

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



Analytical Paper¹ **Young People, Solidarity and Democracy**

Theme 2: Participation & Expression - Theme 3: Volunteering

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Background

To facilitate a constructive dialogue between academics, policy makers and practitioners, the EU-CoE youth partnership ran a symposium ‘Youth Policy Responses to the Contemporary Challenges Faced By Young People’ in June 2017. A central pillar of these challenges was identified to be Solidarity and Democracy for which there were two key components: Participation and Volunteering. In preparation for the symposium the authors of this paper drafted material intended to stimulate debate and suggestions for the future direction of policy in these areas. This paper represents the authors’ synthesis of the topics covered from academic, policy and practice perspectives. It is structured using the priorities taken from the symposium, that is focusing on the major headings identified by the participants. For the theme entitled ‘participation’, the key areas of concern were grouped

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under two headings: underrepresentation, and new forms of participation. For the theme entitled 'volunteering' the key areas of concern were grouped under two headings: recognition and frameworks.

Introduction

There is a need for citizens to be engaged in social and political life not only to ensure that basic democratic values flourish, but also to foster social cohesion at a time of increasing social and cultural diversity. However, in order for individuals to participate fully in civic life, research suggests that they must be equipped with the right knowledge, skills, and competences grounded in understandings of social values, political concepts and structures. Such knowledge, skills, and attitudes are important in forming future citizens (Eurydice 2012). How young people are educated to become active citizens will define the future of all societies. In the context of European civic participation, there has been extensive activity over the past 10 years. Countries and institutions are placing increasing emphasis on educational and training activities concerning the promotion of active citizenship, equity, and social cohesion (Kerr et al. 2010, Eurydice 2005).

Participation

Research suggests that the political views of young people and, as a consequence, youth participation in formal politics are linked to ethnicity, social class, and levels of educational attainment, and geographical location within country, highlighting the role of background, life circumstances and educational variables in shaping political perspectives and outlooks (Brady et al. 2012, Henn and Foard 2014, Pilkington and Pollock 2015, Pollock 2017). Young people, and those who are marginalised or excluded in a range of ways, are more likely to experience society as external to themselves through disaffection with traditional social structures and institutions, and are less likely to feel empowered or indeed to engage in society at all. Drawing together academics, policy makers and practitioners, the Council of Europe ran a 'reflection group' on youth participation which explored participation from a range of perspectives (EU-CoE 2014). This initiative formed the basis of a comparative understanding of challenges in how participation is facilitated in the diverse societies across Europe with a view to making policy recommendations.

Underrepresentation in formal elections?

Nowadays it is common to hear that young people are not interested anymore in politics. Studies give visibility to underrepresentation and reflect about the root causes of voting abstention and low engagement in political parties and governance institutions. As an example, according to the global ranking of young parliamentarians, young people under 30 make up only 1.9 % of the world's 45,000 members of parliament. In 2016, Sweden was leading in single and lower houses representation with 12.3% of parliamentarians aged under 30 years old. However, the European reality is very diverse and countries such as Slovakia, France, Greece, Romania, Lithuania and Armenia scored less than 1% (IPU 2016).

Youth participation in formal and institutional political processes is relatively low across the globe, particularly in comparison to older citizens. Figures from the European Social Survey indicate that voter turnout in preceding national elections was over 17 per cent higher for older respondents than for the younger cohort sampled (EACEA, 2013b). The [MYPLACE](#) project showed considerable geographical variations in youth voting in 14 European Countries ranging from 39% in Nuneaton (UK) to 94% in Odense (Denmark) (MYPLACE 2016). Moreover, van Biezen and Poguntke (2014) maintain that party membership in European democracies has been in marked decline in recent decades. This decline in party membership across established democracies has been extensively documented (Katz and Mair 1992, Whiteley 2011). Such declines have led authors to surmise that the age profile of party membership across Europe is increasing due to diminished ability to recruit, which in turn is impeding youth membership (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010). Overall, when examined in the context of electoral behaviour, in terms of voting patterns and levels of party membership, evidence in the area of youth participation in formal politics suggests that there is a spiral of decline in both membership and activism in modern parties (Bennie and Russell, 2012). Such evidence may suggest that young people are politically disengaged and often disenfranchised (Furlong and Cartmel 2007, Harris 2009).

There is a need to explore the idea of youth expression and the granting or securing of 'space': public spaces where young people can express themselves, spaces for assembly and association and also spaces for creativity and artistic expression. Indicative practices here

include programmes for youth creativity or support for youth participation at different levels, often in relation to spaces for democratic participation and freedom of assembly. Across Europe there are uneven opportunities for direct formal political participation in voting, increases in digital opportunities, an increasing generational rupture and a growing importance of narrowly defined, often populist, issue politics (such as Brexit, migrants and refugees, populism). Young people need a supportive environment to explore difficult political, ideological and moral issues without feeling threatened. Central to notions of free speech is the importance of individual respect – treating opposing views as legitimate positions to be discussed and debated. This often requires a difficult engagement with freedom versus censorship when applied to emotive, political, religious and moral ideological extremes.

Over the last decade, there has been much interest in identifying, rectifying or explaining youth disengagement from politics and numerous explanations have been postulated for such disengagement. As identified in the European Commission's (2015) recent report, *Their Future is Our Future: Youth as Actors of Change*, 'The young are dissatisfied with our current democratic systems that tend to exclude them from decisions affecting their lives now and in the future'. Feelings of powerlessness and marginalisation among youth voters, whereby there is a perception that political systems are closed to young people, are resulting in few opportunities for youth to intervene effectively with the political process (Henn et al. 2002, Henn and Foard 2014). In addition, little interest in and knowledge of political processes, the complexity of those processes, low levels of trust in politicians who are perceived as having self-serving interests, and growing cynicism of democratic institutions, are often cited as reasons for the younger generations' lack of political engagement (Haste and Hogan 2006, Dalton 2008, Stoker 2006, EACEA 2013a). Furthermore, research has highlighted that politicians tend not to champion policy issues prioritised by the current youth generation and as a consequence they feel relatively ignored and marginalised (O'Toole 2003, Furlong and Cartmel 2012).

One of the most in-depth studies to examine youth participation in democratic life across the EU (EACEA 2013a) found that young people are stakeholders in the European democratic system. They express ideas and preferences, and defend diverse interests. There

is no crisis of democratic participation amongst youth across Europe and neither is there major disenchantment with political issues and concerns on the part of young people (EACEA 2013a). As is evident from the research previously outlined there is a high level of youth interest in politics, but how that interest translates into participation is changing. Young people opt more for the informal politically relevant processes, such as activism or civic engagement, which according to Global Network for Rights and Development (2015) is a deep concern that can influence the quality of democratic governance, challenge the representativeness of the political system and lead to the disenfranchisement of young people. This view is echoed by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance who state that the 'relative under-representation of youth the national political scene has a critical impact on the quality and, importantly, the legitimacy of domestic democratic governance and contributes to the further political marginalization of youth' (International IDEA 2008: p.10).

Youth work has a role in political education but sometimes also creates distance from the more formal political structures, mainly due to fears of tokenism and instrumentalisation. Youth organisations, such as youth branches of political parties, have in this case a key role to continue engaging the youngest generation and a challenge to deconstruct some narratives and practices that repel many from getting engaged. Youth work, as a non-formal education provider, can support 'learning to participate' of young citizens to contribute to their understanding of the democratic system, promote their critical thinking and make available the necessary tools to get engaged in decision and policy making, implementation and evaluation of programmes and policies. The [Treaty of Lisbon](#) (European Union 2007) refers to the need to encourage participation of young people in democratic life. Youth participation in civil society is also a key dimension of the [EU Youth Strategy](#) (European Commission 2012).

Although relevant to look at underrepresentation to interpret part of the reality of youth participation, discussions should not focus entirely on the traditional understanding of political participation. There is a need to look at new trends that are a sign that politics for the millennial generation goes well beyond the representative democracy system and its traditional ways of engagement.

New forms of participation

There is a growing body of literature contributing to a popular understanding of social media as a potent tool for moving young people to political engagement (Bode 2012, Conroy et al. 2012, Gil de Zúñiga et al. 2012). The political identity and attitudes of young citizens, in particular, are seen to be increasingly shaped less by their social ties to family, neighbourhood, school or work, and more by the manner in which they participate and interact through the social networks, which they themselves have had a significant part in constructing. A groundswell of academic opinion has also suggested that the political attitudes of many young people in many parts of the world can be characterised increasingly by a less deferential and more individualised (Beck 1992, Giddens 1991, Inglehart 1990) self-actualising (Bennett et al. 2009) and critical dispositions (Norris 1999), which marks a re-casting of what is meant by the dutiful norms of citizenship (Dalton 2008). A review of policy literature from 356 stakeholders across Europe showed that co-management, co-production, digital participation, deliberative participation and the concept of 'participatory spaces' are seen as the more innovative forms of participation but that these innovative forms are just as likely to suffer from the factors which provide barriers to traditional forms of participation (Crowley and Moxon 2017).

Increasingly, when young people wish to make their voices heard, they are more likely to turn to some participatory forms of expression, such as demonstrations, protests, signing petitions and boycotts, which, according to Furlong and Cartmel (2012), can be viewed as 'new' because young people attach new meanings to such actions and redefine their traditional role. Van Biezen and Poguntke (2014) maintain that we are witnessing the development of various grass roots alternatives to traditional partisan mobilisation, which are sometimes fuelled by social media networks. There is a growing interest in forms of direct, participatory and deliberative democracy that aim to give ordinary citizens more influence over the political process that falls outside the traditional and hierarchical partisan channels. These changes in modes of political engagement are linked to new perceptions of citizenship. It is through new forms of political engagement and participation that young people feel that they influence political decisions more directly and effectively (Dalton, 2008).

New ways of participation are attracting young people, some organisations and practitioners in the youth sector resist or are critical towards eParticipationⁱ but ‘it can be argued that social networks present an opportunity for more democracy’(Bonnici, 2015) as it allows to bring local issues to global attention and everyone can produce contents, share opinions and take (somehow limited) action. Self-expression can gain another dimension and outreach when using internet and new communication technologies. But one can also argue that without a strategy to develop young peoples’ skills to e-participate, we might end up widening the gap between social groups that have/have not the conditions assured to participate (Crowley and Moxon 2017).

eParticipation goes beyond national borders, authorities and institutional frameworks. In a globalised world where many young people choose to engage online rather than offline in discussions related with current challenges that Europe is facing, it is important to promote digital literacy and human rights online (including political and commercial awareness around these media). The right to participation is intrinsically linked with the right of expression but it is not easy to set the rules online and from freedom of expression and hate speech. In addition, eParticipation goes well beyond blogs and social networks. Online campaigning, information sharing, consultations, volunteering and even monitoring and reporting are all features that represent an opportunity to participate.

In terms of young people’s conception of power in the digital realm, Lyons (2008) found that computer-mediated action was sometimes preferred over traditional forms of participation by young Europeans, especially those from different ethnic origins. The degree to which this preference was expressed differed. For example, for British Muslims in particular, the choice of the Internet was related differently to national and ethnic collective identities. Levels of ethnic identification were related to use of the Internet to support minority political rights, while levels of national identification were related to willingness to engage in peaceful conventional activities to protect minority rights. The latter finding demonstrates the complex ways in which minority groups balance ethnic, religious, and national ideologies. It suggests that, in cases of strong national identification and high levels of perceived

discrimination, ethnic minority groups may not want the majority group to perceive their political protest as a neglect of, or a barrier to, their integration into society.

Participation and policy

Participation in communities and at policy making level is important for development and social cohesion. Young people are engaged in political parties, youth organisations, local NGOs, faith-based organisations and many participate actively in an informal way, doing it within their local communities or in the big online community. However, there is still a significant part that is not engaged by option or because the youth sector, among others, are not able to reach them. In the case of young refugees and migrants, sometimes it is difficult to access the right to participate, especially in the processes leading to decisions that affect them. In addition, participation at a more decision-making level is many times not youth-friendly, lacking creativity in the way to engage young people and not giving them enough space to propose and create. Informal groups have today more access to funding and participation spaces than some years ago but there is still space for improvement in facilitating access of non-organised youth to existing opportunities.

To tackle issues of underrepresentation, initiatives have been promoted by institutions and civil society, such as the global campaign [Not too Young to Run](#) initiated by the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youthⁱⁱ that aims to convene existing efforts into a global movement and provide young people with a central platform through which to advocate.

Youth participation is a key issue for the Council of Europe. Through its Youth Department, the Council of Europe has been a driver in Europe in the development of [pedagogical resources](#) to support democratic citizenship education and equip youth workers to deliver quality educational activities. The Council of Europe trains young people every year that are actively engaged at local, national and European level, to use a rights-based non-formal education approach in the activities organised by youth organisations. The Council of Europe also strongly engages young people and youth organisations in its work. Known as the [co-management system](#), representatives from youth non-governmental organisations sit in committees with government officials and together they discuss and decide on the priorities of the youth sector and make recommendations for future budgets and

programmes of the organisation. These proposals are then considered and discussed by the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe's decision-making body.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe also has extensive work related with the participation of young people at local and regional level. The [Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life](#) (May 2003) is an important advocacy reference for fostering cooperation between local authorities and the youth sector in Europe. Together with the Manual: [Have your Say!](#) (that is a tool to educate and act towards participation at local and regional level), it has strongly contributed to the creation of new spaces for participation, including the organisation of consultative processes for policy development and the creation of local youth councils. In addition, one of the [2016-2017 strategic priorities](#) of the Council of Europe's youth sector focuses on supporting young people and member states in increasing the participation of young people in democratic processes. Through the [European Youth Foundation](#), the organisation provides financial support to youth activities at local and international level.

The European Union has a permanent consultative process that aims to engage young people in decision-making related with youth policy. The '[Structured Dialogue](#)' is a means of mutual communication between young people and decision-makers aiming to implement the priorities of European youth policy cooperation and to make young people's voice heard in the European policy-shaping process.

Despite these efforts, the underrepresentation of youth remains an issue and especially when seen from a gender, social class and ethnicity perspective. Young people, especially women, from migrant and minorities background still face challenges to have a say on decisions that affect them. Initiatives such as the [Enter!](#) project (initiated by the youth sector of the Council of Europe in 2009) aimed at the development of youth policy and youth work responses to situations of exclusion, discrimination and violence affecting young people, particularly in multicultural disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Young people's access to social rights is a means for their inclusion and participation in society.

Regarding eParticipation, the [No Hate Speech](#) Movement (Council of Europe), a youth-

focused initiative that addresses online hate speech and promotes human rights initiated in 2012 has been prolonged until the end of 2017. This campaign contributes to the implementation of the Council of Europe's Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies. The EU-CoE youth partnership also launched in October 2017 the "[Essentials Youth Policy](#)" online course, making use of new technologies as a way to further develop young people's skills and foster their participation.

Future youth policy developments

How to better motivate and engage young people to be fully-fledged actors of democratic governance and to create an enabling environment for the development of youth-led participatory initiatives remains a challenge nowadays. In addition, how can we be prepared for increasing online participation practices and educate ourselves to be active but also responsible citizens in these spaces?

Below are proposals for youth policy developments that might inspire future youth policy making and youth work practices. The proposals listed are drawn from discussions and conclusions of the symposium, plus additional suggestions identified through research by the authors.

Youth participation could be integrated at all levels of governance and areas of public policy - effective and meaningful youth participation could be integrated into policy and decision-making processes and youth participation incorporated and embedded across all areas of public policy, not just youth policy. The development of consultative bodies, youth councils, participatory budgets and other initiatives could be promoted.

National strategies to fight underrepresentation –political parties and national authorities are invited to discuss different options such as the establishment of youth quotas (e.g. reserved seats, legislated quotas and or party quotas) to guarantee the representation of young people. Special attention could be given to young women and from marginalised groups. If relevant, open discussions that include the youth sector can be promoted around reducing the voting age and minimum age to become eligible to run for office.

Capacity-building on youth participation - Practitioners and policy makers working with and for young people could be trained to incorporate effective youth participation

approaches into their practice. In addition, formal and non-formal education systems could ensure that young people develop the skills, knowledge and competencies required to participate in policy and decision-making processes. The youth sector, as non-formal education provider, could be involved.

Fostering peer-learning and cooperation between networks of young representatives

– networks of young parliamentarians, youth parliaments and youth councils could be promoted at European and national level to empower group members (enhancing legislative skills, fostering collaboration and raising awareness on youth issues in public policy)

Educating for and creating spaces of eParticipation

– the youth sector and governance structures are encouraged to develop youth-friendly eParticipation methodologies, including awareness raising, information sharing and more participatory approaches such as monitoring tasks. Such initiatives could be developed together with young people, based on their interests and practices of online participation and expression. Information and training on effective eParticipation could be provided to young people, youth workers, youth organisations and public authorities.

Research on underrepresentation and new forms of participation

– national authorities are encouraged to collect, report and publish data on the age of parliamentarians on a regular basis to assess progress and identify needs for action to ensure real participation of young people. Studies in understanding new trends on youth participation are also encouraged, especially on eParticipation and local initiatives.

Support to local, informal and innovative ways of participation

- existing programmes and funding could value proposals that represent new ways of engaging young people. Adaptability and transferability can be explored and disseminated. Local authorities can have a special role in creating the conditions for such practices.

Volunteering

Volunteering is a means of civic engagement for and by young people. There is a need to explore the value of voluntary service types of intervention in two respects: for young people as citizens, and for young people's competences, particularly in relation to the job market. While most opportunities for volunteering operate in localised and national

contexts there are a growing number of international programmes, through which young people can have learning mobility opportunities.

Through volunteering, young people are made aware of society from different perspectives beyond their family, school and peer group. Volunteering can be an opportunity to help others or work to promote a cause. It is often a means by which young people work alongside older generations hence fostering intergenerational communication. In addition volunteering facilitates a 'gift' mentality where the return is not monetary nor a direct or immediate benefit to self. Torney-Purta et al. (2004) found, youth institutional trust, in particular, directly predicts a range of forms of civic and political participation, including voting, volunteering, joining a political party, and writing letters to a newspaper about social or political concerns. Religious, political and ideological (cause oriented) organisations represent important volunteering opportunities for young people. Opportunities for young people to volunteer are uneven both between and within countries.

More than 1 billion people volunteer in the world and the majority is engaged in local and national assignments. Volunteers are key to support around the world the work of non-governmental organisations, social and political movements. Volunteerism is currently present and promoted by the public sector and more recently also by the private sector. However, not everyone has access to volunteering; in general, young male from urban areas have more opportunities than others, for example, from rural or marginalised groups' background (UNV, 2015).

The reality of (youth) volunteerism is very diverse in Europe. There are several countries that have youth volunteering schemes promoted by national authorities such as the [National Citizen Service](#) in the UK (for young people aged 16-17 years old), the [Service Civique in France](#) (16-25 years old) and the [Servizio Civile Nazionale](#) in Italy (18-28 years old). They are many times created to complement formal education paths, as an alternative to military service and in close partnership with the civil society, creating volunteering opportunities from local to international level.

The format and approach of these schemes vary from country to country. Legal environments and frameworks are also different and rights and duties are understood, promoted and protected in different ways (and consequently recognition also differs). The acknowledgement and valorisation of the value of volunteering experiences should be accompanied with personal and professional development of competences but also with the recognition of its impact in community development. Recently, there has been a trend in the youth sector to link volunteering opportunities with the development of youth skills and employability.

There is, however, a risk that volunteering work promoted by the youth sector is used to fill gaps in public service provision as a result of a lack of government funding. More than recognition in this case, young people might need protection. This means that future youth policy developments on volunteerism should take into consideration that *the idea that volunteers only serve to support service delivery or are only involved in charitable activities is one that is limited and provides a superficial line of difference between volunteering and activism'* (UNV, 2015).

Recognition

While there is an intuitive causal link which suggests that to be involved in voluntary work there is a likely enhancement to an individuals' employment prospects, there is evidence to suggest that this may not actually be the case. A study by Paine et al. (2013) using the longitudinal British Household Panel Survey, which is able to track career development through time, found that the evidence for a positive effect was at best weak. This held true for both entry to work and for wage progression. This finding is echoed by researchers looking to see if voluntary work can be a way of enhancing the skills of the unemployed in order to facilitate them getting jobs (Kamerāde 2013).

Frameworks

Despite different initiatives and opportunities in the last 30 years promoted by the Council of Europe and the European Union, there arguably remains a need for further improvements in the volunteering field across Europe. The 2005 publication '[Charting the landscape of European youth voluntary activities](#)' and the report of the '[Study on](#)

[Volunteering in the European Union](#)' (2010) identified existing challenges related to, among others, the engagement of volunteers, the professionalisation of the sector, the lack of recognition and the risk of instrumentalisation in the voluntary sector. Both publications also highlighted the need to further work on legal frameworks, data collection and analysis and recognition of volunteers' competences.

The Council of the European Union designated 2011 the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship (also known as the European Year on Volunteering – EYV2011). That year was a unique opportunity to give visibility to almost 100 million citizens in Europe of all ages that invest their time, talents and resources to make a positive contribution to society. The four main objectives of the Year were: to create an enabling and facilitating environment for volunteering in the EU; to empower volunteer organisations and improve the quality of volunteering; to reward and recognise volunteering activities; and to raise awareness of the value and importance of volunteering. The EYV2011 was a milestone in the development of policy proposals at the civil society and institutional level.

The EYV2011 Alliance adopted the [Policy Agenda on Volunteering in Europe](#) that includes policy recommendations for a more efficient and effective policy framework in Europe to promote and support volunteers, volunteering, volunteer-involving organisations and their partners. Also in 2011 the European Commission Communication on [EU Policies and Volunteering: Recognising and Promoting Cross-border Voluntary Activities in the Europe](#), highlighted the challenges mentioned in the 2010 study and identified practical areas for future intervention (such as the integration of voluntary work experience and skills acquired through in the Europass documents and the 'European Skills Passport' and the funding of the pilot phase of what would be later called the EU Aid Volunteers initiative).

In the following years, volunteering opportunities and recognition of contributions continued to be promoted and included in a variety of Council of Europe and EU programmes and initiatives, such as in the funding of the European Youth Foundation, Erasmus+, Europe for Citizens, European Solidarity Corps, EU Aid Volunteers and also in the framework of 2013 European Year of Citizens.

In 2014, the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe became the first European structure of its kind to officially acknowledge the work of thousands of youth work volunteers. The [VTR](#) (volunteer time recognition) method was introduced to valorise volunteer time contribution in grant applications and reports for work plans and international activities and for pilot activities. The methodology used to calculate VTR is based on specific criteria.

The [European Voluntary Service](#) (EVS) started in 1996. It has been part of Erasmus+ and it has offered young people aged 17-30 the chance to volunteer in another Member State as well as outside the EU.

More recently, other two initiatives were launched the [European Solidarity Corps](#) and the [EU Aid Volunteers](#). The European Solidarity Corps (launched in December 2016) allows young people to volunteer (or work) in projects for the benefit of communities and people around Europe. The European Solidarity Corps is open to people between the ages of 18 to 30. Concerns have been raised by the youth movement that this new initiative should be built on the success of EVS and not to replace it.

The second initiative is not limited to young people, the minimum age is 18 years but there is no upper limit. EU Aid Volunteers brings together volunteers and organisations from different countries, providing practical support to humanitarian aid projects and contributing to strengthening the local capacity and resilience of disaster-affected communities.

Other volunteerism-related initiatives include the [European Youth Portal](#) that has a [Volunteering Database](#) where young people can find information about current volunteering opportunities. The European Commission also supports Member States through the promotion of exchange of experiences through the Expert Group on the Mobility of Young Volunteers across the EU.

In addition, the competences developed in the framework of informal and non-formal learning, such as in volunteering-related activities, have also been valued and tools have

been developed and adapted for their recognition, for example through the [YouthPass](#). Recently these competences can also gain further recognition in the framework of the recent revision process of EuroPass and the Key Competences framework. At the Council of Europe level, the [European Portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers](#) *'is an online tool that helps individuals, teams and organisations doing youth work around Europe to understand their competence and to develop it more effectively'*.

The European and international youth movement namely the [European Youth Forum](#) (YFJ) and the [Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations](#) have been actively contributing to the promotion and recognition of voluntary activities. For example, the YFJ, approved in 2011 a [Resolution on the Rights Based Approach to Volunteering](#). This approach establishes volunteers and volunteering providers as active rights-holders and creates corresponding duties for responsibility-holders. In the framework of the European Year of Volunteering it was also developed a [Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers](#) that appeals to European, national, local authorities and all other relevant stakeholders for designing and updating policies related to volunteering.

At the global level, youth volunteerism has been high in the agenda in the last years and there are also other opportunities for young people to be engaged voluntarily in development and peace projects. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, in his Five-Year Action Agenda (2012-2016) recognised the enormous potential of young people to contribute positively to their societies and announced a specific measure to 'create a UN youth volunteers programme under the umbrella of UN Volunteers'. As stated in the report (A/70/118) of the UN Secretary General [Integrating volunteering in the next decade](#), that includes a 2016-2030 Action Plan: *'youth volunteerism not only engages that large segment of the population in positive activities that contribute to peace and development, but also bolsters the personal growth and employability of young people.'*

Future Youth Policy Developments

There is a need to explore how to promote volunteering opportunities assuring better access of young people from marginalised groups and stronger recognition of public institutions, private sector and society. These remain issues that need policy responses.

Below are proposals for youth policy developments that might inspire future youth policy making and youth work practices. The proposals listed are drawn from discussions and conclusions of the symposium, plus additional suggestions identified through research by the authors⁶.

Relaunch youth volunteering in the European agenda – other priorities such as youth employment should not overshadow the importance of supporting volunteerism. Local and national governments, and international institutions could work with civil society to ensure that policies, legislative frameworks, adequate funding and programmes are promoted and accessible.

Stronger recognition of youth volunteerism - policy makers could emphasise the learning and social contribution made through voluntary activity, rather than focussing on volunteering as a pathway to employment. Initiatives such as media communications, youth volunteerism awards, promotion of recognition tools are some of the options available to recognise, celebrate, and promote the contribution that young volunteers make to society.

Promote quality volunteering opportunities - European institutions and national and local partners are encouraged to work together to disseminate and advocate for the adoption and implementation of the [European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers](#).

Outreach and access to volunteering opportunities - local and national governments, international institutions, NGOs, and formal education institutions could actively promote and raise awareness of volunteering amongst young people. Special outreach efforts to engage young people from rural areas and disadvantaged backgrounds could be more clearly planned. Mentoring and financial support could be made available to assure equal access to volunteering opportunities (to organisations and to volunteers).

Fostering research on volunteerism - digital mappings of volunteer-involving organisations could be undertaken to enable young people to identify volunteering

opportunities (use as reference already existing practices such as websites and apps). Evidence on how volunteerism contributes to inclusion, integration and social cohesion is also a relevant focus of study to be considered.

Private sector commitment towards volunteering – volunteering experiences could be more recognised and valued in the job market by the private sector. Employers could create the necessary conditions for a possible balance between work-volunteering activities. Different initiatives could be considered such as corporate volunteering in cooperation with youth sector (coaching young entrepreneurs, supporting project management) and volunteering schemes to, allows use of working hours for engagement in volunteering activities (online and offline).

Conclusion

There is a need for policy makers to be fleet of foot when it comes to securing the participatory democratic position of young people throughout Europe. The evidence suggests that, while there remains to be much continuity, for many the terrain is shifting fast. Not just for young people but that they are perhaps more able to keep up with technological change and are often at the cutting edge of technologies which are leading changes in how the whole of society participate in civic life. The continuities and political predictability of old has been shown to be more fragile than many thought. There is a need to prevent the undermining of the legitimacy of democratic structures at both national and cross national levels. Interventions which strengthen civic participation, including volunteering are likely to help in this regard. Through commissioning research and the engagement of practitioners, policy makers are best able to ensure that they are kept informed of both where we currently are but also the trajectory of future development.

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ⁱ Understood as e-informing, e-engaging and e-enabling.

ⁱⁱ In partnership with United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth & Advancement (YIAGA) and the European Youth Forum (YFJ).