-solving, communication with different people, and public speaking. Asked about digital competencies, participants said their knowledge is much more advanced than the school curricula (except those focused on programming). Interestingly, participants agree that the grading system should stay as it is, but they would make grades less public, as some students get discouraged.

Based on the previous questions, the participants offered their answers about what should be a school of the future. Primarily, the participants listed a more flexible and individual approach with more elective subjects. Also, an opportunity to spend time in a company, organization, or other institutions to follow the school program or curricula (learning by doing). Furthermore, new subjects were suggested: peace and civic education, life skills, a subject focusing on emotional and mental health.

An online focus group specifically targeting university students and graduates was also held. A comparison was made between the participants' initial dreams and aspirations before starting their studies, and it was found that all but one had completely different goals, which subsequently changed as they began their studies. Regarding their current job satisfaction, all participants expressed high levels of contentment, stating that they had no difficulties finding employment in close proximity to their homes, and all of them were successful in securing jobs relevant to their university programs. Fields of employment people were active in included for example personal development, IT, data science.

Within the working group in **Italy**, the focus was on the right to study and how this translates into the demand/supply of work. The fact that emerges is that many young people think that what they study, especially in high school, is not relevant to what they will do in life. For this reason, the group proposed several actions to improve training and guidance in Italy.

One of the proposal was the promotion of the recognition of skills acquired through participation in mobility programs, as well as the recognition of qualifications and professional figures in the youth work sector, for example through the establishment of a European Social Fund at the service of the figure of youth worker. Youth mobility for study, internship and work experiences in Europe and in other continents through the recognition of skills and qualifications acquired in Italy and abroad should be supported.

The economic value of scholarships aimed at study, traineeship and work experiences in Europe and in other continents should be recognized, effectively taking into account the average cost of living in each host country. All

male and female students should have the opportunity to study abroad for at least one year starting from upper secondary school, both in terms of bureaucracy and recognition of the activities carried out, and from the point of view of economic resources.

Traineeships should be defined from a European perspective. Tools such as curricular and extra-curricular internships should be encouraged by giving them a European dimension as well and providing, in addition to incentives for territorial mobility, also common regulations in order to regulate the following areas: minimum wage; mandatory training; placement percentage, i.e. the obligation to confirm trainees at the company; maximum duration period.

Youth in **Latvia** have diverse opinions about the current state of education in the country, particularly regarding the quality of learning. Some express concerns about the lack of diverse courses and the inadequacy of teachers' professional expertise. Additionally, they find certain subjects purposeless and perceive university education as relatively easier, with little emphasis on deep learning. Moreover, some question the repetition of subjects studied in high school, feeling that it offers little value.

On the positive side, some youth appreciate the opportunity to explore different fields and gain insights into their interests during university studies. However, they acknowledge that obtaining a diploma no longer guarantees job opportunities, with employers prioritizing work experience over formal qualifications. To improve the educational situation, Latvian youth propose several solutions. They suggest including more non-compulsory courses, allowing students to have greater flexibility in choosing their studies. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of practical elements

in education, advocating for hackathons with skilled mentors and providing reliable information through improved assistance and mentoring. Additionally, integrating non-formal education into school curricula is seen as a beneficial way to engage students more effectively. The presence of excellent mentors is also highlighted as crucial in guiding students towards their desired career paths and fostering their personal and professional growth.

The focus group in **Poland** showed that the country's education system needs a decisive transformation, focusing on the individual needs of students. Adequate support, access to quality teaching and a variety of extracurricular activities are crucial for young people to develop their potential and achieve success. It is also important to provide support for students with different abilities.

Access to a variety of extracurricular activities, such as sports, art, language learning and technology, broadens students' horizons and allows them to discover their passions. This, in turn, shapes a developed personality and prepares young people to function in various spheres of life.

It is important for universities in Poland to focus on providing students with access to advanced curricula, modern teaching methods and rich educational resources. Fostering the development of research and critical thinking skills allows students to gain deeper knowledge, and shapes their ability to analyze problems and make sound decisions.

In addition to providing advanced content, it is also important to provide appropriate career opportunities. Universities should work with employers to provide students with hands-on experience and internships to gain the practical skills and knowledge required in the job market.

The youth in **Serbia** have a negative perception of the education system in Serbia, particularly criticizing the learning system that lacks understanding, outdated and overly extensive curriculum, teaching staff, and the fact that high school did not provide them with skills important for the future, which they only acquired at the university level. They highlighted the presence of inequality in access to educational programs, with individuals in lower financial situations unable to enroll in their desired college or high school, especially if they come from smaller towns and wish to continue their education in larger cities.

Participants pointed out that the pre-university educational program did not provide them with basic knowledge of civic education, interpersonal relationships, reproductive health, and sexual education. They believe that all these areas should receive more emphasis in schools. They feel that they were able to learn digital skills and creativity to some extent in high school, as well as develop some level of critical thinking. The youth agreed that non-formal education is equally important as formal education and should be more emphasized in the education system.

They cite thoroughness as the biggest benefit of the formal education system in Serbia, while on the other hand, they highlight the lack of practice as the biggest drawback. Bearing in mind that practice is one of the most important factors in employment, this lack is a big problem for them because they feel the pressure that they have to improve in addition to the university, i.e. that a diploma after completing their studies does not provide them with the certainty that they will surely get a job. They manage to make up for that shortcoming with informal education, but they believe that cooperation between the formal and informal sectors

should be much better. In the end, standardization is something that the educational system in Serbia needs because there are positive examples, but they are more exceptions than practice.

Conclusion

Youth Goal #8: Quality Learning is only moderately included in the national policy documents, as only three out of seven targets are included to a large degree in a majority of countries. Survey results show that both the satisfaction with the educational program and its usefulness for finding a job is above 3 (on a scale from 1 to 5) in all countries except Serbia. In focus groups, young people proposed a wide range of actions to improve their national educational systems, which include increasing flexibility for students to tailor their own curricula, introducing more practical experience and recognizing knowledge and skills gained through non-formal education.

#9 Space and Participation for All

Table 17. presents the degree of inclusion of each target of the Youth Goal #9 in the national policy documents (see the Chapter on methodology). Five out of seven targets are included to a large degree (grades 3 and 4) in a majority of the countries in the research. Serbia has the highest degree of inclusion of the goal among the five countries.

Table 17. Inclusion of Youth Goal #9 in national policy documents

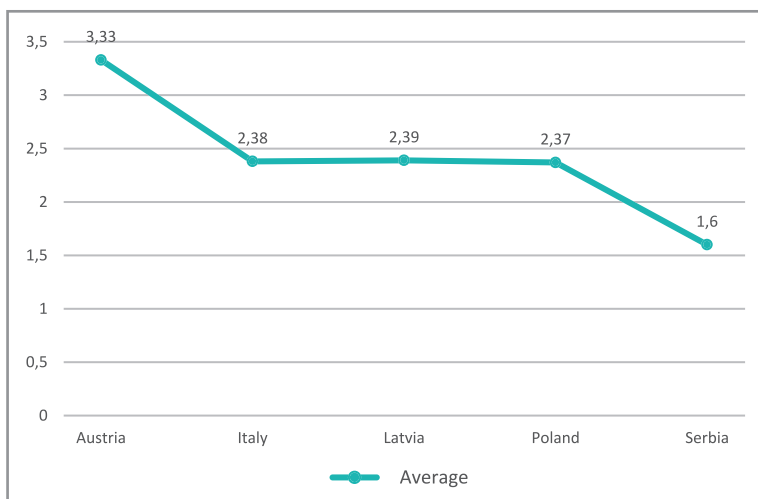
Youth Goal	Targets	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
#9 Space and Participation for All	Ensure young people can adequately influence all areas of society and all parts of the decision-making processes, from agenda setting to implementation, monitoring and evaluation through youth-friendly and accessible mechanisms and structures, ensuring that policies respond to the needs of young people	3	2	3	2	4
	Ensure equal access to everyday decision making for all young people from different backgrounds	3	3	3	2	4
	Increase youth participation and thus equal representation in the electoral process as well as in elected bodies and other decision-making organs at all levels of society	4	3	2	2	2
	Provide youth-led physical facilities and infrastructures called youth spaces defined by being autonomous, open and safe, accessible to all, offering professional support for development and ensuring opportunities for youth participation	2	2	2	1	4
	Ensure safe virtual youth spaces are accessible to every young person which provide access to information and services as well as ensure opportunities for youth participation	3	3	2	1	4
	Ensure sustainable funding, common recognition and development of quality youth work in order to strengthen youth organisations and their role in inclusion, participation and non-formal education	3	4	4	3	4
	Provide youth-friendly, relevant, comprehensive information, also developed by and with young people, in order to enable youth participation	3	4	4	2	4

1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic document; 2 – this target is somewhat included; 3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic document

Survey results

The results of the survey have shown that, with the exception of Austria, young people generally believe the political system of their country allows little influence for young people (Figure 28.).

*Figure 28. “How much do you think the political system in your country allows young people to influence political processes?”
(1 – not at all; 5 – significantly)*



The majority of young people say they would vote in the national elections if they were held next week. As Table 18. shows, in Austria and Latvia, youth turnout in the national elections has been higher than the turnout of the total population. In Italy, Poland and Serbia, it has been lower.

Figure 29. If the national elections were next week, would you vote?

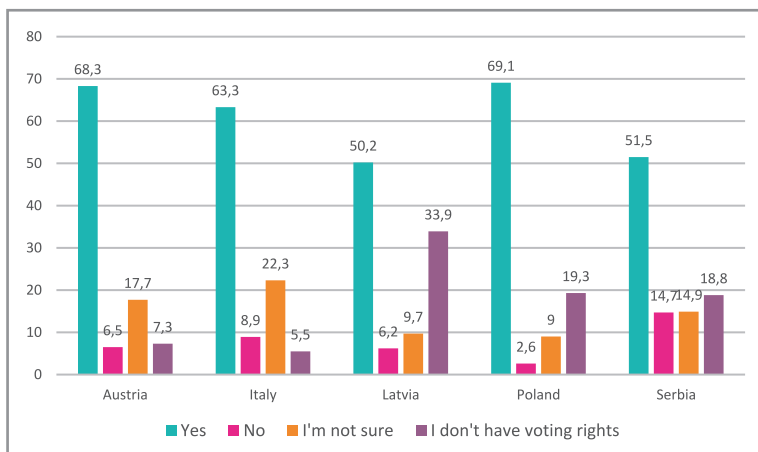


Table 18. Youth turnout in the national elections

Austria (2017 ⁵)	Italy (2022 ⁶)	Latvia (2021 ⁷)	Poland (2019)	Serbia (2022 ⁸)
16–17 years: 90.3%	18–24 years: 60.2%	18–24 years: 61%	18–29 years: 46%	18–29 years: 57.8%
18–19 years: 74.6%, 20–29 years: 81.8%	25–34 years: 59.5%			
Total population: 80%	Total population: 63.9%			
		Total population: 59.43%	Total population: 61.7%	Total population: 58.53%

5 Youth Wiki: Austria; <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/austria/52-youth-participation-in-representative-democracy>

6 https://www.istitutoixe.it/newsletter/2022/20220926_Flussi.pdf#page=11

7 <https://www.cvk.lv/lv/media/110/download?attachment>

8 <https://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Alternativni-izves%C-C%8Ctaj-o-polo%C%8Cju-i-potreinama-mladih-za-2022.-godinu.pdf>

The number of young people in the parliament (determined by the country's definition of young people) is low in all countries.

Table 19. Number and percentage of young people in the parliament

	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
Number of young MPs / Total number of MPs	4/183	3/400	2/100	14/460	9/250
Percentage of the total	2.2%	0.75%	2%	3.04%	3.6%

The survey also tested the trust young people have in various national and political institutions, and the results are presented in Figures 30. to 34. Generally speaking, young people in Austria have a high level of trust, while the trust among young people in Serbia is low. Other countries are somewhere in between.

Figure 30. "How much trust do you have in the following institutions on a scale from 1 to 5?" (pt. 1)

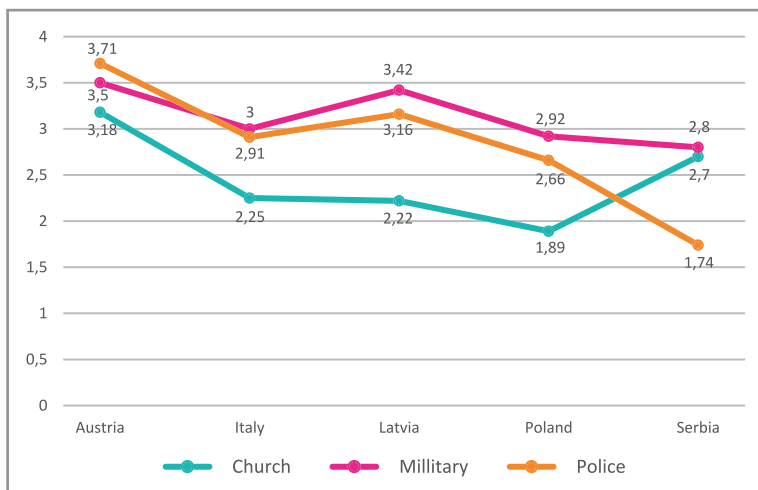


Figure 31. "How much trust do you have in the following institutions on a scale from 1 to 5?" (pt. 2)

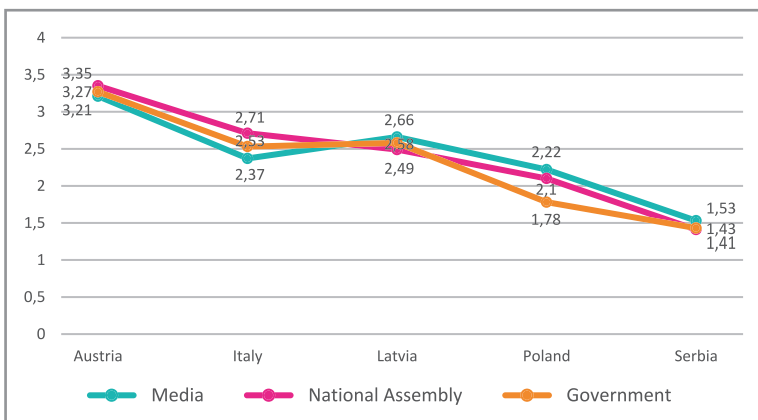


Figure 32. "How much trust do you have in the following institutions on a scale from 1 to 5?" (pt. 3)

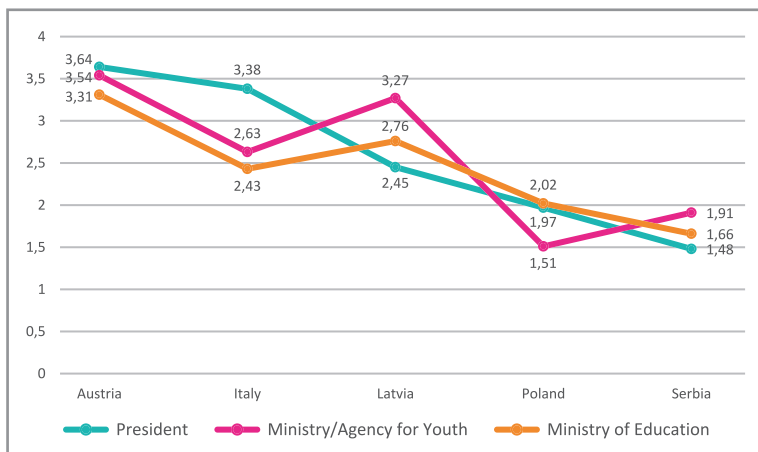
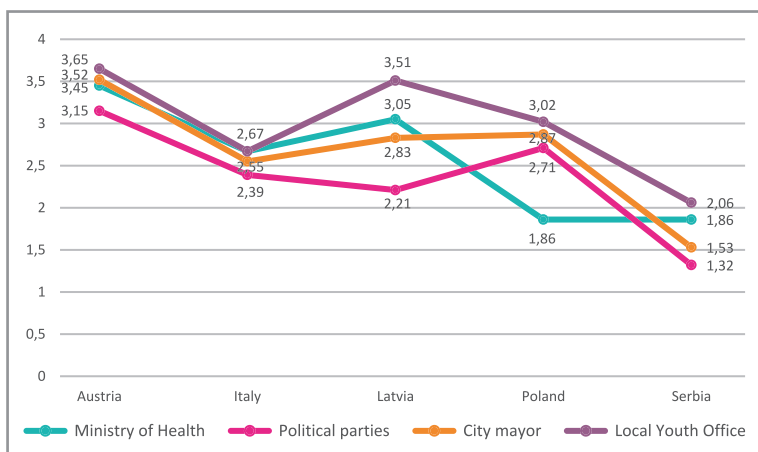


Figure 33. "How much trust do you have in the following institutions on a scale from 1 to 5?" (pt. 4)



Reports from focus groups

Focus groups on Youth Goal #9: Space and Participation for All concluded that young people often lack opportunities, interest and, sometimes, self-confidence to participate in decision-making processes. The awareness of specialized youth spaces still seems to be low. Some proposals to improve the situation include eliminating all socio-economic obstacles to participation, communicating issues in a more youth-friendly way and raising awareness of political issues and opportunities for participation within the education system.

The participants in **Austria** were invited to state a topic or place where young people should be asked to participate, such as public infrastructure and services, everything related to University, spaces for young people and leisure time activities, employment questions. When asked, all participants agreed that, even if possible, it would not be good to have only young people who decide on this topic, but jointly with the older ones. When asked if they could choose who would select, only youth or only more senior on those questions, 9 out of 11 participants said “older”, showing a lack of trust in young people (one person was indecisive).

All the participants agreed the spaces for young people are on the high level (in Graz but also Austria). When asked to explain them, the first associations were sports facilities, parks, and public squares. Looking from a wider angle, some participants mentioned pubs, cinemas, pools, even schools as safe spaces for people. The participants did not mention youth clubs, youth centers, public kitchens, or similar, but they agreed it is also vital.

Participants were asked what would they do first if they were elected to have power. More and free schools, more

parties, more work, and better paychecks were some of the answers. Asked if you would consider asking young people to help, the argument of “depends on which people and their competencies” come up again. Participants were then asked to name one thing they would want to be asked, as they have motivation and competencies. All of the participants had at least one topic or area they felt they could contribute. Also, all of the people believe they had a chance to contribute (public forums, writing emails) but lack trust and belief that it can make a change. The participants could not name a single institution that they believed would certainly evaluate and consider their ideas. Asked how they actively support those types of participation, people mentioned signed petitions by accepting the promo materials or by answering this type of research.

The opinions are divided on the question should young people vote, should young people be able to run for office (again, “depending on which office”). But most people think “Vote16” is not a good idea as the young people do not know how to think independently. Youth lack knowledge in technical but also political program parts. Both groups came independently to the conclusion that politicians lack interest in young people and their issues because youth does not vote. Even if politicians care, it is only for the votes.

The active and democratic participation of young people in **Italy** is still seen by the participants at the working table as distant and hindered. Italian politics has been suffering from very high levels of disaffection and disillusionment for years. To this it must be added that Italy is a country where young people are still undervalued, and where 64.5% of the population thinks that there are too many elderly people in positions of power: this is an opinion supported by eight

young out of ten even though it is actually confirmed across the different age groups.

In this regard, the group proposes to eliminate any type of obstacle related to the participation of disadvantaged young people, digitize the initiatives that are part of the EU Dialogue with young people and create more meeting opportunities to disseminate more and better information about European issues, in order to develop strategies and common methods in this area. The need to overcome socio-economic and geographical obstacles was also noted, which cause some young people to have fewer opportunities in this regard. There is a clear need to make communication regarding the world of young people more captivating and engaging through, for example, the production and dissemination of podcasts, virtual apps, audiovisual material, working groups and consultations with decision-makers.

In **Latvia**, there is a general agreement among youth that youth participation is quite minimal due to insufficient information and lack of discussion in schools, as well as the historical perspective and “Soviet horror memory’ dominating political discussions instead of focusing on current events. Some youth have attempted to engage in political conversations, for example, reaching out to politicians through Twitter or Facebook platforms, but their efforts are often met with limited effectiveness.

In many cities and regions youth city councils that are operated by the municipality or student councils in schools and universities act as a bridge between young people and politicians, but sometimes politicians do not take their input seriously enough. Many young individuals seem disinterested, partly due to mechanisms that hinder and discourage their involvement, giving the impression that political initi-

atives are merely symbolic. A lack of interest in politics before the age of 18 is also noted, influenced by the impact of parents and families, historical mistrust in society, and the belief that voting might not bring about significant changes. Nevertheless, there is some support for the Vote16 initiative.

To improve the situation, youth propose several mechanisms and resources. They suggest starting with small steps, integrating participation topics into school curricula from an early age, and creating opportunities for students to engage in political discussions with authorities themselves, such as coffee with politicians. A small step in education in schools that can be implemented immediately are discussions on current affairs, for instance, talking about political news at the beginning of some lessons. Increasing peer to peer communication about these topics and raising awareness about political participation events can also be effective in encouraging youth involvement.

Young people in **Poland** have the right to express their opinions and aspirations that can shape the future of the country. Youth participation is not only an expression of social justice, but also a way to enrich public debate and bring fresh, innovative perspectives to a variety of challenges. Fostering active citizenship among young people is a key element in building trust and bonds between society and its future leaders. It gives young people a sense of responsibility for their environment and a belief that their voice has a real impact on reality.

At the same time, such participation is an opportunity to shape young leaders who will strive to solve problems and care for the common good. It is also an investment in the future of the country, as engaged young people, aware of their influence, can contribute to the development and

progress of Poland. Promoting the equal participation of young people is in line with the principles of democracy, justice and civic participation. This is a path toward building a society in which every voice matters and young people feel responsible for the common good. This is a key aspect of Poland's development as a democratic and advanced society, ready to meet future challenges.

Young people in **Serbia** do not believe they have influence in decision-making processes in Serbia, even though they believe they should be listened to more when it comes to public policies in the fields of education, mental health, and cultural policy. They believe that youth participation in state institutions should be increased, but they also express concerns that it would be reduced to a formality and that only those who are politically favored would be employed, thus putting the interests of young people in the background again.

The focus group participants believe that young people are not interested in participation and often are not familiar with its various forms, and they do not see its purpose and goals, especially if it does not bring them direct benefits. As youth activists, they often receive questions from their peers about what they gain from activism and whether they earn any money.

The participants view many forms of participation positively, such as elections, protests, involvement in youth organizations, activism, and volunteering. However, they notice that youth organizations, as an important encouragement for young people to participate further, are not visible enough among them. They see youth spaces as something very useful for young people because they provide them with the freedom to openly discuss various topics, but they

also observe that local authorities in Serbia are not doing enough to provide infrastructure for such facilities.

Conclusion

Youth Goal #9: Space and Participation for All is among youth goals that have a higher degree of inclusion in the national policy documents. Survey results show that respondents lean towards disagreeing that political institutions in their countries allow them to influence decision making. Young people in Austria have a high level of trust in the national political institutions, while the trust among young people in Serbia is low. Other countries are somewhere in between. Focus groups concluded that young people often lack opportunities, interest and, sometimes, self-confidence to participate in decision-making processes.

#10 Sustainable Green Europe

Table 20. presents the degree of inclusion of each target of the Youth Goal #10 in the national policy documents (see the Chapter on methodology). Four out of seven targets are included to a large degree (grades 3 and 4) in a majority of the countries in the research. Austria has the highest degree of inclusion of the goal among the five countries.

Table 20. Inclusion of Youth Goal #10 in national policy documents

Youth Goal	Targets	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
#10 Sustainable Green Europe	Ensure everyone including young people knows the effect of their actions on the environment	4	3	3	2	2
	Empower the entire society especially young people to act as agents of change for environmental and sustainable development	4	3	3	2	4
	Take into account the environmental impact of every policy and life decision while ensuring that young people are included in sustainable development policy-making on all levels	3	3	2	2	4
	Increase international cooperation to eliminate environmentally harmful production and consumption	2	3	2	2	4
	Support and strengthen opportunities for young people to volunteer in the environmental sector	3	4	3	2	3
	Ensure everyone especially young people has access to eco-friendly infrastructure for living a more sustainable lifestyle	3	2	2	2	1
	Expand research and innovation into eco-friendly solutions and technologies	4	3	2	2	1

1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic document; 2 – this target is somewhat included; 3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic document

Survey results

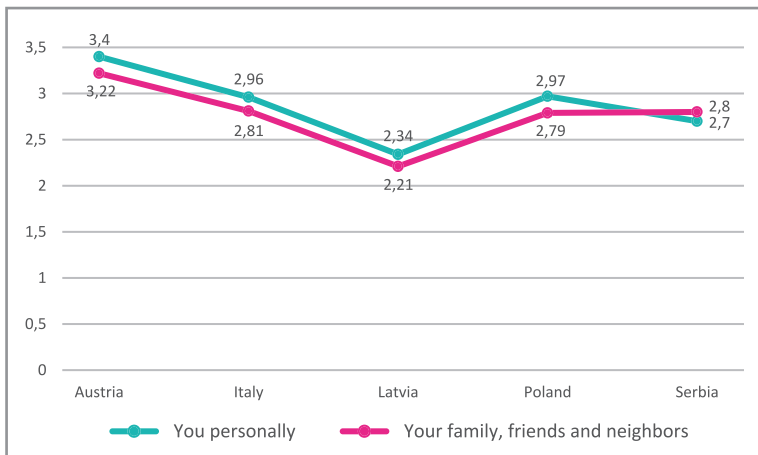
The results of the survey show that young people in Austria and Latvia are generally satisfied with the quality of the environment; young people in Poland are rate the quality of environment as neither good nor bad; and the young people in Italy and Serbia generally believe that the quality is poor.

Figure 34. How do you rate the quality of the environment in your country from 1 to 5?

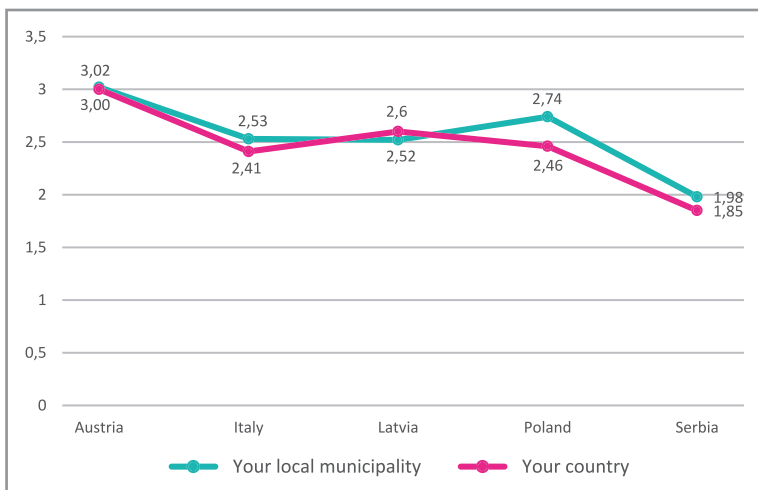


Young people were also asked, this time on a scale from 1 to 4, how much they personally, their family and local community, their city/municipality and their country do for the environment. Majority of answers are above 2, which indicates that the respondents recognise the existing efforts of all parts of the society, including themselves.

*Figure 35. How much do you and your society contribute to environmental protection? (pt. 1)
(1 – Not at all; 4 – I/They contribute significantly)*



*Figure 36. How much do you and your society contribute to environmental protection? (pt. 2)
(1 – Not at all; 4 – I/They contribute significantly)*



Reports from focus groups

Focus groups on Youth Goal #10: Sustainable Green Europe concluded that young people are well aware of the environmental issues, while the satisfaction with the environment varies depending on the country. Proposals to promote eco-friendly practices include sharing personal experiences on social networks, including them in education system and creating professionals with skills in sustainability and innovation.

Participants in **Austria** gathered in small groups outdoors and participated in a comprehensive quiz covering various aspects of an eco-friendly lifestyle, green practices, and the overall environmental situation in Europe. Following the quiz, correct answers were summarized, leading to a discussion among the participants about their personal experiences with environmental protection and their impressions of Austria's approach to this issue, including the initiatives introduced to combat climate change. The majority of participants expressed satisfaction with the country's environmental protection system. When asked about their individual contributions and efforts to save the environment, each participant shared the practices they employ to be eco-friendlier, the factors that led them to change their previous way of life, and the motivations that drive them to sustain this lifestyle. The group utilized this opportunity to share good practices and exchange tips with one another.

The focus group in **Italy**, after an intense brainstorming activity, where data from the country were analyzed in terms of sustainability and attention to the environment, proposed accompanying the younger generations in the green and digital transition by creating professionals with skills in sustainability and innovation.

Another proposal was to standardize green and digital professionals in a single catalogue, the sectors in which they operate and what technical and transversal skills are required, starting from the changes that the Next Generation EU will bring about with investments in ecological and digital transformation. This catalog will also be necessary for the phase of school-university and school-work orientation to prevent the lack of skills required in a labor market in transition.

The group also recommended promoting global policies aimed at sustainable development, ecology and the fight against climate change for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, through actions aimed at developing capacity building actions, supporting the EU Green Deal towards a Green & Digital Deal+ and promoting a European sustainable transport system.

Youth in **Latvia** recognize the pressing need for a sustainable green Europe. However, they often feel detached from the impact of their actions on the environment due to a lack of information and the prevalence of greenwashing practices. Despite efforts to adopt eco-friendly behaviors, the scope of their influence seems limited, which leads to skepticism about the effectiveness of individual actions in tackling larger environmental issues like climate change.

They call for larger systematic changes, as a positive example giving the improvements on waste recycling system that has been implemented in Latvia in past years. To improve the situation among the youth themselves, young people express the need for environmental education in schools, promoting eco-friendly practices within families, and encouraging small yet meaningful changes in daily routines. They also suggest creating honest, but easily under-

standable informational materials that don't discourage youth by being too fatalistic as well as by not stepping into the trap of greenwashing. Youth ask for ability to participate in the creation process of incentives for ecological projects and larger decision-making.

Additionally, youth stress the importance of social media to share personal experiences and inspiring examples that can help motivate others to embrace sustainable practices. On a larger scale, young individuals highlighted the importance of providing adequate funding for forest preservation to protect vital biotopes. Examples from other countries, such as the introduction of packaging-free stands in major stores, were also discussed as potential practices that could be adapted in Latvia to encourage more sustainable consumption habits.

Young people in **Poland** play a key role in building a future based on sustainable development. Their attitudes, informed choices and involvement in environmental, social and economic issues have a huge impact on the fate of the country and the planet.

Encouraging young people to take pro-environmental actions is key to protecting the environment. Promoting energy conservation, waste segregation, or the use of public transportation contributes to reducing negative impacts on the climate and nature. Young people who are at the forefront of environmental movements contribute to changing the public consciousness and making pro-environmental decisions on a wider scale.

It is also important for young people to be active in the fight against poverty and social inequality. Getting involved in charity work, volunteering or initiating social projects that

support those most in need can help reduce social disparities and create a more just society.

Young people who are interested in economic issues can contribute to sustainable economic development. Initiating innovative solutions, supporting small entrepreneurs or promoting ethical business can lead to a strong and sustainable economy.

The participants in **Serbia** are largely aware of and dissatisfied with the environmental situation in Serbia. However, few of them know what they can do to contribute to a better situation or activate the local community. They believe that the local government in the city of Leskovac is not doing anything to improve the environment and point out that they do not have the basic conditions for practicing ecological habits, as well as that the problem of air and river pollution in their environment is big.

Those who are most informed about ecology are elementary school students, who can be taken as an example of good practice of what it looks like when this topic is implemented in the educational system. They highlight a series of actions that their elementary school implemented, in which a large number of students were involved. This is exactly the conclusion of all the participants – education from a young age is the key to positive change, because enlightened young people will be able to put pressure on institutions.

Conclusion

Youth Goal #10: Sustainable Green Europe is moderately included in the national policy documents. The results of the survey show that young people in Austria and Latvia are generally satisfied with the quality of the environment; young

people in Poland are rate the quality of environment as neither good nor bad; and the young people in Italy and Serbia generally believe that the quality is poor. Focus groups made several proposals to promote eco-friendly practices: include sharing personal experiences on social networks, including them in education system and creating professionals with skills in sustainability and innovation.

#11 Youth Organisations & European Programmes

Table 21. presents the degree of inclusion of each target of the Youth Goal #11 in the national policy documents (see the Chapter on methodology). Several targets within Goal #1 are not applicable to Serbia since it is not an EU Member State. Three out of seven targets are included to a large degree (grades 3 and 4) in a majority of the countries in the research: “Ensure visibility and provide quality information on youth organisations and European youth programmes for all young people”; “Ensure sufficient resources from EU programmes for youth organisations to develop projects and access structural support to carry out their missions and to support their work” and “Increase resources, and widen the variety of grants and diversity of initiatives available for youth organisations and youth groups”. Latvia has the highest degree of inclusion of the goal among the five countries.

Table 21. Inclusion of Youth Goal #11 in national policy documents

Youth Goal	Targets	Austria	Italy	Latvia	Poland	Serbia
#11 Youth Organisations & European Programmes	Ensure visibility and provide quality information on youth organisations and European youth programmes for all young people	2	3	4	3	3
	Ensure sufficient resources from EU programmes for youth organisations to develop projects and access structural support to carry out their missions and to support their work	2	3	4	3	N/A
	Ensure youth organisations and European youth programmes are better bridged with the educational systems and acknowledging them as actors fostering life skills and active citizenship	1	3	4	2	1
	Increase the accessibility of European youth programmes, ensure a youth friendly administration process and provide support and quality information for all participants and applicants	2	3	4	2	2
	Reach out to and support marginalised young people to be active in youth organisations, youth groups and EU youth programmes	1	4	3	2	2
	Increase resources, and widen the variety of grants and diversity of initiatives available for youth organisations and youth groups	2	3	4	3	N/A
	Ensure participation of young people in governance processes of European youth programmes	2	2	4	3	N/A

1 – this target is not included at all in the strategic document; 2 – this target is somewhat included; 3 – this target is largely included; 4 – this target is completely included in the strategic document

Survey results

Figure 38. shows that a majority of young people in Austria, Italy and Poland are members of a citizens' association, while this is not the case in Latvia and Serbia. Most of the young people, with the exception of Poland, either have not participated in an EU program or do not know if they have (Figure 39.).

Figure 37. Are you a member of any citizens' association?

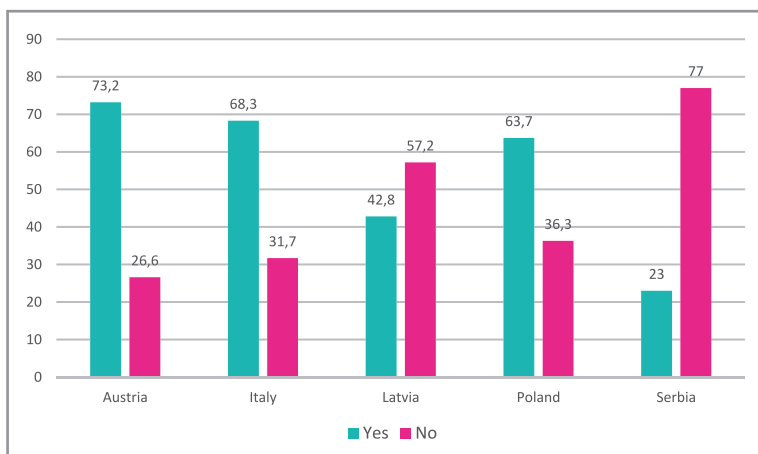
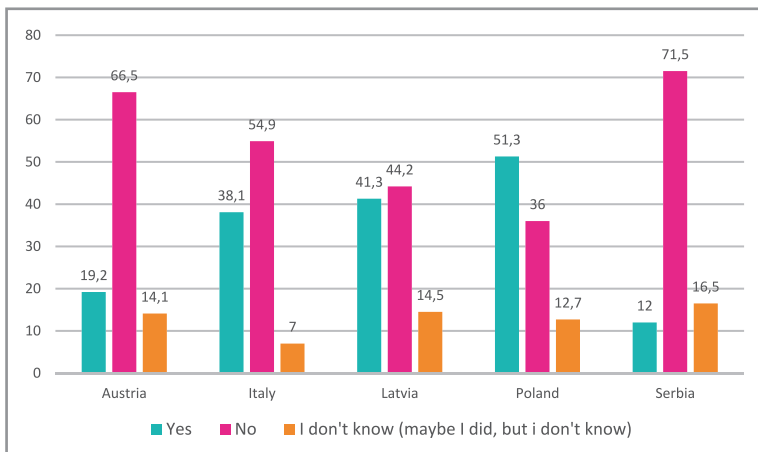


Figure 38. Have you participated in some EU program (like Erasmus+)?



Reports from focus groups

Focus groups on Youth Goal #11: Youth Organizations and European Programmes concluded that young people find European Programmes useful and are mostly interested in participating in them. However, lack of awareness and information remains a problem. Also, it needs to be ensured that all young people have access to them.

When asked about their familiarity with European programs, particularly Erasmus+, all participants of focus groups in **Austria** expressed a lack of knowledge about the program and mistakenly associated it with the regular Erasmus program, assuming it was exclusively for students. None of them had previously participated in any Erasmus+ activities. However, they displayed great interest in joining future events and activities related to Erasmus+ and expressed a strong desire to learn more about this

opportunity. After a brief presentation about Erasmus+, numerous questions arose, and the discussion encompassed various aspects of the program. Regarding other EU programs, none of the participants were aware of their existence or had any experience participating in them. They were surprised to learn that such opportunities were available to young people and felt that this information was not widely known, as it had never been mentioned in school or at any point in their lives. This finding suggests that, in Austria, European programs are not popular among young people, not due to a lack of interest, but rather because these programs are largely unknown to them.

In **Italy**, the objective was read and analyzed by the group who then viewed the results collected from the surveys administered during the project. The brainstorming took place using a digital whiteboard where the commissioners wrote down their considerations regarding the two objectives. The group developed its own considerations, reported below by answering two questions/suggestions.

One of the suggestions was to ensure all young people equal access to European youth organizations and programmes, building a society based on European values and identity. Youth organizations and European youth programs should involve millions of young people in order to support active citizenship and develop their life skills. However, youth organizations and European youth programs remain underfunded and lack recognition and accessibility.

Providing young people in **Poland** with access to reliable information about NGOs and European programs is a key element in encouraging them to actively participate in social initiatives and gain international experience.

NGOs play a key role in creating positive change in society. Access to reliable information about their activities, goals and opportunities for cooperation allows young people to choose activities that best match their passions and interests. Being active in NGOs develops social and leadership skills, which is extremely valuable in professional and personal life.

European programs offer unique opportunities for young people to gain international experience, education and internships. However, in order to take advantage of these opportunities, reliable information about available programs, application deadlines and requirements is essential.

Good access to reliable information is key to developing awareness and activity among young people in society. By encouraging reliable knowledge about NGOs and European programs, Poland can build a society that values social involvement, intercultural exchange of experiences, and the personal and professional development of the younger generation.

The general conclusion in **Serbia** is that young people are not overly informed or involved in the work of youth organizations. They see youth organizations as a means of addressing community issues, but there is confusion among many about what constitutes a youth organization. Lack of information and lack of interest are the main reasons for youth inactivity in youth organizations, along with a lack of free time. On the other hand, young people are not well acquainted with European programs for young people, but they assume that the EU helps Serbia in this area. They believe that there are no significant barriers for the participation of young people from Serbia in European projects. Similar to activism in associations, lack of interest is the main reason for young people's non-participation in these programs. Nevertheless, they believe that these programs can

be beneficial for employment, empowerment, and the development of critical thinking among young people.

Conclusion

Youth Goal #11: Youth Organisations & European Programmes is moderately included in the national policy documents. Most of the young people, with the exception of Poland, either have not participated in an EU program or do not know if they have. Focus groups concluded that young people find European Programmes useful and are mostly interested in participating in them. However, lack of awareness and information remains a problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides recommendations to the decision-makers in the local, national and EU institutions. They are based on the research presented in the previous parts of the document. The main aim of the recommendations is to improve the implementation of European Youth Goals, both generally and specifically.

General recommendations

- Government activities planned by the national youth policy documents should include references to European Youth Goals and their targets, so that direct linkage is created between the implementation of national policies and European Youth Goals (following the example of Austria; see Chapter 3);
- Countries should increase the overall level inclusion of the European Youth Goals in their national policy documents as much as possible, thus fulfilling the political commitment to the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027.;
- Countries which are in the process of establishing youth policy instruments on the national level should finalize it efficiently and ensure the inclusion of the European Youth Goals and their targets;

- Goals which should receive priority when it comes to increasing their overall level of inclusion in the national policy documents, due to their current low level of inclusion, are **Goal #1**: Connecting EU with Youth, **Goal #2**: Equality of All Genders, **Goal #8**: Quality Learning and **Goal #11**: Youth Organisations & European Programmes;
- European Youth Goals themselves should be further promoted among the young people, so that the increased awareness produces more political pressure for their implementation;
- Gap between countries in terms of financial resources provided for the implementation of youth policies, such as the one between Latvia and Serbia, should be reduced by increasing the shares of the national budgets for youth policy, as well as international assistance.

Goal-specific recommendations

- Increasing accessibility of European Programmes can and should be used as an opportunity to also promote the European Union in general among the young people, creating a synergic effect between **Goal #1** and **Goal #11**;

- Priority areas in tackling gender-based discrimination should be the position of young women on the job market and in the division of responsibilities within a family (**Goal #2**);
- As the percentage of young people reporting experiences violence and discrimination remains high, further research should be carried out into the origin, frequency and forms of these occurrences, which should serve as a foundation for the strategies of tackling them (**Goal #3**);
- Formal education should equip young people with the skills to recognize and report misinformation and disinformation on the Internet, in particular social networks; education systems which lack this aspect of the curriculum should be reformed accordingly (**Goal #4**);
- National and local governments should work with the young people who plan to stay in rural areas, addressing their concerns and improving the living conditions they find the most relevant (**Goal #6**);
- Further research should be carried out into the reasons behind relatively high levels of young people living with their parents and which factors prevent them to start living independently; these should serve as a foundation for the strategies to tackle them (**Goal #7**);

- Governments should support the establishment of more *paid* internship opportunities for young people (**Goal #7**);
- Governments should re-evaluate the linkage between formal education and job market and strengthen it where necessary (**Goal #7 and Goal #8**);
- Formal education should be further reformed to include areas such as mental and reproductive health, civic education, as well as practical skills such as money management; more flexibility to design their own curriculum is of significant importance for the young people (**Goal #5 and Goal #8**);
- All national institutions, including government ministries, as well as police, local government and political parties, should devote part of their public communication to reaching out to the youth and addressing their issues (**Goal #9**);
- Eco-friendly practices should be further promoted through mechanisms such as sharing personal experiences on social networks, including them in education system and creating professionals with skills in sustainability and innovation. (**Goal #10**).

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Club for Youth Empowerment 018 (KOM 018) from Serbia in cooperation with organizations: Beyond Borders ETS – Italy, Association for Active Life and Education (ACTIVE) – Austria, Idea4Life – Poland, Piedzivojuma gars (PG) – Latvia and national youth councils: National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) – Serbia, Consiglio Nazionale dei Giovani (CNG) – Italy, Polska Rada Organizacji Młodzieżowych (PROM) – Poland, and National Youth Council of Latvia (LJP) – Latvia implements “European Youth Voices” project to address major youth issues and key priorities of young people in 5 participating countries: Serbia, Italy, Austria, Latvia and Poland as stated in EU Youth Strategy and 11 Youth Goals. The project focuses on mainstreaming youth policies on national and European level through development of comparative analysis and set of recommendations for bringing EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 on national levels while also creating European network of young people, youth workers, activists and other relevant stakeholders who will contribute to more opportunities and initiatives for achievement of defined 11 European Youth Goals. Project “European Youth Voices” is implemented in the period 01.12.2022 to 30.11.2024. and is co-financed by the European Union through Erasmus + European Youth Together.

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