

Youth Partnership

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Learning from national and local approaches to youth mainstreaming and the use of youth perspective in policy making across Europe

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Executive summary

This paper examines the concept of youth mainstreaming and youth perspective as well as their implementation across Europe. It identifies how these agendas are gaining political traction and aims to provide a clearer understanding of their meaning and execution through a review of policies, academic literature and practical case studies at a national and local level. By analysing national initiatives in France, Malta, Ireland, Croatia, Germany, Austria, Finland and the Flemish Community of Belgium, it identifies key challenges and success factors in the implementation of these agendas.

The research identifies that at policy level, while both the European Union's youth mainstreaming agenda and the Council of Europe's youth perspective agenda aim to better integrate youth considerations into policy making, the definitions of these concepts are still in development by the two institutions. The goal of both agendas can be understood broadly as incorporating consideration of young people into policies outside the youth field, in order to improve policy making and reduce, or at least avoid increasing, intergenerational inequality through new policies.

Achieving this within an institution requires a shift in the organisation of policy making, moving the youth priority from the exclusive domain of youth sector actors to a cross-sectoral competence or priority. This can be enabled through the establishment of supportive legislation to recognise young people as a distinct social group of rights bearers that policy can affect and through the establishment of a cross-sectoral method of co-ordination. On a more practical level, tools are needed to assess the impact of proposed policies on young people (such as youth tests or youth checks) and also to obtain feedback from young people on policy proposals through participatory mechanisms.

The use of participatory mechanisms to involve young people in policy making can be distinguished from the broader concept of promotion of youth political or civic participation in general. Supporting young people's participation in policy making requires state-deployed tools for an institutional body to engage directly with young people or youth organisations on a specific policy item during the drafting or formulation stages. Research finds that a range of methods can be used for this, and that existing research and publications could be drawn upon to create a common ethical standard for meaningful participation in policy making.

In all situations, an increase in capacity-building resources is required for any institution to work towards a mainstreaming approach. Across the case studies, it is common (but not exclusive) for those in the youth sector to provide the expertise and capacity to support other sectors, though co-ordination of sectors might also be required through leadership at a senior political level (such as presidential level).

Introduction and background

This publication explores the concepts of youth mainstreaming and youth perspective as well as how they have been implemented at national level within Europe. These two agendas are now gaining increasing political attention across Europe and there is therefore a need to develop deeper understandings of their meaning and implementation. This study aims to support this understanding through a review of policy, relevant literature and practical case studies in a range of countries.

The publication will be useful to policy makers and institutions at national and international level in all fields who wish to adopt youth mainstreaming and youth perspective approaches within their approach to policy making. Such approaches are fundamentally cross-sectional in nature. At their heart, these agendas require interaction between youth policy makers and policy makers outside the youth field. This work therefore hopes to provide a clear understanding of what this interaction might look like, how it might be achieved and what the relevant goals of youth mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas might be.

It sits alongside two other research activities from the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth. The first being a parallel study into youth mainstreaming and youth perspective within international organisations and the second being a knowledge book on the same topic.

The objective to promote youth mainstreaming and the “integration of a youth perspective” within policy making is now a prevalent concern in the documentation of both the European Commission and the Council of Europe, as well as at national level in many European countries. Conceptually, these two terms are not yet fully defined and the policies and practices needed to support them are still under development. The term “youth mainstreaming” is the one favoured by the European Commission. The Council of Europe (2023a) adopts a “youth perspective” through its Reykjavik Declaration and makes “integration of a youth perspective” into the work of its intergovernmental committees and other deliberations a priority, building on its previous work to generate a variety of standards and recommendations in the area of youth participation. Both institutions position the agendas within the context of democracy, with the European Union conceptualising mainstreaming as a tool for democratic renewal and the Council of Europe conceptualising integration of a youth perspective as a way to strengthen democratic institutions.

It is also clear that the intention for both agendas is to lead to better policy in relation to young people. Youth mainstreaming and youth perspective are based on the recognition that the lives of young people are impacted by measures designed in the context of many policy areas and that there is a need to ensure that consideration of young people and their rights is not confined to youth-specific policies, but rather integrated into a multisectoral approach across all policy areas (European Commission, EACEA and Youth Wiki 2024). However, this seemingly simple assertion is further complicated by the variable boundaries of youth (specific) policy itself; “youth policy” covers much wider terrain than “policy in the youth field” (Williamson 1993). The purpose of youth policy is to create conditions for learning, opportunity and experience that can enable young people to develop knowledge, skills and competences. This is in order to allow young people to be actors in a democracy, to integrate into society and, in particular, to enable them to play an active role in both civil society and the labour market. and thus, youth policy has the potential to cover a wider range of thematic

areas. However, in practice, policy in the youth field has traditionally focused on core themes such as the transition to independence, development of youth work and youth participation in democratic life this (Siurala n.d.). The age range that determines youth also varies within youth policy. The European Commission targets its EU youth programmes at the 15 to 29 age range and monitors the majority of statistics relating to youth through the EU youth dashboard as 15/16 to 29. This inherently creates an overlap with childhood, defined as up to the age of 18 by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some European countries (such as Serbia) take the approach of separating youth and childhood within policy, while others target policies at “children and young people” or similar (as in Ireland).

The mainstreaming and perspective agendas require that youth sector policy makers (however youth policy is defined) operate in new ways and stimulate or lead interaction with policy actors who are, at least in name, outside the youth field. Likewise, the mainstreaming and perspective agendas require these policy makers outside the youth field to engage more deeply with youth-focused policy making and even young people themselves. There is a recognition that the direct involvement of young people in policy making through participatory mechanisms may be crucial to both agendas. There is a need then to better understand what these agendas require of policy makers on both sides, how these agendas affect the act of policy making and what practical tools, conceptual understandings and mechanisms are needed to foster youth mainstreaming and a youth perspective.

The promotion of youth mainstreaming is therefore underpinned by encouraging sectors outside the youth field to adopt specific value-based positions with regard to young people and how they are affected, as a group, by policy making. These positions might be regarded as established in the youth field, but new to other sectors. Adopting them across all sectors could be seen as a prerequisite, and they resonate with other mainstreaming approaches such as child rights mainstreaming (United Nations 2023). Furthermore, it is a commitment to such values that stimulates change in the mechanism of policy making across and between sectors.

The values positions can be defined as:

- 1) Recognition of the rights and status of young people.** Young people are a distinct social group with a range of common social concerns and experiences. The concerns and interests of young people can often be unique from other social groups. This uniqueness arises because young people as a social group face specific disadvantages and forms of marginalisation in comparison to other age groups. This intergenerational inequality can include things such as economic and labour market disadvantages or lack of representation within democratic decision making (Deželan 2024a). The uniqueness can also arise from the relative lack of autonomy young people experience compared to older social groups, in that youth is fundamentally a transition phase from dependence to independence. As a social group, young people are also intersected by other identities such as gender and ethnicity. While young people may have a strong level of common concerns and interests, they are also not a homogeneous group, and their experiences and perspectives may vary with other intersections. Above all, young people are rights holders, with their rights defined through international legislation on human rights such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter as well as accompanying frameworks. The principles of equality and non-discrimination within these frameworks therefore place consideration of the concerns and interests of young people equal to other social groups when policies are made.

- 2) **Acknowledgement that all areas of policy can potentially have unique effects on young people.** All areas of policy have the potential to impact on young people's lives and are therefore relevant to young people. The distinct needs of young people arising from intergenerational marginalisation means that policies can affect young people in distinct and unique ways. Therefore, if the rights and concerns of young people are not taken into account during policy making, policies may indirectly discriminate towards young people and increase intergenerational inequality.
- 3) **Commitment to considering youth perspectives and young people's rights when making policy.** Distinct mechanisms and processes are needed to take into account the concerns and rights of young people when creating policy. Youth participation mechanisms can be used to identify common youth perspectives on a particular policy agenda in order for these perspectives to better be taken into account when making policy. Young people are experts in their own lives, able to express their concerns and needs, and best placed to decide how their rights can be better upheld. Therefore, the incorporation of the perspective and voices of young people into policy making can help to better inform policy by generating new insights and knowledge. Alongside this, other non-participatory policy mechanisms such as regulatory impact assessment and cross-sector bodies can further ensure that the rights and concerns of young people can be fully taken into account when making policy.

It might also be recognised that the idea of engaging with citizens when developing policy is not specific to young people. Citizen engagement, be that with young people or other sectors of the population, is increasingly recognised as a means of innovating and improving the quality of policy. In the same way that private enterprises might engage in market research when developing products and services, there is a fundamental utility to finding out what the end-user, or in this case the citizen, wants. Thus, a further value position might be that citizen engagement has value as a tool for improving the quality of policy. Young people can be understood as one of many groups of citizens that might be engaged in policy making to achieve this. As a generation that will be living with the policy outcomes for the longest, engagement with young people potentially adds a dimension of long-term thinking to policy making.

Policy developments at European Union Level on youth mainstreaming

Within the European Union, the roots of youth mainstreaming can be traced back to a European Commission 2001 white paper entitled "A new impetus for European youth", which refers to "incorporating the youth factor into sectoral policies". However, the substantive development in terms of youth mainstreaming within EU policy on youth occurred with the creation of the 2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy (European Commission 2018). "Youth perspectives" is used by the EU as a supporting term when youth mainstreaming is discussed.

In this vein, The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 refers to the need for a "dual approach". It distinguishes between "specific initiatives in the youth field", which are described as "policies and actions specifically targeted at young people", and "mainstreaming initiatives", which "enable a cross-sectoral approach where due account is taken of youth issues when formulating, implementing and

evaluating policies and actions in other policy fields which have a significant impact on the lives of young people”. The strategy notes that:

only by mainstreaming youth as a priority amongst different policy areas [outside the youth field] can it be ensured that the specific needs or effects for young people in envisaged policies or programmes are taken into account. To lead by example, at EU level a cross-sectoral approach should be further pursued as a fundamental basis. Furthermore, youth mainstreaming can only be effective when it also guarantees a say for young people in all possible policy areas that affect them.

Through the EU Youth Strategy, a general policy direction for the EU relating to youth mainstreaming is established with three aspects. First, the need for general consideration of young people in policy fields outside the youth field. Second, the need for the consideration of young people’s views and perspectives, via the use of youth participation mechanisms, when formulating policy in those fields. And third, the role of a cross-sectoral approach, implying that the consideration of young people within other policy fields is enabled or encouraged, at least in part, by the actions within the youth field. This threefold direction is then built upon quite rapidly in a series of EU policy texts from 2022 onwards.

The EU’s European Year of Youth (EYY) 2022 had a specific objective to “mainstream youth policy across all relevant Union policy fields ... to encourage the bringing of a youth perspective into policy making at all levels” (European Parliament and Council 2021). This is later referred to as “mainstream[ing] youth policy across all relevant Union policy fields” and “factoring in the youth dimension into all relevant policy areas” by the European Commission (2024). A variety of concrete instruments have been set up by the Commission as a legacy of the European Year of Youth to contribute to youth mainstreaming, such as the Commission’s youth network of youth correspondents and its youth stakeholders group.

Closely following this, the Council of the European Union’s (2023c) conclusions on youth mainstreaming invited EU member states and the European Commission to build upon the EYY and “promote the incorporation of a youth perspective” into the development of policy as well as “mainstream a youth perspective in policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, applying that view to all areas affecting young people’s lives”. These conclusions describe mainstreaming as “an approach that incorporates the perspective and needs of young people in the processes of policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as in decision-making processes. Mainstreaming ensures that the challenges and concerns inherent to young people are not addressed in isolation but are integrated cross-cuttingly into broader policy frameworks”.

Both the EYY and the EU Council’s conclusions on youth mainstreaming also link the concept of mainstreaming to what might be termed regulatory impact assessment by way of reference to *ex ante* policy impact assessments, the European Commission’s (2023) Better Regulation toolbox and youth tests. Regulatory impact assessment (RIA) consists of a systematic appraisal of how proposed legislation will affect certain categories of stakeholders, in this case young people, as well as economic sectors and the environment (European Commission EACEA and Youth Wiki 2024). Youth tests can be understood as a specific method of RIA, and though not widely developed, they include a youth impact

assessment and some form of consultation or participatory mechanism involving young people or youth organisations (Conference on the Future of Europe 2022, European Youth Forum n.d.)

The Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the social dimension of a sustainable Europe for youth (Council of the European Union 2023a) emphasises and further defines youth mainstreaming and the “dual approach”. This text positions youth mainstreaming clearly as a tool for both policy improvement and democratic renewal. It notes that “young people’s knowledge, perspectives and experiences contribute to more purposeful political decisions and are valuable resources in the democratic process”. In addition to this, the conclusions also introduced the idea of a “rights-based youth perspective” to youth mainstreaming. A rights-based youth perspective is described in the annex as:

link[ing] national youth policy objectives with the rights of children and youth such as they are stipulated in international conventions, laws, and regulations ... based on research and statistics and aim to create conditions to include young people in the general development of society, both from their own initiatives and from the initiatives of decision makers.

However, it should be noted that unlike children’s rights, there is no international legal framework that prescribes the youth rights as body of rights that is distinct from general human rights.

The resolution of the Council of the European Union and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the outcomes of the 9th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue (Council of the European Union 2023b) adds further definition to the concept of youth mainstreaming. It invites EU member states to “take appropriate measures to mainstream meaningful youth participation across all relevant policy fields ... foster a youth perspective in all relevant policy areas” and highlights that “the youth policy area should act as a bridge to other areas of policy making, to ensure that the voices of children and young people are amplified and included in other sectors”. Subsequent Council conclusions on children, youth and children’s rights (Council of the European Union 2024b) and inclusive societies for young people (Council of the European Union, 2024a) then go on to identify that the youth mainstreaming agenda needs to develop in harmony with the mainstreaming of children’s rights, as well as with attention to inclusion and the heterogeneity of young people.

Overall, there is varying use of language across EU policy texts relating to youth mainstreaming. EU policy texts cited above (this section) state that “youth perspectives”, “youth policy”, “youth participation”, the “needs” of young people, “youth rights” and more ambiguous terms like “the youth dimensions” are all things to be mainstreamed. Similarly, the exact role that actors in the youth policy field might play to encourage youth mainstreaming is also not fully defined. While it is clearly identified that youth policy actors have a role to play in encouraging youth mainstreaming, the extent and ways in which they might work with other policy sectors is not specified. The various EU texts relating to youth mainstreaming might require youth policy actors to consider:

- an expansion of the remit of youth policy actors to other policy areas;
- supporting other policy fields to engage directly with young people and their needs;
- deeper, more sustained interagency collaboration between policy fields;

- any of the above in varying measures.

Policy developments within the Council of Europe relating to youth perspective

Within the Council of Europe, emphasis on the need to integrate a youth perspective in the work of its intergovernmental committees and other deliberations stems from the “Reykjavik Declaration” drawn up at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government (Council of Europe 2023a). This states the Council of Europe’s priority objective to:

set the Council of Europe on a new path of increased transparency and co-operation with its stakeholders, with strengthened visibility and sufficient resources. This should include a youth perspective in the Organisation’s intergovernmental and other deliberations as youth participation in decision-making processes improves the effectiveness of public policies and strengthens democratic institutions through open dialogue.

This document is supported by the adoption by the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) of Elements for a Council of Europe reference framework for a youth perspective (Joint Council on Youth 2023). This document makes it clear that this means to “include a youth perspective in the Organisation’s intergovernmental and other deliberations” and that “this dimension is in addition to the principle of youth participation in decision making”. It notes that a youth perspective can “increase the relevance, openness and sustainability” of the Council of Europe’s policies and activities. It states that a youth perspective can be seen as:

- an attitude – think with youth;
- an experience – learn from and with youth;
- a skill – participate with youth;
- an action – act with and for youth.

The discourse of the text emphasises youth perspective as something arising from participatory mechanisms, in particular “meaningful engagement” with youth civil society. There is a clear intention within the Council of Europe to distinguish between youth participation and youth perspective, and a recognition of the need for a stronger conceptualisation of youth perspective. The Council of Europe also indicates that youth perspective is distinct from mainstreaming.

On an organisational basis, the draft reference framework for a youth perspective positions the Council of Europe’s youth sector as a conduit for enabling youth perspectives to be produced and integrated within other aspects of the Organisation’s work. This builds on the principles of co-management and the programme of the European Youth Centres and of the European Youth Foundation, which are developing practices, benchmarks and standards for youth policies and youth work established within the Council of Europe’s youth sector. It could be interpreted that the Council of Europe’s youth sector has a role to play in supporting the mainstreaming of youth participation mechanisms into other parts of the organisation, in order that youth perspectives can be heard by these other actors. Overall, the Council of Europe’s concept of youth perspective is still in

development, awaiting a forthcoming reference framework. It does share similar cross-sectoral ambitions to the European Union's "youth mainstreaming"; the intention of both is to enable policy makers outside the youth sector to consider young people, in some way, when making policies.

Policy developments at national and local level

Data on the national and local use of youth mainstreaming and utilisations of youth perspective in fields outside youth policy are somewhat limited. These concepts are relatively new and not widely studied, though they build on the heritage of policy relating to youth participation. It is known that there has been rapid development and discussion across Europe relating to them, though most identified examples are within EU countries.

A European Commission-led analysis of youth mainstreaming within 35 European countries participating in the EU Youth Wiki indicates that in about half of the countries analysed (n=18), youth issues can be taken into consideration in the drafting of legislation limited to the youth policy field (European Commission, EACEA and Youth Wiki, 2024). In the other half (17), the assessment can cover legislation in any policy field that has repercussions for young people. Considering the countries where youth issues can be taken into consideration outside the youth field, a range of procedures are used, with consultation with representatives of young people and consultation with youth stakeholders being the most common. This is followed by references to studies, reports and surveys. The stage of legislation when youth issues are considered also varies, with *ex ante* assessment of proposed legislation being the most common stage at which youth issues are considered, followed by consideration at the drafting stage and consultation on draft legislation. Debates on draft legislation by an executive or legislature are the least common stages in which youth issues are considered.

The Youth Wiki research also identifies that:

- the Flemish Community of Belgium, Germany, France and Austria have formal instruments for impact assessment relating to youth, such as youth checks or youth tests;
- Italy, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands and the German-speaking Community of Belgium are also in the process of development or consultation regarding the establishment of similar measures.

There are also consultations occurring at national level in Spain in relation to development of youth tests (Spanish EUYD NWG 2024).

Considering implementation of youth mainstreaming and youth perspective at local level, there is very limited previous research. It is known that developments relating to youth tests are occurring at local level in the city of Parma, Italy (Comune di Parma, 2023) and in various localities in Poland (Polish EUYD NWG, 2024).

Connections between youth participation, youth mainstreaming and youth perspective

Within both the international and national policies referenced above, there are frequent references to youth participation. Both the Council of Europe and the European Union have also been highly active in the promotion of youth participation within their policies through things such as the EU Youth Strategy and the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030, as well as in their support for policies

such as the EU Youth Participation Strategy (Salto PI n.d.) and the Council of Europe's (2023b) Guidelines on young people's participation. Youth participation is defined within the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe 2003) as "about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society". The EU's Youth Participation Strategy (SALTO PI n.d.) follows a similar definition, emphasising that youth participation should enable young people "to freely express their views, contribute to and influence societal decision making on matters affecting them, and be active within the democratic and civic life of our communities".

In its fullest sense youth participation refers to the active citizenship of young people as well their ability and agency to influence democratic life (Kiilakoski 2020, Deželan, Bacalso and Lodeserto 2023). Involvement in democratic life is a wide concept, encompassing many different forms of youth participation. This includes forms of participation which enable young people to express their voice in order to influence policy and decision making within democratic bodies, as well as forms of youth participation where young people take action within civic and public life without involvement in policy and decision making (Salto PI n.d.). Though the distinction between the two types is not always discrete, voice-based forms of participation create (or attempt to create) a direct connection between young people and policy making, while action-based forms of participation do not have a focus on this. Thus, it is important to recognise that youth participation in its broadest sense is not always synonymous with youth participation in decision making/policy making (PARTISPACE 2018).

At their heart, the youth mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas are fundamentally about policy development and, at least in some way, the incorporation of young people's voices or perspectives into policy. As there are many forms of youth participation which do not strongly contribute to this goal, it can be said that policy to promote youth participation is not necessarily always promoting the forms of youth participation which have most utility to the youth mainstreaming and youth perspective approaches. Forms of youth participation which do not generate youth perspectives/voices in a substantive manner, nor seek to provide a conduit for these voices into policy-making institutions, have more limited potential to enable young people to shape and influence policy. Examples of these forms of participation include community-based youth volunteering and civic activism, adoption or re-appropriation of public space by young people (PARTISPACE 2018) and educational programmes to support the development of young people's democratic competences or increase youth voter turnout (Barta et al. 2021). While these forms of participation are useful and valuable to democracy and democratic life as a whole and thus are still encouraged by policies which promote youth participation, they have more limited value to youth mainstreaming and the integration of youth perspectives into policy making. Nevertheless, it is still possible for policy makers to engage with these forms of participation, for instance by responding to the results and outcomes of civic activism, so there is still at least some potential for them to inform policy making, and thus mainstreaming as a whole.

To be most useful to mainstreaming and the integration of youth perspectives into policy making, a form of participation must generate a set of messages from young people relating to their views on the direction and nature of a particular public policy, ideally at a time when that policy is under

development. The forms of participation which do this are widely studied and identified (Crowley and Moxon 2017, Gretchsel et al. 2014). They include participatory mechanisms that can be deployed by state actors, such as:

- co-management of policy and programmes with young people;
- youth steering groups or youth advisory groups;
- deliberative participation mechanisms (for example, participatory budgeting, citizens assemblies, the EU Youth Dialogue);
- co-production and service design methods.

They also include consultation mechanisms (Lundy 2018) where the views of young people are systematically sought by state actors. Although these are sometimes considered “less meaningful” forms of participation, as there is a lower commitment on the side of policy makers to utilise the views and opinions received when policy is made (Hart 1997). Examples of these mechanisms include:

- research into and consultation on young people’s views (opinion polls, youth consultation events, public policy consultations);
- monitoring mechanisms that enable young people to give user feedback when accessing a public service.

Young people might also attempt to influence policy making without the direct support of the state by becoming involved in advocacy campaigns through youth organisations and civil society, or with informal protest movements. Policy makers concerned with youth mainstreaming and integration of youth perspectives might seek to engage with such organisations or movements, should they exist at the time of policy making.

Considering the range of participatory mechanisms that can be used to involve young people in policy making above, there is no one method or form that is accepted as the most effective. Instead, different methods deliver different messages and voices and may be more or less valuable depending on the context (Crowley and Moxon 2017). Key considerations include the level of inclusiveness and representation, the range of young people that can be involved and the time and cost required to implement each approach effectively.

The term youth perspective is not generally used within academic literature on youth participation, but it might be considered to be a synonym for the concept of voice, which is more widely written about. Literature on voice and participation identifies voice as one component of participation, alongside others such as space, audience and influence (Fielding 2007, Lundy 2007). “Voice” within the context of participation is a distinct concept from simply the literal expressions of young people (Hartung 2017) and can be regarded as a metaphor for taking the views and concerns of young people seriously within a political context (Skelton 2013, Mayes 2019). It can refer to both individual voice, as well as group or collective voice (Stern 2013). However, voice is not considered to be a static property or something held within young people that can be extracted through a participatory process (Spyrou 2018). Instead, it is generated in dialogue through the interaction of both young people and other interlocutors, as other contextual elements (Moxon 2023). Thus, the “youth voice”, or perspective, rather than being a static or stable thing created by young people, is unstable and evolving, and

contingent on the active involvement and recognition of other (non-youth) actors, as well as other contextual elements (Mazzei and Jackson 2012, Mazzei and Jackson 2019, Moxon 2023). Within the context of participatory mechanism, this means that what becomes recognised as the “youth voice” or “the perspective of young people” is shaped and influenced not just by the things that young people say, but also by the dominant policy context and discourses, the involvement of supporting actors (such as youth workers) and those in direct dialogue with young people (such as policy makers), the institutional context and many other factors (Arnot and Reay 2007, Moxon 2023).

As a result of this, participation of young people, or political dialogue with other actors can be said to generate and create a youth perspective. The youth perspective from participatory mechanisms is generated by a combination of interactions between i) the young people involved in the participation mechanism; ii) the nature and quality of the participation mechanisms used, and context in which the participation occurs; iii) the dialogue between young people and with other actors in the participation mechanism. Different participatory mechanisms may produce different youth perspectives. These varying youth perspectives all will bring different levels of utility and value to policy making, but no method can produce a definitive youth perspective, as young people, like any social group, do not share a static universal held view on all topics. Research on youth voice identifies that young people do not have a universally shared homogeneous view of the world or universally held youth perspective (Hartung 2017). Like any group of people, individual opinions, values and beliefs will vary among individuals. Instead, young people hold a common generational standpoint from which they speak, which is framed by being marginalised within intergenerational relationships and which leads to a level of common concerns and interests (Alanen 2009) and is also intersected by other social identities such as race, class and gender (Moxon 2023).

A final point of learning from literature on participation is that the utilisation of participatory mechanisms within the context of the youth mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas creates expectations that policy makers will engage seriously with the messages coming from these mechanisms. This means creating a realistic possibility for these messages to have an impact on the content of policy, that is, to ensure young people’s involvement is not tokenistic (Kiilakoski 2020). Importantly, as the perspectives of young people are only one consideration when making policy (Denstad 2009), tensions and conflicts will exist between realising the aspirations of young people and other policy drivers. As a result, for mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas to avoid tokenism and manage this tension ethically, consideration will be required for developing “meaningful” participatory mechanisms.

A review of literature by Barta et al. (2021: 23) identifies meaningful participatory mechanisms as incorporating the following.

- **Respect for the voice(s) of young people.** Young people must have the authority to voice their opinions and suggestions. Their voices must be heard and respected by other stakeholders.
- **Clarity on power sharing between stakeholders.** While different forms of partnerships between young people and other stakeholders can be established with varying levels of power sharing, transparent conditions about power sharing and decision making, agreed by all those concerned, are required. In other words, a clear division of competences, allocation of votes or rules for accepting decisions is needed and the responsibilities of all stakeholders should

be clearly set out. Young people should be able to see what conditions govern their involvement and under what conditions their voices count.

- **Transparency and accountability.** All processes should be transparent and clear to all stakeholders, including young people. Young people should be informed well in advance about the processes and mechanisms taking place and involving them. They should know what roles they play and what other actors is involved, and in what capacity. The explicit responsibilities of the various actors should be communicated to all, and the outcomes of decisions should be fed back to all participants.
- **Access to youth-friendly information and communication.** In order to ensure the policy-making process is accessible to young people, appropriate, understandable and up-to-date information should be supplied concerning all matters.
- **Material and non-material support provided to young people.** Young people should have the necessary support available to safely engage in participatory mechanisms regardless of their background, status or identities. This can include material support, such as reimbursement of travel costs, as well as support to develop competences required to undertake their role, such as training.

Methodology

The objectives of this study were to build on the overview of current international policy and the state of affairs in relation to youth mainstreaming and youth perspective in Europe above, and to:

1. generate in-depth, intrinsic (Stake 1995) case studies which analyse and explore examples of national or local youth mainstreaming/use youth perspectives in policy making outside the youth field;
2. conduct an inductive analysis of all cases, supplemented by relevant academic literature, to:
 - develop further clarity on the concepts of youth mainstreaming and youth perspectives;
 - identify common success factors and challenges;
 - identify recommendations for future development of youth mainstreaming/youth perspective by European Union and Council of Europe stakeholders.

Selection and development of case studies

The research is based around a holistic multiple case design with each case treated as an individual case existing within its own context and not linked to other cases. Each case study relates to a single national or local initiative within a Council of Europe Member state that:

- involves young people in the process of reviewing, developing, implementing or evaluating a specific nameable piece of local/national policy or set of policies;
- operates in a field of policy outside the youth field, although delivery mechanisms to support the participation of young people may still be from within the youth field;
- has some form of regulatory backing or formal institutional support; in other words, the initiative is not based around civil society advocacy or primarily occurred as a result of actors external to state institutions.

For case study data collection, a desktop review of institutional documents and one-to-one semi-structured key informant interview with a policy maker linked to each case was conducted. The focus of data collection within each case study was on:

- the process and nature of involving young people in policy development (what participatory mechanisms were used to gather the youth perspectives?);
- the process and nature of transferring the youth perspectives and voices coming from the participatory mechanisms into policy making – understanding from which parts of the policy development are youth perspectives used and how;
- the cross-sectoral mechanism used to enable collaboration between the policy fields and institutions, and to facilitate youth mainstreaming or the use of youth perspective;

- where possible, the product and impact of the process – what is the nature of the policy produced and what are the positive changes for the youth population as a result?

Case study selection occurred in two stages. A long list of potential cases was identified through:

- a call for nominations distributed to the Pool of European Youth Researchers and the European Centre for Knowledge on Youth Policy Correspondents;
- a review of the EU Youth Wiki and Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy country information conducted by the research team;
- additional examples identified from the research team's other activities within the youth field.

The long list was then reviewed to select final cases for inclusion within the study. Emphasis was placed on cases which could be clearly identified as quality examples of mainstreaming or the utilisation of youth perspectives outside of the youth field. Attention was also paid to ensuring the final selection included countries from across a range of regions within Europe. Availability of policy makers to take part in interviews was also a factor limiting selection; the study took place over the summer period when several relevant contacts were not available.

Results: case studies

Case study: France

Key policy actors: the Ministry of Sport, Youth and Voluntary Organisations (formerly the Ministry of Education and Youth) – Directorate of Youth, Non-formal Education and Voluntary Organisations, Prime Minister, Interministerial Youth Committee

Further details: [Advisory Council on Youth Policies](#) is the one that provides an overview on youth initiatives in France.

Age of youth: 16-25

Background and regulatory basis

Youth mainstreaming and utilisation of youth perspectives outside of the youth field are concepts which, while not mentioned specifically, have been advanced in France at national level since 1982 with the creation of the Interministerial Youth Committee established through [Decree No. 82-367 of 30 April 1982](#). More substantial developments occurred between 2014 and 2021 when further regulations and mechanisms were set up, as follows.

- **The Interministerial Delegate for Youth**, established through [Decree No. 2014-18 of 9 January 2014](#).
- **The Advisory Council of Youth Policies**, established through [Decree No. 2016-1377 of 12 October 2016](#) and renewed by [Decree no. 2021-1301 of 7 October 2021](#).
- **The youth check**, established through the [internal communication “circulaire” of 2 May 2016 regarding the evaluation of the impact on youth of draft laws and regulations](#) amending [Organic law No. 2009-403 of 15 April 2009 concerning the implementation of Articles 34-1, 39 and 44 of the constitution](#).

Youth mainstreaming within the French Government is therefore best understood as a collection of interconnected cross-sectoral initiatives rather than a single initiative. The Ministry of Sport, Youth and Voluntary Organisations primarily run several of these initiatives through the Directorate of Youth, Non-formal Education and Voluntary Organisations, while some positions and responsibilities have been placed under the authority of the prime minister. It is notable within this context that France no longer has a national youth strategy; the last one adopted was for the period 2012-2017 and was not renewed.

Overall, in France, there is not one definition that refers to young people from an age perspective. Primarily, it is understood as the age group 16 to 25, with provisions being extended up to 30 years old, such as the age limits for members of youth-led organisations in the Advisory Council on Youth Policies.

Key policy-making activities

The Interministerial Youth Committee is designed to examine problems affecting young people, particularly by proposing measures which could improve young people's lives. The committee is chaired by the Prime Minister or, on his delegation, by the minister in charge of youth affairs. It was created under the minister responsible for youth and the secretariat of the committee is provided by the General Secretariat of the Government. Membership includes ministerial representatives from the majority of ministries, and non-participating ministries may be called upon to sit on the committee depending on the agenda. While the structure has been active in the past, no meetings have been organised since 2015, with the last three taking place between 2013 and 2015. Despite this, there is still co-operation between the Youth Directorate and other parts of government. The creation of the Interministerial Committee can therefore be seen as a springboard from which further mainstreaming arrangements were developed.

The Advisory Council on Youth Policy is arguably the main mechanism supporting youth involvement in decision-making processes within the French Government. Reporting to the Prime Minister, it contributes to the co-ordination and evaluation of public policies relating to young people, to non-formal education and to dialogue between the stakeholders concerned by these policies. At the request of the Prime Minister, the minister responsible for youth or any other member of the government, the council examines any question of general interest in matters of youth policy, non-formal education or relating to the integration of young people, and may be consulted on draft laws and regulatory texts relating to these subjects. The council may address to the government any proposals relating to public policies on youth, non-formal education and youth integration. Integration is understood in a broad sense, and the council has the scope to act outside of areas that might traditionally be understood as youth policy.

The Advisory Council on Youth Policy is organised into "colleges" according to different types of membership. It includes governmental representatives (Interministerial Delegate for Youth, representatives of ministries, local authorities), representatives of young people and youth-led organisations, representatives of formal and non-formal entities, and social partners. The chair of the advisory council and two vice-presidents are appointed by decree by the minister responsible for youth for a three-year mandate, with the chairmanship usually assigned to a representative of a youth organisation under the age of 30.

The structure operates through two permanent commissions, the first on the integration of young people (understood in close connection to social integration) and the second on non-formal education. The priorities the two commissions work on are informed by issues raised by ministries in other sectors (such as law proposals from the Ministry of Labour) or initiated at the proposal of one of the chairs of a commission. Before sending their recommendations, the commissions usually organise hearings with experts in the field. Additionally, ad hoc commissions could be created to raise awareness of specific priorities (such as on sustainable development). Their work usually concludes after publishing a report with their findings and recommendations on the respective issue.

The advisory council is supported by a General Secretariat hosted by the Directorate of Youth, Non-formal Education and Voluntary Organisations. Usually, two persons from the directorate are tasked

with supporting the council, publishing activity reports and submitting certain thematic reports to various ministries based on their requests.

The Interministerial Delegate for Youth role is to co-ordinate the actions of various governmental structures related to young people, ensure consistency of measures and ensure ongoing dialogue between them. Between 2014 and 2023, the director in charge of the Directorate of Youth, Non-formal Education and Voluntary Organisations held the position through appointment by the Council of Ministers. In 2023, the Interministerial Delegate for Youth's position was moved under the authority of the Prime Minister. The role follows the model set by other ministries in the French Government who also have interministerial delegates for their respective policy areas. In November 2024, a new Interministerial Delegate for Youth was [appointed](#).

The Youth Check is co-ordinated by the government's General Secretariat, which includes a team of lawyers responsible for the implementation of youth checks. For each law proposal, there is one ministry responsible for conducting the general check, which also includes different sub-checks, depending on which sector policies it impacts. The instrument is built on three main objectives.

- To consider the situation of young people in the pre-assessment of laws/policies prepared by the government (draft laws, draft regulatory texts).
- To systematically analyse the impact of the draft laws/policies in terms of equality among all young people, intergenerational justice and non-discrimination in access to rights and services.
- To integrate a forward-looking dimension: analysing the effects of the provisions not only for today's youth but also for future generations.

While the youth check is a stand-alone mechanism, it is also connected with the other mainstreaming mechanisms, as the Directorate of Youth, Non-formal Education and Voluntary Organisations reports on the implementation of the youth check to the advisory council. Ultimately, the advisory council assess the youth check's implementation and includes its recommendations in an annual report.

Engagement of young people in policy making

The Advisory Council on Youth Policies is the main structure in which young people have a permanent presence, with the leadership role often granted to a representative of a youth-led organisation under the age of 30, and spaces for young people and youth-led organisations within its membership.

The remaining mainstreaming mechanisms above foresee young people's engagement, yet the use of this practice is dependent on political will. As a general practice, in France, youth engagement in policy making is primarily facilitated by the Directorate of Youth, Non-formal Education and Voluntary Organisations, which can organise direct consultations between other ministries and youth-led organisations or provide a point of view based on the results of previous consultations. Nevertheless, other governmental entities can also organise consultations with young people

One of the most noteworthy consultations was initiated in 2022 by the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, under the umbrella of the wider "Conseil national de la refondation" (CNR). The CNR

organised a dedicated [Youth Council](#) – a temporary consultative structure which brought together representatives of young people, NGOs and other public stakeholders, and which in 2023 discussed a series of issues relevant to young people’s emancipation, organised under four main pillars: the daily life of young people, building their professional future, ecological action and citizen engagement. The CNR Youth Council organised five meetings (Les Rencontres Jeunesse de Matignon) joined by the prime minister, 15 regional workshops and 100 working meetings and engaged a total of 550 young people. As a result, various proposals emerged, which the prime minister committed to implementing during the period 2023-2024 or having them discussed in a new Interministerial Youth Committee. Even if the majority were not followed up, one noteworthy measure brought to life was the adoption of the decree that lowered the minimum age for a driving licence to 17 from 18, starting in January 2024.

A further example is the three Interministerial Committee meetings during between 2013 and 2015 which were supported by a series of large consultative events with young people. The events were organised using the hackathon methodology, at the end of which young people would agree on a set of recommendations. The recommendations produced from this process have been discussed and analysed during the annual Interministerial Committee meetings, directly contributing to the policies proposed by the committee, and later used to serve as a road map for identifying policies affecting youth that the government should support in the upcoming year(s).

Future trajectories

As most mechanisms in place already have a long history in France, their work is expected to continue, with no foreseeable changes in the short term. In between, there have been no public announcements about future meetings of the Interministerial Youth Committee.

The advisory council has also undertaken the responsibility of revising the functioning of the youth check and the council’s [2023 report](#) mentions a series of recommendations regarding its implementation. Among them are the need to establish a consultation process with young people and their representatives and more simplified procedures to monitor and visualise the mechanism’s outcomes.

Main lesson learned from this initiative

The mainstreaming of youth policy within France has been driven by and is dependent on commitment at the highest political level. Having certain mechanisms or consultations organised under the authority of the prime minister extends the youth mainstreaming agenda outside the Ministry of Sport, Youth and Voluntary Organisations. Youth mainstreaming does not occur under one law, but it is regulated under four different ones, with responsibility being divided between different stakeholders and requiring strong communication between various sectors. The four mechanisms support each other and bring the youth dimension to different levels, ensuring strong institutional support for their implementation. As shown, the Interministerial Youth Committee has been the mechanism that created the enabling environment for the creation of all the others. Nevertheless, the fact that there have been no other committee meetings since 2015 indicates a certain level of uncertainty, potentially impacting the implementation and resource allocation to existing youth mainstreaming mechanisms.

This distribution of responsibilities may potentially make it more challenging to gain a strong overview of what results are achieved for young people. The lack of a single youth strategy might make monitoring progress for young people more complex, and current processes lack key measurable indicators. Even the outcomes resulting from large public consultations (such as the Conseil national de la refondation) often do not include a timeline or specific measures on how they can be achieved and by whom.

Permanent allocation of human and financial resources for the functioning of the advisory council acts as a stabilising factor. The Secretariat of the Council is held by the Directorate of Youth, Non-formal Education and Voluntary Organisations, offering structural stability regardless of political changes or interruptions in other mechanisms. It is also the most visible mechanism, with annual reports and an active online platform.

Considering the role of youth participation, the Advisory Council on Youth Policy is a type of co-management structure that seems to work effectively to ensure that the different governmental youth initiatives are continuously reflected upon with youth representatives. However, while the Advisory Council on Youth Policy includes the voice of young people through representatives of youth-led organisations, it does not have an objective to facilitate wider structural consultation with young people. The space provided for such initiatives is still dependent on political leadership and will, and thus wider youth participation in policy making and consultation can be somewhat ad hoc.

Case study: Malta

Name of Initiative: Youth Proofing

Key policy actors: Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ (the National Agency for Youth) and the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation

Further details: www.opengovpartnership.org/members/malta/commitments/MT0021/

Age of youth: 13-30

Background and regulatory basis

Setting up the youth proofing system in Malta is an initiative implemented at the national level by Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ, the national agency dedicated to co-ordinating the Maltese national youth policy, part of the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation. An important role in developing the system is also held by the Ministry of Justice as the process has also been included in Malta's commitments to the Open Government Partnership (OGP)¹ – the Ministry of Justice being the leading institution representing Malta within the OGP initiative. The initiative was not published at the date of the study, with a full proposal being expected after 2025.

1. OGP, founded in 2011 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, is a multilateral initiative that promotes open government. The members of the OGP are governments that work with civil society to determine priority public policy areas. Through the OGP process, members address issues that need reform to make a positive impact in their communities.

The specific development of the youth proofing system stems from the 2021-2030 [National Youth Policy – Towards 2030: Reaching out to, working with and supporting young people](#). Strategic Goal 8 of this policy framework aims to “ensure effective coordination and cohesion in the implementation of the national youth policy and maximise its potential for supporting young people” and mentions a specific action on setting up a youth proofing system that “will be implemented to help ensure that in enacting legislation and formulating national policies and strategic plans and initiatives, the interests of young people are recognised and taken into account”. Since the youth proofing system is an integral part of the national youth policy, the Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ is the main stakeholder responsible for its co-ordination.

However, Malta has long since held a more general commitment to cross-sectoral work. Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ, [created in 2010](#), has a permanent role to “liaise and ensure the necessary co-ordination between Government departments and other agencies in the implementation of youth policy and measures or initiatives proposed by Government or the Agency from time to time”.

Impetus towards integrating youth mainstreaming and youth perspective approaches in Malta was further inspired by the 2022 European Year of Youth and Maltese engagement with the OGP. To meet OGP’s participation and co-creation standards, Malta made a series of cross-government [commitments](#), including creating a “youth proofing” framework. This brought the Maltese Ministry of Justice (responsible for implementing the [national OGP Action Plan in Malta](#)) more directly into the process and fast-tracked the work behind the youth proofing system.

In terms of the youth age definition, according to the National Youth Policy 2030, young people are those in the age group 13 to 30 years old, while for the Youth Advisory Forum, the Maltese government engaged young people aged 16 to 30.

Key policy-making activities

A preparatory cross-sectoral committee has been created to define the functioning of youth proofing and draft the proposal through which the mechanism will be institutionalised. The committee includes representatives of Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ, other ministries, the National Youth Council, youth work organisations and a lawyer assigned by the Ministry of Justice.

Although details are still under development, Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ is expected to co-ordinate the youth proofing mechanism, as its attributions are already closely connected to the objectives set for the mechanism. It is anticipated that the youth proofing mechanism will have a governance structure – a committee similar to the one involved in its design. This will be created through a public call. While the composition is not yet finalised, the members of the governance structure are expected to include representatives of the National Youth Council, youth work organisations and professionals working with young people. The future structure could also include professionals from other sectors (such as health), possibly in a non-permanent role or on a rotating basis. The process is inspired by previous gender mainstreaming processes and is expected to benefit the youth sector similarly.

Engagement of young people in policy making

Malta has previous experience of establishing structures for engaging young people in policy making. It is hoped that the development of youth proofing will contribute to formalising the use of these, across all governmental policies, with the long-term goal of strengthening youth perspectives and impacting the entire policy-making culture, at all levels.

Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ is the main institutional stakeholder that facilitates young people's involvement, while the National Youth Council of Malta (KNZ) is the main stakeholder recognised to represent the voice of young people at national level. Within the youth proofing mechanism, the National Youth Council has a seat on the preparatory committee and is expected to hold a permanent one in the future governance structure, and it is likely that Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ will take responsibility for further engagement. This may involve utilising tools such as in-person focus groups and the [opin.me](#) online platform to collect more specific inputs.

The Youth Advisory Forum was created in 2023 for 18 months and includes a representative nominated by the National Youth Council, as well as other youth leaders aged 16-35, selected through an open call.

Future trajectories

At the time of writing, a new multistakeholder forum established as part of the 2023-2025 OGP Action Plan is planned to discuss the updates on the youth proofing system and explain to representatives of other sectors how its functioning might impact their processes. The youth proofing system is expected to be piloted by the end of 2025, with legislation to support it adopted in the same year.

Main lesson learned from this initiative

There are a series of success factors that have contributed to the development of the youth proofing system in Malta and an overall enabling environment for youth development. The most important is the co-operation between the National Youth Agency Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ and the Ministry of Justice. Including the youth proofing as part of both the national youth policy and the OGP commitments has led to a stronger engagement of various governmental stakeholders in prioritising it on the government's agenda. The very existence of a National Youth Agency, which acts as a co-ordinator of youth policy and dialogue facilitator between youth-led and youth work organisations is also key. Such an agency has ensured stability and continuous development of the youth sector.

Alongside this, there is already a long-standing tradition of engaging young people in various processes; hence, the youth proofing system seems more of a way to formalise and institutionalise it, with an anticipation that it will impact all sectors equally. There is a strong connection between national and European/international processes. Malta's national youth policy strongly references the different policies and commitments made as part of its membership of the European Union and Council of Europe. Such references indicate a stronger awareness of the various initiatives at the governmental level, not just within organisations traditionally responsible for youth.

In terms of challenges, while there are high hopes for the current process, one important issue concerns the allocation of resources. At the moment, there is some uncertainty about how the youth

proofing system will work beyond the fact that Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ will co-ordinate it. One important element to consider is the capacity of the governance structure and/or the agency to meaningfully analyse all policy and legislative proposals that will be analysed through the system. Current discussions aim to have all policy/law initiatives not only undergo the checklist analysis but also engage young people to gather relevant feedback (when impacting them). This requires sufficient resources to ensure that the process is not overwhelming and that it is done in a meaningful way for the young people.

Case study: Ireland

Name of Initiative: Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028

Key actors: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)

Further details: <https://hubnanog.ie/young-ireland-national-policy-framework-for-children-and-young-people-2023-2028/>

Age of youth: Children and young people up to the age of 24

Background and regulatory basis

Young Ireland: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2023-2028 is an initiative of the Irish Government developed and implemented at the national level. It is primarily connected to policies affecting children and young people up to 24, with a key focus on the age group 0-18. It sets out governance and support mechanisms and to support children's and young people's rights in Ireland, promoting an approach where children and young people are a central consideration in the public agenda across a variety of sectors. It is an integral part of the Irish Government's efforts to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the EU Child Guarantee, building on the outcomes of various other national efforts, such as the 2012 national referendum on children's rights and the commencement of the Children First Act. It is the third such national strategy. The first, "Our Children – Their Lives", was published in 2000; and the second, "Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures", ran from 2014 to 2020. The framework is part of the government's effort to integrate the various commitments Ireland has undertaken at the European and international levels by ensuring these commitments are systematically addressed and benefit from a single governance system, allowing for easier implementation and monitoring.

Thematically, Young Ireland is focused on advancing a series of cross-sectoral policy priorities called "spotlights", which have been chosen based on the most pressing issues identified as affecting young people. These were established through a consultation that engaged over 1 200 children and young people throughout Ireland as well as other relevant stakeholders such as parents, professionals in Tusla (the Child and Family Agency), civil society representatives and the general public.

The three spotlights are child and youth poverty; child and youth mental health; and well-being and children's disability services. Furthermore, by the end of the implementation of the policy framework,

it is expected that progress towards five national cross-sectoral outcomes will contribute to children and young people's rights:

- active and healthy;
- achieving in learning and development;
- safe and protected from harm;
- economic security and opportunity;
- connected, respected and contributing to their world.

The Young Ireland Framework provides specific indicators for each policy priority, identifies the responsible institutions and details a timeline for their implementation activities in order to monitor and assess the accomplishment of set outcomes. Each of the three spotlights is meant to be addressed within a specific time frame of about two to three years. The governance structure behind the framework can also propose new priorities that can later be operationalised and allocated resources.

In terms of governance arrangements, the framework comes under the responsibility of the Cabinet Committee on Children and Education and Disability, while its implementation team is under the DCEDIY, whose role under the framework includes:

- supporting the functioning of the governance structures established under the policy framework;
- developing and maintaining the communication platform designed to promote the rights of children and young people;
- embedding the consideration of children and young people's rights across the different governmental institutions or other relevant structures.

The governance structure established includes the following.

1. **The Children and Young People's Policy Forum** is chaired by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth with a Deputy Chair from the Department of the Taoiseach, and involves members from all government departments and relevant government agencies, as well as representatives from the Children and Young People's Advisory Council. Its main role is to oversee and support the implementation of different policies impacting children and young people, as defined in the policy framework. Additionally, it is meant to create space for its members to suggest new policy priorities in case newly emergent needs arise other than those already covered by the framework.
2. **The Children and Young People's Advisory Council** comprises up to 16 members, including representatives with expertise in the key spotlight issues, civil society representatives and representatives of youth participation structures. Its main role is to provide a forum for civil society organisations and independent experts to engage with the Children and Young People's Policy Forum in order to advise and support the development and implementation of the policy framework.

3. **Children and Young People's Participation Structures** are represented through the National Youth Assembly of Ireland, which includes delegates from Comhairle an Óg,² Young Voices: EU Youth Dialogue, young people nominated by youth organisations and guest delegates.

Measures to support policy making

In order to embed the consideration of children in decision making across government, a series of mechanisms are being developed to ensure a sustainable enabling environment for the consideration of children and young people's rights within policy making.

A child and youth rights impact assessment (CRIA). The purpose of the CRIA is to make sure assessment of the impact on child rights is a core part of developing policy. It will highlight important opportunities, within a given policy, to progress children's rights and set out actions to safeguard against possible negative impacts on children's rights. A critical part of the CRIA process is making sure that decisions about children are based on evidence, and that children and young people's views are included and factored appropriately into the decision-making processes. Current work is focused on ensuring that the instrument is user-friendly for the different ministries and departments, to inform how it may be fully adopted at a later stage.

Capacity building of decision-making structures to respect the rights of children and young people. Young Ireland foresees that children's and young people's voices are embedded in all relevant decision-making processes and policy and research development and is complemented by the [Participation of Children and Young People in Decision Making: Action Plan 2024–2028](#). Through this plan, capacity building relating to child and youth participation is directed at public servants to enable them to better understand and realise the rights of children and young people to have a voice in decisions that impact their lives. [Hub na nÓg](#), as the national centre of excellence and co-ordination of children's and young people's participation in decision making, is increasing capacity across all sectors by providing training, support and advice for service providers and policy makers. It currently works to develop sectoral training, including a training-the-trainer module and an online participation training module. The DCEDIY also plans to develop new training programmes focused on children's rights.

Engagement of children and young people in policy making

The National Youth Assembly of Ireland (described above) is the official structure representing children and young people within the governance of the framework.

Alongside this, within the Irish Government, the participation of children and young people in policy making is facilitated by the DCEDIY, through a dedicated Participation, Play and Recreation Unit. The department acts to ensure that children and young people have a voice in the design, delivery and monitoring of government policies, programmes and services at the national and local level, and is

2. Comhairle na nÓg is a network of local youth councils. Young people aged 12 to 18 become members of their local Comhairle na nÓg through their schools, youth organisations and community groups. It is recognised as the national structure for participation by children and young people in decision making in all 31 local authorities.

committed to ensuring the inclusion of seldom-heard children and young people in participation structures and initiatives.

This is achieved through a National Participation Office (NPO), established in 2021 within the DCEDIY to manage and co-ordinate the activities of Comhairle na nÓg (a national network of local youth councils and a National Executive) as well as other related youth participation initiatives and structures such as The National Youth Assembly of Ireland and Youth Parliament. The NPO oversees the [Comhairle na nÓg Five Year Development Plan](#), which aims to strengthen and develop Comhairle as the leading youth participation structure in Ireland. The DCEDIY directs, oversees and supports the work of the NPO and collaborates with the office on cross-government engagement to enable the government to engage with Comhairle na nÓg as well as other participatory structures.

Alongside Comhairle na nÓg, other initiatives used to engage young people in policy making include the following.

Support for young people on decision-making committees. The NPO and the DCEDIY developed [a guide](#) for government and departmental committees to include the voices of young people on adult committees. This document provides guidance, practical advice and useful signposting to government departments and agencies that wish to involve children and young people in committees.

The National Youth Assembly of Ireland was established by the DCEDIY in 2022 to convene youth assemblies on specific policy areas. When convened, the assembly develops recommendations informing government policy on areas such as climate, rural development and other issues of importance to young people. The main function of the National Youth Assembly is to provide a systematic means of capturing the voices of young people in Ireland and feeding this directly into government policy. The messages and recommendations made by a National Youth Assembly may also feed into citizens' assemblies and other broader citizen consultations.

As the Young Ireland Framework advances, it is anticipated that these already established structures will be used to further engage young people in policy making, as part of Ireland's general approach to supporting the involvement of children and young people in decision making.

Future trajectories

As Young Ireland was adopted in 2023, its implementation is in the early stages. The main next steps are focused on setting the governance structures and organising the first meetings for each by the end of 2024. At the time of writing, a first report on the status of its implementation was planned to be prepared in 2025, while a comprehensive mid-term report is planned for 2026. The reporting process will assess how each of the spotlights has been advanced and examine the role of young people in their development and implementation.

Main lesson learned from these initiatives

Young Ireland represents an attempt to better co-ordinate and govern many of the international commitments and national policy concerns relating to children and young people across the Irish government. In this sense, it can be observed a continued evolution of the previous cross-sector work, particularly built on the strong experiences of child and youth involvement in policy making already in

place. Young Ireland fosters an approach towards co-ordination with the emphasis on policy implementation. The governance system that has been proposed shows an intention to have a stronger institutionalised process to structurally engage both relevant ministries/departments and other stakeholders, including youth-led structures and civil society organisations. Since it has not been implemented yet, its success is still to be determined.

The integration of child and youth agendas with each other is fitting to the national context but may not be suitable for other European countries that make a stronger distinction between the two social groups. One of the advantages of this integration is that it allows children's rights to provide a clear rights-based framework to guide policy development. Unlike youth rights, children's rights have specific international legislation in the form of the UNCRC, and engagement with this body of legislation and supporting actors has clearly promoted developments in Ireland.

Arguably the framework falls short of mainstreaming across all areas of policy, but this also illustrates important learning about capacity limitations. The choice of focusing on three policy priorities (the spotlights) as well as several selected priorities is based on the understanding that prioritising them is more important than having too many without allocating sufficient resources in order to achieve visible results. While the policy framework has identified resources to be allocated to its implementation, the policy priorities and the desired outcomes are still very ambitious. The workload of civil servants and the number of various public policies and strategies can thus have an important impact on the decision to add a youth lens to particular sectors. The approach of capacity building and ensuring that the CRIA is user-friendly to all sectors is a further response to address capacity limitations. Having all the recommendations and action plans connected under the umbrella of one framework is also expected to decrease the workload of responsible ministries, as it would allow them to have a single monitoring and reporting process.

It is notable that Young Ireland builds on an already strong country-wide approach to supporting child and youth participation, with a wide number of structures in operation to involve children and young people in decision making. Rather than developing new mechanisms for the youth involvement in policy making, Ireland has embarked on a continued process of capacity building for existing structures, with a view that policy-making actors might be able to directly engage with these mechanisms. The DCEDIY, as well as the operation mechanisms under its remit, acts to maintain the capacity of participatory structures and to co-ordinate engagement from policy makers with them.

Case study: City of Rijeka, Croatia

Name of Initiative: Youth ambassadors in the city of Rijeka

Key actors: Municipality Administrative Department of Education and Schooling, Culture, Sports and Youth

Age of youth: 15-30

Background and regulatory basis

The Youth Ambassadors initiative is implemented in the city of Rijeka, Croatia. The programme aims to promote the city's youth programmes. Each city administrative office has a designated person

responsible for implementing the corresponding measures outlined in the city's programme for youth, which was designed as part of a participatory process that included youth organisations, public institutions and municipal workers and that was funded by the City of Rijeka and the Erasmus+ programme. The initiative is led by the Administrative Department of Education and Schooling, Culture, Sports and Youth, with involvement from all other city administrative departments. The key policy makers are the Mayor of Rijeka, as the initiative's initiator, and the head of the Administrative Department of Education and Schooling, Culture, Sports and Youth, responsible for its operational implementation. Within the department, a co-ordinator oversees the process, supports ambassadors, compiles information and liaises with external stakeholders crucial to the initiative's success.

The Youth Ambassadors initiative was established by the mayor of the city of Rijeka, Marko Filipović with the aim of supporting quality implementation of the city's youth programme. At the heart of this initiative is a mayoral decision, an internal document governing the activities within the city administration. This decision created a co-ordination team tasked with implementing the project. The decision spells out the team members' duties and authorities. Moreover, the mayor has ordered all city departments to appoint an expert in their respective policy fields and a financial expert to secure the required funding during the process of youth programme making. This comprehensive approach, initiated by the mayor, guarantees a coherent and effective implementation.

The initiative in Rijeka is part of a broader effort to enhance youth participation in urban governance. The city had previously struggled to effectively implement its previous youth strategies, highlighting a systemic issue of engaging young people. The arrival of a new mayor with an interest in youth development provided the necessary political impetus for this initiative. This confluence of factors – a city seeking to improve its youth policies, a new administration eager for change and a broader European push for youth empowerment (predominantly via the European Year of Youth) – created a fertile ground for the development of the Youth Ambassadors programme.

Key policy-making activities

The policy-making process of the Youth Ambassadors initiative in Rijeka is characterised by a top-down approach with limited direct youth involvement. Youth perspectives are primarily integrated within the agenda setting and policy formulation stages of the policy cycle of the city's programme for youth creation. While the initiative aims to incorporate youth perspectives, it primarily operates through city-employed officials tasked with enhancing youth policies. These ambassadors serve as intermediaries between young people and the policy-making apparatus, using the lenses of youth needs (encapsulated in measures stipulated by the city's local youth programme) when working in their respective policy fields. Rather than a participatory model, the process relies on the expertise of these officials to translate youth concerns into actionable policy changes. In other words, The ambassadors play a vital role in translating youth needs into actionable policies and ensuring that these policies are effectively implemented.

The concrete benefits of this initiative, so far, include the following.

- In a revision of the budget, funds have been allocated for the adaptation and furnishing of 20 city-owned apartments that will be offered to young people for rent as a way to combat high market rental prices.

- Additionally, the number of scholarships for young people has been increased, and the application process and eligibility conditions have become more flexible.
- The city's portal, Ri Portal, has also been transformed in collaboration with young people and the ambassadors into a portal dedicated (exclusively) to youth.

Engagement of young people

The initiative itself does not directly include young people. Rather, it is a specific structure within the city administration that aims to be more “youth aware”. However, the foundation for launching the Rijeka Youth Ambassadors initiative was the creation of the local youth programme, which itself included a range of mechanisms for engaging young people. It is estimated that around 350 young people participated in consultations and research.

The process of developing the local youth programme, as a form of youth involvement, was based on a report on the implementation of the action plans for the city of Rijeka Youth Programme for the 2018-2022 period. An evaluation was conducted, revealing the areas and activities that saw the greatest interest and response from young people. Three focus groups were held during the preparation phase, including young people from various profiles and age groups, along with more than 10 working meetings involving representatives of youth organisations, decision makers and recognised experts in all areas related to the three developmental pillars: (1) the education and (self)employment of young people; (2) the well-being and independence of young people; and (3) encouragement and empowerment of, and dialogue with, young people. As a result, three working groups were formed, one for each developmental pillar, each consisting of 7 to 10 members.

Subsequently, young people were then involved in formulating the youth programme stage through a two-year Erasmus+ “KA 154” (youth participation) project. This two-year project was designed to bring together young people and city representatives through 12 activities that would help them get to know each other, better understand each other and start working together towards achieving the goals and outcomes of the youth programme.

Alongside this, using the World Café method in three focus groups, 54 young people, three city employees and one parent of a minor participated, with the Delta Association (an NGO) facilitating the process. The results of the working groups and focus groups were consolidated, leading to the definition of the objectives, measures and activities of this programme. The draft of the programme was presented to the city council members and put out for public discussion. Based on the collected suggestions and comments, the final draft programme was prepared and submitted for a 30-day public consultation.

Finally, a public consultation was also conducted through a less formal method via a special website, E-consultation, which the city of Rijeka established in 2011. This provided another way to include and communicate with young people, giving them the opportunity to share their opinions and suggestions in a less formal manner. After incorporating the accepted comments and suggestions from the public debate and consultations, the draft programme was sent to the City Council of Rijeka for consideration and adoption.

Future trajectories

Based on the implementation of this initiative so far, it can be concluded that the initiative is functioning, as communication among city officials in Rijeka on topics important to young people has intensified. It is assumed that this has also increased awareness of the importance of local youth policies. Another indicator of success is that the perspective of young people has been included in some public policies that traditionally did not involve youth voices (such as housing policy). The dominant ways of including young people are its involvement in various working groups that have a mandate to suggest policies to the mayor or city council.

It is important to note that the success of this initiative is not linear but cyclical. There are periods when the initiative is more successful, with officials dedicating significantly more time to youth issues, and other times when youth are not as high on their agenda.

As for future plans, there is an idea to involve departmental heads in the initiative to further emphasise the importance of youth-related issues within the city administration and to shorten the decision-making process. The challenges with this approach will lie in potentially overloading department heads and their motivation to engage in youth matters. In addition to this, an evaluation is foreseen but no details on how it will be conducted are available at this point.

Learning from this initiative

The greatest strength of this initiative lies in the fact that it has elevated youth issues on the administrative and political agenda within the city administration. It has raised awareness of the importance of young people among the local-level bureaucracy and incorporated the youth voice into traditionally youth-unfriendly policies. The challenges of the initiative include the motivation of officials which is addressed by providing more information on the relevance, sending them on different training courses, the time it requires and the lengthy decision-making process.

It can be concluded that the initiative has been successful so far. Contributing factors to this success include the motivation of the initiative's co-ordinator, the commitment of decision makers (such as the mayor) and the high level of motivation of some of the ambassadors, who, through their enthusiasm, inspired other ambassadors who were less intrinsically motivated to work on youth-related issues. What should be emphasised is that the respondent in the interview never used the term "youth mainstreaming" in their narrative.

A key piece of advice that the city of Rijeka would offer to city administrations interested in implementing similar initiatives is the importance of changing the mindset of public officials. They need to be empowered to recognise the broader potential of their roles, beyond the narrow scope of their immediate responsibilities, by placing their work within the context of youth policies. This is why it is crucial that training explains what youth policy is and why it is relevant. Additionally, education is a legal obligation for public officials, so it is important to emphasise that this specific type of training is significant enough to encourage officials to participate.

Case study: Germany

Name of Initiative: Jugend-Check

Key actors: Competence Centre Youth Check

Further details: <https://www.jugend-check.de/english/>

Age of youth: 12-27

Background and regulatory basis

The German youth check (Jugend-Check), established in 2017, serves as a critical instrument for evaluating the impact of federal legislation on young people aged 12 to 27. It was created by the Competence Centre Youth Check (ComYC) as part of Germany's broader federal youth strategy. This strategy emphasises the integration of youth perspectives into legislative processes to ensure that policies reflect their needs and challenges. The youth check addresses a key gap in traditional regulatory impact assessments by focusing specifically on the effects of laws on the younger generation, thereby promoting more inclusive and youth-centred policy making.

The federal youth strategy, overseen by the Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), provides a comprehensive framework for youth engagement and support, aligning with the youth check's objectives. This strategy aims to enhance youth participation in political and social spheres, improve educational and employment opportunities, and address issues related to health and social inclusion. The youth check is instrumental in operationalising these objectives by systematically assessing how proposed legislation might impact these areas of young people's lives.

This example was chosen because it demonstrates the importance of a structured approach to youth mainstreaming, as well as the potential that arises from the collaboration between formal and informal youth policy actors.

Key policy-making activities

The youth check employs a structured evaluation methodology to assess legislative proposals. Central to this process is the Competence Centre Youth Check (ComYC), which oversees the tool's implementation and refinement. ComYC evaluates draft laws through a detailed framework that covers six core life domains: education, environment, health, leisure, mobility and political participation. For instance, when analysing proposed changes to the education system, the youth check assesses how these reforms might affect educational access and outcomes for students. Similarly, in reviewing environmental regulations, the youth check evaluates their potential impact on young people's health and well-being, particularly in relation to climate change and sustainability.

Federal ministries, such as the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth (BMFSFJ), collaborate closely with ComYC in a structured manner and in order to integrate youth check evaluations into the legislative process. This collaboration ensures that proposed laws are scrutinised for their potential impacts on young people before they are enacted so a policy can be either modified or further assessed. For example, during the assessment of housing policies, the youth check evaluates

how these regulations might affect housing affordability and availability for young people. This process helps to identify and address potential issues early in the legislative cycle.

Legislators and policy makers use the insights provided by the youth check to guide their decisions. An illustrative case is the review of labour laws, where the youth check identified potential negative impacts on youth employment opportunities. The feedback from the youth check prompted legislative adjustments to better support young workers and address their specific needs.

The youth check is incorporated during the interdepartmental co-ordination phase of legislative development. This early-stage review allows for the identification of youth-related issues before laws are finalised, contributing to more inclusive and responsive policy making.

The methodology of the youth check aligns with broader principles of regulatory impact assessment (RIA) as outlined in various studies, including those detailed in the report “RIA in Germany” (April 2022). This report highlights the integration of stakeholder inputs and evidence-based evaluations as crucial components of effective regulatory assessments. The youth check applies similar principles by systematically gathering data and feedback on how legislative proposals affect young people, ensuring that their perspectives are incorporated into policy development.

Engagement of young people in policy making

Engaging young people is a fundamental aspect of the youth check process, and although the tool itself is not directly participatory, various mechanisms are used to incorporate youth perspectives into the evaluation process.

- Workshops and feedback sessions provide platforms for young people to express their views on draft legislation. For instance, during the review of health policies, young people’s input on mental health services led to enhancements in legislation.
- The youth check app is another important tool for gathering real-time feedback from young users who can connect at any time during the process. This app was used in particular during the evaluation of recreational policies, where it collected valuable input from youth on how proposed changes might affect their access to leisure activities.
- Structured consultations further involve young people as “experts of their own lives”, ensuring that their feedback is integrated into the legislative evaluation. An example of this is the assessment of environmental regulations, where young people’s concerns about climate change influenced more robust environmental protections in the final legislation.

Youth organisations and advocacy groups play a key role in facilitating these engagement activities, helping to ensure that diverse youth voices are represented and their feedback is effectively incorporated into the legislative process.

Future trajectories

Looking forward, the youth check is set to evolve and expand its impact through several key initiatives. The Competence Centre Youth Check (ComYC) will continue to refine the methodologies and extend the scope of the youth check. Future updates are expected to address emerging issues such as digital

privacy and other contemporary challenges faced by young people. This ongoing refinement will ensure that the youth check remains relevant and effective in addressing the evolving needs of the younger generation.

The federal government remains committed to supporting the youth check with sustained funding and policy alignment. This commitment involves integrating youth check insights into broader legislative frameworks and ensuring that the tool's findings are effectively used to inform policy development.

Germany also plans to enhance international collaboration by sharing best practices and working with global counterparts to promote youth-friendly legislative frameworks. This includes participating in international forums and working groups focused on youth policy, which will contribute to the refinement of the youth check and its global impact.

These future plans aim to strengthen the youth check's role in shaping inclusive and supportive legislation, setting a global benchmark for youth-focused policy evaluation.

Learning from this initiative

The German youth check represents a significant advancement in integrating youth perspectives into the legislative process. By involving key actors through the work of ComYC, federal ministries, legislators and young people, the youth check ensures that laws are developed with a thorough understanding of their impact on youth. The tool's success in influencing labour laws and enhancing health policies illustrates its effectiveness in promoting inclusive and responsive policy making.

Based on input from individuals involved in this initiative, it appears that some government bodies and civil society organisations are aware of the concept of youth mainstreaming and understand its importance.

The youth check's approach underscores the value of systematic evaluation and active youth engagement in legislative processes. Its success in Germany offers valuable lessons for other countries seeking to incorporate youth voices into their governance frameworks. By creating policies that effectively address the needs and aspirations of the younger generation, the youth check demonstrates the benefits of a comprehensive and inclusive approach to policy development.

Case study: Austria

- **Name of Initiative:** Wirkungsorientierte Folgenabschätzung (impact-oriented assessment) – Jugend-Check
- **Key actors:** Department VI/6 – family law policy and children’s rights, Youth Competence Centre at the Federal Chancellery
- **Further details:** www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/agenda/jugend/jugendpolitik/jugend-check.html (in German)
- **Age of youth:** up to 30

Background and regulatory basis

The Austrian youth check (Jugend-Check) was introduced in 2013 as a key component of the country’s effort to integrate youth concerns into policy making. It is part of a broader framework under the Wirkungsorientierte Folgenabschätzung (WFA), or impact-oriented assessment, which was established by the Federal Budget Act of 2013. This legislation requires that all new laws undergo a structured evaluation process to assess their financial, social, environmental and youth-related impacts.

The youth check specifically focuses on the effects that new laws may have on individuals aged up to 30. It addresses the need for youth-sensitive policy making by ensuring that the unique perspectives and needs of young people are considered alongside those of adults. The youth check is not just a procedural tool; it forms part of Austria’s broader youth strategy, which aims to create a society that supports the development and well-being of its young citizens. By embedding the youth check in the legal framework, Austria has ensured that youth issues are systematically considered at the national level, particularly in areas such as education, employment and health.

One example of the youth check’s application is the Digital Skills Strategy, in which the government evaluated the potential impact of digital education policies on young students. This ensured that digital training in schools was aligned with the needs of younger populations, equipping them with skills necessary for future employment. The legislative basis for this process is grounded in Sections 17 and 18 of the Federal Budget Act, which mandate that every new policy or law undergo an impact assessment to evaluate its effects on youth, aligning with broader principles of equality, transparency and efficiency.

This case was selected because it illustrates the importance of a structured approach and demonstrates that a decentralised approach to implementing youth mainstreaming as a policy instrument is one of the options for developing this public policy.

Key policy-making activities

The youth check is a mandatory component of the Wirkungsorientierte Folgenabschätzung (WFA), applied to all new government legislation. The process starts with an initial analysis conducted by experts to determine whether the proposed legislation will have a significant impact on young people. If youth impacts are identified, a more detailed youth check is carried out. This detailed assessment is

structured into five steps: problem analysis; goal formulation; measure identification; impact estimation; and planning for internal evaluation.

The IT tool used for the WFA process plays a crucial role in ensuring that ministries can systematically evaluate the effects of proposed laws on young people. It helps gather quantitative and qualitative data, often from research studies, national statistics and surveys. Key dimensions assessed include education, health, social inclusion and employment, reflecting the broad scope of policies that affect youth.

For instance, when Austria updated its Apprenticeship Training Act, a youth check was conducted to ensure that the changes addressed the needs of vulnerable youth populations, such as those with fewer educational opportunities. The youth check revealed that additional support measures were necessary for disadvantaged groups to access apprenticeship opportunities, prompting the government to adjust the legislation accordingly. This structured approach ensures that youth interests are factored into policy decisions and that potential negative impacts are mitigated wherever possible.

Engagement of young people in policy making

Although the youth check is an effective tool for integrating youth concerns into legislative processes, direct youth participation in the assessment itself is somewhat limited. Ministries conduct the assessments, relying primarily on expert input, data and research rather than on consultations with young people. However, youth perspectives are indirectly incorporated through broader consultations with youth organisations and stakeholder groups, such as the Federal Youth Council (Bundesjugendvertretung).

This approach helps ensure that the policies evaluated by the youth check are grounded in the realities of young people's lives, even if they are not directly involved in the initial stages of assessment. Additionally, young people are sometimes consulted during broader policy evaluations and are engaged during the *ex post* evaluation phase, which occurs five years after the law has been in force.

For example, during the evaluation of Austria's National Action Plan for Youth, young people from various backgrounds were consulted to gather input on the challenges they faced in employment and education. These insights helped shape policies aimed at reducing youth unemployment and improving vocational training and career guidance. This indirect engagement demonstrates Austria's commitment to considering youth voices while acknowledging that there is room to improve the direct participation of young people in the legislative process.

Future trajectories

Austria's youth check has proven effective at embedding consideration of the needs of young people into national legislation, but there are plans to enhance its scope and deepen youth participation in the future in order to bring further youth perspectives into the process. One area identified for improvement is the formal involvement of young people earlier in the policy development process. Currently, their participation is limited to consultations during evaluations or through stakeholder organisations. To strengthen youth involvement, Austria is exploring ways to establish advisory groups made up of young people, to ensure that their voices are heard in the early stages of policy formation.

There are also plans to extend the application of the youth check to regional and local levels of government. While it currently operates primarily at the federal level, expanding it to include subnational governance would ensure that youth impacts are assessed comprehensively across all layers of government. Additionally, Austria is looking to align the youth check more closely with EU-wide youth initiatives, particularly as part of the European Union's broader Youth Strategy, which emphasises the importance of youth participation in policy processes.

In line with future digital developments, the youth check will also focus more intensively on assessing the impact of digital policies on young people. This includes ensuring that young people are adequately prepared for the digital economy, with a focus on digital education and employment opportunities. These future trajectories demonstrate Austria's commitment to evolving the youth check to remain relevant and responsive to the changing needs of its youth population

Main lesson learned from this initiative

Austria's youth check represents a significant milestone in youth mainstreaming and has established itself as a valuable tool for ensuring that young people's needs and perspectives are systematically considered in the legislative process. By embedding the youth check within the broader Wirkungsorientierte Folgenabschätzung framework, Austria has institutionalised a process that ensures youth impacts are assessed across multiple policy fields, from education and employment to health and social inclusion. Based on input from individuals involved in this initiative, it appears that some government bodies and civil society organisations are aware of the concept of youth mainstreaming and understand its importance.

One of the key strengths of the youth check is its structured approach, which ensures that youth considerations are built into the legislative process from the outset. This allows for early identification of potential negative impacts, giving policy makers the opportunity to adjust legislation accordingly. However, a key challenge remains the limited direct participation of young people in the assessment process itself. While youth organisations are sometimes consulted, there is a clear opportunity to formalise and strengthen these participation mechanisms. At the same time, this also demonstrates that significant progress can be made within youth mainstreaming without the centralisation of youth participation mechanisms to the methodology.

Another challenge lies in the application of the youth check across regional and local levels of government. Expanding its scope would ensure that youth issues are considered more comprehensively across all levels of governance. Despite these challenges, the youth check remains a valuable tool for other countries seeking to implement youth mainstreaming practices. Its success in systematically addressing youth concerns in policy formulation provides a model that can be adapted to different legislative contexts.

In conclusion, the Austrian youth check has had a positive impact on policy development, ensuring that young people are considered as a vital demographic in national legislation. By further enhancing youth participation and expanding the scope of the youth check, Austria is well positioned to continue leading in youth mainstreaming efforts across Europe.

Case study: Finland

Name of Initiative: The Young People's Climate Change and Nature Group

Key actors: the Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Allianssi (The Finnish National Youth Council)

Further details: [The Young People's Climate Change and Nature Group](#)

Age of youth: Addressed to children and young people up to the age of 29

Background and regulatory basis

The Young People's Climate Change and Nature Group operates across Finland as a national platform for youth involvement in environmental policy. This initiative, launched by the Prime Minister's Office and co-ordinated by the Ministry of the Environment, also involves the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry with operational support from the Finnish Youth Co-operation Allianssi. Together, these organisations ensure that young people have structured opportunities to influence national climate policies and engage in meaningful decision making.

This initiative exemplifies Finland's commitment to youth mainstreaming. By embedding youth viewpoints into its climate policies, Finland aligns with EU guidelines on youth mainstreaming (see previous chapters) that stress the need for youth impact assessments and cross-sectoral approaches. Such strategies guarantee that policies account for the unique needs and perspectives of young people, fostering intergenerational fairness and sustainability. The Finnish Climate Act underscores this approach by recognising the critical role of young people in achieving sustainable development.

The group was established following extensive advocacy by over 50 youth organisations who pushed for formal representation within climate governance. Although there was initially a call for youth representation directly within the Climate Act, the Finnish Government chose to establish this advisory group as an alternative pathway to ensure sustained youth involvement in climate policy making.

Key policy-making activities

The Young People's Climate Change and Nature Group is actively involved in Finland's climate policy cycle, engaging in activities such as planning, consultation and impact assessments. Members work closely with the Finnish Climate Panel, contributing valuable insights during the drafting of policy proposals on issues like biodiversity conservation, sustainable energy and carbon neutrality. This engagement not only allows youth perspectives to shape policy but also fosters adherence to EU youth mainstreaming practices, which advocate youth-driven assessments to measure policy impacts on younger generations.

Central to the group's mission are two key activities that highlight its influence: the Youth Climate and Nature Summit and participation in a presidential debate. The summit, a biennial event, gathers young people from across Finland to discuss pressing environmental issues and present their recommendations to policy makers. This event ensures that youth voices are formally heard and integrated into the national environmental agenda, embodying the EU's principles of inclusive decision making.

The presidential debate, in which all presidential candidates participated, focused exclusively on climate change, and allowed young representatives to question candidates directly. This event underscored the group's role as a significant player in Finnish climate policy, demonstrating its capacity to bring youth concerns to the forefront of political discourse. Both the summit and the debate illustrate how the group acts as a conduit for youth influence, enhancing the visibility of young people's perspectives within national policy debates.

Engagement of young people

The Young People's Climate Change and Nature Group fosters engagement through an inclusive application process managed by the Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi, which selects 14 members from a diverse pool of 77 applicants. This process prioritises geographical and demographic diversity, ensuring a broad representation of young voices from various backgrounds and regions within Finland. Members, aged 18 to 25, are selected based on their interest and experience in environmental issues and serve a two-year term.

The group's activities involve regular meetings with governmental bodies, participation in public consultations and involvement in planning the Youth Climate and Nature Summit. Members also take part in presidential election panels and stakeholder meetings, which expose them to real-world policy making and offer practical experience in advocacy and civic engagement. Through these activities, the group captures and amplifies youth perspectives, ensuring they are a key consideration in the Finnish Government's environmental policy.

Young participants have voiced strong support for the initiative, particularly valuing the opportunity to shape policies that directly affect their future. They often emphasise the importance of taking a long-term view on climate policy, advocating measures that balance immediate needs with sustainable outcomes. The engagement of youth has already influenced policy drafts by emphasising the need for inclusive, science-based approaches that address both current and future environmental challenges.

Future trajectories

The Finnish Government plans to enhance the group's role by introducing rotating membership, which will bring in fresh perspectives and sustain youth engagement. This approach reflects a core aspect of youth mainstreaming by ensuring ongoing renewal and responsiveness to the evolving interests of young people. Stakeholders have also emphasised the importance of allowing young people to independently set their agenda topics, which has already led to increased engagement and commitment.

Future developments may include establishing structured feedback mechanisms and exploring international partnerships with other youth climate groups. By adopting these practices, Finland hopes to further align with EU youth mainstreaming strategies and reinforce its leadership in youth-inclusive environmental governance. As Finland continues to refine the group's processes, these enhancements could further solidify the group's impact on policy.

Main lesson learned from this initiative

While the Young People's Climate Change and Nature Group highlights several strengths, such as integrating innovative youth perspectives into policy discussions, it is essential to recognise that this initiative is still in its early phases. The full impact of the group on policy outcomes remains to be seen, as the processes continue to develop and mature. Nonetheless, the initiative is a promising model for youth mainstreaming within environmental governance.

Challenges include maintaining voluntary engagement and securing sufficient resources. However, the group's structure – rooted in youth mainstreaming principles – demonstrates that young people can significantly contribute to shaping policies that are both forward-thinking and equitable. This model offers valuable insights for other nations seeking to integrate youth perspectives in various policy areas, emphasising the importance of youth involvement for fostering sustainable and intergenerationally fair policies.

By contrast to other case studies within this research, the Young People's Climate Change and Nature Group is much narrower in scope, and it is not recognised as youth mainstreaming per se. It operates within only one policy field, rather than across sectors. As a result, many of the mechanisms present in other cases relating to cross-sectoral leadership and co-ordination are not required. Furthermore, it includes only a participatory process, and no form of regulatory impact assessment or expert-led policy analysis. It could be argued that this mechanism (taken on its own) is not a full mainstreaming approach, because of this more limited scope. However, it is clear that the activities are still a significant contribution to mainstreaming the consideration of young people outside the youth policy field.

Case study: Flemish Community of Belgium

Name of Initiative: Various combined instruments

Key actors: Department of Culture, Youth and Media

Further details: www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/sites/default/files/2021-04/JKP_summary_digital%20version.pdf

Age of youth: Addressed to children and young people up to the age of 30

Background and regulatory basis

The Government of Flanders has defined six different instruments to achieve integrated youth and children's rights policies. All of them include different mechanisms that ensure co-operation across the different sectors and involvement of various youth stakeholders. They address the rights of children and young people up to the age of 30, with some of them focusing on specific age groups. Within this, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media is the leading institution responsible for youth policy in Flanders; it is in charge of all stages of planning, implementing and evaluating youth policies and relevant legal instruments. The department is placed under the authority of the Minister for Youth.

The main regulatory document governing these policy instruments are the Flemish Decree of 23 November 2023 on the Youth and Children's Rights Policy and the Support of Youth Work, and the [Decree of the Flemish Government implementing the Youth Decree of 23 November 2023](#), adopted in February 2024. The youth decree was intended to give new impetus to mainstream youth policies across all sectors. It builds on previous efforts already in place, such as the 1997 Child Impact Report (CIR) and the 2008 Act on Youth and Children's Rights Policy (CRJA), the law that introduced the Child and Youth Impact Report (JoKER), through which the CIR was extended to cover young people up to 25 years old, followed by subsequent law changes until 2019. The 2023 decree is designed to bring all main instruments addressing youth and children's rights under one legal framework, including by integrating youth policy and children's rights policy, while also expanding its scope, which originally focused on JoKER. The six main instruments covered by the new decree are:

- the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (JKP);
- the Child and Youth Impact Report (JoKER);
- designated contact points for youth and children's rights;
- horizontal consultations – organised by the Department of Culture, Youth and Media with the contact points and the intermediary youth organisations;
- vertical consultations – organised by each ministry, including various youth representatives, contact points, the Flemish Youth Council and the Children's Rights Commissioner;
- the Youth Research Platform (JOP) – an interdisciplinary structure dealing youth research systematically, including through the publication of the State of Youth report, published every five years in preparation for the new legislative period.

Key policy instruments in detail

The Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan (JKP) is the main policy document and defines three to five priorities. The first integrated policy plan was in place for the period 2015-2019, the second for 2020-2024 and at the time of writing a new plan for 2025-2029 is due out for public consultation. It is designed for children and young people up to the age of 30 and defines the main priorities to be addressed in the respective time frame. The document is formally adopted by the Flemish Government and submitted to the Flemish Parliament and Flemish Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner. Before its adoption, various consultations take place, including through the involvement of the Flemish Youth Council. The 2020-2024 policy plan includes a specific sub-chapter on the child and youth perspectives, recognising this as one of the basic principles that guides the development and implementation of the strategy. It underlines the importance of focusing on the needs and rights of children and young people, ensuring their voices are heard, and following up with appropriate actions; moreover, children's rights form the foundation of the JKP.

The Child and Youth Impact Report (JoKER) is an instrument to protect children's and young people's rights. It entails that any draft legislation submitted to the Flemish Parliament by the government has to be accompanied by a report detailing its impact on children and youth, whenever the proposal directly affects people under the age of 25. Such legislation covers not just policies that specifically target young people (such as those connected to education and youth work) but also other broader

policies that might have an indirect connection with them (such as driver training or nature management).

Contact points for youth and children's rights policy have been introduced together with the former decree of 20 January 2012 concerning the implementation of a renewed Flemish youth and children's rights policy. The senior officials of all departments and internal and several external autonomous agencies of the Flemish Government are required to appoint/select an official as a contact point for youth and children's rights policy. However, the contact points are civil servants, not political appointees, thus their position is not dependent on changes in the political structures. The overall co-ordination is ensured by the Minister for Youth through the Department of Culture, Youth and Media, which is responsible for co-ordinating the entire network of contact points, as well as integrating their work into the wider process of preparing and reporting on the policy plan. At the same time, the contact points are also expected to be involved in the entire policy process, including preparing, following up, monitoring, advocating action with their own minister, reporting and evaluating.

The Flemish guide for contact points mentions the following tasks.

- Contributing to the preparation of the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan.
- Ensuring the monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan.
- Assessing the effects on children and young people and their rights of the policies prepared or implemented by their department or agency.

The contact points are not expected to work in isolation, they are part of a network, co-ordinated by the Minister of Youth, as well as part of a horizontal consultation – a discussion platform for youth and children's rights organisations from other governmental bodies, non-governmental organisations or academic institutions. The reflection group does not have the status of a formal advisory body but is expected to meet three to four times a year and, if needed, to set specific working groups based on relevant priorities. The members of the reflection group, as defined in the decree and later expanded through the decision of the Flemish Government for the implementation of the youth decree, include the Department of Culture, Youth and Media, the youth and children's rights policy contact points, a representative of the Minister for Youth – responsible for co-ordinating the children's rights policy – and a representative from a range of child rights organisations. Moreover, the contact points can also participate in dedicated training, organised one to two times per year, and join the ongoing exchange of information connected to the policy cycle.

Horizontal consultations with stakeholders. The Government of Flanders, through the Minister for Youth, is expected to organise horizontal consultation on youth and children's rights policy for the following purposes.

- To contribute to the preparation of the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, with specific input on the environmental analysis, the selection of priorities and cross-cutting objectives.

- To monitor the progress of the implementation of the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan and of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to formulate proposals to adjust the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan.
- Assess the effects of the Flemish policy on children and young people and their rights.
- Address the results of the vertical consultations on youth and children's rights policy.

The list of stakeholders engaged in the horizontal consultations includes the following: the Department of Culture, Youth and Media; the contact points for youth and children's rights policy; the intermediary youth organisations; the Flemish Community Commission; the Flemish Radio and Television Broadcasting Organisation, mentioned in Article 3 of the Decree of 27 March 2009 on radio and television broadcasting; the Children's Rights Commissioner; the Scientific Support Centre for Youth; the National Commission for the Rights of the Child; the Belgian Committee for UNICEF; Mediawijs and Child Focus.

Vertical consultations on youth and children's rights policy are mandatory and are expected to be organised by all Flemish ministries in their own area of competence, for the following purposes.

- To assess specific policy initiatives advanced by the respective ministers, for their effects on children and young people and their rights.
- To provide input on public policy and budget explanation.

All vertical consultations need to engage the following stakeholders: the Children's Rights Commissioner, the Flemish Youth Council and the competent contact points for youth and children's rights policy.

State of the Youth is a scientific report that monitors the young people's living conditions and needs and is an integral part of the youth and children's rights policy. The research is carried out by the governmental institute, the Youth Research Platform (JOP). It is a mandatory instrument designed to be published every five years, with the last one being [published in 2024](#) (the fifth of its kind). It identifies the main priorities that are the basis for the consultations on the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan.

Engagement of young people

The first instrument in the policy cycle is the State of the Youth Report, which is based on the responses to a survey designed for children and young people aged 12-25. Thus, young people can express their viewpoints every five years when the research is carried out before a new Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan is proposed. The young people involved in the research are not necessarily representatives of youth organisations.

Throughout the policy cycle, a special role is played by the Flemish Youth Council as the official advisory body to the government representing youth voices within policy processes. The Youth Council is one of the main stakeholders identified in the consultations organised around the Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, as well as in the vertical consultations initiated by different sectoral ministers. Moreover, the Youth Council does not have just a consultative role but also an advisory one,

as the Flemish Government is required to ask for their advice on draft decrees and regulatory drafts of the Flemish Government that implement the Flemish Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan. The Flemish Youth Council can additionally provide advice on its own initiative. Following their advice, the government is also expected to explain their final decision. Considering the important role of the Flemish Youth Council, their functioning is regulated by law. The council's membership consists of elected advisers, international youth representatives for the EU and the UN, and a group of volunteers. The structure is led by an official advisory board, which is re-elected every three years and includes 16 advisers, eight young people and eight youth workers.

Finally, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media, as the primary institutional body responsible for supporting youth and children's rights policies, has developed additional measures that promote youth participation, such as:

- designating a specific staff member to support other departments/miniseries to design participatory processes with young people;
- developing a "The Participation Circle" guidelines and workbook, with the support of the Children's Rights and Knowledge Centre (KeKi), aimed at offering practical tools to those interested in implementing meaningful youth participation.

Future trajectories

As the youth decree was only implemented in 2024, it is relatively new, so future plans and development have not yet been identified. One of the Flemish Government's most important short-term priorities is the process behind developing and adopting the new Youth and Children's Rights Policy Plan, since the current one is set to expire at the end of 2024.

Main lesson learned from this initiative

This case study highlights the potential of linkages between children's rights mainstreaming and youth mainstreaming, recognising that both agendas involve consideration of intergenerational equality, and there is an overlap between the groups of childhood and youth.

The value of creating informal spaces where civil servants and institutional staff have the opportunity to learn from past experience in the long term, contributing to a sustainable organisational culture, is also clear. The case highlights how while it is important to have designated contact points in each ministry/relevant institution, investing in them as a network has also brought value, ensuring they also get support and understand what kind of information they need to share with other sectors, understand the value of their work and share common values in terms of children and young people.

Finally, the case study highlights the resource requirements, both human and financial, for investing in mainstreaming. A balance between investing in participatory processes and investment in cross-ministerial processes are required. Participatory mechanisms are identified by the case interviewee as requiring both sufficient investment and adequate time. Working with representatives of children, young people and youth workers can facilitate the work of institutions in this area. Especially important is giving feedback to young consultation participants, which requires monitoring what

happens with the input received through the various consultations (for example, via the tasks set for the contact points).

Conclusion: what can be learned about the youth mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas from the case studies?

The case studies within this research illustrate the range of approaches that have been taken to youth mainstreaming and the youth perspective agendas at national level. Most of the initiatives are relatively new and could be considered as exploratory or even experimental in nature. Even the most long-standing example, in France, has been through a series of iterative developments. Although there are differences between the cases, a number of common approaches, key mechanisms and learning can be identified. This both builds on and, in some areas, contrasts, the small body of literature on youth mainstreaming.

It should be noted that cases in this study have not necessarily set out to implement youth mainstreaming or youth perspective as defined by the European Union and the Council of Europe respectively. Developments in all cases occurred either before, or in parallel with, the current policy discussion at international level. Case study interviewees used terms like mainstreaming or youth perspective in a relatively flexible manner, rather than as a clear signifier of a link or reference to international policy. Connections to EU mainstreaming agendas were more commonly referred to within interviews and were particularly understood within the context of cross-sectoral policy developments and collaboration relating to young people. Youth perspectives was generally only referred to as a synonym for voices or views of young people, and not typically identified as a dedicated policy term.

Therefore, the extent to which cases do indeed reflect an implementation of mainstreaming or youth perspectives as envisaged by European Union and the Council of Europe respectively is open for future consideration as the two agendas become more defined within international policy. This is particularly the case for the youth perspective agenda, which is still emerging at the time of writing, and as a result will have made limited contribution to the cases within this study. The extent to which the cases do in fact represent the youth perspective agenda will only become clearer as the concept of youth perspectives becomes fully articulated by the Council of Europe. With this in mind the reminder of this chapter refers to “youth mainstreaming” as envisaged within academic literature and European Union policy.

Based on the learning from the cases, youth mainstreaming can be defined as a cross-sectoral policy process implemented to enable institutions to improve policy making with regard to young people. When established, the goals of this process will be:

- ensuring that the rights and perspectives of young people are taken into account when policy is made by policy sectors outside of the youth field;
- ensuring that new policy outside of the youth field contributes to a reduction of intergenerational inequality (or at least does not increase it); that is, ensuring new policy

measures do not have disproportionate negative impacts on the lives of young people or erode their rights in some other manner (Seneviratne 2017).

However, the intention to promote youth mainstreaming and encourage its adoption can also be understood as a specific goal for the youth policy field. In most of the case studies, the youth field is a critical enabler, catalyst and support mechanism that encourages other policy fields to adopt the two goals above. The role of youth policy actors expands to take on a role of championing the rights and concerns of young people across and between other policy sectors. The youth field also provides the practical means to enable other sectors to better take account of the rights and perspectives of young people.

Common lesson learned from the case studies: enabling policy mechanisms

A number of concrete policy mechanisms required for the implementation of youth mainstreaming can also be identified. These are common across many, but not all, of the case studies in this study.

First, a commitment from senior political leadership to reorganise policy making is required. Across the case studies it can be seen that a decision to reorganise policy making in this way typically falls under the authority of the most senior governmental level, such as a mayor (in the case of Reijka) or a prime minister (in the case of France). Youth mainstreaming requires a shift in the organisation of policy making. Its adoption moves consideration of young people from an exclusively youth sector to all (or at least more) policy sectors. Implementation of youth mainstreaming requires, in the first instance, support from senior governmental figures or bodies (Camarinhas 2019) and especially those who have the power to determine the remit and interaction of different policy sectors under their leadership.

Second, enabling legislation, regulation and strategy may be necessary to permit existing government departments or ministries to begin operating in a different manner and achieve such a reorganisation. Depending on the context, such legislation might need to:

- permit or require non-youth sector policy actors to address the topic of youth;
- permit or require youth sector policy actors to provide capacity, resources and expertise to other policy actors
- define the governance mechanisms for interaction between policy actors and fields in relation to the topic of youth.

Third, specific mechanisms for cross-sectoral or cross-ministerial interaction must be established, potentially attached to a national strategy and with some form of national co-ordination mechanism. The movement of the youth priority out of the exclusive competence of the ministries of youth (or equivalent) to a cross-sector competence necessitates a mechanism to co-ordinate and govern how the topic of youth is addressed within policy making, such as a cross-sector youth committee. One of the key functions of this seems to be the determination of which upcoming policies might require the most in-depth consideration vis-à-vis the concerns of young people. While the aspiration of youth mainstreaming might be to consider young people in all policy fields, in practice many of the examples above found it necessary to determine which policies required consideration or assessment in relation to young people (for example, initial analysis of policies within the Austrian WFA). In some cases this

even leads to prioritisation of some policy areas within national strategies (for example, the Irish “spotlights”). This is likely to be driven in part by resource limitations, given that deployment of specific methods to assess upcoming policy requires a resource commitment.

Fourth, when it is determined which policies require in-depth consideration with regard to young people, specific methods and capacity are needed to assess policies. In the cases above these assessments fall into two categories.

- Participatory mechanisms to produce and integrate the perspective of young people into a particular policy (Seneviratne 2017).
- Technical processes to assess the impact of policies on young people (European Commission, EACEA and Youth Wiki 2024).

From the cases it is clear that organisational capacity is needed to conduct these assessments. In many, but not all, cases above, this capacity were provided by youth sector actors.

Common lesson learned from case studies: use of participatory mechanisms

Across the case studies it is evident that a wide range of participatory approaches are used to identify the voices of young people on specific policies. These include the following.

- Deliberative methods. Where dialogue with young people takes place through in-depth workshops, feedback sessions or even youth assemblies (as in Ireland). These methods occur on a task-and-finish basis, address a specific topic or policy and may occur with different young people each time they are deployed.
- Permanent youth advisory groups or forums (as in Malta and Finland). Where young people, often from youth organisations, are selected as representatives or a representative voice of young people, and can be consulted regularly on upcoming policy priorities.
- Digital consultation tools (as with Opin Malta and the youth check app in Austria). These enable wider numbers of young people to submit their views on a policy, without the need to join an activity or group.
- Joint advisory structures (as in France). Where young people and experts or sector representatives jointly form an advisory board, co-managing their own work and input on policy making.

The lack of any common form or method of participation among the cases suggests that there is no specific form or model of youth participation that is suited to youth mainstreaming.³ However, it is clear that all of the participatory processes used are institutionalised processes – forms of

3. Although some forms of youth participation such as civic activism, electoral participation and volunteering can be ruled out, they are not by design methods that can be deployed by state actors to gauge young people’s voices on a topic (see Connections between youth participation, youth mainstreaming and youth perspective section).

participation that can be set up and maintained by state intuitions. It is also clear that the exclusive purpose of the participatory mechanisms in all cases is to enable young people to comment on, be involved in or in some way express an opinion to influence policy making. None of the participatory mechanisms identified were especially new or novel, instead they all reflect participatory approaches to involve young people in policy making that have already been widely used within youth policy. Most interestingly, in some instances (Austria and Rijeka) the use of youth participation mechanisms within the cases was even highly limited or ad hoc. This suggests that youth participation mechanisms might not be as central to the mainstreaming agenda as some of the literature (e.g., Seneviratne 2017) suggests.

It is also notable that in most cases studies there is no formal commitment to co-decision making or power sharing with young people and participatory mechanisms are often only consultative in nature. Many advocates of youth participation have long suggested that such sharing of power with young people is the highest level of participation (Kiilakoski 2020), and therefore the most desirable approach. However, the importance of full power sharing is also disputed in literature on participation. First, it is argued that young people should have a choice regarding their participation, and the appropriate degree of youth participation should be tailored to the needs of participants, rather than aspiring to any specific ideal (Treseder and Crowley 2001). Second, it is argued that lower levels of power sharing may be a necessary first step towards higher levels (Lansdown 2018). Third, it is argued that understanding of power as property that individuals may have, rather than an action that people may exert, is too conceptually limited as a method of understanding participation (Gallagher 2008). It should be further noted that meaningful participation does not per se require power sharing, only clarity of how power is shared (Barta et al. 2021). Last, it can be questioned why young people should formally hold the power to influence a public policy that affects many different social groups, instead of this power being shared by a more widely representative mixed-age group of citizens; much writing on citizens'/civic participation argues that participatory mechanisms should strive to fully represent all groups affected by a policy (Michels 2011). Despite this, the recent literature on youth mainstreaming still generally calls for power sharing (Deželan 2024b; Seneviratne 2017). The lack of power sharing within the cases in this study suggests that it may not be essential to the mainstreaming agenda. Seemingly, significant progress can be made with only consultative approaches to engaging young people. Indeed, if the purpose of youth mainstreaming is to influence and improve policy making, it could be argued that one measure of successful youth participation is the extent to which the participation provided useful, usable and timely information and intelligence to policy makers in order to improve the content of policy (Barta and Moxon 2022).

Common lesson learned from the case studies: use of expert-led mechanisms

A central feature of youth mainstreaming within many cases is the use of tools (such as youth checks) to somehow assess or predict the impact of policies on young people *ex ante* during the policy drafting stage. These tools allow policy or legislation proposed by a state body to be scrutinised for any unintended consequences on young people, allowing for potential changes to be made. The most developed set out a framework of pre-specified domains against which the potential effect of legislation or policy making can be evaluated.

Rather than being participatory, these tools and checks are often expert driven. They therefore do not constitute the integration of a youth perspective into policy making. Nevertheless, youth impact

assessments such as youth checks are clearly part of the growing youth mainstreaming agenda. The use of these tools further adds weight to the idea that youth mainstreaming is a broader approach than simply the development of participatory mechanisms in sectors outside the youth field.

All of the impact assessment tools within these cases are, in some way, still under development or revision. Most have only been implemented a relatively small number of times and nearly all cases identified need further development. There is potential then for further development of indicators banks, frameworks and assessment criteria, against which legislation can be critiqued, which could be done at international level by the Council of Europe. A human rights-based framework might serve as the foundation for this.

Towards a model of youth mainstreaming

At the heart of the mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas lies an intention to reorganise the mechanisms and approach to policy making in relation to young people. They both promote consideration of youth outside of the domain of youth policy, or more accurately outside of the exclusive domain of youth policy actors, such as national ministries with responsibilities for youth. As the national case studies in this research demonstrate, mainstreaming and youth perspective encourage policy actors outside the youth domain to explicitly consider how their policies relate to and affect young people. This requires cross-sectoral governance mechanisms to determine how and when “non-youth” policies are to come under scrutiny vis-à-vis young people. This requires support from youth sector policy makers to both encourage mainstreaming and support its implementation. It also requires political support from more senior policy actors with the power to determine how policy fields interact together, potentially enabling legislation to achieve new ways of working.

The ultimate goal of mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas is not simply “to mainstream” but instead to improve policy making in all fields with regard to young people and thereby strengthen democratic processes. This is based on the value propositions (see the Introduction and Background section) that all fields of policy can affect young people, often in specific and unintended ways, and that young people can be understood as a defined group of rights holders, with common though not universal needs. These needs and rights however are often marginalised in comparison to other social groups, and therefore mainstreaming is needed as a way to prevent this.

Both the mainstreaming and youth perspective discourses heavily emphasise the role of youth participation. The mainstreaming agenda can be understood as distinct from policy agendas to promote youth participation in democratic life. Policies to promote youth participation are wider ranging and address issues such as promoting young people’s civic activism, voter engagement, volunteering and the involvement of young people in policy making. With regard to their intersection with participation, a mainstreaming agenda is clearly concerned with youth participation in policy making. Specifically, the mainstreaming agenda promotes the use of state-deployed participatory mechanisms that can gather the perspectives of young people on specific issues and policies while such policies are under development. The forms of participation that are suitable for this (e.g., advisory councils, consultations and co-management), and the standards of meaningful participation (Barta et al. 2023: 23) that can be adopted to support it, are already well defined within existing literature on youth participation. But it can be understood that the involvement of young people in policy making is only one area of youth participation in democratic life. Many forms of youth

participation exist (such as protest movements, civic volunteering and electoral engagement) that do not directly link young people to policy making.

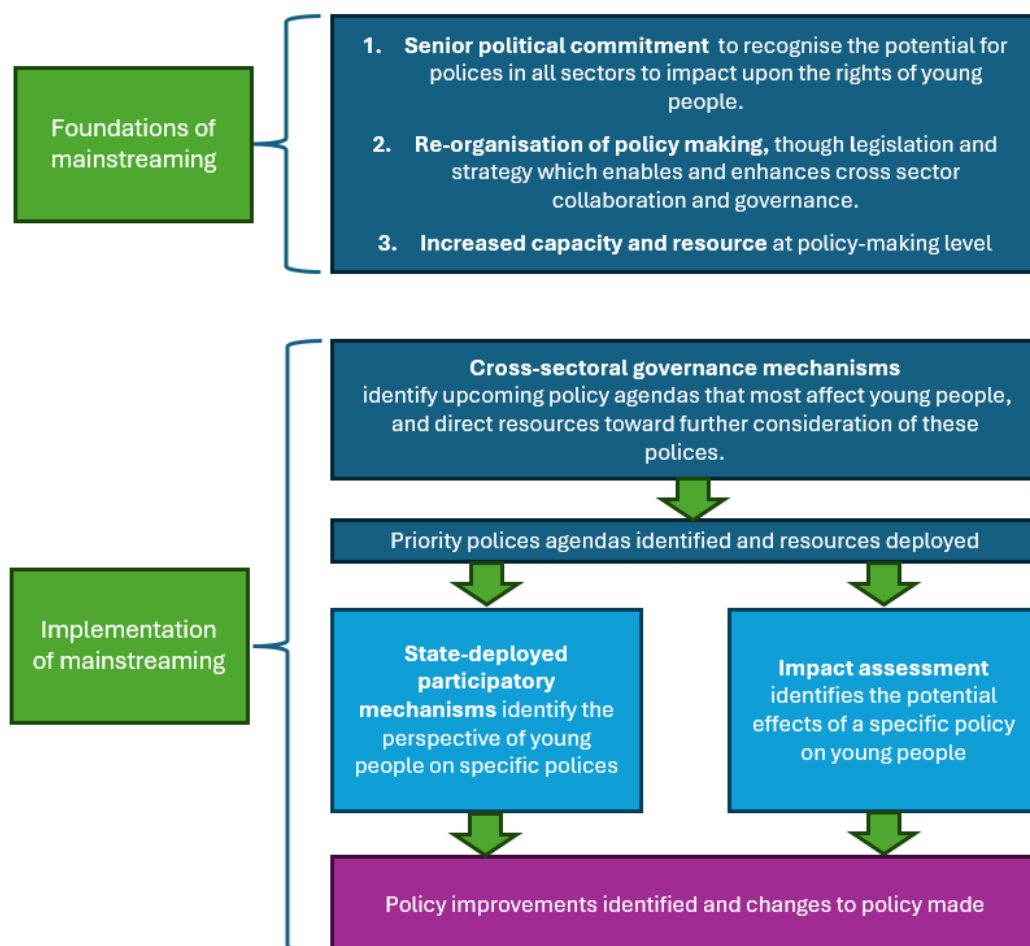
One of the interesting findings of this research is that the use of participatory mechanisms may not be as central to the mainstreaming and youth perspective agenda as previously thought. Many of the national cases use participatory mechanisms that are ad hoc, or relatively limited. Across nearly all cases strong commitments to formal power sharing between young people and policy makers are not in place. More importantly though, the participatory mechanism is not the central transformative factor that leads to mainstreaming. Instead, mainstreaming is typically driven by policy reorganisation and cross-sectoral collaboration, and then participatory mechanisms are typically used as a tool through which policies are assessed, once a commitment to mainstreaming is in place.

Within many of the case studies the use of regulatory impact assessment (*ex ante* evaluation) of policy is also an instrumental tool through which policies are assessed with regard to young people. This can be understood as a technical, expert-led process, which seeks to understand the effect a policy might have on young people (such as with youth checks or youth proofing). It is clear that there is a strong value in undertaking a technical assessment of policies and how they impact on young people. Furthermore, this approach can clearly be distinguished from the use of participatory mechanisms to understand young people's perspective on a particular policy. Exactly what indicators or dimensions might be considered a technical assessment is not always clear, or indeed fully developed in many of the cases. There is a strong opportunity for international actors such as the Council of Europe, to create some sort of indicator framework that can be used by member states to assess policy, and the obvious construct on which to base this would be the human and social rights of young people. This would also help define and shape the mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas, as it would further imply clearly that the goal of mainstreaming and youth perspective is to improve upcoming policies so that they better support the rights of young people.

A final point of note is that while the theoretical goal of mainstreaming and youth perspective might be to ensure all policy fields better promote the rights of young people, this may be rhetorical in practice. Nearly all national cases demonstrate that mainstreaming requires additional capacity, often of the youth sector actors who provide practical support. Many cases have responded by prioritising which policies and policy fields are to undergo detailed assessment, in order to make best use of capacity. A more pragmatic goal for youth mainstreaming might be to ensure that the rights of young people are considered in all policies to the greatest extent possible with available resources, with greatest scrutiny given to policies likely to have the most effect on young people's rights and lives.

Based on the findings of this study, a draft model of youth mainstreaming is shown in the diagram below, divided into two sections. First, the foundations of youth mainstreaming, which reflect the conditions needed within a national government (or equivalent cross-sectoral policy-making body) to establish youth mainstreaming. Second, the implementation of youth mainstreaming, which reflects the ongoing processes used once mainstreaming has been established. The extent that this model also reflects the youth perspective agenda will depend on how the Council of Europe defines and develops the youth perspective agenda as distinct from mainstreaming.

Draft model of youth mainstreaming



It should be recognised that this model is, like all models, a simplification of the more complex reality of policy making and to some extent idealised. It assumes that specific policies can be named and identified as being “put through” a mainstreaming process or assessment, leading to clearly identifiable changes within said policies. This was not necessarily identifiable within all of the cases within this research. While some cases (such as Germany) could articulate clearly policies that had been addressed within their mainstreaming approaches, others (such as Finland and France) also operated in a more generalised manner providing mechanisms for feedback on general policy areas to influence the working of government more holistically. A particular absence across many of the cases was the lack of evaluation and monitoring of the effect mainstreaming has on policy formulation. To some extent this is because many cases were relatively new in their approach. However, it also reflects that tracking and monitoring influence on policy agendas is generally a challenging endeavour that may not be possible in practical terms. Such evaluation problems have long been identified by those seeking to evaluate the impact of advocacy (Coates and David 2002) or participation (Crowley 2012). Put simply, identifying what government policy might have looked like in the absence of a mainstreaming process, identifying how policy content is different where mainstreaming is present and attributing any identifiable changes to mainstreaming mechanisms alone are likely to be challenging and perhaps even unachievable in practical terms.

It can also be said that this model primarily reflects mainstreaming within policy design. There may still be potential to further add functions and mechanisms that relate to implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policy within this. Moving forward, as the practice, theory and international policy on youth mainstreaming and youth perspective develops, it is likely that more comprehensive models and understandings of youth mainstreaming and youth perspective can be developed.

Recommendations

National governments seeking to advance the mainstreaming and youth perspective agenda within their government should undertake the following process.

1. Ensure senior political support is present for the agenda(s), and especially support for the consideration of the rights of young people within policies outside of the youth field.
2. Consider if supporting legislation is needed to create possibilities for new interaction between sectors and departments, recognising that mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas involve reorganisation of policy making outside traditional sector-based approaches.
3. Define clear long-term policy goals for youth mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas, for instance within a national strategy or action plan. These could be framed with regard to policy improvement. That is, improving policy making outside the youth field by ensuring the rights and perspectives of young people are taken into account when policy is made, and that new policy contributes to a reduction of intergenerational inequality.
4. Establish cross-sectoral co-ordination mechanisms that strengthen governance and increase capacity for consideration of young people within policy making. These should enable governments to identify and agree between sectors how and when upcoming policies need to be considered with regard to young people.
5. Develop dedicated mechanisms that can be deployed for assessing upcoming policies with regard to young people, such as:
 - a. regulatory impact assessment – to assess the impact of policies on young people, especially with regard to their human rights;
 - b. participatory mechanisms to enable young people to give feedback on draft policy.
6. Increase the capacity and resources of policy makers to implement the assessment measures above. This might typically be those in the youth sector, but this may not be exclusively the case.

The Council of Europe and the European Commission might also adopt a similar approach to the above when seeking to advance the mainstreaming agenda internally within their institutions. Alongside this,

to support the wider European community with the promotion of youth mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas, the Council of Europe and the European Union should do the following.

7. Define more clearly the concepts of youth mainstreaming and youth perspective. In particular, the Council of Europe should consider either harmonising its concept of youth perspective with the concept of youth mainstreaming (recognising that they are not distinct agendas and adopting similar terminology) or defining youth perspective more clearly, making the case for how it is distinct from youth mainstreaming and demonstrating what additional value the concept of youth perspective brings in addition to the concept of mainstreaming. If doing the latter, establishing a clear set of policy objectives for youth mainstreaming would add significant value.
8. Establish ethical standards for meaningful youth participation in policy making. These should be elaborated from the youth partnerships existing work (especially Barta et al. 2021). A handbook of established models for participation in policy making might also be produced; this could draw on the Council of Europe's existing work (Crowley and Moxon 2017; Gretchel et al. 2014). Care should be taken to distinguish participation in policy making from the wider concept of participation in democratic life.
9. Develop tools and frameworks to support the expert assessment of draft policies for their impact on young people. Such tools might include rights-based indicator frameworks to identify where and how policies impact on young people's human rights and that enable policy makers to develop mitigating measures to reduce this impact.
10. Continue to support the sharing of practice and general development of the mainstreaming and youth perspective agendas among member states through exchange seminars, further research, publication of best practice and other general measures. Rather than drawing primarily on existing practice, as this study has done, it may be useful to adopt a future-focused approach and consider in more hypothetical terms what possible new approaches could be developed to implement mainstreaming and youth perspective approaches moving forward.
11. Host round-table discussion between the national and international actors within the children's rights sector and the youth policy sector to explore crossovers between youth mainstreaming and child rights mainstreaming. Both agendas relate to improving policy with regard to intergenerational equality, and therefore have considerable potential for duplication.

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