



Flanders
State of the Art

FOLLOW-UP OF THE BELGIAN EU PRESIDENCY-YOUTH NOTE OF 2010

THE EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY AGENDAS ON CHILDREN, YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

STATE OF THE ART - UPDATE 2025

COLOPHON

AUTHORS

Follow-up of the Belgian EU Presidency – Youth note 2010

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CONTEXT

The Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010 – 2018) stipulates that the following general initiative should be considered in all the fields of action identified: “including, where appropriate, a children’s policy dimension, having regard to their rights and protection taking into account that the life and future prospects of young people are significantly determined by the opportunities, support and protection received during childhood”.

This perspective aligns closely with the EU’s broader commitment to safeguarding the rights and well-being of children, as outlined in the EU Strategy for the Rights of the Child. This strategy places a strong emphasis on ensuring that children across Europe enjoy their rights to participation, protection, and provision of basic needs. By integrating a children’s policy dimension into various fields of action, the EU seeks to create an environment where young people can thrive and develop to their full potential.

Moreover, this approach also resonates with the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. By recognising the critical role that early experiences and protections play in shaping the trajectory of young people’s lives, the EU aims to foster a supportive environment that empowers youth and equips them with the skills and opportunities they need to succeed.

However, it should be noted that the European and international agendas on policy in respect of children, youth and children’s rights are not always entirely clear to the Council of Youth Ministers. Therefore, the overview of these (European and international) agendas needs a regular update. With this publication we make a renewed contribution.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Various policy agendas on children, youth and children's rights have been adopted at the European and international level. This study offers an inventory of the main policies of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations in which children and youth are the focus and that are aimed at influencing government policies. The text updates the note 'The European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth and Children's Rights', issued by the Belgian EU Presidency in 2010. The analysis focuses solely on those policies to be taken into consideration by the European Union Member States internally and thereby excludes EU external policy. Furthermore, most of the analysed policy agendas are characterised by their non-binding character.

Children and youth are identified in the renewed social agenda of 2008 as one of the priorities within European Union policy¹. Policy initiatives on education, employment and poverty reduction consider children a priority. The Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union (2008), which entered into force on 1 December 2009, states for the first time that the European Union shall promote the protection of the rights of the child and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, in article 24, states that children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. To fulfil this, the European Commission put in place an 'EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child' (2011-2014), focusing on promoting child-friendly justice and safer internet, protecting children from violence, and addressing discrimination and social exclusion. The current 'EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child', published on 24 March 2021, focuses on measures within six key actions: participation, socio-economic inclusion, health and education, violence, child-friendly justice, digital and information society, and a global dimension. The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child aims to develop EU instruments and national policies. The Council recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee complements the key action on socio-economic inclusion of this strategy by aiming at "preventing" and "combating" social exclusion among children.

EU competence in the field of youth is enshrined in Article 6 of the Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2008). In November 2018, the European Union Council of Youth Ministers adopted a Resolution on the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027, based on the European Commission's Communication of May 2018 'Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy'. EU youth policy fosters youth participation in democratic life, in line with Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. It also supports social and civic engagement and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society. During the 6th cycle of the Structured Dialogue with youth in 2017-2018, 11 European Youth Goals were developed. They reflect the views of European youth and represent the vision of those active in the Structured Dialogue, now called the EU Youth Dialogue². The EU Youth Strategy should contribute to realising this vision of young people by mobilising EU level policy instruments as well as actions at national, regional, and local level by all stakeholders. In December 2021, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union designated 2022 to become the European Year of Youth, aiming to mainstream youth policy

¹ Unlike children's rights, which Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union of 2000 and other articles explicitly define, youth is not mentioned as a distinct category, except in relation to admission to employment (Article 32). While children's rights would only cover young people up to the age of 18, the full range of rights covered under the Charter would be seen as applying to all people the EU, including young people over the age of 18.

² The Structured Dialogue is since 2019 called the EU Youth Dialogue.

across all relevant EU policy fields. From January 2024 to June 2024, Belgium held the rotating Presidency of the Council of Europe.

At the level of the Council of Europe, the Warsaw Declaration of 2005 expresses the commitment of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe to eradicate violence against children, whereas the Warsaw Action Plan lists as one of its goals 'Building a Europe for Children'. Consequently, the programme 'Building a Europe for and with children' (2006-2011) was launched, with two interconnected objectives: promoting children's rights and protecting children from violence. The fourth Strategy within this programme, the 'Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child' (2022-2027), entitled "Children's Rights in Action: from continuous implementation to joint innovation", has been adopted at the beginning of 2022 and continues to prioritise freedom from violence, equal opportunities and social inclusion, participation, access to and safe use of technologies and child-friendly justice for all children, and has an added focus on children's rights in crisis and emergency situations.

With respect to the Council of Europe policy agenda on youth, the Warsaw Action Plan of 2005 includes the objective of 'developing youth co-operation'. Typical of the Council of Europe is the system of co-management in the field of youth policy. This means that representatives of youth organisations and government officials formulate policy proposals together, which are then adopted by the Committee of Ministers. In November 2008, the Committee of Ministers adopted a resolution on the youth policy of the Council of Europe, with as general objective "to provide young people ... with equal opportunities and experience, which enables them to develop the knowledge, skills and competences to play a full part in all aspects of society".

Recently, in May 2023, a summit was held in Reykjavík with a declaration stating, among other things, that "throughout its history, the Council of Europe's standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law have been pivotal to ensuring and strengthening individual freedoms, peace, and prosperity in our Member States. As we work to promote the rights of the child, we underline the importance of education to give children and young people the necessary references to grow up embracing our democratic values in culturally diverse societies and take an active part in the protection of our cultural heritage."

"The Council of Europe will increase its 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."

A declaration on the situation of the children of Ukraine was annexed to the Reykjavík declaration.³

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its three Optional Protocols – the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2000), the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000) and the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure (2011) offer a comprehensive normative framework to assess the policy agendas on children (and youth). The four key principles of the Convention are non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child. After 'A world

³ <https://rm.coe.int/4th-summit-of-heads-of-state-and-government-of-the-council-of-europe/1680ab40c1>.

In 1965, the United Nations General Assembly adopted 'the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Goals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples'. In 1995, the United Nations strengthened its commitment toward young people by adopting the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. The Programme of Action "focuses in particular on measures to strengthen national capacities in the field of youth and to increase the quality and quantity of opportunities available to young people for full, effective and constructive participation in society". A Supplement to the Programme of Action was adopted in 2007, including five additional priority areas. In 2021 UN Member States unanimously agreed to establish a United Nations Youth Office as a dedicated entity for youth affairs. The Youth Office is established within the UN Secretariat. In 2018 the UN Youth Office launched the Youth 2030 Strategy. It is the first UN System's overarching strategy on youth.

1 INTRODUCTION

The first issue of ‘The European and International Policy Agendas on Children, Youth and Children’s Rights’, was conducted under the Belgian EU Presidency in 2010. The study provides an overview of the main policy agendas on children (’s rights) and youth of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations. The publication was updated in 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2021, 2023 and 2025. In this report we provide a historic overview, as well as a state of the art of the European and international policy agendas on children, youth and children’s rights, that set out the beacons for the current and future policy on children(’s) rights or youth of the organisation concerned. Also in the most current Belgian EU Presidency in 2024, youth was high on the agenda. The youth priorities during the Belgian presidency were involving, empowering and connecting young people.⁴

The selection of policy agendas (on children’s rights and youth) is based on five criteria.

1. A primary objective of the policy agenda is children, youth and/or children’s rights.
2. The analysis is restricted to agendas that aim at influencing government policies, by providing guiding principles.
3. The selected policy agendas are those of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.⁵
4. The policy agenda needs to be taken into consideration by the European Union Member States internally, thus excluding EU external policy.
5. The policy agenda needs to be in effect and adopted before 31 December 2025.

As a result of the above criteria, the scope of this study is limited. A focus on those agendas that have children and youth as their primary objective, obscures the fact that there has been attention for children and youth issues in other policy areas, such as migration, poverty (e.g. at European Union level) and education (e.g. within UNESCO⁶). Certain initiatives taken at the various *vertical policy levels* with respect to children, youth and children’s rights remain hidden. This entails the risk of an imbalanced assessment of the actual attention for the interests and rights of children and youth within the three selected organisations. What is presented here shows by no means the full and actual breadth of attention that is paid to children(’s) rights or youth in all European and international policy agendas.

The personal field of application of the policy agendas is based on the criterion of age. At the three levels, children are coherently defined as human beings ‘below the age of eighteen years’, in accordance with Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).⁷ With respect to youth, the age limit varies. The concept of ‘youth’ is respectively defined as comprising young people from 13 to 30 years (in European Union youth

⁴ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/en/belgian-presidency-council-eu/belgian-eu-presidency-youth-programme>

⁵ Not included are, for instance, the initiatives of the Hague Conference on Private International Law.

⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. More information: <https://www.unesco.org/en/education>

⁷ UN Doc. A/44/49.

programme Erasmus+, there is no common definition in policy documents)⁸, from 13 to 30 years (Council of Europe)⁹ and from 15 to 24 years (United Nations)¹⁰.

The discussion of the different policy agendas on children, youth and children's rights follows the same structure:

- Legal basis
- Decision-making body
- Main policy document
 - Institution responsible for (monitoring) implementation
 - Time frame
 - Objectives of the policy agenda on children/youth
 - Agenda – Thematic priorities
 - Approaches, methods and instruments
 - References to policies on children('s rights)/youth respectively

Where relevant, a brief historical overview is included.

⁸ The definition of 'youth' varies among Member States of the European Union. As an instrument for implementing the EU Youth Strategy and according to Article 6 (2) of Decision 1719/2006, the Erasmus+ programme targets "young people from 13 to 30". The European Solidarity Corps Programme, however, targets young people from 18 to 35.

⁹ Council of Europe Glossary on Youth (<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/glossary>) For the purposes of European youth policies the age 13 to 30 years is used by the European Commission and Council of Europe. References: Council of Europe and European Commission Research Partnership: Report of the Research Seminar 'The Youth Sector and Non-formal Education/Learning: working to make lifelong learning a reality and contributing to the Third Sector', Strasbourg 28-30 April 2004.

¹⁰ For statistical purposes, the UN defines persons between the ages of 15 and 24 as youth, without prejudice to national definitions. This definition was made during preparations for the International Youth Year (1985) and endorsed by the General Assembly (see A/36/215 and resolution 36/28, 1981).

2 EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union is an economic and political partnership between 27 European countries, with the central objective to provide peace, prosperity, democracy, and freedom for its citizens in a fairer, safer world. The Union is founded **on the principles of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and the principles** common to the Member States.¹¹ The action of the European Union is limited by the principle of conferral of competences; at the same time the use of these competences is governed by the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Those competences not conferred upon the Union in the Treaties remain with the Member States.¹²

2.1 CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN GENERAL EU POLICY

Changing social realities in Europe (technological advances, globalisation, an ageing population, etc.) resulted in a public consultation launched by the Commission in 2007, in order to deliver direct and concrete results for the citizens of Europe. In 2007, this consultation resulted in the Communication **‘Opportunities, access and solidarity: towards a new social vision for the 21st century Europe’** (also called Social Vision Communication)¹³. This communication provides an overview of changes in European society and drafts a new vision on how to respond to these issues. It calls for more investment in children's education and welfare and for more resolute action in promoting equal opportunities and guaranteeing access to basic social services, like education and health care. The European Commission adopted a Communication on a **‘Renewed social agenda: opportunities, access and solidarity in 21st century Europe’** in July 2008.¹⁴ The Commission published a broad range of proposals in the **‘Social Package’** on 2 July 2008, built around this ‘Renewed Social Agenda’. The ‘Renewed Social Agenda’ completes the Lisbon Strategy¹⁵ for the period 2008-2010 and was intended to enhance wellbeing and quality of life, create opportunities, provide access, and demonstrate solidarity. It covers not only “traditional” social policy domains (employment and social protection) but covers a wide range of policy areas including education and youth, health, immigration and intercultural dialogue. One of the seven priorities¹⁶ of the renewed social agenda is **‘Children and Youth — Tomorrow's Europe’**. The personal field of application of this policy agenda is children and youth (comprising young people from 13 to 30 years). The following initiatives are listed as part of the renewed social agenda:

- a Communication from the Commission on ‘Improving competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools’¹⁷

¹¹ Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union (2008) art. 6.

¹² Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2008) art. 5.

¹³ COM(2007) 726 final.

¹⁴ COM(2008) 412 final.

¹⁵ The Lisbon Strategy proposes an integrated approach with a view to responding to transformations in the employment market and European society, http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs_2009/index_en.htm

¹⁶ The six other priorities of the renewed social agenda are: (i) investing in people, more and better jobs, new skills; (ii) mobility; (iii) longer and healthier lives; (iv) combating poverty and social exclusion; (v) fighting discrimination; and (vi) opportunities, access and solidarity on the global scene.

¹⁷ COM(2008) 425 final.

- a Green Paper on ‘Migration and Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems.’¹⁸
- a Communication from the Commission on developing the open method of coordination on youth: ‘An EU Strategy for Youth - Investing and Empowering. A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities’. (see below)
- a comprehensive approach to child poverty, based on quantitative targets, inspired by the European strategy on inclusion and social protection

On 6 May 2009 the European Parliament proposed a resolution on the Renewed social agenda. This considers “*that there should be a better link at the EU level between economic, environmental and social policies, with reaffirmation of the original Lisbon Strategy goals and the need to ensure that economic and employment policies actively contribute to the eradication of poverty and social exclusion*”. The Renewed Social Agenda, including its actions, is revised in 2010, together with the Lisbon strategy¹⁵. The successor of the Lisbon Strategy is the Europe 2020 strategy. The 2010 Communication ‘**Europe 2020 — A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**’ (Europe 2020 strategy) envisaged a Europe where children would have a better education and access to the services and resources they need to grow up.

The new comprehensive EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child¹⁹ and the European Child Guarantee²⁰ are major policy initiatives put forward by the European Commission to better protect all children, to help them fulfil their rights and to place them right at the centre of EU policy making.

2.2 EU POLICY AGENDA ON CHILDREN(’S RIGHTS)

2.2.1 Legal basis

Article 24 of the **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union of 2000** is devoted exclusively to children’s rights, and reads as follows²¹:

1. Children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. They may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity.
2. In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child’s best interests must be a primary consideration.
3. Every child shall have the right to maintain on a regular basis a personal relationship and direct contact with both his or her parents, unless that is contrary to his or her interests.

¹⁸ COM(2008) 423 final.

¹⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0142>

²⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>

²¹ Emphasis added. According to Article 3 (3) para. 5 of the Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union (2008) the Union shall in its relations with the wider world contribute to “the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child.” However, as noted in the introduction, EU external policy is not included in this study.

Furthermore, other children's rights are stated in article 7 on right to private and family life, article 14 on right to education, article 32 on the prohibition of child labour and the protection of youth in employment and article 33 on family and professional life. The Charter gained binding legal effect (equal to the Treaties) after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009. The Lisbon Treaty put an end to the many years of debate on whether the European Union had any competence in the field of children's rights. Indeed, pursuant to Article 3 (3) para. 2, the European Union *"shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child"*.²²

2.2.2 Decision-making body

EU Member States develop their own national policies on children and children's rights. Nonetheless, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2012 consolidated version) includes two explicit references to children. The European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, are competent to adopt measures for:

- combating trafficking in persons, in particular women and children²³
- establishing minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions in the area of, among others, trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation of women and children.²⁴

At European Union level, decision-making in relation to children's rights is linked to the substantive field in which measures are taken, such as asylum and migration or education. A compilation of EU law and policy documents relevant to children's rights is attached as an annex to the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and shows the broad spectrum of legislation and policies that relate to children's rights.

2.2.3 Historical overview

In its Communication on **Strategic Objectives 2005-2009**, the European Commission recognised children's rights as a main area of concern: *"A particular priority must be effective protection of the rights of children, both against economic exploitation and all forms of abuse, with the Union acting as a beacon to the rest of the world"*.²⁵ In March 2006, the European Council asked the Member States that all children with different social backgrounds would be given equal opportunities and that child poverty would be rapidly and significantly reduced. In July 2006, the European Commission issued the Communication 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child'.²⁶ The communication was accompanied by an impact assessment²⁷ and a preliminary inventory of European Union action affecting children's rights.²⁸

²² Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2008) art. 79(2)(d).

²³ Art. 79, (2) d) TFEU

²⁴ art. 83, (1) TFEU

²⁵ COM(2005) 12 final

²⁶ COM(2006) 367 final

²⁷ SEC(2006) 888

²⁸ SEC(2006) 889

The Communication ‘**An EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child**’ was adopted on 15 February 2011.²⁹ The actions proposed were to be carried out within different time frames, until 2014. The purpose of the EU Agenda was to reaffirm *“the strong commitment of all EU institutions and of all Member States to promoting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of the child in all relevant EU policies and to turn it into concrete results”*. This EU Agenda included eleven concrete actions in four areas where the EU could bring real added value. These areas are child-friendly justice, the protection of children when they are vulnerable, children in the EU’s external action³⁰ and child participation and awareness raising. Review on the progress made in the implementation of the EU Agenda was included in the Commission’s Annual Reports on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights from 2011 until 2014.

In the resolution of 27 November 2014 on the 25th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child³¹, the European Parliament calls on the Commission to present *“an ambitious and comprehensive child rights strategy and action plan for the next five years”*. The Council Conclusions on children’s rights were adopted on 4-5 December 2014³², and called on the Commission to develop a renewed EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child in line with Better Regulation principles.³³ The Commission confirmed to *“continue the process of coordinating and mainstreaming of rights of the child in all EU legislative proposals, policies and financial decisions, in particular through the inter-service group on rights of the child, training on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, inter-service consultations, and other bilateral and ad hoc means. In this context, the Commission is reflecting on the appropriate follow-up to the action plan on Unaccompanied Minors (2010-2014)”*.³⁴

Among others, in 2017 the Commission issued the Communication on the protection of children in migration.³⁵

With a new term of office for the European Commission in 2019, President Von der Leyen sent a mission letter to then Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, Ms. Dubravka Šuica. One of her mandates was to be the Commission’s lead for protecting children’s rights. She had to prepare a comprehensive strategy on the rights of the child, which were to include actions to protect vulnerable children, protect their rights online, foster child-friendly justice and prevent **and fight violence**.

The European Parliament resolution of 26 November 2019 on children’s rights on the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child³⁶ called on the Commission *“to present a strategy to support and protect children everywhere, with no exception, including a specific budget and a child marker in the allocation of the Commission’s budgets that would enable EU investment in children to be measured and monitored and would ensure accountability”*. The new comprehensive EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee are currently two main policy initiatives by the European Commission. These policy documents have been drafted after extensive consultations with citizens, stakeholders and over 10,000 children.³⁷

²⁹ COM(2011) 60 final

³⁰ External EU policy falls outside the ambit of this study.

³¹ 2014/2919(RSP) , <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52014IP0070>

³² 17016/14.

³³ Better regulation for better results – An EU agenda, COM(2015) 215 final, 19.05.2015.

³⁴ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2015-005691_EN.html?redirect

³⁵ COM(2017) 211 final.

³⁶ 2019/2876(RSP).

2.2.4 Main policy document

The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child³⁸ was adopted on 24 March 2021, together with a Commission Proposal for a **Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee**³⁹ (see below).

INSTITUTION RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Within the European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Unit C2 'Fundamental Rights Policy'⁴⁰ of Directorate C 'Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law' is primarily responsible for children's rights (see Annex 1). The Directorate-General for Justice has a coordinating role on the rights of the child among the Commission's services. The European Commission coordinator for the Rights of the Child cooperates with other services, including through an inter-service group, to ensure that the rights of the child are duly considered in all relevant policies and actions, in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In order to help with the mainstreaming and coordination of initiatives at national level and among key stakeholders to ensure better implementation of existing EU and international legal obligations the strategy envisaged the establishment of the EU Network for Children's Rights. Building on the work of the existing informal expert group on the rights of the child, which was set up in 2013, the Network aims to reinforce the dialogue and mutual learning between the EU and Member States on children's rights, and to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy. It is composed of national representatives and will include in some of its activities international and non-governmental organisations, representatives of local and regional authorities and children, among others⁴¹. It was officially launched on 31 March 2022. The sixth meeting took place in June 2025⁴².

The Commission monitors the implementation of the strategy at EU and national level, and reports on the progress at the annual European Forum on the rights of the child. The European Forum on the Rights of the Child is an annual event for the promotion of children's rights, which was established after the adoption of the 2006 Communication 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child'. The Forum is composed of a diversity of members, namely Member State representatives, Ombudspersons for children, EU institutions, international organisations, civil society, academics, and practitioners. The 15th European Forum on the Rights of the Child took place from 23 to 24 June 2025 in Brussels. The overarching theme was 'Championing children's rights: Building fair and resilient societies for the EU's present and future.' The Forum reported on the progress achieved, discussed gaps and gave new input to the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.⁴³

³⁷ ChildFund Alliance, Eurochild, Save The Children, UNICEF, World Vision (2021), Our Europe, Our Rights, Our Future. <https://www.unicef.org/eu/reports/report-our-europe-our-rights-our-future>

³⁸ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en#documents

³⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0137&qid=1647980233530>

⁴⁰ Formerly Unit C2 Fundamental Rights and Rights of the Child.

⁴¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0142>

⁴² https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-network-childrens-rights_en

⁴³ EU Children's Participation Platform, 'Our Call to Action for a fairer future', June 2025, https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/system/files/2026-02/2025-Call-to-Action-short_Final.pdf

Children's opinions and views are included in the monitoring and evaluation, notably through the Children's Participation Platform. The commission set up this Platform as a safe space for children and teenagers to have their say on the European laws and policies that concern them. During the Forum a group of children from the EU Children's Participation Forum delivered their Call to Action, based on their second General Assembly that took place on 20 to 21 June 2025.⁴⁴

TIME FRAME

The strategy aims to cover the period from 2021 without setting an end date.

OBJECTIVES

This strategy aims to provide a comprehensive framework for all new and existing EU legislative, policy and funding instruments and thus mainstreaming children's rights through all relevant EU policies.

AGENDA – THEMATIC PRIORITIES

The Strategy proposes a series of actions across six thematic priorities⁴⁵ and specifically considers the needs of certain groups of children in vulnerable situations.

- **Thematic area 1: EU actions to empower children to be active citizens and members of democratic societies.** Among other actions, the European Commission set up an EU Children's Participation Platform. It recommends Member States to establish, improve and provide adequate resources for new and existing mechanisms of child participation at local, regional, and national level and increase awareness and knowledge of the rights of the child, among others. Additionally, the Commission has developed digitally inclusive and child friendly versions, for example of Better Internet for Kids+. ⁴⁶ The Commission has also developed guidelines on the use of child friendly language in documents ⁴⁷ and events and meetings. ⁴⁸ Since May 2025, the EU Children's Participation Platform has an alumni group, Rise and Reflect, made up of young people aged 18-21. They support the Participation Platform. ⁴⁹
- **Thematic area 2: EU actions to fight poverty, promote inclusive and child-friendly societies, health and education systems.** Delivering on this priority, the European Commission proposed a Council recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, aimed – as explained by the President Ursula von der Leyen – at making sure that “every child in Europe at risk of poverty or social exclusion has access

⁴⁴ EU Children's Participation Platform, 'Our Call to Action for a fairer future', June 2025, https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/system/files/2026-02/2025-Call-to-Action-short_Final.pdf

⁴⁵ The last request for national updates of the EU Network for Children's Rights regarding the implementation of the Strategy has included a request for updates on a seventh thematic area titled "Embedding a child perspective in all EU actions".

⁴⁶ European Commission, Child-friendly version of European strategy for a better Internet for kids (BIK+), 21 June 2022, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/child-friendly-version-european-strategy-better-internet-kids-bik>

⁴⁷ European Commission: Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, *Creating child-friendly versions of written documents – A guide*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2838/559340>

⁴⁸ European Commission: Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, *Creating child-friendly versions of written documents – A guide*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2838/559340>

⁴⁹ https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/about/rise-and-reflect-group_en

to the most basic of rights like healthcare and education”.⁵⁰ The recommendation⁵¹ aims at preventing and combating social exclusion by guaranteeing for children in need access to quality key services, such as early childhood education and care, education (including school-based activities), healthcare, nutrition (including at least one healthy meal each school day), and housing. The main focus is on creating equal opportunities for inclusive and universal access for all children, more specifically those in poverty and in a disadvantaged situation. In 2025, the EU organised a consultation with children on the review of progress made in the implementation of the Child Guarantee.⁵² More than 40.000 children participated. While many children recognise that services exist and that progress has been made, access is not always experienced equally, and equal rights do not always translate into equal chances in everyday life.⁵³ The Commission also established a Best Practice Portal on Public Health to improve public health and address children’s mental health.⁵⁴ The Digital Education Plan (2021-2027) lays out a strategic vision and 14 actions to foster quality and inclusive learning. It includes, for example, recommendations on blended learning.⁵⁵ In 2025, the Council adopted conclusions on promoting and protecting the mental health of children and adolescents in the digital era.⁵⁶ Referring, among other things, to the Strategy, the Council calls on EU countries and the Commission to better protect the mental health of children by promoting the safe and healthy use of digital tools.

- **Thematic area 3: EU actions that help children grow free from violence.** It calls EU Member States to raise awareness of, and invest in capacity building and measures for (i) a more effective prevention of violence, (ii) protection of victims and witnesses, including with the necessary safeguards for child suspects or accused; as well as to improve the functioning of child protection systems at national level, among others. Delivering on this priority, the European Commission adopted a recommendation on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems, published on the 23rd of April 2024.⁵⁷ The recommendation supports Member States to develop and strengthen their child protection systems in accordance with children’s needs and in their best interests. It encourages a multidisciplinary approach to child protection. Together with the recommendation comes a communication from the Commission on putting children’s interests first.⁵⁸ There is also an Annex with the EU acquis and key policy documents and funding relevant to child protection systems.⁵⁹ Over 1000 children shared their opinion through the EU Children’s Participation Platform on what is needed for them to feel safe.⁶⁰

⁵⁰ Political Guidelines for the European Commission 2019-2024.

⁵¹ COM(2021) 137 final (L 223/14, (EU) 2021/1004).

⁵² EU Children’s Participation Platform, *Findings from the consultation with children on the review of the progress made in the implementation of the European Child Guarantee*, 2026, Poverty-Social-Inclusion-Survey-Full-Report_2026.pdf

⁵³ https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/poverty-social-inclusion_en

⁵⁴ <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dyna/bp-portal/submission/search?call=Mental%20Health>

⁵⁵ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/plan>

⁵⁶ Council conclusions of 27 May 2025 on promoting and protecting the mental health of children and adolescents in the digital era (9069/25)

⁵⁷ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/1238 of 23 April 2024 on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child (C/2024/2680)

⁵⁸ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 23 April 2024 on Putting Children’s Interests First: A Communication accompanying the Commission Recommendation on Integrated Child Protection Systems (COM/2024/188)

⁵⁹ Annex to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 23 April 2024 on Putting Children’s Interests First: A Communication accompanying the Commission Recommendation on Integrated Child Protection Systems

⁶⁰ https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/feeling-safe_en

- **Thematic area 4: EU actions to support justice systems that uphold the rights and needs of children.** The European Commission key actions include the strengthening of the implementation of the 2010 Guidelines on Child-friendly Justice with the Council of Europe as well as proposing a horizontal legislative initiative in 2022 to support the mutual recognition of parenthood between Member States. The recommendations for EU Member States include the support of judicial training providers and all relevant professionals' bodies to address the rights of the child and child friendly and accessible justice in their activities, among others. In November 2025 the Commission adopted a new Judicial Training Strategy 2025-2030. The Judicial Training Strategy mentions to be outlined with the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.⁶¹ Since January 2024 there is a joint project between the Council of Europe and the European Commission on child-friendly justice. The Project objective is to contribute to improved protection of children in contact with the law – as offenders, victims or witnesses in non-judicial, judicial (such as civil and criminal cases) and administrative proceedings – across Europe at national and local level. Belgium has been selected as a focus country to pilot the implementation of activities at national and local level.⁶²
- **Thematic area 5: EU actions to ensure that children can safely navigate the digital environment and harness its opportunities.** European Commission key actions cover the adoption of an updated Better Internet for Kids Strategy in 2022⁶³. Member States Recommendations ensure effective equal access to digital tools and high-speed Internet connection, digital literacy, accessible online educational material and education tools etc. for all children as well as to support the development of children's basic digital competences. The Strategy also covers actions for the ICT companies. In July 2025 the Commission adopted guidelines on the protection of minors under the Digital Service Act (DSA) to ensure safe online experiences for children and young people.⁶⁴ There is also a family-friendly version of the guidelines.⁶⁵
- **Thematic area 6: EU actions supporting, protecting, and empowering children globally, including during crisis and conflict.** On the key actions for the European Commission, measures include funding on education, including in emergencies, as well as actions to address child labour, such as an action to make supply chains of EU companies free of child labour, notably through a legislative initiative on sustainable corporate governance. The European Commission also prepared a Youth Action Plan in EU External Action 2022 to promote youth and child empowerment and participation around the world. In June 2024 the Council updated the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict, which are intended to strengthen the EU's contribution to the respect, protection, and fulfilment of rights of children

⁶¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 20 November 2025 on European Judicial Training Strategy 2025-2030 – Creating a supportive environment for DigitalJustice@2030 (COM(2025)801).

⁶² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/child-friendly-justice-project>

⁶³ COM(2022) 212 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2022:212:FIN>

⁶⁴ Communication from the Commission of 10 October 2025 – Guidelines on measures to ensure a high level of privacy, safety and security for minors online, pursuant to Article 28(4) of Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 (C/2025/5519)

⁶⁵ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/digital-service-act-dsa-explained-what-online-platforms-should-do-keep-kids-and-teens-safe-online>

in armed conflict and other situations of armed violence by terrorist organisations or organised criminal groups, globally.⁶⁶

APPROACHES, METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

Three general principles should ensure that EU action is exemplary in ensuring respect of the provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child with regard to the rights of children. These principles are:

- Making the rights of the child an integral part of the EU's fundamental rights
- Building the basis for evidence-based policy making
- Cooperation with stakeholders.

The Commission will mainstream a children's rights perspective in all relevant policies, legislation, and funding programmes. For the effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy, the following methods and instruments are proposed:

- Training and capacity building to EU staff and increased internal coordination through the team of the Commission's Coordinator for the Rights of the Child.
- Development of a mainstreaming checklist on children's rights.
- Development of more reliable and comparable data for making evidence-based policies, amongst others through the research and innovation framework programme Horizon Europe (2021-2027).
- Establishment of an EU Network for Children's Rights, to reinforce the dialogue and mutual learning between the EU and Member States on children's rights, and support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy. It was officially launched on 31 March 2022. The sixth meeting took place in June 2025⁶⁷.
- Establishment of an EU Children's Participation Platform, jointly with the European Parliament and child rights organisations, upon discussion at the EU Network for Children's Rights meeting in March 2023. The EU Children's Participation Platform had its first general assembly on 26 June 2023, aiming to connect existing child participation mechanisms at local, national and EU level, and to involve children in decision-making processes at EU level, making the involvement of Member States and of all stakeholders, at all levels, essential to its implementation. In June 2025, the Participation's Platform held its second General Assembly.
- Collaboration with regional and local authorities, and with other relevant institutions, regional and international organisations, civil society, and ombudspersons for children.
- Contribution of EU funding for Member States initiatives to protect and fulfil the rights of the child. In particular in relation to tackling child poverty, Member States that have a rate of child-at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion higher than the EU average (in 2017- 2019) will have to earmark 5% of the ESF+ for combatting child poverty.

Furthermore, for the effective governance, monitoring and reporting of the European Child Guarantee the following methods and instruments are proposed:

⁶⁶ Council Conclusions of 24 June 2024 on the update of the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict (11296/24)

⁶⁷ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-network-childrens-rights_en

- Nomination of national Child Guarantee Coordinators who should be equipped with adequate resources and mandate enabling the effective coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the European Child Guarantee recommendation;
- Development, within six months from the adoption of the recommendation (i.e. before mid-March 2022) of national action plans that should cover the period until 2030. The action plans should include targeted categories of children in need to be reached by corresponding integrated measures, quantitative and qualitative targets to be achieved in terms of children in need to be reached by corresponding measures, taking into account regional and local disparities, measures planned or taken in implementing this Recommendation, including at regional and local level, and the necessary financial resources and timelines, other measures planned or taken to address child social exclusion and to break intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, and national frameworks for data collection, monitoring and evaluation;
- Regular reporting on the progress in implementing the European Child Guarantee recommendation: every two years by the Member States to the Commission and by the Commission to the Council 5 years after the adoption of the recommendation (mid-2026).

Certain actions in the EU Strategy of the Rights of the Child refer to youth policy or the youth sector. The EU Youth Dialogue, for example, should ensure that the views and experiences of young people and youth organisations are taken into account when drafting youth policies. The Strategy also supports the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. Furthermore, the strategy invites members “*to implement the reinforced Youth Guarantee⁶⁸ and promote the involvement of young people in Youth Guarantee services*”.

2.2.5 Other relevant policy documents

⁶⁸ The reinforced Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all Member States to ensure “that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment continued education apprenticeship traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. All EU countries have committed to the implementation of the reinforced Youth Guarantee in a Council Recommendation of October 2020. The Recommendation is based on a Commission proposal, part of the Youth Employment Support package. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11320-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

- The European Commission proposed in 2022 a Council Regulation on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition of decisions and acceptance of authentic instruments in matters of parenthood.⁷⁰ It tackles existing problems concerning the recognition of parenthood across Member States. The European Parliament has adopted its non-binding position in 2023.⁷¹
- The EU Commission proposed a regulation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse in 2022.⁷² The Council has reached a position on law in November 2025.⁷³ One of the aims is to establish permanent rules concerning detecting, reporting and removing child sexual abuse materials. For now, there are only interim regulations in place.

2.3 EU POLICY AGENDA ON YOUTH

2.3.1 Legal basis

Europe has a limited legal basis for taking action in youth policy (and youth work). Since 1992 youth is included as a policy area, following the signing of the **Treaty on European Union (Treaty of Maastricht)**⁷⁴. In the chapter 'Education, vocational training and youth', Article 126, §2 encourages *"the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors"*.

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, as entered into force since 1 December 2009, enshrines EU competence in the field of youth in Article 6, which states:

The Union shall have competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States. The areas of such action shall, at European level, be: (e) education, vocational training, youth and sport.

Articles 165 and 166 are the basis for EU action in the youth field. Article 165, 2 of Title XII on 'Education, Vocational Training, Youth and Sport' specifies that Union action shall be aimed at '*encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors*'; as already included in the Maastricht Treaty. However, it is added that Union action shall also aim at '*encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe*'.⁷⁵

Article 166 of the TFEU states that “the Union shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organization of vocational training”.

⁷⁰ COM/2022/695 final

⁷¹ COM/2022/695 final

⁷² COM (2022) 209 final

⁷³ General Secretariat of the Council on 13 November 2025 concerning the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down rules to prevent and combat child sexual abuse - Partial mandate for negotiations with the European Parliament (2022/0155)

⁷⁴ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

⁷⁵ As regards vocational training policy, Union action shall aim to “facilitate access to vocational training and encourage mobility of instructors and trainees and particularly young people.” Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2008) art. 166. 2.

Article 214, 5 creates a framework for young people to contribute to EU humanitarian aid operations by establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps.

2.3.2 Decision-making body

Youth policies are in the first place developed at national level by the different EU Member States. At European Union level, a framework for co-operation has been established. The main decisions in this respect are taken by the Council of Youth Ministers. The meetings of the Council are prepared by the Youth Working Party⁷⁶, which brings together representatives from the ministries of youth of the EU Member States, and by COREPER⁷⁷.

2.3.3 Historical overview

The first youth mobility/exchange programme was introduced in 1988. Until 2001, the activities of the European Union in the youth field consisted mainly in the implementation of specific programmes. In 2001, the European Commission issued the **White Paper 'A New Impetus for European Youth'**, which incorporated the results of wide consultation exercise within the EU.⁷⁸ The White Paper proposed a new framework for European cooperation in the youth field, based on two approaches: first, the application of the **open method of coordination** in the specific field of youth, and second, paying more attention to the 'youth dimension' in the development of other relevant policies, such as education, lifelong learning, mobility, employment and social integration, and combating racism and xenophobia. For the application of the open method of coordination, the European Commission suggested four thematic priorities: participation, information, voluntary service among young people, and a greater understanding and knowledge of youth. In its Resolution of 27 June 2002, the Council of the EU endorsed the Commission's White Paper.⁷⁹ Common objectives on participation by and information for young people were adopted by the Council of the EU in 2003.⁸⁰ In 2004, the European Commission similarly proposed common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth⁸¹ and for voluntary activities among young people.⁸² In the years thereafter, the Council of the EU issued various resolutions on the implementation of these common objectives.⁸³

⁷⁶ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/preparatory-bodies/youth-working-party/>

⁷⁷ COREPER is composed of the 'permanent representatives' from each member state and coordinates and prepares the work of the different Council configurations, ensures consistency of the EU's policies and works out agreements and compromises which are then submitted for adoption by the Council. More information: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/preparatory-bodies/coreper-i/>

⁷⁸ COM(2001) 681 final.

⁷⁹ Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field (2002/C 168/02). For an evaluation, see Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States of 24 May 2005 meeting within the Council on the evaluation of activities conducted in the framework of European cooperation in the youth field (2005/C 141/01).

⁸⁰ Council resolution of 25 November 2003 on common objectives for participation by and information for young people (2003/C 295/04). See also COM(2003) 184 final.

⁸¹ COM(2004) 336 final.

⁸² COM(2004) 337 final.

⁸³ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States of 24 May 2005 meeting within the Council on implementing the common objectives for youth information (2005/C 141/03); Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on implementing the common objectives for participation by and information for young people in view of promoting their active European citizenship (2006/C 297/02); Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of

In March 2005, the European Council adopted the **European Youth Pact**, as an instrument to contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon goals of boosting jobs and growth. The Pact⁸⁴ focused on three areas:

- employment, integration and social advancement
- education, training and mobility
- reconciliation of working life and family life.

Among the measures to reconcile working life and family life, the improvement of childcare facilities is explicitly mentioned. In November 2005, the **European framework for cooperation in the youth field** was updated to take the European Youth Pact into account.⁸⁵ This framework of cooperation was set to expire in 2009.

In 2005 the Council of Youth Ministers adopted a resolution calling upon Member States to develop **structured dialogue** with young people and their organizations on policy actions that affect them, with the involvement of researchers in the youth field'. From 2007 to 2013, the **Youth in Action programme**⁸⁶ aimed at 'active citizenship, solidarity and tolerance and involving young people in shaping the future of the European Union'. The Youth in Action programme is now enclosed in the **Erasmus+ framework** for 2021-2027⁸⁷, and targets young people between 13 and 30 years. It promotes mobility, non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue, and encourages the inclusion of all young people.

In April 2009, the Commission presented a Communication entitled ‘**An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering. A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities**’.⁸⁸ This Strategy was in line with the goals set out in the **renewed social agenda** published in 2008. (*see 1.1.1*) Creating more opportunities for youth in education and employment, improving access and full participation of young people in society and fostering mutual solidarity between society and young people were identified as primordial. The Communication proposed a strategy for future youth policies in Europe, and invited Member States and the Commission to cooperate in the youth field through a **renewed open method of coordination**. As an objective it proclaimed that ‘*youth work should be supported, recognized for its economic and social contribution and professionalized*’. Adopting a cross-sectoral approach, it is mentioned that youth policies can contribute to delivering results in areas such as ‘*child and family policy, education, gender equality, employment, housing and healthcare*’. After the publication ‘Investing and Empowering’, the Council of Youth Ministers adopted the Resolution on a Renewed Framework for Cooperation in the Youth Field 2010-2018.⁸⁹

It should be mentioned that in the same time period, the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 established the Youth Guarantee (and the “Reinforced” Youth Guarantee in 2020), which is one of the best-known examples of youth-related policy under DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. However while the EU Youth

the Member States, meeting within the Council of 16 May 2007 on implementing the common objectives for voluntary activities of young people (2008/C 241/01) and Corrigendum (2008/C 292/06).

⁸⁴ Presidency Conclusions of the European Council, Brussels, 22-23 March 2005 (7619/05), Annex 1.

⁸⁵ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – implementing the European Pact for Youth and promoting active citizenship (2005/C 292/03). See also COM(2005) 206 final.

⁸⁶ https://youth.europa.eu/home_en

⁸⁷ Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013.

⁸⁸ COM(2009) 200 final.

⁸⁹ 2009/C 311/01.

Strategy and EU Youth Goals highlight employment as a specific concern for young people, the two policies have little reference to each other.

Furthermore, in December 2016 the European Union launched a new mobility programme **European Solidarity Corps**⁹⁰, to create opportunities for young people to volunteer or work on projects in their own country or abroad that benefit communities and people around Europe. The Council adopted a Regulation establishing the European Solidarity Corps Programme. The most recent programme runs from 2021-2027.⁹¹ The actions of the European Solidarity Corps are consistent with and complementary to the relevant policies, instruments, and programmes at Union level in general, and in particular **the Erasmus+ programme**.

The Commission proposed to review and develop the Youth cooperation in its Communication of May 2018 **'Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy'**.⁹² The main proposals have been endorsed in the Council resolution of 26 November 2018.⁹³

In the **Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Year of Youth (2022)**, specific reference has been made to the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child⁹⁴, and the European Child Guarantee, which set a new standard for child and teen representation and recognise children and young people as active citizens and agents of change.⁹⁴ In the aftermath of the Year of Youth, the EU Youth Stakeholders Group came into existence. The aim of the EU Youth Stakeholders Group is to engage European youth organisations, national youth councils, youth researchers, representatives of Member States and other EU institutions in the implementation of the legacy of the European Year of Youth 2022 and the 2019-2027 EU Youth Strategy, and to facilitate exchanges and youth consultations on forthcoming EU policy initiatives. In November 2025 they held their third meeting.⁹⁵

European Youth Week is an event organised by the European Commission every second year to celebrate and promote youth engagement. The next one will be dedicated to solidarity and fairness and will take place in April 2026.⁹⁶ The European Parliament organises the European Youth Event every two years. It brings together young people between 16 and 30 to inspire and get inspired by members of the European Parliament. The previous one was held in 2025.⁹⁷

During the Belgian Presidency of the Council of Europe in 2024, the Youth Presidency booked different results. During the Presidency, two council conclusions and a council resolution were tabled.⁹⁸

⁹⁰ For more information: https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en

⁹¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/888 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the European Solidarity Corps Programme and repealing Regulations (EU) 2018/1475 and (EU) No 375/2014.

⁹² COM (2018)269.

⁹³ COM(2018)269.

⁹⁴ Decision (EU) 2021/2316 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 December 2021 on a European Year of Youth (2022).

⁹⁵ https://youth.europa.eu/strategy/euyouthstakeholdersgroup_en

⁹⁶ https://youth.europa.eu/youthweek_en

⁹⁷ <https://european-youth-event.europarl.europa.eu/en>

⁹⁸ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/en/belgian-presidency-council-eu/belgian-eu-presidency-youth-programme>

1. The first council conclusions focus on the theme 'inclusive societies for young people'. "The conclusions call on member states and the Commission to strive for social cohesion, equity and inclusion, and to ensure the participation of young people in democratic life. This can be done through inclusive measures that facilitate the meaningful participation of all young people in decision-making, especially through youth work."⁹⁹
2. The second council conclusions deal with the evaluation of the European and international policy agendas on children, youth and children's rights. "This council conclusion points to opportunities for better cooperation, coordination and exchange in order to create stronger links between youth and children's rights policies, not only at the European level but also with other multilateral fora such as the Council of Europe and the United Nations."¹⁰⁰ The Belgian Presidency also organised an expert seminar on European and international policy agendas on children, youth affairs and children's rights, supporting the council conclusions.¹⁰¹
3. Thirdly, the council resolution on 'youth work policies in an empowering Europe' was also proposed. The resolution aims to strengthen youth work so that it can support young people in navigating towards autonomy within new societal realities. The resolution calls on Member States and the Commission to support the development of quality youth work and youth work policy at all levels.¹⁰²

2.3.4 Main policy document

The **EU Youth Strategy** is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027, based on the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018.¹⁰³ EU youth cooperation shall make the most of youth policy's potential. It fosters youth participation in democratic life, in line with Article 165(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It also supports social and civic engagement and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society. The EU Youth Strategy operates in 3-year work cycles. The priorities for each cycle are set by the Council together with the Commission in EU Youth Strategy Work Plans. In December 2024 the **EU Youth Strategy Work Plan 2025-2027 was adopted**.¹⁰⁴

The **European Youth Goals**¹⁰⁵, that are an integral part of the EU Youth Strategy, have been developed by young people for young people under the 6th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue process, and represent the areas where change still needs to happen, in order for young people to live to their full potential.

The EU Youth policies are underpinned by significant EU investment, in particular through programmes such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, the European Social Fund Plus, Creative Europe, HorizonEurope, the

⁹⁹ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9849-2024-INIT/en/pdf>, as found on <https://www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/en/belgian-presidency-council-eu/belgian-eu-presidency-youth-programme>

¹⁰⁰ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:202403528>, as found on <https://www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/en/belgian-presidency-council-eu/belgian-eu-presidency-youth-programme>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.vlaanderen.be/publicaties/the-european-and-international-policy-agendas-on-children-youth-and-childrens-rights>

¹⁰² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:202403526>, as found on <https://www.vlaanderen.be/cjm/en/belgian-presidency-council-eu/belgian-eu-presidency-youth-programme>

¹⁰³ 2018/C 456/01, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL>

¹⁰⁴ Resolution of the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 13 December 2024 on the EU Youth Strategy Work Plan 2025-2027 (C/2024/7438)

¹⁰⁵ https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/european-youth-goals_en

Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Justice Programme, the European Regional Development Fund, the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development. These funding programmes make a significant EU contribution towards enabling youth to pursue their personal, social, and professional fulfilment.

INSTITUTION RESPONSIBLE FOR MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture (EAC) comprises a Youth unit within Directorate B (Youth, Education and Erasmus+). Unit EAC.B.3 is in charge of youth policy aspects, European Solidarity Corps, the Youth chapter of Erasmus + and the Traineeship Office.

TIME FRAME

The renewed framework aims to cover the period from 2019 until 2027.

OBJECTIVES

The EU Youth Strategy (EUYs) creates a framework capable of responding to the challenges faced by young people throughout the EU, while investing in a **common and coherent Union response**, complementary to the Member States' efforts and initiatives in tackling these present challenges. In line with Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, the EUYS aims to **increase social and civic engagement and participation in democratic life** for all young people.

The Strategy strives to:

- Enable young people to be architects of their own lives, support their personal development and growth to autonomy, build their resilience and equip them with life skills to cope with a changing world;
- Encourage and equip young people with the necessary resources to become active citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change inspired by EU values and a European identity;
- Improve policy decisions with regard to their impact on young people across all sectors, notably employment, education, health and social inclusion;
- Contribute to the eradication of youth poverty and all forms of discrimination and promote social inclusion of young people.

AGENDA – THEMATIC PRIORITIES

The Council agrees on working on effective, focused and joined-up implementation within and across sectors while tackling core areas of the youth sector through engaging, connecting and empowering:

- (a) *Engage* means that there should be meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural, and political participation of young people in the development, implementation and assessment of policies that concern them, such as the EU Youth Strategy and national youth strategies. The EUYS requests to support and foster (new and alternative; digital forms of) **inclusive democratic participation, active involvement** of young people and youth organisations in the development, implementation and evaluation of policy, support for the **creation and development of youth representation**, investing in and following **the EU Youth Dialogue** and developing **learning opportunities** around participation for young people.
- (b) *Connect* focusses on creating **solidarity** within the European Union and on building the European Union's future development through mobility and exchanges, cooperation, and cultural and social activities at European level. This means that young people and youth workers should gain access to **volunteering** in civil society, solidarity activities, support schemes, etc. and share best practices and

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further develop **effective validation systems and recognition of skills and competences** acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

- (c) *Empowerment* implies that young people feel encouraged taking their lives in their own hands. The EUYS emphasizes that youth work delivers a non-formal learning setting with unique benefits to empower young people. Quality, innovation and recognition of youth work should be further developed and implemented, further synergies with the work of the Council of Europe should be encouraged, the quality of youth work development on all levels (local, regional, national and European) should be supported and easily accessible contact points for young people should be established.

The Council resolution acknowledges the European Youth Goals¹⁰⁶ identified in the dialogue process and underlines that the EUYS should contribute to realising this vision of young people. Following non-binding goals were identified:

- connecting EU with youth;
- equality of all genders;
- inclusive societies;
- information and constructive dialogue;
- mental health and wellbeing;
- moving rural youth forward;
- quality employment for all;
- quality learning;
- space and participation for all;
- sustainable green Europe;
- youth organisations and European programmes.

APPROACHES, METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

In order to achieve the objectives of the EUYS, all policies and activities concerning young people should be firmly anchored in the international system of human rights and should follow the principles of **equality and non-discrimination, inclusion and participation**. The lives of young people are shaped by policies rooted in various policy areas and determined at different levels of implementation. In order to ensure durable impact of youth policy, the **global, European, national, regional and local dimension** needs to be interlinked and policies should aim to tackle youth-relevant issues by **mainstreaming initiatives across policy areas and by supporting specific initiatives in the youth sector**.

For the effective implementation of the framework of cooperation, the following methods and instruments are proposed:

- (a) *Evidence-based policy making and knowledge building in the youth field*. A deeper understanding of the needs of young people through continuous research, knowledge development and outreach to young people and youth organisations with the support of the Youth Wiki, youth research networks and cooperation with international organisations.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.youthgoals.eu/>

- (b) *Mutual learning and dissemination.* Mutual learning between Member States, the European Commission, expert groups and relevant stakeholders as a basis to further youth policy in core and cross-sectoral areas.
- (c) *Participatory governance.* Involvement of young people and their representative organisations in the different phases of implementation of the EUYS through the EU Youth Stakeholders Group and an EU Youth Strategy Platform. Through Youth Policy Dialogues, which were first held during the European Year of Youth in 2022, young people are encouraged to express their views on EU policy initiatives by interacting with Commissioners and to integrate youth views in the EU's political agenda.¹⁰⁷ In the Political Guidelines 2024-2029, President von der Leyen initiated the existence of the President's Youth Advisory Board.¹⁰⁸ The aim of the Board is to advise the European Commission on political and societal issues that matter to young people, and to act as a sounding board for ideas developed by the Commission. The Board brings together young people aged between 18 and 28 years from National Youth Councils of EU Member States and from the European Youth Forum. The first meeting took place on 3 December 2025 on the topic of social media and young people.¹⁰⁹
- (d) *Mobilising EU programmes and funds.* Effective use of EU programmes and funds, such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020, etc.
- (e) Monitoring of EU funding, by monitoring spending on youth through using existing mechanisms as appropriate.
- (f) *Communication* on the purpose and the content of the EUYS in a comprehensive way and youth-friendly language.
- (g) *Future National Activities Planner (FNAP)* will allow Member States to share their priorities (in line with the EUYS) on a voluntary basis, to increase transparency in the implementation of youth policies at regional, national and EU level and identify appropriate partners for mutual learning activities and responding to individual needs of Member States. The 2024 Future National Activities Planners are accessible online.¹¹⁰
- (h) The *EU Youth Dialogue* aims to include more decision-makers and young people, especially those not-listened-to and/or with fewer opportunities, to foster their engagement and political participation. Furthermore, more regular exchange between EU Youth Dialogue National Working Groups and the European Commission should be facilitated. In 2025, the Council of the EU adopted conclusions on the EU Youth Dialogue in order to strengthen and improve the EU Youth Dialogue in the coming years by developing and implementing practical measures to address the process's main challenges. Since then, secretariat of the EU Youth Dialogue within the European Youth Forum is established. The EU Youth Dialogue is organised into 18-month work cycles. Each cycle focuses on a different thematic priority, linked to the European Youth Goals. The 11th cycle (January 2025-June 2026) focusses on Youth Goal number 1.¹¹¹
- (i) An *EU Youth Coordinator* to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation, knowledge development and exchange on youth issues within the European Commission services. In June 2021 the first EU Youth Coordinator was appointed. The Coordinator led, for example, the rollout of the youth check

¹⁰⁷ <https://youth.europa.eu/youth-policy/dialogues.en>

¹⁰⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupID=4004> en Ursula von der Leyen, Europe's Choice : *Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024 on 18 July 2024. 2029*

¹⁰⁹ <https://youth.europa.eu/strategy/pyab.en>

¹¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/publication/FNAP2024>

¹¹¹ <https://youth.europa.eu/get-involved/eu-youth-dialogue/look-back-eu-youth-dialogue-consultations.en>

process in the European Commission in 2025.¹¹² The EU youth check is a check ran on the key policy proposals by the European Commission in order to examine the potential impact of policies on young people.

- (j) *Equal access to quality Youth Information services and platforms*, including inter alia the European Youth Portal, notably with the support of European-wide organisations and promoting young people's rights, opportunities, youth services and EU programmes.
- (k) *The EU Work Plans for Youth will present priorities and actions* for triennial working periods within the EUYS, drawing on the guiding principles and priorities of the EUYS. The Council will set these EU Work Plans together with the Commission, beginning with a work plan for 2019-2021. The plans will allow addressing youth issues in other Council configurations and their preparatory bodies in other areas. In December 2024 the EU Youth Strategy Work Plan 2025-2027 was adopted.¹¹³
- (l) *Monitoring, reporting, evaluation*. The Commission will report on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy every three years, based on information provided by Member States and the Youth Wiki. The last report dates from March 2025.¹¹⁴ Progress will be monitored in the EU Youth Strategy Platform, with the assistance of youth organisations and other relevant stakeholders. The Dashboard of EU Youth Indicators can be used to monitor the overall situation of young people in Member States. A policy review of EU funded research projects should be conducted from 2019 on to extract relevant findings for the youth policy area.
- (m) *Mid-term Review* of the EUYS by the Council on the basis of an evaluation report of the Commission by 31 December 2023. The European Commission evaluated the EU Youth Strategy in 2024.¹¹⁵ The Strategy has been found to be effective overall. Some points of improvement were identified, such as the need to continue to strengthen the inclusion of the EU Youth Dialogue.

REFERENCES TO CHILDREN('S RIGHTS) POLICIES

The EUYS does not contain explicit references to children's (rights) policies. The Council does explicitly emphasize that all actions undertaken within this EUYS should affirm the international standards of human rights, and thus specifically **children's rights. Equality, non-discrimination, and participation** are underlying requirements for all policies and activities concerning young people.¹¹⁶ These general requirements are also guiding principles within the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. The EUYS also emphasises that young people should have equal access to quality **youth information on their rights**.¹¹⁷

¹¹² https://youth.europa.eu/strategy/euyouthcoordinator_en

¹¹³ Resolution of the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 13 December 2024 on the EU Youth Strategy Work Plan 2025-2027(C/2024/7438).

¹¹⁴ COM(2025) 117 final

¹¹⁵ COM (2024) 162 final en <https://youth.europa.eu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Infographic-EUYouthStrategy-final.pdf>

¹¹⁶ COM(2018)269, p. 4.

¹¹⁷ COM(2018)269, p. 13.

3 COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The Council of Europe is an international organisation composed of 46 member states¹¹⁸, covering almost the whole European continent. Its basic objective is to create a common democratic and legal area throughout the whole of the continent, ensuring respect for its fundamental values: human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

3.1 COUNCIL OF EUROPE POLICY AGENDA ON CHILDREN('S RIGHTS)

3.1.1 Legal basis

The **European Convention on Human Rights** (ECHR) of 1950 sets out civil and political rights and freedoms. The rights of children are not specifically mentioned in the Convention. However, pursuant to Article 1, the Convention applies to everyone within the jurisdiction of the States Parties, thus also to children. In an increasing number of cases brought before the European Court of Human Rights, issues of children's rights have been addressed.¹¹⁹

The **European Social Charter** (ESC) was adopted in 1961 and revised in 1996. The Charter complements the ECHR by guaranteeing social and economic human rights. In the revised Charter, two provisions exclusively address children's rights, namely Article 7 (the right of children and young persons to protection) and Article 17 (the right of children and young persons to social, legal and economic protection). The European Committee of Social Rights monitors compliance by the States Parties with the ESC.

The Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention) of 2007 requires the criminalisation of all kinds of sexual offences against children. It sets out that states in Europe and beyond shall adopt specific legislation and take measures to prevent sexual violence, to protect child victims and to prosecute perpetrators. The so-called "Lanzarote Committee", Committee of the Parties to the Convention, regularly monitors whether Parties effectively implement the provisions. The Committee is also charged with identifying good practices, in particular during capacity-building activities (conferences, study visits, etc.).

The **European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment** was adopted in 1987. Other **Council of Europe Conventions** address particular aspects of children's rights, namely:

- European Convention on the Legal Status of Children born out of Wedlock (1975)

¹¹⁸ On 16 March 2022, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe decided that the Russian Federation ceased to be a member of the Council of Europe as from 16 March 2022.

¹¹⁹ All the Court's judgments and a large selection of decisions, information on communicated cases, advisory opinions, press releases, legal summaries and Commission decisions and reports are published in the HUDOC database: https://echr.coe.int/Pages/home.aspx?p=caselaw&c=#n14597620384884950241259_pointer

- European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on the Restoration of Custody of Children (1980)
- European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights (1996)
- Convention on Contact concerning Children (2003)
- Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005)
- European Convention on the Adoption of Children (Revised) (2008)
- Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2011).
- Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law (2024)

In the **Warsaw Declaration** of 2005, the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe declared their commitment to '*eradicating violence against women and children, including domestic violence*'.¹²⁰ The **Warsaw Action Plan** states as regards the strengthening of human rights in the information society, that '*the Council of Europe shall ... continue its work on children in the information society, in particular as regards developing their media literacy skills and ensuring their protection against harmful content*'. Also, and more importantly, one of the goals catalogued under the third main task of the Council of Europe of 'Building a more humane and inclusive Europe' in the Warsaw Action Plan is 'Building a Europe for children'.

3.1.2 Decision-making body

The decision-making body of the Council of Europe is the **Committee of Ministers**, which is composed of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of all Council of Europe Member States or their permanent diplomatic representatives in Strasbourg.

3.1.3 Historical overview and main policy document

As a response to the Warsaw Declaration and Action Plan, the programme '**Building a Europe for and with children**' was launched in 2006, with two interlinked aims: the promotion of children's rights and the protection of children from violence. Since 2009, this has been guided by four consecutive Strategies on the Rights of the Child. The first one, the **Stockholm Strategy** for the years 2009-2011, was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 November 2008.¹²¹ The second one, the **Monaco Strategy**, was adopted on 15 February 2012, for the years 2012-2015. The third one, the **Sofia Strategy** 2016-2021, was adopted on 2 March 2016¹²².

The fourth one called '*Children's Rights in Action: from continuous implementation to joint innovation*', for the years 2022-2027¹²³, has been adopted by the Committee of Ministers in February 2022, and has been launched under the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers in April 2022. This is **currently the main policy document**. It guides the intergovernmental work on the rights of the child undertaken by the Council of Europe until 2027.

¹²⁰ CM(2005)79 final.

¹²¹ CM(2011)171 final.

¹²² CM(2015)175 final.

¹²³ <https://rm.coe.int/council-of-europe-strategy-for-the-rights-of-the-child-2022-2027-child/1680a5ef27> .

At the 4th Summit of the Council of Europe, held on 16 and 17 May 2023, Heads of State and Government from the organisation's 46 member states have adopted a **Declaration on the situation of children of Ukraine** as part of the [Reykjavik Declaration](#) **"United around our values"**. The Summit hosted by the Icelandic Presidency of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers has been a historic opportunity for European leaders to reaffirm their common commitment to the Council of Europe's core values and to refocus its mission in the light of new threats to human rights, including to the rights of the child, and democracy, and to further support its member State Ukraine through concrete measures to help achieve justice for the victims of the Russian aggression.

In the declaration is stated, among other things: “Throughout its history, the Council of Europe's standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law have been pivotal to ensuring and strengthening individual freedoms, peace and prosperity in our member States. As we work to promote the rights of the child, we underline the importance of education to give children and young people the necessary references to grow up embracing our democratic values in culturally diverse societies and take an active part in the protection of our cultural heritage.”

INSTITUTION RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Since January 2020, the implementation of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child is supervised by the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF), which is an intergovernmental body responsible for the standard-setting activities in the field of the rights of the child and providing a forum for exchanges on common challenges and good practices in this area. Additionally, it oversees the implementation of the Strategy for the Right of the Child, ensures that the rights of the child are mainstreamed into all relevant Council of Europe committees and bodies, and supports member States in protecting and promoting children's rights. Its Terms of Reference (2024-2027) set out in detail its tasks and responsibilities for these 4 years.¹²⁴

The **Children's Rights Division**, which belongs to the Directorate-General Democracy and Human Dignity (DG II), is providing the Secretariat of the CDENF and coordinates the implementation of the subsequent Strategies for the Rights of the Child within the organisation through an Inter-Secretariat Task Force on the Rights of the Child, where representatives of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Commissioner for Human Rights and approximately 30 other operational entities in charge of steering and expert committees, monitoring bodies and the relevant institutions and bodies participate. The Head of the Children's Rights Division is also the Council of Europe Coordinator on the Rights of the Child. The Task Force meets twice a year with a view to encouraging exchange and mutual update on progress achieved and challenges met with regard to the rights of the child within the Council of Europe.

TIME FRAME

The current Strategy contains the programme objectives for six years, from 2022 until 2027.

OBJECTIVES

The Strategy aims to remedy the gaps in children's legal protection in law and practice. It follows a comprehensive human rights approach based on the understanding that all children's rights are indivisible and interdependent.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ CM(2023)131-add final

¹²⁵ Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) para 22.

The Council of Europe's work on the rights of the child is based on the UNCRC and its four general principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development and the right to be heard.¹²⁶

The six strategic objectives are:

- There is also a child-friendly version of the Strategy available.¹²⁷

- Committee of Experts on the rights and the best interests of the child in parental separation and in care proceedings (CJ/ENF-ISE) together with the European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ), which finalised its work in 2024
- Committee of Experts on the prevention of violence (ENF-VAE)
- Committee of Experts on access to child-friendly justice through multidisciplinary and Interagency services (ENF-JUS)

- making the standards work for children
- involving all relevant stakeholders
- communicating children's rights
- evaluating performance

¹²⁶ UN Doc. CRC/GC/2003/5. §12.

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In April 2025 the Mid-Term Review Conference was organised under the Luxembourg Presidency to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.¹²⁸ The Conference programme was structured around the six strategic objectives of the Strategy. During the Conference, a strong emphasis was placed on shared responsibility. There was also genuine and structured involvement of children and young people. In January 2024 the Secretariat presented its first implementation report on the Strategy for the period 2022-2023. “The report sets out a number of challenges that lie ahead in each of the priority areas, as well as specific topics where action should be stepped up to ensure the full implementation of the Strategy, intending to give an opportunity to examine what could be done to further protect, respect and promote the rights of the child in Council of Europe member states, in line with the priorities set out under the Strategy, and as complemented by other Council of Europe thematic action plans”.¹²⁹ In January 2026 the second implementation report will be presented.

REFERENCES TO YOUTH POLICIES

The new Strategy also refers to the Youth Sector Strategy 2030 as a key reference. Under “1.1 Key references of the Council of Europe”, the Strategy of the Rights of the Child 2022-2027 mentions that it will aim at supporting and finding synergies with priorities and actions proposed by the Youth Sector Strategy 2030.

OTHER RELEVANT POLICY DOCUMENTS

Next to the Strategy on the rights of the child, there are also other relevant documents to share.

- Council of Europe Recommendation on the Protection of the rights and best interests of the child in care proceedings.¹³⁰
- Council of Europe Recommendation on the protection of the rights and best interests of the child in parental separation proceedings.¹³¹
- Council of Europe Recommendation on young people and climate action.¹³²
- Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.¹³³

3.2 COUNCIL OF EUROPE POLICY AGENDA ON YOUTH

3.2.1 Legal basis

In the **Warsaw Action Plan of 2005**, the third principal task of ‘Building a more humane and inclusive Europe’ includes the objective of ‘developing youth co-operation’. The Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe declared in this respect:

“We will intensify our efforts to empower young people to actively participate in democratic processes so that they can contribute to the promotion of our core values. The Council of Europe Youth Centres and the European Youth Foundation are important instruments to this effect. We will integrate a youth perspective in all Council of Europe

¹²⁸ Council of Europe Conference report of April 2025 on Mid-Term Review Conference for the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027).

¹²⁹ Secretariat of the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child, First implementation report of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child, January 2024.

¹³⁰ CM/Rec(2025)5

¹³¹ CM/Rec(2025)4

¹³² CM/Rec(2024)6

¹³³ CM/Rec(2012)2

activities. To promote diversity, inclusion, and participation in society, we decide to launch a Europe-wide youth campaign, in the spirit of the “European Youth Campaign against racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance” (1995). The Council of Europe will further develop its unique position in the youth field. It will continue to assist member states in developing national and local policy instruments and actively promote youth exchanges and youth mobility in Europe.”

3.2.2 Decision-making body

Characteristic for the Council of Europe, and unique at the international level, is the system of co-management that it employs in the policy field of youth, with the aim of enhancing youth participation. Such **co-management** entails that representatives of **youth organisations together with government officials** think about the priorities for the youth sector and jointly formulate policy proposals. The Committee of Ministers then adopts these proposals. Concretely, the following decision-making bodies can be distinguished (see Figure 1):

- The European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) is composed of government officials, who represent the state institutions responsible for youth matters in the 50 States Parties to the European Cultural Convention;
- The Advisory Council on Youth consists of 30 representatives of youth organisations and networks, who give input with respect to all youth sector initiatives of the Council of Europe;
- The Joint Council of Youth brings the CDEJ and the Advisory Council on Youth together in a co-decision body to agree on the priorities, aims and budgets for the youth sector;
- The Programming Committee on Youth brings together eight members each of the CDEJ and the Advisory Council on Youth in a “subsidiary co-decision body”, to decide and follow up on the activities of the European Youth Centres and the European Youth Foundation.

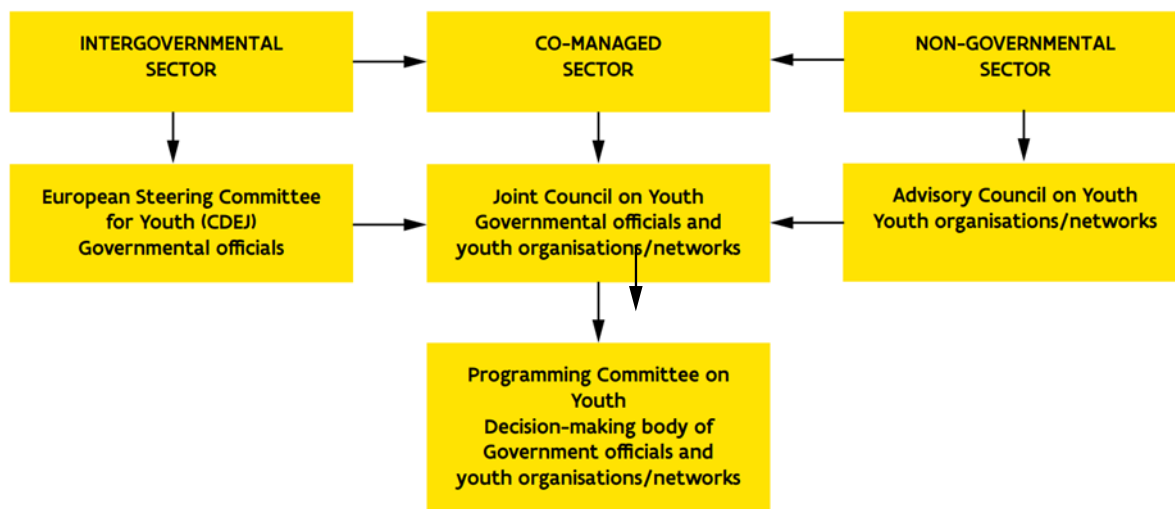


Figure 1: The Council of Europe system of co-management in the youth field¹³⁴

¹³⁴ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/home>

3.2.3 Historical overview

The Council of Europe has already been active in the youth field for a long time. In 1972, the European Youth Centre was established in Strasbourg. In 1998, the Committee of Ministers adopted a resolution on the Youth Policy of the Council of Europe.¹³⁵ On 25 November 2008, the Committee of Ministers adopted a new **resolution on the youth policy of the Council of Europe**.¹³⁶ This resolution takes various previous documents into account, namely the Warsaw Action Plan, the Final Declaration adopted by the 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, held in Kyiv (Ukraine) in October 2008¹³⁷, and the Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of 2008 on 'Refreshing the youth agenda of the Council of Europe'.¹³⁸ On May 2017, the Committee of Ministers adopted the new Recommendation to the Council of Europe member states on youth work.¹³⁹ The recommendations set out in this document are aimed at advancing youth work, *'in providing sufficient resources, particularly at the local level and supporting the exchange of good practices and promoting equal access to youth work.'*

As mentioned above, on 16 and 17 May 2023, the Council of Europe Summit was held in Reykjavík. This was the fourth time in the 74-year history of the Council of Europe. The leaders decided to establish a Register of Damage caused by the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine and agreed to strengthen the Council of Europe and its work in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law by adopting a declaration on the situation of the children of Ukraine, democracy principles, recommitting to the European Convention on Human Rights and developing tools to tackle emerging challenges in the area of technology and the environment.

The declaration stated, with regard to youth, the following: *"We set the Council 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. We also call for a review and further reinforcement of the Organisation's outreach to, and meaningful engagement with, civil society organisations and national human rights institutions."*¹⁴⁰

At the same summit, the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy¹⁴¹ have been adopted, in which principle 8 refers to the importance of participation of young people in democratic life and decision-making processes. Now the Council of Europe is adding the integration of a Youth Perspective in the organisation. In October 2025 the 10th Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth took place in Malta. The main theme of the conference was 'Young people for democracy: youth perspectives in action'.¹⁴² There had not been a ministerial conference since 2012. During the conference, ministers for youth assessed developments since the last conference in view of the Reykjavik

¹³⁵ Resolution CM/Res(98)6 on the Youth Policy of the Council of Europe. See also, among others, Recommendation 1585 (2002) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, on Youth policies in the Council of Europe.

¹³⁶ Resolution CM/Res(2008)23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe.

¹³⁷ Final Declaration: "The future of the Council of Europe youth policy: Agenda 2020", adopted by the 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, held in Kyiv (Ukraine) on 10 and 11 October 2008.

¹³⁸ Recommendation 1844(2008) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, on Refreshing the youth agenda of the Council of Europe.

¹³⁹ CM/Rec(2017)4.

¹⁴⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/4th-summit-of-heads-of-state-and-government-of-the-council-of-europe/1680ab40c1>.

¹⁴¹ <https://rm.coe.int/4th-summit-of-heads-of-state-and-government-of-the-council-of-europe/1680ab40c1>

¹⁴² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/10th-ministerial-conference-2025>

Declaration and agreed on the main orientations for European youth policy. By the end of the conference a final declaration was adopted on “Young People for Democracy: Youth Perspectives in Action.”¹⁴³ They also adopted a resolution on the Council of Europe Reference Framework on a Youth Perspective.¹⁴⁴ The resolution is a next step in order to promote and support the integration of a youth perspective.

3.2.4 Main policy document

On 22 January 2020, the Committee of Ministers adopted a new **resolution on Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030**⁴⁵. This resolution defines the framework for the Council of Europe youth sector to “*enable young people across Europe to actively uphold, defend, promote and benefit from the Council of Europe’s core values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law*”.

INSTITUTION RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The Youth Department, which forms part of the Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation of the Directorate-General of Democracy (DGII) of the Council of Europe, is responsible for the implementation of the Council of Europe youth policy (see Annex 1). The Youth Department 'elaborates guidelines, programmes and legal instruments for the development of coherent and effective youth policies at local, national and European levels'.

The Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) will take stock of the implementation of the Strategy. In July 2025 the Mid-Term Review of the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030 was presented.¹⁴⁶ The Joint Council on Youth also defines the strategic priorities to be taken within the Youth Sector Strategy. The most recent priorities of the Council of Europe youth sector have been adopted in 2025 for 2024-2027.¹⁴⁷

TIME FRAME

The Strategy will be the framework from 2020 until 2030.

OBJECTIVES

Actively upholding, defending, promoting, and benefiting from the Council of Europe's core values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, by:

- strengthening young people's access to rights
- deepening youth knowledge and expertise
- broadening youth participation

AGENDA – THEMATIC PRIORITIES

The four priorities of the Council of Europe youth policy and action are:

- Revitalising pluralistic democracy: a stronger contribution to young people's democratic citizenship and active participation
- Access to rights: guaranteeing better access for young people to their rights

¹⁴³ <https://rm.coe.int/final-declaration-ministerial-2765-4580-6097-1/488028cf71>

¹⁴⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/resolution-on-the-coe-reference-framework-on-a-youth-perspective-w-app/488028cf72>

¹⁴⁵ Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030.

146 COM(2025)11

¹⁴⁷ Joint Council on Youth, Priorities 2024-27, <https://rm.coe.int/priorities-2024-2027-adopted-by-cmj48/1680aeb0fc>

- Living together in peaceful and inclusive societies: diverse young people living free of discrimination, of violence, of exclusion, and are contributing to peaceful and inclusive societies
- Youth work: youth work and non-formal education/learning strengthen young people's autonomy and democratic citizenship.

APPROACHES, METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

To implement these priorities, the following approaches, methods, and instruments are proposed:

- intergovernmental co-operation at pan-European level on the preparation and implementation of youth policy
- assistance to youth policy development in member States through bilateral and multilateral support measures
- capacity building of young multipliers (youth leaders and youth workers) through the European Youth Centres and their education and training programmes
- good governance and youth participation, via the co-management system
- shared decision taking by young people and government representatives
- financial support to the development of youth civil society, by the European Youth Foundation
- innovation in youth work, youth policy and youth research
- co-operation between policy makers, practitioners, and researchers in the field of youth
- quality development and standard setting in the field of youth policy
- co-operation with the European Union and partnerships with other stakeholders and services
- youth mainstreaming and cross-departmental co-operation inside the Council of Europe
- proactive outreach to and engagement of young people experiencing disadvantage
- anticipating future trends, challenges, and opportunities

The periodical assessment of the strategy will be guaranteed through the successive programmes and budgets of the Council of Europe up to 2030.

REFERENCES TO CHILDREN('S RIGHTS) POLICIES

Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030 makes scant mention of children's rights or policies. Only in the preamble does the resolution mention the "Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)", among several other strategies relating to areas such as gender, disability, and discrimination.

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4 UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations is an intergovernmental organisation composed of 193 Member States, committed to maintaining international peace and security and promoting better living standards and human rights.

4.1 UN POLICY ON CHILDREN(S RIGHTS) AND YOUTH

4.1.1 Historical overview

In 2000, world leaders adopted the **United Nations Millennium Declaration**¹⁴⁸, which called on the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocols and set out a series of time-bound targets to be achieved by 2015, known as the **Millennium Development Goals**.¹⁴⁹ For 15 years, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were a guiding force on many issues affecting the lives of children, young people and their families. During this time, progress was made in reducing preventable child deaths, getting more boys and girls into schools, reducing extreme poverty, and ensuring more people have access to safe water and nutritious food. However, progress was uneven and many of the most pressing issues for the world were not adequately covered in the MDGs. The Millennium Declaration and the associated Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) essentially shaped a social service delivery agenda of primary relevance to developing countries.

4.1.2 Main policy document

In September 2015 the UN General Assembly adopted a Resolution entitled “**Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**”¹⁵⁰, also called the post-2015 development agenda (hereafter 2030 Agenda or SDGs), at the UN Sustainable Development Summit. The 2030 Agenda adopts a general and comprehensive set of universal Sustainable Development Goals and targets. The 2030 agenda is the result of an intensive public consultation, including opinions of governments, civil society, the private sector, academics, the UN system and concerned individuals.¹⁵¹ The SDGs are people-centred, transformative, universal, and interlinked. Implementing the SDGs requires collaboration and partnership between developing and developed countries, but also between governments, NGO’s, private and public sector, academics, and society in its whole.^{152 153}

In September 2024 the United Nations held the ‘Summit of the Future’. It is a high-level event, bringing world leaders together to forge a new international consensus on how we deliver a better present and safeguard the future. The Pact for the Future, the Global Digital Component and the Declaration on Future Generations were adopted, the most wide-ranging international agreement in decades, aiming at making the international system more inclusive, effective and fit for current challenges. Within the Pact is a chapter dedicated to youth and future generations, containing the following actions:

¹⁴⁸ For more information: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

¹⁴⁹ This resolution is not legally binding, in order to prevent legal obstruction and complexity.

¹⁵⁰ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/291/89/PDF/N1529189.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁵¹ UN Doc. A/RES/70/1. (see also: A/68/970 and A/68/970).

¹⁵² UN Doc. A/RES/70/1.

¹⁵³ The UN Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018) on Youth, Peace and Security can also be mentioned here.

- Action 34. We will invest in the social and economic development of children and young people so that they can reach their full potential.
- Action 35. We will promote, protect and respect the human rights of all young people and foster social inclusion and integration.
- Action 36. We will strengthen meaningful youth participation at the national level.
- Action 37. We will strengthen meaningful youth participation at the international level.

The Pact for the Future and the annexes are commitments of the states to build a more inclusive, secure and sustainable world. While most fall under the responsibility of Member States, the United Nations is also advancing a wide range of actions and supporting Member States in their efforts. The UN's progress on the Declaration on Future Generations is monitored.¹⁵⁴ In 2026 the UN will report on how the Declaration is being implemented.

INSTITUTION RESPONSIBLE FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The implementation of this Agenda and its Goals and targets will be followed up and reviewed until 2030 on a voluntary and country-led basis. Monitoring and evaluating of the progress on the implementation of the Goals and actions are primarily focused on a **national level** and organised by the **governing bodies of the Member States**. Complimentary monitoring also exists on a regional and global level. The United Nations **High-level Political Forum** on Sustainable Development (HLPF), is the main platform with a central role in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the SDGs on a **global level**. The establishment of the High-level Political Forum was mandated in 2012 by the outcome document 'The Future We Want' of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).¹⁵⁵

The Forum meets annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council for eight days and every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly for two days. It provides for the full and effective participation of all States members of the United Nations and States members of specialized agencies. In addition, the United Nations Children's Fund – UNICEF - monitors the SDGs so that it delivers for all children globally.

TIME FRAME

The Resolution '**Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**' was adopted on 25 September 2015 and is valid until 2030.

OBJECTIVES

The SDGs want to build further on the outcomes of the MDGs. Member states aim to **end all forms of poverty**, and to ensure that 'no one will be left behind'. The SDGs address the social, economic, and environmental dimensions a sustainable development. It seeks to realise the human rights of all, and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. World leaders further reaffirmed their vision of a 'world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation'.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ <https://www.un.org/pact-for-the-future/en/overview-uns-progress>

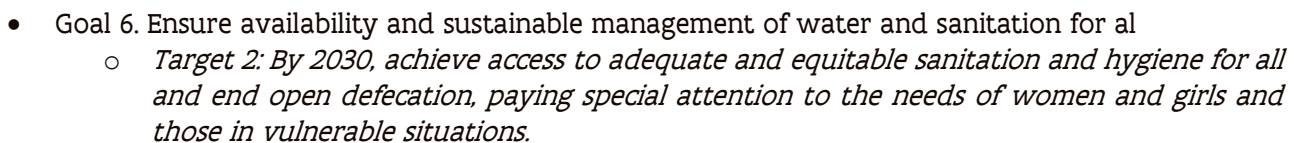
¹⁵⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/733FutureWeWant.pdf>

¹⁵⁶ UN Doc. A/RES/70/1.

The SDGs set out 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets that are based on five pillars (5 P's): People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. It is important to note that all SDGs are integrated and indivisible and should be understood as such. The achievement of the Goals and targets will have a beneficial influence on children and young people. Furthermore, some of the Goals and targets are explicitly directed towards children and young people and their rights:

- ////////////////////////////////////

- ## Planet



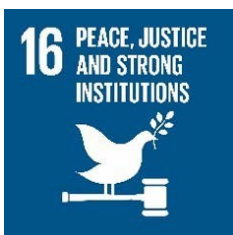
10.06.2026

Prosperity



- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
 - *Target 5: By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value*
 - *Target 7: Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms*
 - *Target 8.b: By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization*
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable
 - *Target 2: By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.*
 - *Target 7: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities*

Peace



- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels
 - *Target 2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children*
 - *Target 9: By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration*

Partnership



APPROACHES, METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

The Goals and targets of the SDGs will be monitored and reviewed using **a set of global indicators**. The 2030 agenda mandates the UN Statistical Commission to set a global SDG indicator framework for following and reviewing SDG goals and targets. The Statistical Commission established an Inter-Agency & Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDG)¹⁵⁷ to outline this framework. The Statistical Commission approved an official list of global SDG indicators in March 2017 and was adopted by the General Assembly in July 2017.¹⁵⁸ It has classified the 232 global indicators based on methodological development and data availability. Several indicators must be broken down according to relevant categories such as gender, age, geographical location, etc. For some indicators there is already broad methodological agreement, while for others further work is needed. Countries will need to develop a set of national indicators that align with this framework and build upon existing monitoring methods used by the national statistical office or system. The Resolution states that the indicator framework¹⁵⁹ will be adjusted annually and reviewed comprehensively by the Statistical Commission in 2020 and 2025, and that it will be completed by regional and national indicators developed by Member States.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025¹⁶⁰ marks the tenth annual stocktaking of global progress toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With the 2030 deadline only five years away, the report delivers a stark assessment: the Sustainable Development Goals have improved millions of lives, but the current pace of change is insufficient to fully achieve all the Goals by 2030.

In §39, the Resolution explains that “(t)he scale and ambition of the new Agenda requires a revitalized **Global Partnership** to ensure its implementation. We fully commit to this. This Partnership will work in a spirit of global solidarity, in particular solidarity with the poorest and with people in vulnerable situations. It will facilitate an intensive global engagement in support of implementation of all the Goals and targets, bringing together Governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system, and other actors and mobilizing all available resources”.

¹⁵⁷ The IAEG comprises of 28 member states representing all regions of the world, with regional and international agencies as observers. A rotating mechanism is put in place. The UN Statistical Division acts as the secretariat and coordinates inputs from the UN system.

¹⁵⁸ UN Doc./A/RES/71/313.

¹⁵⁹ The official indicator list includes the global indicator framework as contained in A/RES/71/313, the refinements agreed by the Statistical Commission at its 49th session in March 2018 (E/CN.3/2018/2, Annex II) and 50th session in March 2019 (E/CN.3/2019/2, Annex II), changes from the 2020 Comprehensive Review (E/CN.3/2020/2, Annex II) and refinements (E/CN.3/2020/2, Annex III) from the 51st session in March 2020, and refinements from the 52nd session in March 2021 (E/CN.3/2021/2, Annex). https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/Global%20Indicator%20Framework%20after%202021%20refinement_Eng.pdf

¹⁶⁰ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/>

UNICEF monitors the 48 child-related SDG's on a country- and universal basis.¹⁶¹ The Economic and Social Council has published a report in 2025 exploring the connection between the SDG's and the World Programme of Action for Youth.¹⁶²

4.2 UN POLICY ON CHILDREN ('S RIGHTS)

4.2.1 Legal basis

Already in 1924, the League of Nations, the precursor to the United Nations, adopted the **Geneva Declaration** of the Rights of the Child. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 paid attention to the particular needs of children, providing in its article 25 that 'motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance'. In 1959, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the **Declaration on the Rights of the Child**, which consisted of ten principles.¹⁶³

At the thirtieth anniversary of this Declaration, on 20 November 1989, the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** was adopted by the General Assembly and opened for signature.¹⁶⁴ The CRC is a legally binding instrument, setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children. As of October 2015, there are 196 Parties to the CRC, turning it into the most universally ratified human rights convention.¹⁶⁵ In 2000, the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC) were adopted.¹⁶⁶ In 2011, the General Assembly approved a third Optional Protocol on a communications procedure (OPIC).¹⁶⁷

INSTITUTION RESPONSIBLE FOR MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the CRC and its Optional Protocols. The Committee clarifies its interpretation of the provisions contained in these instruments by issuing General Comments.¹⁶⁸

TIME FRAME

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989, its first two Optional Protocols in 2000. The third Optional Protocol was adopted on 19 December 2011 and opened for signature on 28 February 2012. It entered into force on 14 April 2014.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶¹ <https://data.unicef.org/sdgs/>

¹⁶² UN Doc. E/CN.5/2025/4

¹⁶³ UN Doc. A/4354.

¹⁶⁴ UN Doc. A/44/49.

¹⁶⁵ https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsq_no=IV-11&chapter=4&clang=_en_3

¹⁶⁶ UN Doc. A/RES/54/263.

¹⁶⁷ A/RES/66/138.

¹⁶⁸ https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=5&DocTypeID=11

¹⁶⁹ According to article 19(1) OPIC, the Protocol enters in force three months after the deposit of the tenth instrument of ratification or accession. On the 24th of July 2018, countries that have ratified the Optional Protocol are: Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Belgium, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, Mongolia, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Samoa, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine and Uruguay.

OBJECTIVES

The four core principles of the CRC are non-discrimination (art. 2); the best interests of the child (art.3), survival and development (art. 6) and respect for the views of the child / participation (art. 12).¹⁷⁰

THEMATIC PRIORITIES

In its general guidelines regarding the form and content of initial reports¹⁷¹ and periodic reports¹⁷² to be submitted by States Parties, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has grouped the articles of the Convention into seven clusters:

1. General measures of implementation (arts. 4, 42 and 44, para. 6)
2. Definition of the child (art. 1)
3. General principles (arts. 2, 3, 6 and 12)
4. Civil rights and freedoms (arts. 7, 8, 13-17 and 37 (a))
5. Family environment and alternative care (arts. 5, 9-11, 18, paras. 1 and 2; 19-21, 25, 27, para. 4 and 39)
6. Education, leisure and cultural activities (arts. 28, 29 and 31)
7. Special protection measures (arts. 22, 30, 32-36, 37 (b)-(d), 38, 39 and 40).

APPROACHES, METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

States Parties undertake to submit to the Committee reports on the measures they have adopted to implement the rights protected by the CRC, initially within two years of the entry into force of the treaty, after that every five years.¹⁷³ The Committee provides feedback to the States Parties in the form of concluding observations.

On 2 February 2023, the Committee decided that the simplified reporting procedure will be the standard reporting procedure for periodic reports under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and for initial reports under the Optional Protocols as from 1 January 2024. The Committee will send the State party that did not opt out of the simplified reporting procedure a request for specific information, known as List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LOIPR) containing up to 30 questions. The State party's replies to the LOIPR constitute the State party's report to the Committee¹⁷⁴.

Based on the third Optional Protocol on a communication procedure (OPIC), the Committee is able to consider individual complaints (or communications) from children and their representatives concerning alleged violations of the CRC and its first two Optional Protocols. In addition, OPIC also provides for inter-state communications and inquiry procedures. In 2019, the Committee adopted new rules of procedure.¹⁷⁵

Two conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) address the issue of child labour: ILO Convention No. 138 concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1973) and ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour

¹⁷⁰ UN Doc. CRC/GC/2003/5, §12.

¹⁷¹ UN Doc. CRC/C/5.

¹⁷² UN Doc. CRC/C/58/Rev.1.

¹⁷³ CRC, art. 44, 1.

¹⁷⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crc/reporting-guidelines>

¹⁷⁵ UN Doc. CRC/C/4/Rev.5.

(1999). The ILO warned that progress in putting a halt to the worst forms of child labour is slowing down, and that renewed energy must be invested.¹⁷⁶ In response, at the Global Child Labour Conference in May 2010, more than 450 delegates from 80 countries agreed on a roadmap, which characterizes the effective abolition of child labour as a “moral necessity”. In November 2010, the Governing Body (the executive body of the ILO) endorsed the Global Plan of Action for achieving the elimination of the worst forms of child labour by 2016, which includes the aforementioned roadmap.

4.2.2 Decision-making body

Within the United Nations system, the General Assembly is the main policymaking organ. It comprises all 193 Member States of the United Nations.

4.2.3 Historical overview

In 1989, the CRC was adopted (see above). At the **World Summit for Children** of 1990, two policy documents were adopted: The World **Declaration** on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and a **Plan of Action** for implementing this Declaration in the 1990s.¹⁷⁷ The political leaders committed themselves to a ten-point programme to safeguard the rights of children and improve their living conditions, around ten action points.¹⁷⁸

In 1996, a mid-decade review of the progress on implementation of the World Summit Declaration and Action Plan was carried out.⁸² In 2001, the Secretary-General presented its report ‘We the Children: End-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children’.⁸³ Some 155 countries had drafted national programmes of action aimed at implementing the goals of the World Summit for Children, and more than 100 states had carried out monitoring surveys.

At the special session of the UN General Assembly on children in 2002, the document ‘**A world fit for children**’¹⁷⁹ was adopted. For the decade 2002-2012, world leaders stressed their commitment to complete the unfinished agenda of the World Summit and to create a world fit for children, which was described as follows:

“A world fit for children is one in which all children get the best possible start in life and have access to a quality basic education, including primary education that is compulsory and available free to all, and in which all children, including adolescents, have ample opportunity to develop their individual capacities in a safe and supportive environment. We will promote the physical, psychological, spiritual, social, emotional, cognitive, and cultural development of children as a matter of national and global priority.”

¹⁷⁶ Accelerating action against child labour. Report of the Director-General, International Labour Conference, 99th session, 2010, ILO/10/19.

¹⁷⁷ UN Doc. A/45/625, Annex.

¹⁷⁸ (1) Promoting ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, (2) Enhance children's health, (3) Take measures to eradicate hunger, malnutrition and famine, (4) Strengthen the role of women, promote maternal health and family planning, (5) Work for respect for the role of the family, (5) Provide basic education and reduce illiteracy, (7) Ameliorate the plight of children in especially difficult circumstances, (8) Protect children during armed conflicts, (9) Work for common measures to protect the environment, (10) Work for the alleviation of poverty and the revitalization of economic growth.

¹⁷⁹ <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/7321/file/A%20world%20fit%20for%20children.pdf>

Promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS were identified as priority areas of action.

4.2.4 Main policy document

The current legal framework on children ('s rights) can be found in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The United Nations has not adopted a new policy document exclusively directed towards children or children's rights since 'A world fit for children'. However, it did adopt for example the Pathfinding Global Alliance in 2024, aiming at ending all violence against children. It is a platform for partners to share ideas, actions, and lessons learned, as well as to collaborate and demonstrate progress.¹⁸⁰

4.3 UN POLICY AGENDA ON YOUTH

4.3.1 Legal basis

In 1965, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the **Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples**.¹⁸¹ According to this non-binding instrument, young people shall be brought up *"in a spirit of peace, justice, mutual respect and understanding"* (Principle I) and *"in the knowledge of the dignity and equality of all men, without distinction as to race, colour, ethnic origins or beliefs"* (Principle III). Associations of young people are encouraged to promote the purposes of the United Nations (Principle V).

4.3.2 Decision-making body

Within the United Nations system, the General Assembly is the main policymaking organ. It comprises all 193 Member States of the United Nations.

4.3.3 Historical overview

In 1979, the General Assembly decided to designate 1985 as the **International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace**.¹⁸² The year offered a *'useful and significant opportunity for drawing attention to the situation and the specific needs and aspirations of youth, for increasing co-operation at all levels in dealing with youth issues, for undertaking concerted action programmes in favour of youth and for improving the participation of young people in the study, decision-making processes and resolutions of major national, regional and international problems'*.¹⁸³ From 1980 to 1984, several plenary meetings of the UN General Assembly focus on preparations for the International Youth Year and marks the first time that this policy-making organ is devoted to the topic of youth. Significantly, in a 1985 Secretary-

¹⁸⁰ <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/en/pathfinding-global-alliance>

¹⁸¹ <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/195840?ln=en>

¹⁸² UN Doc. A/RES/34/151.

¹⁸³ UN Doc. A/RES/40/1.

General Report, the UN defines young people as a broad population made up of different subgroups, rather than a single demographic category, for the first time. At the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year, in 1995, the United Nations strengthened its commitment towards young people by adopting the **World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)** to the Year 2000 and Beyond.¹⁸⁴

In 1999 the 12th of August was declared as the **International Youth Day**. The International Youth Day promotes better awareness of the World Programme of Action for Youth.¹⁸⁵ The theme of International Youth Day 2025 was 'Local Youth Actions for the SDGs and Beyond'.¹⁸⁶

In 2021 UN Member States unanimously agreed to establish a **United Nations Youth Office** as a dedicated entity for youth affairs. The Youth Office is established within the UN Secretariat. As provided by General Assembly resolution 76/306 in 2022, the work of the UN Youth Office focuses on:

- Advancing youth priorities across the UN System in the areas of peace and security, sustainable development, and human rights, by promoting meaningful and inclusive youth participation in UN activities and decision-making processes.
- Strengthening coordination and accountability mechanisms across the UN System to ensure the UN delivers on its commitments to youth, including support to Member States, upon request, in empowering youth and fostering participation in national and global processes.
- Fostering partnerships and innovation by developing multi-stakeholder initiatives and spearheading innovative approaches for youth empowerment and meaningful youth engagement.
- Enhancing representation of young people at the UN through equitable access to internships, employment and leadership opportunities to youth in all their diversity.
- Strengthening intergenerational and intercultural dialogue and collaboration to foster solidarity across age groups and cultures.
- Building capacity and bridging gaps through supportive initiatives that enhance education, skills development and capacity-building to enable young people to thrive and contribute meaningfully to their societies.
- Mobilizing resources to bridge the digital divide and create opportunities for young people to thrive in the evolving global landscape.
- Engaging directly with youth through inclusive and innovative outreach strategies, including on social media, to amplify young people's voices and ensure their contributions shape global and local decision-making processes alike.¹⁸⁷

In 2023, Dr. Felipe Paullier was assigned as the first-ever Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs, leading the UN Youth Office. A Youth Office Reference Group helps to shape the work of the Youth Office. Members of the Youth Reference Group provide strategic advice and guidance to the UN Youth Office. Their contributions help shape both specific initiatives and the broader vision for how the UN Youth Office works with and for youth.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ UN Doc. A/RES/50/81.

¹⁸⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/crc/reporting-guidelines>

¹⁸⁶ <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/youth/events/iyd2025>

¹⁸⁷ <https://www.un.org/youthaffairs/en/about-us>

¹⁸⁸ <https://www.un.org/youthaffairs/en/youth-reference-group>

the SDG's.¹⁸⁹ Now the Youth Strategy is entering its second phase (2025-2030).¹⁹⁰

4.3.4 Main policy document

on measures to strengthen national capacities in the field of youth.

In 2025 the Economic and Social Council published a report on the policies and programmes involving youth.¹⁹¹ In the report 'the Secretary General explores in the present report the connections between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the World Programme of Action for Youth, with a particular focus on how local youth actions can accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.'

INSTITUTION RESPONSIBLE FOR MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION

Focal Point on Youth is in charge of monitoring progress and constraints in achieving the goals of the WPAY. It resides under the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA DISD).¹⁹² It has various publications on youth, among which the World Youth Reports.¹⁹³ The Division for Social Development furthermore provides support to the Commission for Social Development (CSocD). As advisory body to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on key social development issues and policies, the CSocD is responsible for the implementation and follow-up of the WPAY.¹⁹⁴ The Commission currently has 46 members, with memberships based on equitable geographical distribution and for four-year terms.

TIME FRAME

the UN General Assembly. The second phase concerned worldwide implementation to the year 2000. In the third phase, from 2001 to 2010, the focus was on “*further implementation and evaluation of progress made, and obstacles encountered*”; and suggestions should be formulated as regards “*appropriate adjustments to long-term objectives and specific measures to improve the situation of young people*”. In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the **Supplement to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond**,

¹⁸⁹ United Nations Youth Office, Youth2030: First Interim Review, July 2024.

¹⁹⁰ United Nations Youth Office, Youth2030: Phase 2, April 2025.

¹⁹¹ UN Doc. E/CN.5/2025/4

¹⁹² <https://social.desa.un.org/>

¹⁹³ <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/youth/united-nations-world-youth-report-wyr>

¹⁹⁴ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/united-nations-commission-for-social-development-csod-social-policy-and-development-division.html>

which expanded on the five additional priority areas.¹⁹⁵ The Supplement contains various references to ‘children and youth’. Interestingly, with respect to armed conflict, a series of proposals for action aims at ‘protecting youth under age 18 from direct involvement in armed conflict’ and is thus in fact limited to a specific age group within youth that coincides with the international definition of ‘children’, i.e. minus 18 years old. Resolution 66/121 of 19 December 2011 on policies and programmes involving youth reaffirmed the World Programme of Action for Youth, including its fifteen interrelated priority areas, and called for further implementation on all levels.

At the first, and so far only, Global Forum on Youth Policy in 2014, led by the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, the co-conveners committed in the Baku Commitment to Youth Policies for *“further promoting and supporting the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth”* and *“promoting synergies between youth policies and broader development policies and frameworks, particularly in the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and means of implementation thereof”*.

OBJECTIVES

The Programme of Action “*focuses in particular on measures to strengthen national capacities in the field of youth and to increase the quality and quantity of opportunities available to young people for full, effective and constructive participation in society*”.

AGENDA – THEMATIC PRIORITIES

The WPAY covers **fifteen youth priority areas** and contains principal issues, specific objectives, proposals for action in each of these areas. The fifteen identified fields of priority are education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, substance abuse, juvenile justice, leisure-time activities, girls, and young women and the full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making, as well as globalisation, information and communication technologies, HIV/AIDS, armed conflict, and intergenerational issues¹⁹⁶. The WPAY includes various references to ‘children and youth’ and ‘street children’ and refers to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the context of the protection of girls and young women from economic exploitation and hazardous work. Nevertheless, no structural links with policies on children’s rights have been established.

The World Youth Report is a publication of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESCA). It addresses youth development issues around the world. The World Youth Report 2003 examined the global situation of young people. The World Youth Report 2005 was entitled 'Young People today, and in 2015'. The World Youth Report 2007, 'Young people's transition to adulthood: Progress and challenges', provided a regional overview of the challenges faced by young people in the different priority areas. The World Youth Report 2010 focused on youth and climate change; the World Youth Report 2012 was entitled 'Youth Employment: Youth Perspectives on the Pursuit of Decent Work in Changing Times'. The World Youth Report 2013 was entitled 'Youth and Migration'. The World Youth Report 2015 has been about youth civic engagement. The 2020 Report was about social entrepreneurship and the 2030 agenda. The most recent 2025 Report was about youth mental health and well-being.

¹⁹⁵ UN Doc. A/C.3/62/L.4

¹⁹⁶ In August 1998, in the eve of the 21st century, several commitments on those policy fields were stated in the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, as part of the outcomes of the 1 World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth.

APPROACHES, METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

According to the WPAY, *“implementation of the WPAY is ultimately the responsibility of Governments with the support of the international community and in cooperation, as appropriate, with the non-governmental and private sectors”*. In the implementation, Governments should *“promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes”*. As regards the implementation of the WPAY at national level, the Programme (moreover) urges or calls on governments to:

- Formulate and adopt an integrated national youth policy as a means of addressing youth-related concerns;
- Undertake special efforts to develop and disseminate model frameworks for integrated policies and to identify and organise an appropriate division of responsibilities among governmental and non-governmental entities concerned with youth-related issues.
- Strengthen national capacities for data collection and dissemination of information, research and policy studies, planning, implementation, and coordination.
- Establish or strengthen national coordinating mechanisms for integrated youth policies and programmes.
- In a report of the Secretary General of 2007, the advancements and difficulties as regards the participation of young people in the global economy were analysed.¹⁹⁷ In its resolution on ‘Policies and programmes involving youth: youth in the global economy’, the UN General Assembly formulated various recommendations towards Member States in this respect.¹⁹⁸ A report of the Secretary General of 2009 focused on the implementation of the two other clusters, the well-being of youth and their role in civil society.¹⁹⁹ Again, the UN General Assembly extracted various policy recommendations from this report with respect to the eleven priority areas²⁰⁰:

In December 2009, the UN General Assembly decided to proclaim the year commencing on 12 August 2010 the **International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding** among others to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the International Youth Year of 1985.²⁰¹ Until 11 August 2011, a wide range of activities took place throughout the world, guided by the United Nations Framework approach. This system’s approach focused on three key areas: creating awareness (to increase commitment and investment in youth); mobilising and engaging (to increase youth participation and partnerships); and connecting and building bridges (to increase intercultural understanding among youth).

Following on the International Year of Youth, the United Nation Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) was established. The aim of the IANYD is to establish a more structured coordination mechanism and to ensure the greatest possible efficacy in UN efforts. IANYD advocates for, supports and reviews progress on the implementation of UN Resolutions, Conventions and the internationally agreed development goals that are youth-related. In addition, IANYD also contributes to increasing the understanding and visibility of the UN System’s work on youth development. In particular, the Network:

- Provides a forum for cooperation and support;

¹⁹⁷ UN Doc. A/62/61-E/2007/7. See also UN Doc. A/62/61/Add.1-E/2007/7/Add.1, elaborating on goals and targets for monitoring the progress of youth in the global economy.

¹⁹⁸ UN Doc. A/RES/62/162.

¹⁹⁹ UN Doc. A/64/61-E/2009/3.

²⁰⁰ UN Doc. A/RES/64/130.

- Provides an opportunity for ongoing exchange of information on the UN system's work on youth development, including through knowledge management initiatives and tools;
- Strengthens and supports cooperation to promote youth development, through joint advocacy, initiatives and other forms of cooperation;
- Draws on the members' networks and relationships with governments, youth-led and youth-focused organizations, donor agencies, civil society organizations, multilateral organizations and others, to advance youth development;
- Facilitates and supports youth involvement and participation in the UN System and its programmes or initiatives at all levels.²⁰²

REFERENCES TO CHILDREN('S RIGHTS) POLICIES

The World Programme of Action for Youth contains some references to 'street children' and 'children and youth' but does not establish links with existing policies on children(s) rights.

²⁰¹ UN Doc. A/RES/64/134.

²⁰² <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/youth/un-inter-agency-network-on-youth-development>

5 ANNEX 1: EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY AGENDAS ON CHILDREN, YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: STATE OF THE ART

FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE		POLICY AGENDAS ON CHILDREN’S RIGHTS		
		European Union	Council of Europe	United Nations
Legal basis / framework of reference	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	- Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000/2007) - Article 3 (3) al. 2 of the Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union (2008)	- European Convention on Human Rights (1950) - European Social Charter (1961/1996) - Council of Europe conventions relevant to children - Warsaw Declaration and Action Plan (2005)	- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and three Optional Protocols - ILO Convention No. 138 concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1973) - ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999)
Decision-making body		For trafficking and sexual exploitation of children: European Parliament and Council of the European Union For other measures that impact on children(‘s rights): linked to the substantive field and according to the EU inter-institutional procedures	Committee of Ministers, supported by the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF)	United Nations General Assembly International Labour Conference
Key reference / Main policy document		EU Strategy for the Rights of the Child	Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022- 2027) “Children’s Rights in Action: from continuous implementation to joint innovation”	“Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG’s)’

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Responsibilities of States Parties / Appeal to the Member States	Undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social, and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation.			Implementation of the plan by all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership
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POLICY AGENDAS ON YOUTH

	European Union	Council of Europe	United Nations
Legal basis	- Arts. 6 and 165,2 of the Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union of 2008	- Warsaw Action Plan (2005)	- Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965)
Decision-making body	Council of Youth Ministers	Committee of Ministers, supported by a system of co-management between the following institutions: - The European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) - The Advisory Council on Youth - The Joint Council of Youth - The Programming Committee on Youth	United Nations General Assembly
Key reference / Main policy document	European Council of Youth Ministers' resolution of 26 November 2018 on the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027	Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030	World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (WPAY)
Type of document	Resolution of the Council of Youth Ministers (non-binding)	Resolution of the Committee of Ministers (non-binding)	Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly (non-binding)

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