R15 The Manifesto of the Generation in Crisis

Proposer: FYEG Executive Committee
Agenda item: 4. Resolutions

Motion text

At the end of 2021, in agreement with the European Parliament and the Council, the European Commission declared 2022 as the European Year of Youth.

We are worried. We are the generation that has been living from crisis to a crisis. When we were born, the world was already in crisis. When we were born, the world was already 0.5 degrees warmer. When we were born, we were already beyond 350 ppm; which is the “safe” level of carbon dioxide.

This generation has witnessed several economic crises, record levels of unemployment, a housing crisis, a global pandemic and wars in Europe. All while grappling with the effects of the climate crisis.

We are not the “Next Generation Europe”, we are THIS Generation Europe and we are in a crisis.

We lost two years of our education, work, mental health and life to the poor political decisions made in this pandemic!

The EU has declared 2022 the Year of Youth, saying it is in recognition of the sacrifices the younger generation had to make during the pandemic. However, the proposals they have made so far fall short to respond to the real sacrifices we made during the pandemic.

Our schools closed down. Not all of us had the means to participate in remote learning, especially those of us from marginalised backgrounds. Some of us have dropped out of education and will not return. For those that stayed, it was very hard to find the incentive and energy to focus on our studies, with no end in sight to the pandemic. Yet we were expected to deliver the same results.

Those of us staying in a different place than our homes had to either return home or stay in towns where our universities were and pay ever increasing rents and dormitory fees. For example, in September 2020 the University of Manchester encouraged the students to go to the campus and promised them face-to-face classes that were finally canceled two days before the course started. The

students were trapped and forced to pay for accommodation that was in bad condition.

We, students, rely on part-time jobs to pay our tuition fees and sustain ourselves while studying. During COVID-19 restrictions bars and restaurants were closed and many students were unable to find part-time jobs. In France, students had to queue for food handouts.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the youth unemployment rate in the EU has risen from 15.8% to 19.5% (Eurostat). Those who didn’t lose their jobs saw a reduction in their income. According to the research done by the European Youth Forum, one in every four young people reported a decrease in their income(Beyond Lockdown - the pandemic scar on young people).

Young people were hardest hit in the 2008 global financial crisis. That crisis has not only led to very high youth unemployment rates in Europe but also a stance among political decision-makers that “any job is better than none”. That left us with unpaid internships, gig-workers, zero hour contracts. The current generation of young people were already worse off than their predecessors and now we are facing the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression.

Additionally, we are in a mental health crisis. Young people all over Europe are sounding the alarms for the drastic rise in mental health and wellbeing issues. The crises we have witnessed ever since we were born and the current economic system driving them have greatly impacted this generation. The rising levels of young people living with burn-out, anxieties and depression show that we have yet to receive the much needed essential aid that was promised to us. With the greater waiting times and overloaded health care, we need more than just raising awareness.

We were promised a good life. And we have been denied. Especially the racialised youth, gender and sexual minorities, disabled youth, migrant youth have been denied.

One year of youth is not going to solve our problems.

We do not need festivals. We need real change!

As FYEG we are concerned that this Year of Youth will result in a lot of stylish campaigns, but very little substance. We are worried that decisions about young people will be made without consulting us at every step of the way. We are worried that the leaders will invite young people to meetings only to listen to us, but not to take the much needed action afterwards. We want to see outcomes from the European Year of Youth exist beyond 2022.

Without concrete actions, the European Year of Youth will only remain as youth

washing and we have seen enough of that. What young people really need is hope. Hope that there is a way out of these crises and that the people in power do not only care about their position, but about our future.

This Manifesto therefore demands:

- The European Year of Youth should not be limited to young people from EU member states but should also involve young people from the UK, the Western Balkans and EU Partnership countries.

- The civil space for youth organisations in Europe has been shrinking. We are very worried that the words of the European Commission are not followed by concrete actions. A strong youth sector is key to ensure that young people from all backgrounds can have access to a safe space to engage and grow as active citizens.

- The increase in the overall Erasmus+ budget should be reflected in the operating grants that youth civil society organisations receive. Even though the Erasmus+ budget has been doubled, the operating grants have remained the same. In a European Year of Youth, we need strong European youth organisations. The operating grant support should be tripled and distributed to more organizations. Especially youth organisations that target marginalised young people should be given a priority.

- The European Commission should provide small funding opportunities to formal and informal youth organisations to organise “pilot” activities, much similar to the Council of Europe’s EYF Pilot Activities. The application and reporting should be simple so that new organisations without professional secretariat can easily apply and report.

- Russia has left the Council of Europe. That means they will not pay their membership fee, which will decrease the overall funding. Last time Russia didn’t pay its membership fee, the CoE immediately cut funds from the youth sector. We can not let this happen again. The European Youth Foundation has been providing support to young people all across the continent for 50 years and they must be protected at all costs.

- The European Commission should start a more formalised research regarding the marginalised young people taking part in the activities organised or funded by the Commission grants, with an aim to understand and prioritise their needs and to remove barriers to their participation in European youth events.

- We are calling on the European Commission and the Member States to put forward a common binding legal framework for an effective and enforceable ban on unpaid internships, traineeships and apprenticeships and providing

a minimum standard of rights concerning working conditions.

- We do not think the European Commission’s new program ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master Achieve) will be a relief to the systematic youth unemployment and precarity. We are worried that this initiative would be limited to privileged few who would already have a good chance in getting short-term work experience in a different member state. Instead, the efforts should be directed towards immediately introducing an EU minimum wage scheme, with minimum wages based on the cost of living in a particular country or region and a mechanism to progressively harmonise them.

- The Commission President Von Der Leyen said “This Next Generation EU recovery pack is a lot of money that the next generation will have to pay back”. We reject the premise that young people should be indebted because of the poor political choices that were made before them.

    - The Next Generation EU should be funded through EU level wealth tax, kerosene tax, and tax on tech giants.

    - Youth organisations should be consulted in the delivery of national plans for the deployment of Next Generation EU Funding.

- We propose a one-time COVID relief to all European young people (age 14 - 30), worth 2000 EUR, to help them overcome the challenges they currently face, due to the sacrifices they had to make in the past years.

- The European Commission should initiate a crisis Mental Health plan targeted at policy change in the Member States. This plan should include, but not be limited to:

    - increasing accessibility and the funding of (mental) healthcare facilities, making sure that everyone gets the help they need

    - investing in training of mental health professionals, equipping them with tools to help people from marginalized communities

    - making (mental) healthcare free

    - investing in already existing, bottom-up community-building initiatives

    - increasing the financial support provided to CSOs who work on mental health

    - mainstreaming mental health into all social, economy and climate policies

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