

“Our house is on fire” - Current debates on youth political participation at a time of change and uncertainty in Europe

Climate change. Brexit. Fake news. Refugee crisis. Right-wing populism. Looking at today’s headlines, we can see that Europe is undergoing a period of momentous change. As Swedish climate change activist, Greta Thunberg, has said, [“Our house is on fire”](#) — a statement that might be true in more ways than we care to admit.

What is the role of youth in all of this? On the one hand, we are inundated with inspiring images from #fridaysforfuture where [young activists take to the streets](#) and march against climate change. On the other hand, there are arguments that youth voter apathy was [partly to blame for the result of the Brexit referendum](#). And when youth do vote, [some are voting for right-wing national parties](#), subverting expectations that young people are typically left-wing and progressive.

Young people are charged with the responsibility to shape the future, and yet are rarely given access to decision-making that allows them to have an impact. While they are the most connected and online generation in history, many decry that youth engagement in traditional structures (e.g. voting, political parties, unions) is waning, without consideration that perhaps young people are [re-defining what participation means for themselves](#).

This webinar will seek to interrogate and problematise current debates on youth political participation, with an aim to generate new lines of questioning and stimulate discussion. In preparation for the symposium, "The future of young people’s political participation: questions, challenges and opportunities", it will push participants to question their own assumptions about participation, and set the stage for open, challenging dialogues at the event in September.



Cristina Bacalso is an independent research consultant and a member of the Pool of European Youth Researchers. She has over 12 years of experience in policy, research, and advocacy, including 5 years as the Research Coordinator for Youth Policy Labs, a global think-tank specifically focusing on youth. Cristina is a co-author of the Commonwealth's 2016 Youth Development Index; an On Think Tanks “Integral Leaders for Global Challenges Fellowship” alumni; and the lead researcher for *“Age Matters! Understanding age-related barriers to service access and the realisation of rights of children,*

adolescents and youth”, which was recently awarded the 2019 UNICEF Best of Research Award.