Triangles and pyramids, or something like that
An analysis of the youth sector based on applicants' responses and profiles
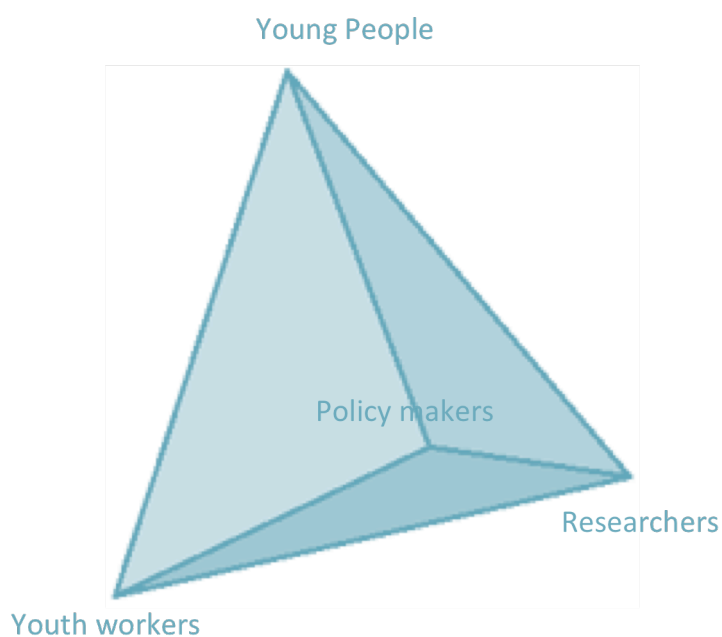
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Introduction

For those in the youth sector, the expression "youth triangle" is more than a familiar one, it stands as an established and consensual principle of the youth sector development and way of functioning, based on the trilateral communication, exchange, and collaboration between youth research, youth policy, and youth work. The very nickname of this so called triangle as "the magic triangle" (Chisholm, 2006) already hints the naïve approach those in the field sometimes tend to have when using this expression.[1] One other dimension can be added to this triangle, by simply including young people directly in this system of relations, without being mediated by ONGs, youth work or other organisation or association. By being integrated in this system, we are turning explicit what is implicit: neither research, nor policy, nor youth work, can be done without actual young people. They are an autonomous, separate set of agents with which all the other corners have to 'directly'- variably according to their professional identity and practices - engage.

In this paper, we do not approach this "triangle" or the pyramid magically. We want to empirically analyse how different (although overlapping as we will see) corners of this geometrical figure, think about contemporary challenges that young people face nowadays. For this purpose, we use the applications made by individuals from all over Europe and from all the corners of the triangle, for the 2017 symposium on "Youth Policy Responses to the Contemporary Challenges Faced by Young People" organised by the team of the partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth (the youth partnership).

These application forms contained some demographic questions (gender, age), questions on professional identity (researcher, policy maker and or youth worker) and multiple choice and open questions on the challenges that young people face nowadays. Applicants were also asked about what comes to their mind when they think about youth policy. Although this group of people should not be seen as representative, neither statistically nor qualitatively, they will be strategically used as an exploratory observatory of the field. Different methodologies will be used to tackle the heterogeneity of the answers, among which we can find statistical analysis for the multiple response answers (descriptive analysis and multiple correspondence analysis to map the profiles), and thematic content analysis (subcodes statistics per corner of the triangle) as well as word counting and clouds for the open questions on challenges and youth policy meaning, respectively.

This paper will start by analysing the composition of the sample, taking a close attention to the overlapping of roles and how it relates to having or not a good practice to share. This is a way of analysing the engagement of the different corners of the triangle with actual concrete practices. Secondly, we will analyse the meanings and processes associated with youth policy and how they differ by corner of the triangle.

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[1] With exceptions, see Zentner, 2016; Nico, 2016, Schild, Williamson, Wicke and Lambert, n.a.

1. How is the 'active' sector composed?

European youth research became a distinct specialist field in the early 1990s, defining itself as an intercultural and transnational coalition committed to supporting an organic ('magic') triangle between research, policy and practice. Both the Council of Europe and the European Commission have supported the development of the youth research community, not least through the Youth Partnership.

Adapted from Chisholm, L. (2006), Youth Partnership Glossary, "Youth Research" entry.

We are assuming in this section that the sample gathered is an 'active' part of the youth sector, engaged with the youth field, and integrated in the "triangular" network of the youth partnership. We do not intend to extrapolate the exploratory results found here for all others policy makers, researcher, youth workers or young persons.

Figure 1 shows us that the so-called triangle or pyramid is quite busy, but that the overlapping of the roles is unbalanced. If we look first at simple affiliations (people that are only researchers, or only youth workers, or only a policy maker, or only a young person), we first notice that despite the fact that this conference is explicitly more focused on youth policy responses than on youth work, youth workers (without any other professional affiliation) are represented in double (N=65) of each one of the remaining groups (researchers are 24, young persons are 29, and policy makers are 31). This alone hints how, at least in this sample, the very composition of the youth triangle puts on the shoulders of youth work a much higher burden and responsibility on the "responses to challenges" that on Research, or Policy Making. Not only this, but if we then look at the bridges between the corners of the pyramid, we see that dual sector affiliation (self-positioning oneself in two corners of the triangle) is also much more frequent among youth workers, as there are 29 youth workers/ young persons themselves, and 16 youth workers/ researchers.

Figure 1. Sample composition
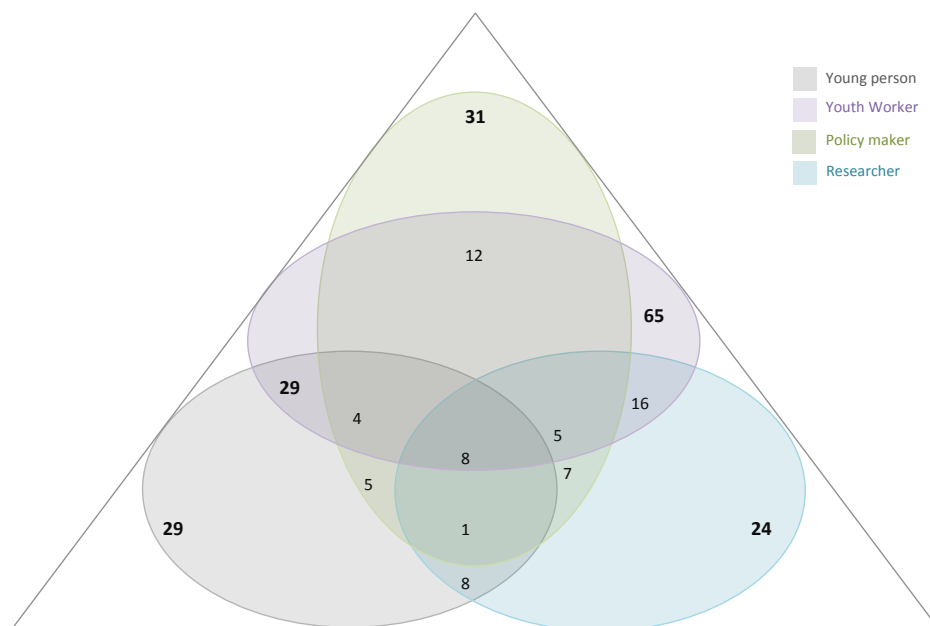
Surprisingly enough, there are other overlapping identities that would pretty much benefit the sector and that are not striking. We refer to the existence of researchers/ policy makers, on one hand, and youth workers/ policy makers. This specifically means that the master of producing, designing or implementing policy is more frequently in the hands of individuals that are solely that: policy makers. Researchers, on one hand, and youth workers, on the other, do not have the power, or to not fell they have access to the power, of influencing or materialising youth policy programs.

Part of this composition of the triangle, and the mentioned overlapping of the roles, has to do not only with the different natures of the roles, but also with the age it is likely necessary to achieve in order to have those roles. The next table confirms this tendency, with youth workers being the youngest group, followed by researchers, and finally by policy makers.

Figure 2. Sample composition per age group
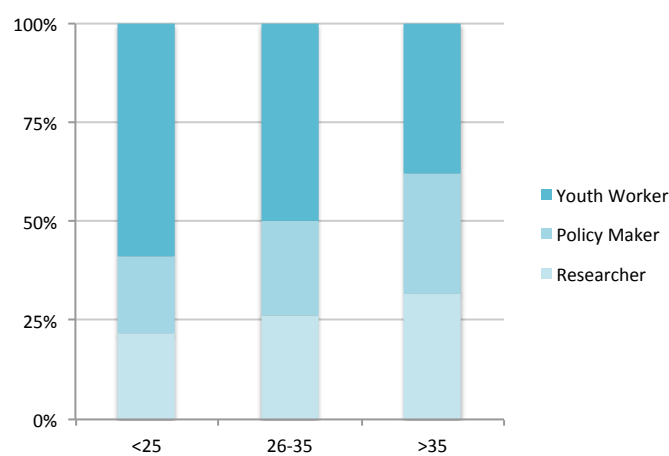
In the application form, candidates to participating in the Symposium where asked if they would have a good practice to share on the occasion of the Symposium. Although this was asked for practical reasons concerning the programme of the event itself, it is here useful to analyse the level to which different agents (corners) in the field of youth are indeed engaged or involved in practices of youth policy to a degree that they would be able to share with a wider audience. This is extremely interesting to tackle, given the discussion in the sector about what type or role (youth worker, youth policy maker, youth researcher) is the most adequate and "privileged informant" or spokesperson to talk about youth realities, challenges, difficulties, but also about the instrument needed to overcome all these hurdles. It is a discussion that usually leads to a dichotomy: those you are "in the field" or at "local level" and those who are not. The former are allegedly more likely to understand and directly deal with the problems of the younger population, in-depth (but for their own local-micro-scale reality), and are supposedly the youth workers. The latter are accused of being out-of-touch with local reality (although they might be more aware of the bigger picture and of the predominant problematic trends). These are supposed to be the researchers.

All in all, these are of course complementary views on the same issues. Nonetheless, if "Youth work is a summary expression for activities with and for young people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature. The main objective of youth work is to provide opportunities for

young people to shape their own futures" (Lauritzen P. (2006), quoted in the youth partnership Glossary) it would be expectable that the most coherent profile for having good practices to share would be this professional group. Results on figure 3 are then counter-intuitive.

The first important point to highlight in figure 3 is that there is no specific profile associated with not having good practices to share. That is to say that neither being or not being a researcher, being or not a youth worker, and being or not a policy maker is associated with not having a good practice to share. Additionally, being a policy maker or a young person, and not being a youth worker are also characteristics that are not associated with any other, and that these are also not associated with having and with not having a good practice to share with the wider audience.

We can then identify two profiles associated with having a good practice to share. The most specific profile that we can identify is being a researcher (but not a young person) and having a good practice (smaller orange circle in figure 3). This is to say that research is surprisingly the professional role that, in this sample, is the most associated with having been engaged in and being willing to share a good practice. This is unexpected, as researchers are often accused of not being in touch with the field and local realities, and not being able to communicate with policy makers. The second profile associated with having a good practice is actually related with being a youth worker (but not a researcher or a policy maker) (large orange ellipse in figure 3). In a conclusion, in a counter intuitive way, policy makers are the ones, in this sample, that are not particularly associated with having a good practice to share.

Figure 3. Profiles of professional role and access to good practices
(Multiple Correspondence Analysis)
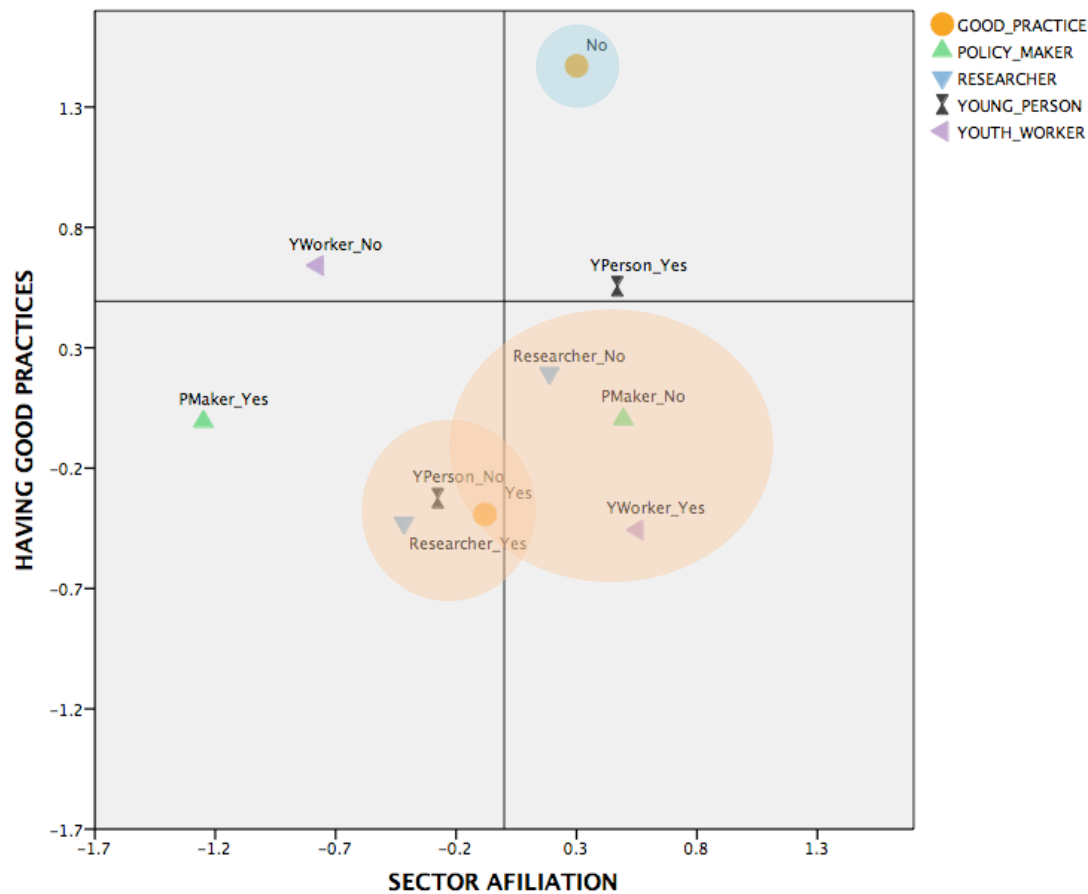
2. What's youth policy about?

The purpose of youth policy is to create conditions for learning, opportunity and experience, which ensure and enable young people to develop the knowledge, skills and competences. This is in order to allow young people to be actors of democracy; integrate into society; and, in particular, enable them to play an active role in both civil society and the labour market. The key measures of youth policies are to promote citizenship learning and the integrated policy approach.

Siurala, L. (2005): "European framework of youth policy", *in* Youth Partnership Glossary, "Youth Policy" entry.

As we can see in the chosen definition of youth policy for the glossary of the youth partnership, "youth policy" can in fact be defined by its immediate goal (ensuring and enabling "young people to develop the knowledge skills and competences"), by its long term sustainable (more abstract) goal ("allow young people to be actors of democracy, integrate the society", and "promote citizenship"), by the concrete performance of roles ("play an active role both in civil society and the labour market"), and lastly by the means necessary to achieve all these goals (promoting "integrated policy approach"). And even this complex and multi-faceted definition is not a consensual or a clear one in the sector. Youth policy might mean different things to different agents in the field. It is departing from this premise that in the application form candidates for the symposium were asked to provide 3 words relating to what youth policy meant to them.

All words used were coded in regard of two aspects. One relates to the positive or negative nature of the word mentioned. When people of the field think about youth policy, do they think of what is going wrong in the process of youth policy creation and implementation or do they more immediately relate to the positive side and potential of youth policy?

Figure 4. Positive or negative nature of the words mentioned (whole sample)
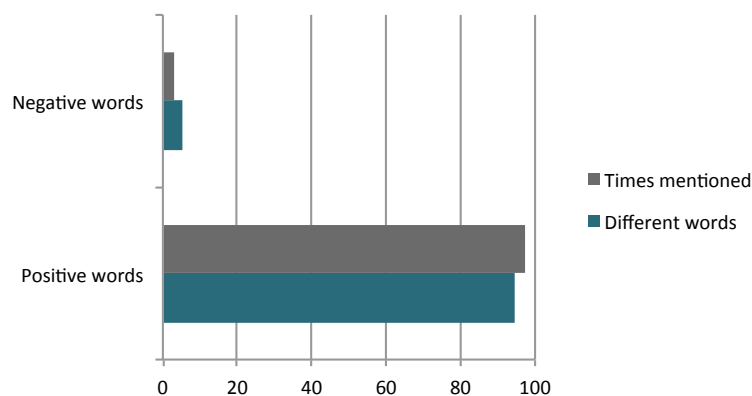
As self-critical as the agents of the youth field can be, and actually are, the fact is that the large majority, almost the totality of the words mentioned, relate to positive (current or desired) aspects of youth policy. Some examples of the negative words mentioned are: "radicalisation", "deficit", "conservatism", "rhetoric", "out-of-touch", among other. Of course this positive majority answer

might be a result of the way the question was made[2], but even so it is noteworthy that both in number of times mentioned and in number of different words mentioned, it is the positive nature of youth policy that is consensual in the field. This might mean that although the different agents in the field would not hesitate in saying that there is, and always will be, room for improvement and to move forward in more effective and efficient ways, they are moved by the positive potential of youth policy, they are most likely motivated by what youth policy still can achieve, and how it can ultimately improve the lives of young people in Europe.

The second codification relates to the content of the word mentioned, more specifically if the words mentioned related to youth policy in what it is supposed to achieve (end), or in how it is supposed to function (means), or if it related to aspects that can be both (means and end).[3] Here, with the exception of the aspects that can indicate both "means" and "end" (which are mentioned much less), the answers are more balanced. This indicates that the youth field has its "two eyes open" and is relatively equally concerned with the goals youth policy is supposed to achieve, quoting aspects such as "inclusion", "equality", "education", "opportunities", "democracy", "mobility", "diversity" or "freedom"; and with the process youth policy must undertake in order to actually achieve them. In this latter case, the aspects most mentioned were "development", "cooperation", "dialogue", "power", "cross-sectoral", "collaboration", or "sustainability". In sum, one might conclude that this duality of what youth policy stands for is indeed a good pre requisite for an efficient youth policy development, as it implies that actors in the field "keep their eye on the ball", but do not undermine what it might take to catch it.

There is also a third set of words that might relate to the goals and simultaneously to the means to achieve goals in youth policy. This is rather relevant because not only does this set of words include one of the most mentioned words in all groups (which is, as we will verify below, "participation") but it relates to one of the interesting on-going debates on youth policy. Included in this debate are the discussions about participatory youth policy. Is participation part of the very definition of youth policy? In other words, must the development of youth policy by definition and principle include the direct participation of young people (and not solely foresee information and evidence on their opinions, challenges and trajectories collected by other channels such as research or secondary sources of data, etc.)? Or should participation be alternatively seen as a goal that is set by the very youth policy development, in the sense that youth policy is supposed to increase young peoples' "active role in society"?[4] The mere suggestion of the word does not indicate which meaning the applicant was relating to, and thus words such as "participation", "voice" or "activism", among others, remain in this ambiguous category.

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[2] Perhaps in a future application, the form can include a question on "what is wrong with youth policy? Name the words that come to your mind."

[3] We will come back to this bellow.

[4] Some chapter in Nico, Taru, Salikau (forthcoming) explore this debate.

Figure 5. Words referring to youth policy as end, means or both (whole sample)
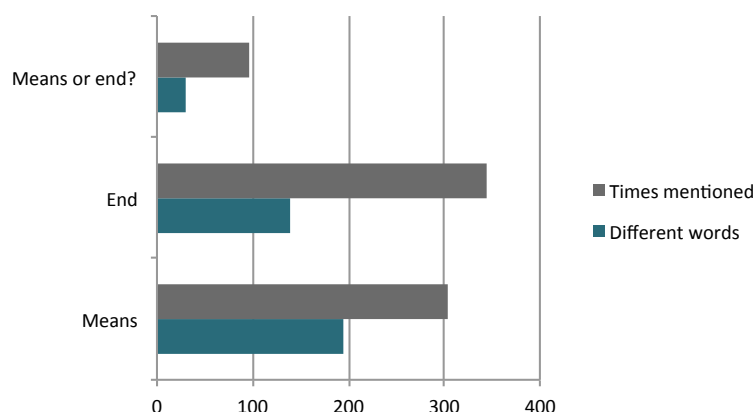
The set of figures 6 illustrate the actual concrete words mentioned by the applicants. One aspect is absolutely striking: participation is by far the most mentioned word and it is so in all the roles of the pyramid. It is possible that is it also so because of the dual meaning and function it can have in the youth policy development. The numeric expression and transversally across the roles, combined with the ambiguity the word acquired, demands further inquiry.

Secondly, the corresponding words most mentioned by young persons and by the professional roles of the triangle, besides "participation", are "inclusion" (less expressive in the researchers and the policy makers groups), "opportunities" and "equality" (both less expressive in the policy makers group), and future.

We also observe that the words mentioned by the group of the policy makers are not only less aligned with the words most mentioned by the other groups, but are also the ones reaching less consensus, as they present the most varied list of words that come to mind when they think about youth policy. This dis-alignment is relevant when we think how policy makers' agenda should be informed by research, young people and youth workers.

Set of figures 6. Words mentioned by professional role

Whole sample

Policy makers

Researchers
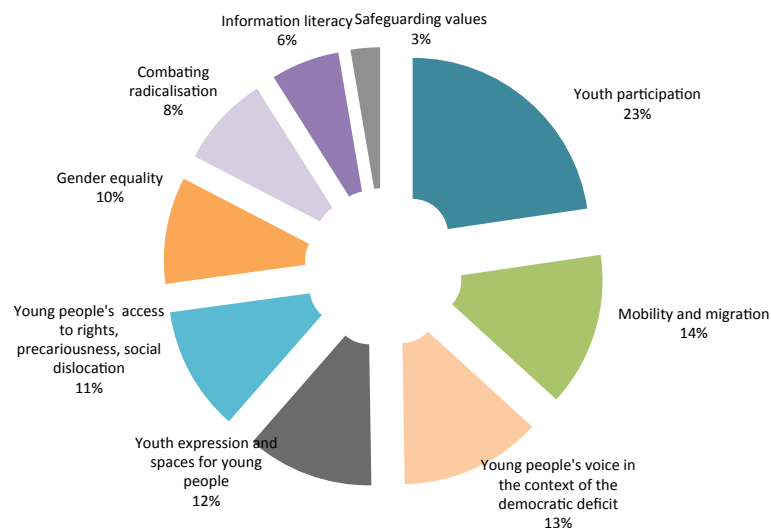

Youth workers

Yong people

3. What are the challenges faced by young people?

The applicants were asked in two occasions and in different formats what they think the contemporary challenges young people face nowadays are. The first format presented a multiple choice (up to 3) list from which the applicants could indicate which ones were the most relevant challenges in their opinion.

Analysing the selection of each of these challenges separately, we verify that again "youth participation" (23%) is the most selected issue, followed by "mobility and migration" (14% of the selections), "young people's voice in the context of the democratic deficit" (13%), "Youth expression and spaces for young people" (12%), "Young people's access to rights, precariousness and social dislocation" (11%), "Gender equality" (10%), "Combating radicalisation" (8%), "Information literacy"(6%) and lastly "Safeguarding values" (3%). All in all, this means that the "outcomes" of being young (participating, being mobile, having a voice, an expression and having access to rights, etc.) is more relevant as a challenge for young people nowadays than the "inputs" for being young (having information literacy, not being subject to gender inequality, etc.). The most relevant challenges for young people are located on the "agency" side of the barricade of life, not so much on the "structural" side (see Nico, 2016).

Of course, the fact that this is a previously set list of multiple choices, and not, as we will see bellow, a more spontaneous reflection on what the major challenges that young people face today are might have influenced the answers significantly.

Figure 7. Challenges identified from a multiple choice list

The distribution of the selected challenges does not change dramatically per corner of the triangle (figure 8). In fact, the distribution of the researchers, policy makers, youth workers and young persons in each challenge reflects the composition of the sample. The only two aspects to mention are the fact that policy makers tend to point out "Youth expression and spaces for young people" relatively more than other groups, and that on the other hand youth workers tend to point out "combating radicalisation" relatively less than other groups."

Figure 8. Challenges identifies from a multiple choice list per role in the triangle
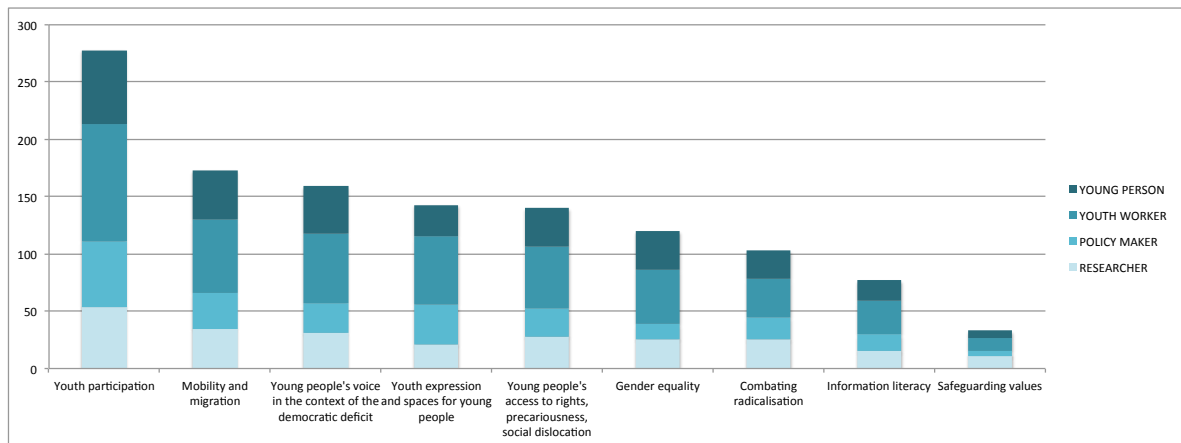
On the other hand, when we analyse the answers per individual, that is, what kind of challenges are selected by the same individuals, we reach four different constellations of answers, three of them related to a specific corner of the triangle (figure 9).

 A - We find one specific profile of answers that includes policy makers (and policymakers/youth workers) answering they find the challenge "youth expression and spaces for young people" and also "youth participation" especially relevant, and the challenge of "mobility and migration" particularly not relevant.

 B – Opposing to this profile we have the profile of the researchers (and researchers/policymakers) that find the challenge "Youth expression and spaces for young people" and "youth participation" particularly not relevant, while finding mobility and migration an especially relevant challenge for contemporary youth.

 C- The profile of answers most characterised by being a youth worker is based on finding "Young people's voice in the context of the democratic deficit" the most relevant challenge for young people, contrary to "combating radicalisation", "Safeguarding values" and "Information Literacy"

 Every other challenge selection is not particularly associated with a specific role other challenges.

Figure 9. Configurations of the challenges faced by young people per role in the sector (Multiple Correspondence Analysis)
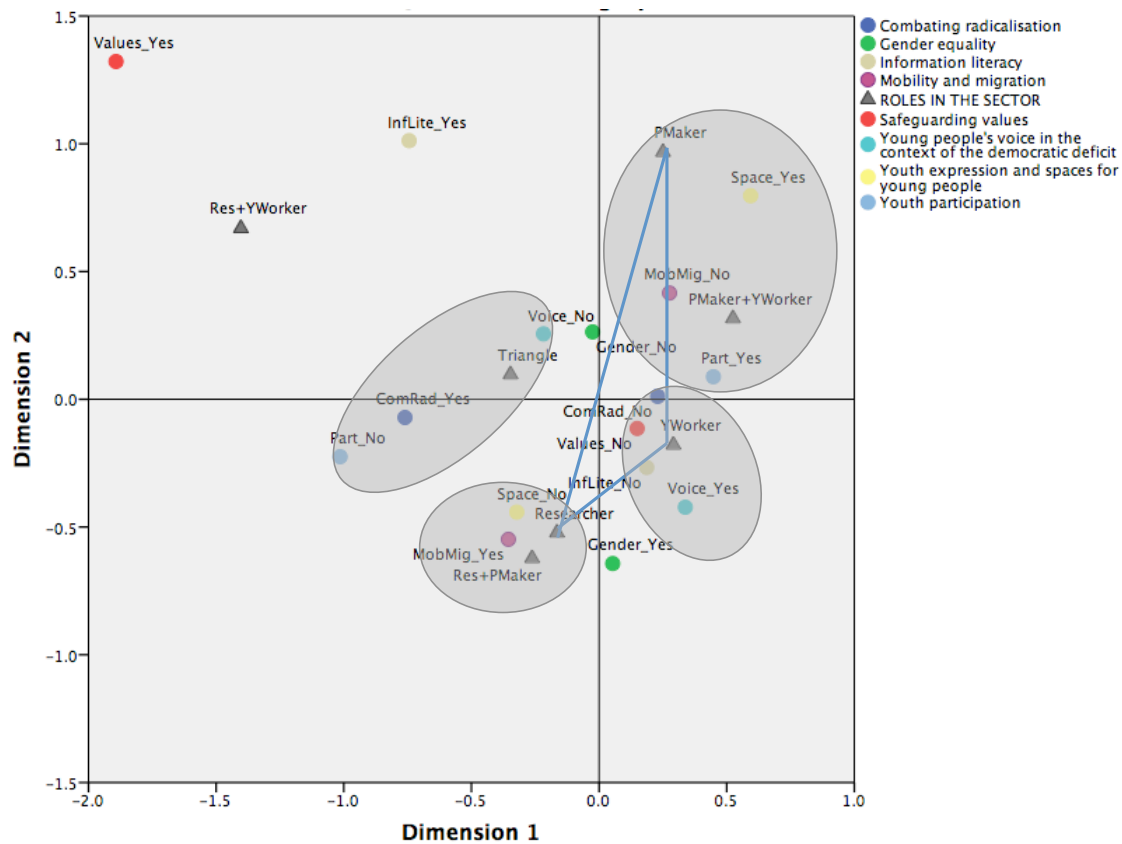
Open questions about the contemporary challenges of young people nowadays indeed open the floor for to other challenges to be pointed out. Transition to the labour market appears now with an expressive percentage of 20% of the challenges mentioned. The aspect mentioned 75% of the times on this dimension is unemployment, but precariousness and mismatch between offer and supply were also mentioned) (see annex). Here are some of the actual statements made on this topic.

Youth in different European Countries are facing today different challenges but I think high youth unemployment rates are common for all countries.

I consider youth unemployment a challenging and complicated issue.

Young people often face disrespect as they are not experienced. And as well they are mostly paid the lowest salaries even if they work the same time and do the same job as the other employees.

First, it's unemployment. The economic situation is terrible, salaries are very low and there are not enough job places in Ukraine, and even if they are, young people don't want to work there because they don't see any perspective.

The precariousness, unemployment, low quality jobs and uncertain future are the basis of youth reality, to which all those with a responsibility in youth issues are forced to address and look for answers.

The challenges included in the dimension of "equality, inclusion and exclusion" (grasping aspects such as diversity and inclusion, discrimination and stereotyping, gender equality, poverty among other) are 20% of those mentioned. Here are some of the quotes from the applicants.

> *They also need a society more inclusive, able to welcome and embrace the diversity.*
>
> *The differences in the roles and status of women and men influenced by patriarchal culture and traditions causes discrimination in labour market, education, political representation with negative repercussions for the development of their capabilities and their freedom of choice.*
>
> *Rural isolation, being 45 minutes away from the nearest public transport and another hour away from the nearest large town or city and the issues that come from this for young people.*
>
> *The increasing trend in income disparities poses the risk of a large poverty among young people. Persistent poverty rate over the last 20 years attests that a substantial proportion of youth is also hit by poverty and all the other related problems.*

This dimension is followed by, and related with, the one on "voice, expression and participation" (that includes the serious aspect of voluntary or involuntary lack of participation, the need for voices to be heard more, and the need for more freedom of expression). The 3 mentioned dimensions occupy 50% of the challenges mentioned by the applicants. Thus, participation has not lost its relevance, but the sphere of work has now gained a much more expressive visibility (see annex). It is also worth sharing some of the applicants' opinions on this, in their own words:

> *Having the passive youth, not involved in different decision-making processes, leads to the situation that only 10% of young people in general takes part in the elections and expresses their opinion about the social issues of importance.*
>
> *One of the main challenges I see is the young people themselves, who do not believe they can be the change they want to see in this world. They still believe they do not matter and I believe, this should be changed as soon as possible. When young people realize their power and importance a lot can change.*
>
> *It is vital that those responsible for making decisions regarding youth policies maintain regular dialogue with young men and women. I stress that youth participation should be by choice, enjoyable, challenging and fun, and able to influence decisions.*
>
> *Creating a space for young people or organising structures for young people to participate can influence our policies. It is not enough to say that young people have a right to be heard unless we are supporting that right and training young people to become effective leaders in their own right. I believe in empowering instead of consulting as an approach.*

With about 10% of the challenges pointed out in the open questions we find 3 other dimensions. The one on the political macro context is a very important one to highlight. In fact it shows how the youth sector is self-reflecting on its position, and leaving the political or social *vacuum* in which it is many times accused of being self-portrayed. It also contradicts the idea of lack or decrease of democratic values across Europe and beyond. The aspects mentioned in this dimension are various but the most relevant might be "radicalisation" "migration and (im)mobility", "distance from European institutions", "right-wing and populists leaders", "corruption" and "human rights violations". As mentioned:

> *Economic instability, populist leaders and immigrant waves are changing the face of European societies. Now days, young people are the most important and less active part of our societies.*

> *Another worries are the right wing movements rising as well as violent extremist groups and recruiting people with less opportunities.*

> *The unity of the EU and Europe as a whole have been seriously questioned and the European political climate is influenced by the rise of new nationalism and right-wing populism. Because of that it is important to identify the relevant socio-political and cultural conditions that influence the lives of young people on local and European international level*

The aspects of the need for quality education, the problem of lack of information, and the importance of non-formal and informal education were clustered in the dimension of "Education, Literacy and Education", that also gathered 10% of the challenges mentioned and explained. And finally, also with 10% of the answers mentioned, is the dimension on "Belonging". In this regard, many of the answers elaborated on issues such as vulnerability and disconnection, citizenship and activism, the need to feeling recognised and useful in the society, and also the times of uncertainty in which young people are living. Here are some quotes that corroborate this:

> *Against this background, many young people find themselves disconnected, excluded, vulnerable, and at times, victims of electronic and vital crimes, bullying, abuse, hate speech, and xenophobia. To nurture the need for those left away, I highly recommend investing into youth policy that preserves and generate digitally immune and engaged young citizens.*

> *Young people from my team want to feel connected with and supported by humans from government, international communities in order to create great ideas of giving our world the better future.*

> *The main challenge I see and sometimes experience by myself is a lack of motivation. Saying motivation I mean something that really inspires you to stand up and start doing changes, however impossible or difficult it may seem. Another challenge may be a lack of commitment still if you are motivated enough you are sure to do something even though it may firstly seem just a small step.*

The challenge that young people must overcome is the apathy, lack of interest of young people for social activism, indifference and scepticism to launch ideas and their implementation.

Figure 10. Challenges faced by young people (open question)
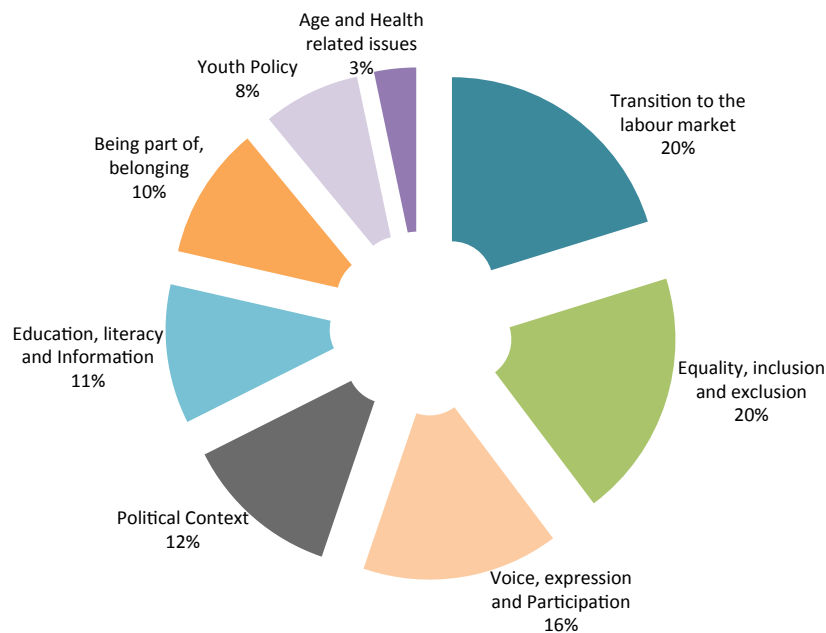
But the distribution of these challenges are quite different depending on the role of the individual in the sector (figure 11.)
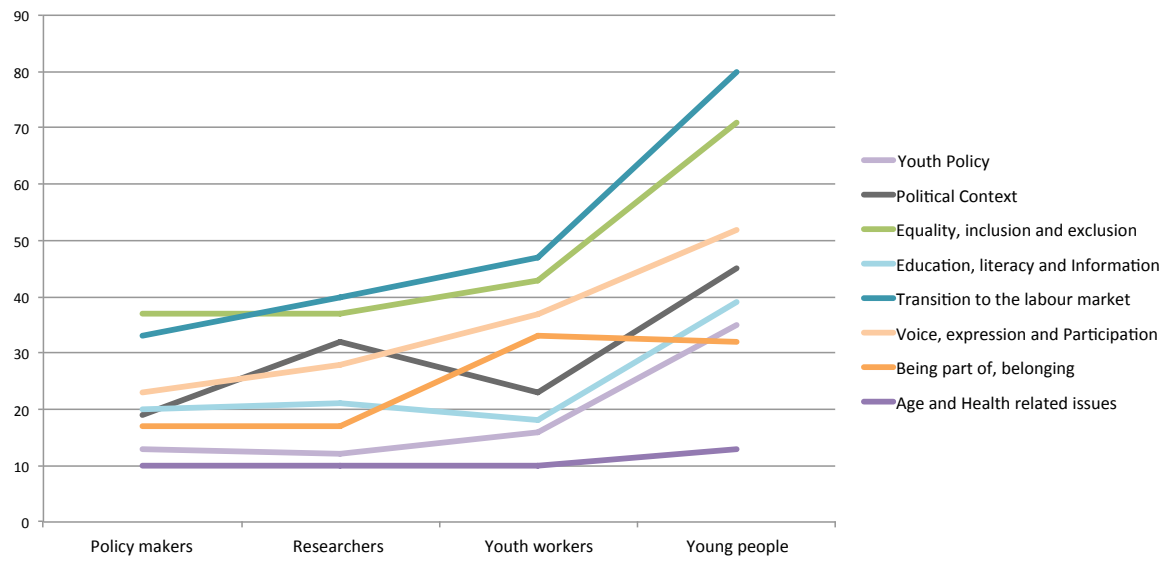
The first observation goes to the fact that we can see that while young people tend to mention a large number of challenges, policy makers are at the opposite spectrum, being the groups that least mentions challenges. The more out of reach of young people themselves, the less the group of agents in the field "has to say".

Nonetheless, accompanying this increasing tendency from policy makers to young people to mention a large number of challenges, and with the exception we are about to explain, the ranking of the dimensions of challenges per role in the sector is equivalent to the one mentioned to the whole sample (figure 10).

The noteworthy exceptions are:

- the fact that the dimension of belonging is much less mentioned by both researchers and policy makers than by young people and youth workers
- the fact that both policy makers and youth workers are less keen in mentioning aspects related to the political macro context as a challenge for young people.
- The fact that transition to the labour market is, although not significantly, relatively less mentioned in the group of the policy makers than in the other groups, where it occupies the first place in the rank.

Figure 11. Challenges faced by young people per role in the sector (open question)

Legend:
- Youth Policy
- Political Context
- Equality, inclusion and exclusion
- Education, literacy and Information
- Transition to the labour market
- Voice, expression and Participation
- Being part of, belonging
- Age and Health related issues

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Acknowledgments

Annexes

Figure 12. Specific challenges concerning youth policy, faced by young people (whole sample, open question)

YOUTH POLICY

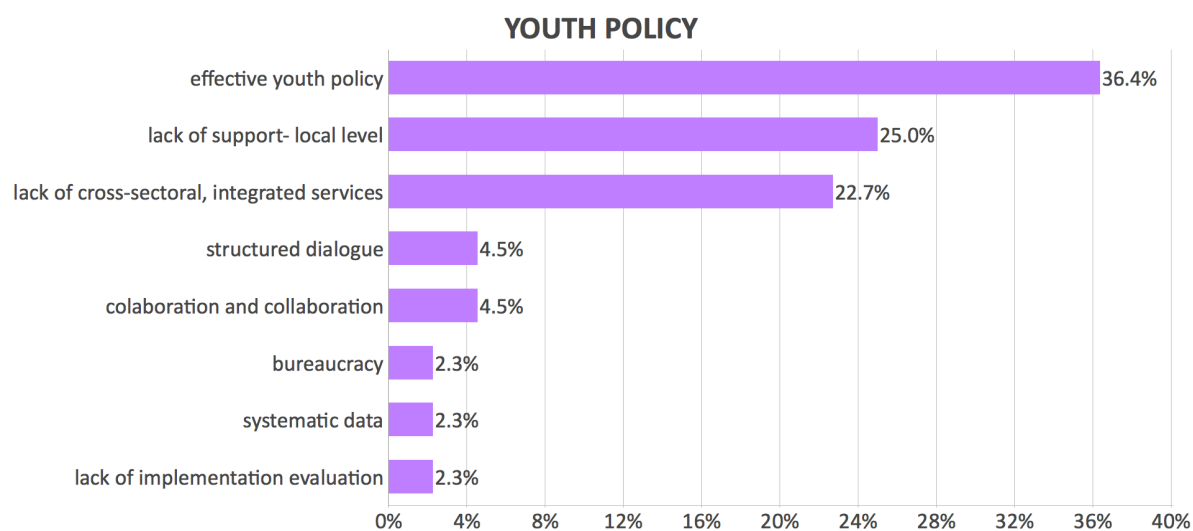| Challenge	Percentage
effective youth policy	36.4%
lack of support- local level	25.0%
lack of cross-sectoral, integrated services	22.7%
structured dialogue	4.5%
colaboration and collaboration	4.5%
bureaucracy	2.3%
systematic data	2.3%
lack of implementation evaluation	2.3%

Figure 13. Specific challenges concerning voice, expression and participation, faced by young people (whole sample, open question)

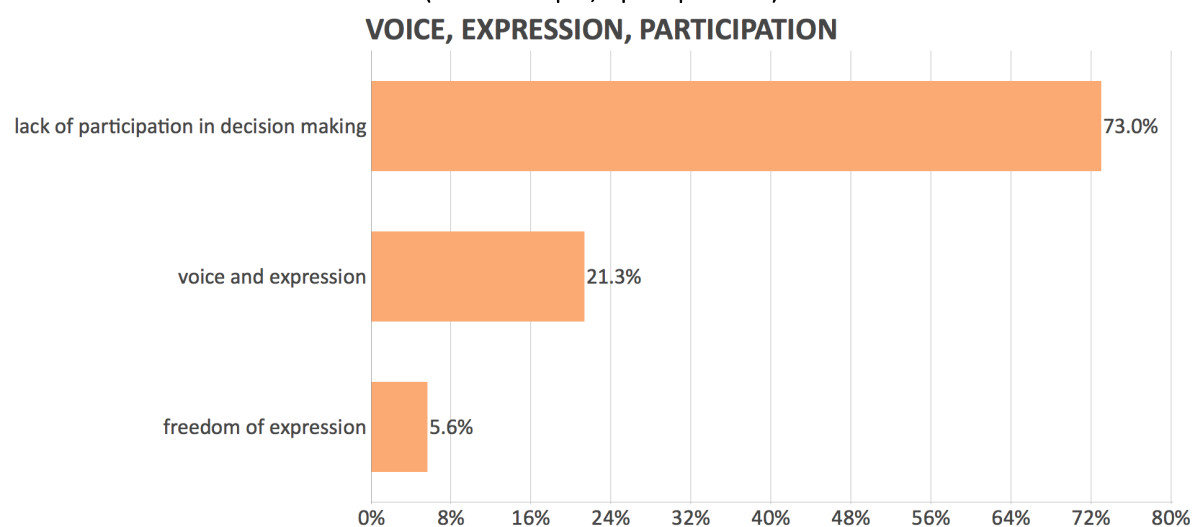**VOICE, EXPRESSION, PARTICIPATION**

Challenge	Percentage
lack of participation in decision making	73.0%
voice and expression	21.3%
freedom of expression	5.6%

Figure 14. Specific challenges concerning transition to the labour market, faced by young people (whole sample, open question)

TRANSITION TO THE LABOUR MARKET

Category	Value
unemployment and transition to labour market	75.0%
precariousness and disrespect in the labour market	14.7%
mismatch	6.0%
entrepreneurship	3.4%
brain drain	0.9%
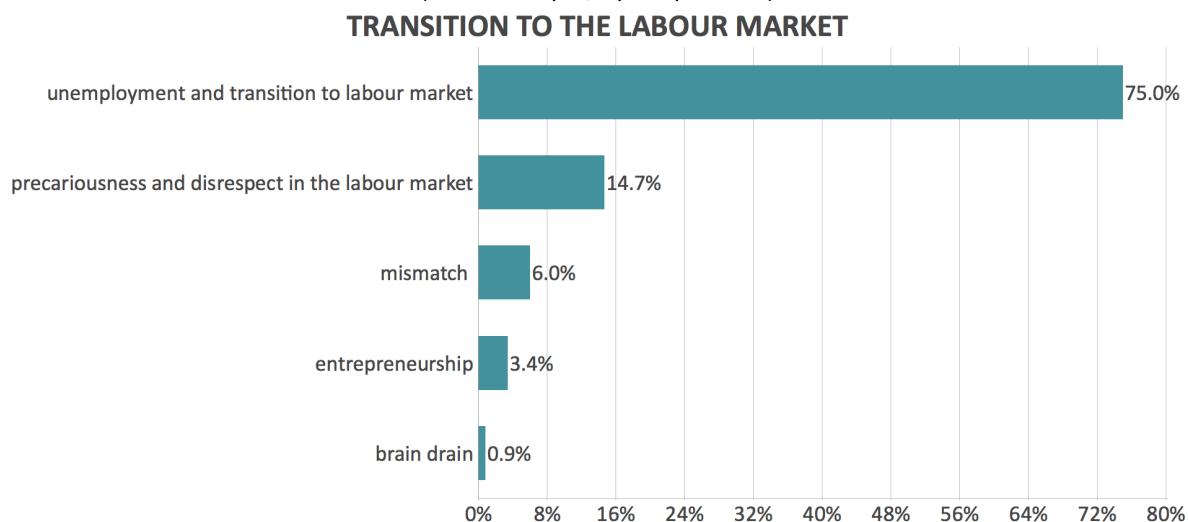
Figure 15. Specific challenges concerning equality, inclusion and exclusion, faced by young people (whole sample, open question)

EQUALITY, INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

Category	Value
diversity and inclusion	29.5%
discrimination ans stereotyping	22.3%
gender equality and inclusion	16.1%
poverty	10.7%
housing and residential independence	8.0%
refugees	7.1%
rural isolation	6.2%

Figure 16. Specific challenges concerning political macro context, faced by young people
(whole sample, open question)

POLITICAL MACRO CONTEXT

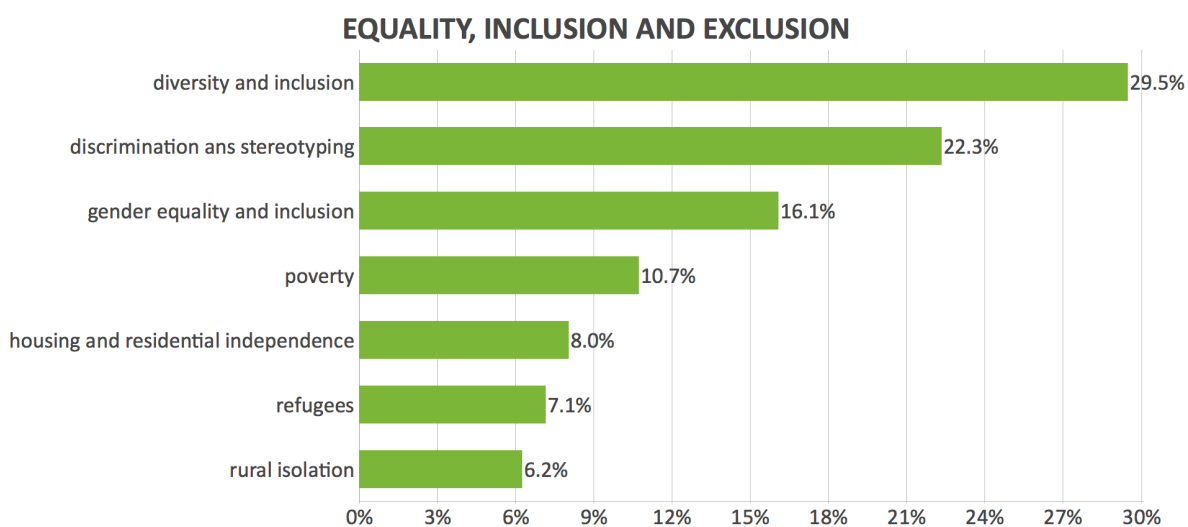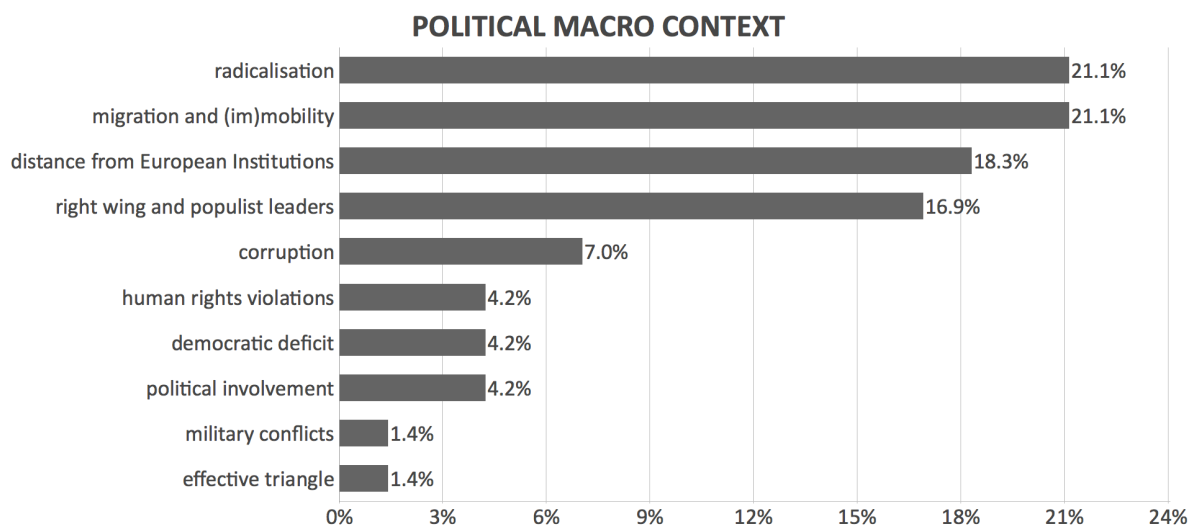| Category	Percentage
radicalisation	21.1%
migration and (im)mobility	21.1%
distance from European Institutions	18.3%
right wing and populist leaders	16.9%
corruption	7.0%
human rights violations	4.2%
democratic deficit	4.2%
political involvement	4.2%
military conflicts	1.4%
effective triangle	1.4%

0%   3%   6%   9%   12%   15%   18%   21%   24%

Figure 17. Specific challenges concerning education, information and literacy, faced by young people
(whole sample, open question)

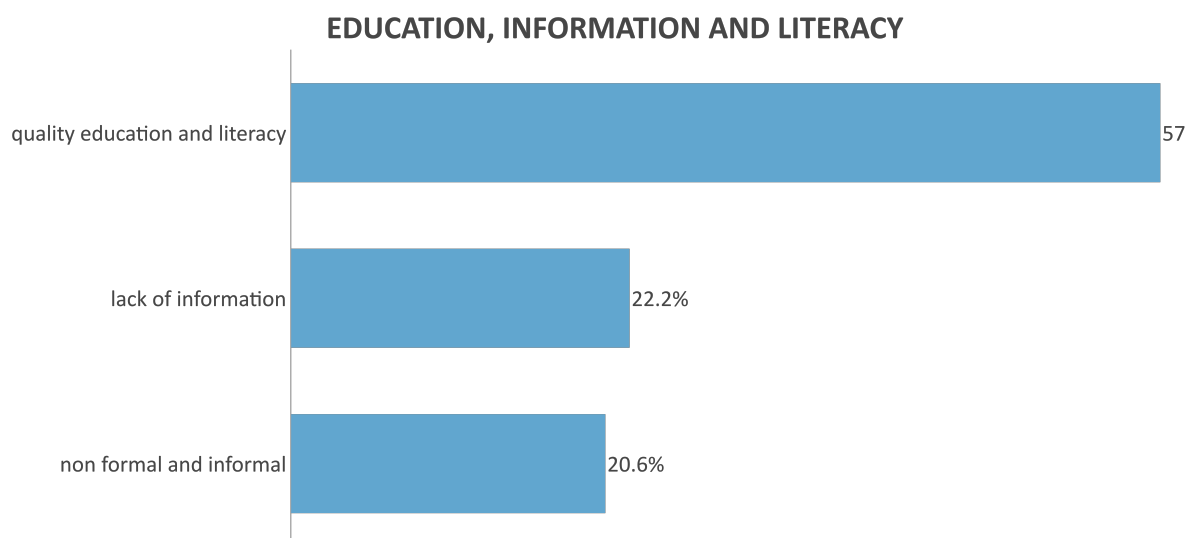**EDUCATION, INFORMATION AND LITERACY**

Category	Value
quality education and literacy	57
lack of information	22.2%
non formal and informal	20.6%

Figure 18. Specific challenges concerning being part and belonging, faced by young people (whole sample, open question)

BEING PART, BELONGING

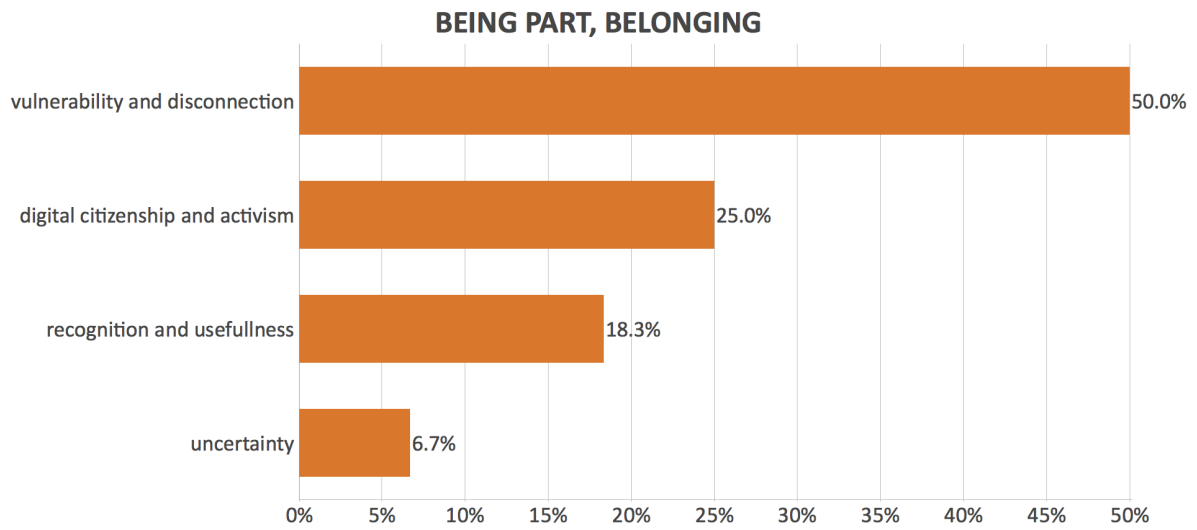| Category	Percentage
vulnerability and disconnection	50.0%
digital citizenship and activism	25.0%
recognition and usefullness	18.3%
uncertainty	6.7%

Figure 18. Specific challenges concerning age and health-related issues, faced by young people (whole sample, open question)

AGE AND HEALTH RELATED ISSUES

Category	Percentage
substance use	26.3%
mental health	26.3%
health insurance or information	15.8%
generation gap and family problems	10.5%
birth rate	10.5%
body image	5.3%
age based separation children-youth	5.3%