

# Empowering youth in Cohesion Policy



## Lessons from EU Teens4Green



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## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Current state of youth involvement</b>	<b>5</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Barriers to youth engagement</b>	<b>9</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Recommendations</b> on how to strengthen youth involvement in policy-making processes and increase their capacity to shape and lead the green transition	<b>29</b>
<hr/>	
<b>The role of the EUTeens4Green initiative</b>	<b>41</b>
<hr/>	
• <b>About the project</b>	<b>41</b>
<hr/>	
• <b>Insights from the selection process</b>	<b>43</b>
<hr/>	
• <b>Analysis of proposed projects and their results</b>	<b>44</b>
<hr/>	
• <b>Recommendations for future improvement</b>	<b>46</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>48</b>



## Introduction

**This report is part of the EUTeens4Green initiative, created by the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) to support young people in initiating and implementing their creative ideas on how to tackle challenges connected to the transformation process in their regions. These initiatives have not only contributed to youth empowerment but have also fostered sustainable and green transitions within youths' local communities. The project has focused on regions designated as beneficiaries of the Just Transition Fund and identified as territories expected to face the most significant adverse impacts during the transition towards climate neutrality.<sup>1</sup>**

A consortium composed of the Startup Europe Regions Network, Youth and Environment Europe, and CEE Bankwatch Network, along with the support of Generation Climate Europe, has been managing this initiative with an allocated budget of almost EUR 1 million.<sup>2</sup>

As the project comes to an end after two years of implementation, it is crucial to reflect on it, assess its outcomes, and formulate recommendations for a more inclusive and youth-centric future for Cohesion Policy. This report will delve into the current extent of youth involvement in Cohesion Policy and broader decision-making processes at the European Union, national, regional, and local levels. It will explain existing barriers that hinder the effective engagement of the younger generation in policy-making, followed by recommendations for overcoming these obstacles. Finally, the identified barriers will also be combined with practical experience and lessons learned from EUTeens4Green projects, showing that they can serve as examples of good practices. In the final part of the publication, we will further reflect on the project and suggest what should be improved if similar initiatives are considered in the future.

The analysis provided in the following sections of this report is based on diverse methodologies. Our approach uses data and quotations obtained from evaluation surveys conducted over the course of the project. Additional insights have been acquired from our regular exchanges with youth representatives from across the European Union. Finally, we also included findings from relevant literature, reports, and other publications concerning the involvement of young people in the decision-making processes.<sup>3</sup>

This publication and all opinions, as well as recommendations presented in the following sections, are produced by the consortium leading the EUTeens4Green initiative and approved by a think tank<sup>4</sup> during the validation webinar, as per the Commission's request outlined in the grant agreement.

1. European Commission, Just Transition Fund, *European Commission*, 27 March 2024.

2. EUTeens4Green, *Promoting Youth Participation in Just Transition*, *EUTeens4Green*, 27 March 2024.

3. European Commission, N° 2021 CE 16 OAT 032, *Call for proposals - Promoting youth participation in just transition – EUTEENS4GREEN*, *European Commission*, 9 April 2024.

4. The think tank was created to gather 57 experts from the youth field and environmental organisations to share knowledge, provide insights and identify needs related to youth. Their input was crucial in the analysis of the survey, in designing the call for projects, and in preparing the final recommendations.



## Current state of youth involvement

Cohesion Policy is at the very heart of the European Union's strategy of reducing imbalances between countries and regions. Through targeted investments, it contributes to the economic, social and territorial development of areas that have been going through serious structural challenges, such as depopulation, brain drain, poverty and social exclusion. To reach these goals and address the diverse development needs in all European regions, the European Union is mobilising one-third of its total budget (EUR 392 billion) for Cohesion Policy for the 2021-2027 period. It is delivered through such funds as:

- 1 the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);
- 2 the Cohesion Fund (CF);
- 3 the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+);
- 4 the Just Transition Fund (JTF).

In the context of the European Green Deal and the necessity of reshaping the socio-economic future of the European Union to bring it into line with climate and environmental objectives, Cohesion Policy has an even more important role to play than ever before. With the available funds, it supports the entire European Union in the path to climate neutrality and the protection of our ecosystems. It can also help with alleviating the effects of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which particularly hit groups in vulnerable situations, including young people. The recent report of the high-level group on the future of Cohesion Policy underlined that 'young people are suffering from a lasting COVID-19 "pandemic scar", which is profoundly impacting their education, work prospects and mental health'.<sup>5</sup> What is more, 'in 2022, 24.7 per cent of children in the European Union were at risk of poverty or social exclusion'.<sup>6</sup> Young people are particularly affected by reoccurring crises, such as the looming climate catastrophe, environmental degradation, and the wars in Ukraine and in Gaza, which create serious concerns and uncertainties regarding their future. According to a survey conducted by EU Teens4Green during the preparatory phase, targeting youth in the European Union, major concerns included environmental degradation, limited job prospects, animal welfare, food quality, soil and water availability, air pollution, climate change, food and industrial waste, and deforestation.<sup>7</sup>

5. European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, *Forging a sustainable future together – Cohesion for a competitive and inclusive Europe – Report of the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy*, February 2024, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024.

6. European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, *Forging a sustainable future together – Cohesion for a competitive and inclusive Europe – Report of the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy*, February 2024, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024.

7. The survey was conducted in May 2022. [The results are available under this link](#).

Given the magnitude of the envisaged changes and the need to mitigate the effects of the aforementioned crises, the future generations are the key stakeholders. They are the ones who will inherit the results of Cohesion Policy. Engaging young people in the just transition is crucial in order to guarantee that Cohesion Policy achieves its goals, fosters the development of the communities it serves, generates new employment opportunities, protects the environment, and enhances the attractiveness and competitiveness of all European regions.

Cohesion Policy operates under shared management, wherein both the European Commission and the Member States bear the responsibility for its administration.<sup>8</sup> In examining youth involvement in Cohesion Policy, we will offer examples from regional and national perspectives, as well as a broader perspective centred on the European Commission. Particular focus will be given to the Just Transition Fund within the scope of the EUTEens4Green initiative, which targets regions that are beneficiaries of this project. These areas have historically relied on the extraction of hard coal, lignite, peat and oil shale, as well as carbon-intensive industries (e.g. cement, steel, aluminium, fertiliser and paper production). To achieve the European Union's goal to move away from fossil fuel-based industries, these territories need additional support to address the challenges of this transition. These involve the restructuring and diversification of their economies, maintaining social cohesion, and facilitating the (re)training of impacted workers and youth to equip them with the necessary skills for future-proof jobs.

**“ In examining youth involvement in Cohesion Policy, we will offer examples from regional and national perspectives. Particular focus will be given to the regions that have historically relied on the extraction of hard coal, lignite, peat and oil shale, as well as carbon-intensive industries ”**

The involvement of young people in the preparatory phase of the Just Transition Fund has been analysed in two reports prepared jointly by CEE Bankwatch Network and Generation Climate Europe.<sup>9</sup> The main findings showed a nuanced picture, varying across the Member States and regions, of youth participation in the drafting of Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs).<sup>10</sup> The first report, issued in May 2022, showed that younger generations were largely not considered by regional and state authorities to be a key stakeholder to approach for the writing of the Territorial Just Transition Plans. Among the 12 countries analysed, only authorities in Ireland and Spain offered effective mechanisms that facilitated the substantial involvement of young people within their respective regions. In contrast, most other Member States, including France, Romania, and Italy, either omitted youth engagement entirely or engaged them in a superficial manner, as in the case of the Netherlands, where they could only provide feedback to already finalised drafts, with no clear evidence of whether their feedback would be genuinely considered by the authorities.

Furthermore, even in places where youth participation was substantial and resulted in tangible contributions to the Territorial Just Transition Plans, such as in Eastern Wielkopolska, Silesia, and Ida-Virumaa, it typically occurred thanks to the ambitious mobilisation of local civil society organisations.

The second edition of the report, published a few months later in October 2022, revealed more promising results, showing positive examples of local and/or regional authorities involving youth in Greece, Hungary and Slovakia. As for the 12 countries assessed in the first report, for the majority of them, the result remained at the same unsatisfactory level. What is more, the fact that youth were engaged in the writing of the Territorial Just Transition Plans helps them to be further engaged in the monitoring committees, but it does not guarantee it. Their absence in these committees creates a significant barrier, preventing them from shaping the future of their regions by expressing their views on the projects to be funded by the Just Transition Fund. Currently, in the implementation phase, the monitoring committees serve as the most crucial forums, in which the use of the Just Transition Fund is determined; yet, with Bankwatch's on-the-ground experience and presence in the committees, we have observed that civil society, including youth, frequently lacks representation in these discussions.<sup>11</sup>

8. European Commission, [Funding by management mode](#), European Commission, 27 March 2024.

9. Manca L., Schreuder J. H., [The state of youth engagement in the implementation of the Just Transition Mechanism of the EU](#), Generation Climate Europe, 4 October 2022.

10. Territorial Just Transition Plans are a prerequisite to receive the funds available under Just Transition Mechanism aimed at transitioning regions at the level of NUTS 3 (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics), facing serious transition challenges. According to the Just Transition Fund's proposal, the purpose of these plans will be to 'provid[e] an outline of the transition process until 2030, consistent with the National Energy and Climate Plans and the transition to a climate-neutral economy and identify subsequently the most impacted territories that should be supported'.

11. Canali F., [Monitoring cohesion policy funds in central and eastern Europe](#), CEE Bankwatch Network, December 2023.

Unfortunately, the second report confirmed this lack of youth representation and showed that youth involvement in the transition continues to fall short, despite some improvement. Out of the 15 countries analysed, only three have youth representatives in their monitoring committees.

Furthermore, the findings from a survey regarding youth engagement in Cohesion Policy conducted by EU Teens4Green, which targets policymakers as well as other professionals involved in the just transition process, revealed that a significant portion of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the level of involvement of young people in decision-making processes.<sup>12</sup> Approximately 81 per cent of respondents rated youth involvement within the framework of the just transition (including working groups, consultations, workshops, debates, open dialogues, or any other relevant activities) at a level between 1 and 3, with 1 being highly unsatisfactory and 5 highly satisfactory.

This concern has been brought to the attention of the European Commission multiple times, including during the Just Transition Platform in October 2023, where Commissioner Ferreira emphasised that 'It is a common objective for us to create conditions for young, qualified people to live where they want to live and avoid brain drain – this is part of broader cohesion policy too.'<sup>13</sup> The Commission indeed showed its dedication and willingness to assist Member States with strengthening the involvement of young people in decision-making processes on several occasions.

In January 2021, when the Member States were just starting to develop their Territorial Just Transition Plans, the Commission released guidelines titled Youth for a Just Transition: A toolkit for youth participation in the JTF, aimed at facilitating meaningful youth involvement in the programming, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Just Transition Fund.<sup>14</sup> It also consists of practical examples of activities and methods, which could serve as an inspiration for regional and national authorities on how to effectively involve youth in the policy cycle.

In September 2021, the Commission, in its Staff Working Document, highlighted that the partnership principle<sup>15</sup> is a key feature of Cohesion Policy, and that 'the Just Transition Fund is about inventing a new economic and social future for these areas, and young people must play an active role in this.'<sup>16</sup>

In addition to policy documents, the Commission launched the Year of the Youth in 2022, organising numerous conferences, events, and informational campaigns in 54 countries, with over 8,000 activities held throughout the year, according to the dedicated website.<sup>17</sup>

The regular conferences held under the Just Transition Platform (JTP) have increasingly focused on engaging vulnerable groups, including young people, in the transition process. Furthermore, it is important to mention the recent establishment of a separate working group within the Just Transition Platform dedicated to equal opportunities for underrepresented groups, along with the creation of the Just Transition Platform Youth Force, which will examine the skills and challenges faced by youth and highlight ongoing efforts to address this issue.<sup>18</sup>

In June 2022 the Commission launched the EU Teens4Green initiative, which acts as a pioneering example of a dedicated fund for youth-led and youth-focused climate and just transition projects. We will delve deeper into the results of this initiative in the last part of this publication. Another similar initiative, called YOUTH 4 OUTERMOST REGIONS, is currently being implemented. It focuses on the European Union's outlying regions,<sup>19</sup> which are located in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, in the Caribbean Sea and in South America.

12. The survey was conducted in February and March 2024. [The results are available under this link.](#)

13. European Commission, [Event report - Just Transition Platform Conference - 23-25 October 2023 \(europa.eu\)](#), European Commission, 23-25 October 2023.

14. European Commission, [Youth for a just transition - a toolkit for youth participation in the just transition fund](#), European Commission, 29 January 2021.

15. "The partnership principle is fundamental to the implementation of European cohesion policy. It implies close cooperation between the Commission, the authorities at national, regional and local level in the Member States and other governmental and non-governmental organisations and bodies during the different stages of the implementation cycle of the Structural Funds." (EMP-08-027 SocPart01 EN.indd (europa.eu) )

16. European Commission, [New Staff Working Document published for the Just Transition Fund \(europa.eu\)](#), European Commission, 23 September 2021.

17. Laaninen, T., [Legacy of the 2022 European Year of Youth](#), European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2022.

18. European Commission, [JTP Working Groups - Terms of Reference](#), European Commission, 27 March 2024.

19. EU outermost regions: Azores, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Madeira, Martinique, Mayotte, Reunion Island, Saint-Martin and The Canary Islands.

The youth-led actions that will be implemented under this initiative aim to empower young people living in these regions and to contribute to the development of their local communities while addressing existing challenges deriving from their remoteness, insularity (for most of them), small size, topography and vulnerability to extreme weather events. The project will provide financial support to youth-led activities in the outermost regions through the launch of two calls for action. Young people and organisations working with youth are invited to propose plans for improving their local communities or regions and fostering development – on any issue or any topic that they think is important.<sup>20</sup>

As the current European Commission and the European Parliament approach their final months, political parties are preparing priorities for their new mandate as well as shaping the new proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework, also referred to as the European Union budget. This presents a perfect occasion to emphasise the significance of multilevel governance in European Union Cohesion Policy, with a special emphasis on engaging young people. Young voices should be integrated into all phases of policy-making, ensuring the adequate representation and involvement of young people in the transformation of their regions. Incorporating their perspectives can foster more innovative, fresh, and inspiring ideas, ultimately enhancing policy quality. Despite existing initiatives targeting youth at both national and European Union levels, significant barriers remain, blocking their full and effective engagement.



20. YOUTH 4 OUTERMOST REGIONS, YOUTH 4 OUTERMOST REGIONS – Supporting a New Generation of Young Changemakers for Inclusive and Sustainable Development, YOUTH 4 OUTERMOST REGIONS, 27 March 2024.





## Barriers to youth engagement

It is important to begin by identifying the obstacles faced by young people in effectively contributing to Cohesion Policy in order to be able to address them appropriately through the suggested measures.

Based on the results of the EUTEens4Green survey<sup>21</sup> conducted in March 2024, policymakers and professionals involved in the just transition process, and aimed at assessing the involvement of young people in Cohesion Policy, say the biggest barriers that prevent young people from getting involved in the green transition of their regions are as follows:

**lack of real youth participation  
in decision-making**

**limited access  
to decision-making channels**

**lack of awareness  
about opportunities for involvement**

**lack of support and resources for  
youth-led initiatives and organisations.**

In the following section, we will delve deeper and explain the challenges mentioned in the survey, as well as additional ones based on our experience and ongoing conversations with young people. The identified barriers will also be linked with specific examples coming from the projects implemented under EUTEens4Green.

21. The survey was conducted in February and March 2024. [The results are available under this link.](#)

## Barriers to youth engagement

### Not being taken seriously by adults, especially decision-makers

Frequent political references to youth-led protests like those organised by Fridays for Future or various appearances by young people in high-level events seem to suggest that youth is high on the agenda of policymakers. In reality, however, there is too little real action that follows these words and speeches. Condescending remarks and approaches are widespread, and it is common to hear that young people do not know how the 'real world' works, that they have too little experience, or that they are too young for their words to be treated seriously.

The patronising comments surrounding Greta Thunberg are a case in point, with claims being put forward that she must be manipulated by her parents, as she is too young to know what she is doing.<sup>22</sup> Such comments show that the opinions of young people are often downplayed, ridiculed, treated condescendingly, and are simply not taken seriously. Real action, youth-focused and youth-led projects, and funding need to follow up on claims of interest in increasing youth participation in order to prove that young people and their needs, opinions and activities are taken seriously by decision-makers. Without providing them with real agency, we are continuing according to the 'business as usual' model, with youth engagement being a mere formality.



22. Wright, J., *These Anti-Greta Thunberg Criticisms Are Almost Hilarious*, Harper's BAZAAR, 2 November 2021.

## Pure air for green future

**Country & region:** Bulgaria, Stara Zagora

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**Grant provided:** 9,800€

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**Duration:** 12 months

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The project's primary objective is to enhance youth understanding of sustainable development and the green transition in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, while creating connections between decision-makers and citizens. Its focus primarily lies on addressing air quality issues in the region. Through a series of activities including events, roundtable discussions, a clean-up campaign, and a competition for an eco-booklet titled "Ecology and Us," project leaders successfully engaged a diverse range of stakeholders in the region.

The clean-up campaign, held in September 2023, targeted the most polluted area in Galabovo. This educational action aimed to create a sense of responsibility among young people towards their town and the environment, discouraging littering. Over 50 kg of trash were collected.

The roundtable, also held in September 2023, aimed to bring together students from local schools, mayors, an NGO called Za Zemiata, and representatives from all thermal power plants and mines in the area. The goal of this event was to hear different points of view, to give space for the older generation and for the younger generation and to hear the perspective of representatives of the local power plants. Unfortunately, not even one representative showed up. One of the power plants accepted the invitation but in the end no representatives came, thus showing how initiatives led by young people are not prioritised and that they are still not being taken seriously by adults.

Yet regardless of their absence, the discussion was fruitful. The students shared their opinion on how they see the region in the future and what kind of jobs they want to have. The conclusion from the discussion was that the future of the town is very unclear and more initiatives like this should be done.

## Limited access to decision-making channels

Generally, while young people are sometimes invited to participate in high-level events or bodies, they usually have very little decision-making power, and it is left to the discretion of those who are older to decide whether their voices will actually be considered. Even such tokenised participation is usually quite low. Additionally, the opportunities given to the youth to be part of the decision-making processes are largely not appreciated and sometimes, when considered, the youth are characterised as unqualified to offer opinions on such matters. The representation of young people in decision-making bodies is extremely disproportionate, with high-level positions being very rarely occupied by people under the age of 35, as the OECD statistics below very clearly show:

“

While democracy does not necessarily require institutions to mirror demographics, youth's underrepresentation in parliament indicates the existence of norms, rules and regulations that hamper their participation to democratic processes. In 2020, on average across the OECD, 22% of members of parliaments (MPs) were under 40, ranging from 36% in Norway to 8% in France. In comparison, 20-39 year-olds represent 34% of the voting-age population on average across OECD countries, an average representation gap of more than 12 percentage points (...). Representation gaps are even more pronounced within countries' political leadership. In 2018, the average age of cabinet members ranged from 45 years in Iceland to 62 years in Japan, with an OECD average of 53 years. The five youngest cabinets across OECD countries were in Iceland (45 years), Norway (46.2), Estonia (47.1), Denmark (47.4) and Finland (47.4) (...). In 2018, across the OECD, only 51 of the then-incumbent cabinet members were under 40 (8%) and only 20 were aged 35 or below (3%).<sup>23</sup>

”

Thus, frequently one of the few ways for young people to participate in decision-making bodies is through consultation processes or as invited speakers, which, however, does not always mean that their opinions actually impact the decisions made. If the young people are invited to participate in processes, it is crucial that they receive feedback on how their proposals were included and the reasons behind any decisions to modify or reject their suggestions. Otherwise, a lack of a sense of agency and disappointment in the possibility of impacting decision-making through democratic means will ensue. Unfortunately, youth representatives/organisations are often not considered as relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process, i.e. they are not invited to working groups or included on authorities' mailing lists. What is more, governments often do not use the right communication methods and channels to reach this group.

## **Brownfields and Orchards Rediscovering what matters in Upper Nitra region**

**Country & region:** Slovakia, Trenčín

**Grant provided:** 10 000€

**Duration:** 12 months

- The project Brownfields and Orchards in the Upper Nitra region of Slovakia focused on achieving several objectives:
- - inclusively engaging various community groups in discussions concerning the Upper Nitra region;
  - providing a platform for young individuals in the region to participate and have their voices heard;
  - disseminating project information through online channels;
  - attracting new team members.

A round table was organised, bringing together 14 participants across different generations and sectors. Among them were representatives from Koš, Sebedražie, Cigeľ, Podhradie, and Lehota pod Vtáčnikom (including four mayors and one representative), as well as four scientists from two universities in Trnava. Project leaders, represented by three members, facilitated the discussion, raised local issues, and voiced community concerns. Additionally, two local high school students assisted in meeting preparation and contributed their perspectives, particularly regarding youth issues in the region.

The participants raised the priorities, attitudes, and needs of each represented group concerning the region's transition. They explored potential collaborations between academics and municipalities regarding environmental regeneration and the use of innovative technologies and methods.

- A primary focus of the discussion was the quality, protection, and management of water resources. Youth representatives emphasised the importance of combatting brain drain and enhancing opportunities for employment and quality of life for young professionals in the region.

The team realised this was an important opportunity for young people to further take part in the discussion; they began preparing to make way for more young people to be better informed about the issues and prepared to be actively involved in the debate with scientists, municipalities and other stakeholders. Through such initiatives, young people prove they are fully motivated and are capable of playing an active role in the dialogue with decision-makers.

## Lack of real youth participation in decision-making

According to the Climate Reality Project website, youthwashing 'refers to young people's voices being used in a performative way without paying attention to them or acting on concerns raised by this group'.<sup>24</sup> Most of the barriers to real youth participation are linked to this issue. While a lot of lip service is paid to getting young people involved in change, very few real possibilities have allowed them to actually impact the decisions made and how European funds are spent. The Climate Reality Project's article on the topic puts this very succinctly:

“ ‘...companies and countries want to broadcast their commitments to equity and diversity for public relations points – they just don't want to actually listen to diverse voices. Young people are not tokens to the climate agenda. They deserve to not only be heard, but invited to the table, and listened to when it comes to climate solutions. After all, they're the ones who will live with climate change’.<sup>25</sup> ”

Youthwashing is when young people are tokenised by being asked to talk or to appear publicly during events or in promotional materials discussing their problems; they are then not invited to decide on what will be done, and no funds are actually allocated to implement the solutions they propose.

The various forms of proposed involvement continue all too often to be box-ticking exercises without a meaningful co-creation process, whereby young people are not really treated as equal partners. Such an example would be institutions bragging about the number of youth participating in a consultation, when in reality none of their ideas, comments or suggestions were later taken into account when deciding on fund allocation or project implementation. Listening to what youth have to say can only be the first step in a meaningful participatory process. Aside from formally including youth in the discussions, especially in high-level meetings, it is necessary to implement actions that extend beyond just hearing them out and that grant them the opportunity to actually impact decisions and fund spending. Ultimately, the young generation is the one that will have to live with any shortcomings in our current response to the climate and environmental crises.



24. The Climate Reality Project, [You've heard of greenwashing, but what is youthwashing?](#), *The Climate Reality Project*, 5 April 2023  
25. The Climate Reality Project, [You've heard of greenwashing, but what is youthwashing?](#), *The Climate Reality Project*, 5 April 2023.

## Living Library Sessions: Kozani's Just Transition as an Open Book

**Country & region:** Greece, Kozani

**Grant provided:** 10,000€

**Duration:** 9 months

The primary objective of this project was to involve key stakeholders from the Municipality of Kozani in creating a dynamic living library accessible to young participants. This approach aimed to highlight the 'human face' of Kozani's ongoing just transition process.

The main achievements of the project focused on a few key thematic discussions, each addressing critical aspects of the transition process in Western Macedonia, and how these aspects have a specific impact on the citizens of Kozani.

The young leaders of the project invited such decision-makers as the Mayor of Kozani, Mr. Lazaros Maloutas, as well as two members of the Greek Parliament, Mr. Michalis Papadopoulos and Mr. Paris Koukouloupoulos, to their activities. They gave the participants some insights from the just transition process of the region of Western Macedonia. A key focus of all of the speakers was the identification of employment opportunities for young people, emphasising environmental protection and the active participation of civil society in the green transition as well.

Furthermore, the project facilitated an informal meeting with representatives from the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) during their regional visit. This gathering provided an opportunity for local EUTeens4Green facilitators<sup>26</sup> for Greece and other project representatives to interact. What is more, the European Commission extended an invitation for project members to join the network of European Climate Pact Ambassadors for Greece.

An integral part of their project was the culmination event – a World Cafe session exploring the youth's vision for Kozani in 2050. This activity involved students from the 3rd General High School of Kozani, who shared their perspectives on the just transition process and highlighted their school's initiatives empowering them in this context.

In summary, the project aimed to gather opinions and suggestions from diverse stakeholders, including young people, regarding their perspectives on the city's progress concerning sustainability, the environment, the economy, and overall well-being. Through the events mentioned above, the youth created a space to voice their concerns and prioritise topics that are important to them. This level of engagement in event organisation and active involvement highlights their efforts to fight against youthwashing.

26. Local facilitators were individuals who guided the youth and helped address questions regarding project management, finances, translation or any other areas needing clarification.

## Lack of awareness and knowledge

Generally, a lack of awareness and knowledge can refer to three main aspects:

- 1 a lack of knowledge of how legislative and fund spending processes work within the European Union;
- 2 a lack of awareness of how citizens of any age can impact decisions made within the scope of policy and funding;
- 3 a lack of general knowledge about the green transition of their respective regions.

While an increasing number of young people in the European Union are showing interest in these issues due to the pressing need to rapidly address the climate and environmental crises, enhancing young people's agency goes hand in hand with increasing their knowledge of the functioning of European Union processes and their relation to the national level, as well as of the different opportunities and strategies for civic involvement.

According to a study on young people's participation in democratic processes, commissioned in March 2023 at the request of the European Parliament, political knowledge is inherently connected to both quality and quantity of involvement.<sup>27</sup> Individuals who are more familiar with how political processes work tend to engage more actively, either through voting in elections or engaging in various forms of political activism.

For meaningful involvement, youth need to have at least a basic working knowledge of how legislative and fund-spending processes function. Additionally, to effectively influence decisions, young people require familiarity with available consultation opportunities and different advocacy strategies. In many countries, this is either not part of the public-school curriculum or it is discussed at a very rudimentary level, making it challenging for young individuals to acquire the necessary skills and insights.



27. Dezelan, T., Young people's participation in European democratic processes - How to improve and facilitate youth involvement, *European Parliament*, December 2022.



### Educational web application for raising teens' awareness about just transition

**Country & region:** Greece, Florina

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**Grant provided:** 9,500€

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**Duration:** 10 months

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This project was created to bridge the above-mentioned knowledge gap among young people, specifically concerning the green transition in Greece. It consists of two principal components. The main one focuses on an application called JUSTRAPP,<sup>28</sup> which takes the form of an online entertainment quiz. It has increasingly difficult questions covering a broad spectrum of topics related to just transition, lignite phase-out, green growth, climate change, and renewable energy sources. The secondary component is a website offering in-depth information on the aforementioned topics through engaging videos, images, research findings, and interactive tools.

In order to ensure that both the application and the website are tailored-made to the needs of teenagers, the project leaders created an online survey at the initial stage of this initiative. This survey aimed to gather teenagers' knowledge about green transition and analyse their interests in studying the subject. The collected data was analysed in order to understand their awareness levels and to get feedback on the content and structure of the mobile application. What is more, extensive research was conducted to gather all the materials for the quiz, drawing from official European Union and national sources as well.

Lastly, the team carefully tested the functionality and usability of both the application and the website with a small group of teenagers. This testing phase aimed to ensure that the interface was interactive and user-friendly.

## Inadequate support structures

The lack of awareness and knowledge is closely linked to the issue of inadequate support structures available to young people to become involved in decision-making processes. Given the low youth representation in decision-making bodies and the need for consistent engagement in and monitoring of policy processes, it is essential to establish support structures for young people. These structures aim to facilitate meaningful youth involvement in decision-making processes.

These can be, for example, various organisations and institutions which provide information and support with regard to grant applications and project implementation disseminating possibilities for youth engagement and capacity-building initiatives. While there are some such opportunities and organisations, they are too few to meet the needs of young people across the European Union.



### Skills for the future

**Country & region:** Poland, Koniński

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**Grant provided:** 10,000€

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**Duration:** 10 months

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This project was conducted in the Eastern Greater Poland (Wielkopolska Wschodnia) region of Poland, which is the first region in the country to phase out coal. Its aim was to help the youth understand what is currently going on in the region and how they can plan their own future in the chaos of transition changes. It aimed at bridging the knowledge gap and explored the lack of appropriate education and inadequate support structures for the youth in the region.

The main activities of the project were focused on visiting schools in the regions and conducting lectures and interactive workshops. The goal was to explain what the just transition process is, why we need it, and why it is important for the future of young people. In addition, the lecturers elaborated on climate change and explained why there is a necessity to phase out coal and other fossil fuels. The second part of the meetings focused more on practical advice and workshops regarding future jobs and students' ideas about how the coming years will look. Lastly, students created theoretical CVs and attempted to discover their inner competences and the skills needed for the future.

The following topics were covered during the workshops:

- lecture on climate change and just transition in Eastern Wielkopolska;
- future jobs related to ongoing transition in the region, but also to globalisation and general technological changes in the world;
- career counselling lecture – how young people should think about their own futures;
- personal future – which soft skills, competences, and qualifications a young person requires in the 21st century.

All in all, 1,500 young people took part in this project. They were shown how to develop a career, create a CV in a more engaging way, and how to plan their futures in an unstable job market. The project leaders hoped to encourage some of the students to stay in the region and thus avoid continuous brain drain. What is more, local authorities will hopefully be inspired to introduce similar lectures and workshops as part of schools' curriculums and thus fill the gap of inadequate support structures available to and tailored for young people's needs in the region.

## Lack of resources for youth-led initiatives

When young people do attempt to get involved, it frequently turns out that their initiatives are rarely supported by adequate resources that could facilitate the implementation of their projects or their involvement in advocacy activities. Taking part in decision-making bodies requires considerable time and capital; however, there are few possibilities for the full reimbursement of costs incurred by such involvement. This is an issue even for experienced NGOs, which have to allocate people to do such work within the scope of their already overloaded work schedules.

Young people frequently do not have access to administrative, legal and financial support, which could provide them with much-needed expert help in developing such projects and initiatives. Regranting opportunities similar to those offered by the EUTeens4Green initiative remain quite rare, and if we really want to make youth involvement a reality, such programmes should be further developed, expanded and improved to actually address the identified barriers to involvement.



## Green Souls

**Country & region:** Spain, A Coruña

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**Grant provided:** 10,000€

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**Duration:** 12 months

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The idea of the Green Souls initiative in Galicia, Spain was born out of a need to enhance awareness and educate the population of the region concerning climate change, fostering their active involvement. The project's activities focused on training programmes conducted in the countryside, complemented by communication activities. Additionally, environmental volunteering initiatives, including sessions and visits to the Fragas do Eume (a Natura 2000 site), were organised by the project leaders.

The team actively involved the local community in activities such as recycling and litter collection in the area of A Coruña. Furthermore, workshops were conducted with an emphasis on the significance of being active and environmentally conscious individuals, promoting awareness about environmental preservation, and carbon footprint reduction.

The primary target audience was secondary schools in the province of A Coruña (aged 15-19). Close collaboration with the local administration of the Province of A Coruña (Diputación) enabled project leaders to effectively reach all public secondary schools in the area and inform them about the project's activities.

With this series of various activities, the project aimed at giving practical information on running their own social businesses, starting with 'how to run an NGO and/or association', moving through the 'main skills needed to be a social change maker' and ending with a 'financing and fundraising for social enterprises' module. Thanks to those activities, each group was able to better understand the situation regarding the impact of climate change on their local community. What is more, they were offered hands-on workshops filled with practical tips on how to set up their own initiatives and, in the context of the aforementioned barrier, how to look for financial resources that could help with the implementation of their ideas.

## Lack of projects directly targeting youth

While European Union regulations and funding programmes frequently refer to the need for involving and providing support to young people, especially in transitioning regions, this does not always translate into very specific legislative provisions or funding opportunities. The need for youth participation in consultation processes is often mentioned at the European Union level, and we have seen a slight increase in their presence in various bodies, such as monitoring committees of European Union-funded programmes for European Union Cohesion Policy in the Member States; but this representation remains far from sufficient in terms of numbers.<sup>29</sup> Most importantly, there are often no instructions on how to spend funding in a dedicated manner to tackle issues faced specifically by young people or those directly affecting them.

To give an example, last year CEE Bankwatch Network analysed the Territorial Just Transition Plans of seven central and eastern European countries (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia)<sup>30</sup>, looking at the Just Transition Fund Regulation<sup>31</sup> provisions and how they were applied in the transition planning of affected regions, including how the issues faced by young people were addressed. The analysis showed that the Just Transition Fund Regulation does not refer to youth separately, but ‘some focus on the impacts on this group can be inferred from the requirement to include in the Territorial Just Transition Plans (Article 11) a description of the demographic issues (e.g. depopulation, migration, ageing demographic structures) faced by just transition regions’. This is discussed further as follows:

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In turn, point 7 of the European Commission’s Staff Working Document on Territorial Just Transition Plans published in 2021 specifically highlights the impact of the just transition on youth: ‘The transition may have wider demographic impacts when, as a result of the decline of certain sectors, a region becomes a less attractive place to live and work. Young people can be especially affected, not only because they face above-average levels of unemployment, but also because they are more inclined to migrate out of the region.’<sup>32</sup>

Thus, there is a direct recommendation in the Staff Working Document regarding the importance of actively involving young people in the governance of the Just Transition Fund: ‘It is essential for young people to be actively involved in the JTF’s governance. A future-proof economy cannot be built without involving those who will live in and shape the future. The JTF is about inventing a new economic and social future for these areas, and young people must play an active role in this.’ Therefore, due to the fact that demographic problems have been widespread in coal-mining regions for years, and that transitioning from carbon-intensive industries will obviously further impact the regions, most Territorial Just Transition Plans mention that this will potentially lead to further depopulation and young people’s migration away from the regions.<sup>33</sup>

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29. Canali F., [Monitoring cohesion policy funds in central and eastern Europe](#), CEE Bankwatch Network, December 2023.

30. Stępień M., [Planning for social justice in Territorial Just Transition Plans in central and eastern Europe](#), CEE Bankwatch Network, September 2023.

31. European Parliament, Council of the European Union, [Regulation \(European Union\) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the Just Transition Fund](#), European Parliament, Council of the European Union, 30 June 2021.

32. European Commission, [Commission Staff Working Document on the Territorial Just Transition Plans](#), European Commission, 23 September 2021.

33. Stępień M., [Planning for social justice in Territorial Just Transition Plans in central and eastern Europe](#), CEE Bankwatch Network, pp. 5-6, September 2023.

However, the analysis done by Bankwatch shows that while such issues as depopulation and brain drain in transitioning regions are indeed mentioned, the regulation itself does not fully reflect this in Article 8, which lays out the scope of support of the Just Transition Fund. In addition, almost none of the analysed regions in the central and eastern European countries have decided to tackle these issues directly through just transition funding. While it should be noted that general activities focused on economic diversification (such as supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, the creation of new firms and start-ups, etc.), research and innovation, educational projects, or up- and re-skilling can potentially also be used to provide support for young people, it is evident that this demographic is not given priority as a target group for funding.

European funding programmes such as Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps focus predominantly on soft measures aimed at personal development, i.e. education and training, networking and collaboration, knowledge transfer, cultural exchange, etc. However, there are very few initiatives like EUTeens4Green that allow young people and youth-led organisations to develop tangible projects which benefit their communities.

The issue of how climate funding should be used has been summarised succinctly by Sheen Tyagi, Research Director at YOUNGO, who stated the following:

“

Climate finance directed towards our projects is the imperative bridge between aspirations and actionable change. The currency of change lies in climate finance for the youth, and to ensure a sustainable tomorrow, we need the unwavering support of governments, institutions, the private sector, communities, and every individual.<sup>34</sup>

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34. The Commonwealth, [Climate funding for young people inadequate, says new report](#), *The Commonwealth*, 9 December 2023.

## Space for Change

**Country & region:** Poland, Katowicki

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**Grant provided:** 10,000€

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**Duration:** 8 months

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The Space for Change project, implemented in Chorzów in Poland, was primarily intended to give students space to think about and reflect on issues related to the transformation of their region. The project resulted in ideas for local initiatives created by workshop participants, who consulted with experts, scientists and representatives of the city government.

During the workshop, participants had the opportunity to listen to a lecture led by experts from the local university. The lecture was tailored to the age of the participants, and at the same time contained knowledge and information that students cannot learn at school.

The activities conducted also led to:

- an increase in self-confidence and readiness to act and make decisions through consultations with experts;
- an increase in the ability to argue their proposals and express their opinions;
- increased language and communication skills;
- increased awareness of climate change and a just transition.

The project improved the sense of agency and decision-making on local issues as well as the overall interest of young participants in civic participation. All the activities were tailor-made to youths' needs, both in terms of topics and format, unlike the remaining barrier explained above, which shows that what hinders young people from successful involvement in decision-making processes is the fact that they are aimed at broader groups without any focus on young people and their needs.





## Barriers to youth engagement

### Failure to apply user-friendly language

In a 2021 youth survey conducted by Ipsos European Public Affairs and commissioned by the European Parliament, young people that did not vote were asked why they had abstained. Around 34 per cent gave answers that point towards a common lack of understanding, such as: 'I don't understand the issues enough', 'I think it would be too difficult to understand the jargon/political speak' or 'I don't think decision-makers listen to people like me'.<sup>35</sup> These answers show that policymakers sometimes do not use the right language or communication channels to capture the interest of youth and motivate them to engage with policies and opportunities. This also creates a huge division between the 'European Union bubble' in Brussels and young people (and more broadly, all citizens) scattered across Europe, who need to be provided with communication that is suited to the everyday language they use.

In order to increase the involvement of citizens, including young people, clearly written supporting materials should be made available and support mechanisms should be put in place to help people navigate the processes described. It is hardly surprising that the necessity for specialised knowledge and the presence of heavy terminology discourage civic involvement.



35. European Commission, [European Parliament Youth Survey](#), European Commission, pp. 30, June 2021.

## **Syra – Smart Sustainable Island**

**Country & region:** Greece, Syros

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**Grant provided:** 8,900€

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**Duration:** 8 months

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The Syra – Smart Sustainable Island project had two primary objectives: first, to engage the youth of Syros, Greece in local and European policy interactions, equipping them with the necessary skills to become leaders in their community; and second, to serve as a model for such leadership.

Throughout the project, the following activities were carried out:

- consultation for reskilling workers in carbon-intensive industries;
- seminars on green and digital skills for public servants;
- conducting 20 SWOT analyses for SMEs in Syros to assess their readiness for absorbing European green grants, along with a statistical survey;
- organising beach cleaning activities;
- producing a scientific report on water pollution from the Neorion Shipyard;
- implementing an innovative Green Bond funding scheme;
- conducting green leadership workshops for students;
- policy recommendations to the Mayor of Syros and the Regional Administrator of the South Aegean.

These activities successfully raised awareness about the European Green Deal and its policy implications for climate governance. Statistics revealed that local youth participants gained significant knowledge about the European Union that was previously unknown to them. Furthermore, a large percentage of participants found the workshops to be informative and clarifying, helping them understand complex policy tools and institutions in a clear and comprehensive manner.

The SWOT analyses conducted for 20 SMEs in Syros identified key weaknesses in their ability to integrate European Union grants. One major obstacle identified was the lack of awareness about such programmes and a limited capacity to prepare grant proposals. Additionally, the analyses highlighted the necessity for improved communication between the European Union and citizens, explaining commonly used jargon – identified in the above-mentioned barrier – such as ‘green and digital transition’ in practical terms.

## Disenchantment and resignation as a result of encountered barriers

As presented above, becoming involved in regional, national or European decision-making processes for a young person can be extremely challenging. After someone first makes the decision to get engaged and tries to find the right channels, support and funding, they must then reach an understanding of the process and how to impact it. This is a path obviously wrought with obstacles and problems. Young people already grow up with a sense of disillusionment with the political system and the state of the world. As they grow older, they become acutely aware of the multiple crises we are facing and the inability of governments to adequately address them and improve societal well-being. It cannot be emphasised enough that if we do not take their voices, opinions and needs seriously, we face a situation in which a whole generation will become disenchanted and resign from taking democratic action to address the transition we so desperately need.



## **Our Sustainable Europe**

**Country & region:** **Malta, Malta (island)**

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**Grant provided:** **10,000€**

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**Duration:** **6 months**

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The Our Sustainable Europe project, based in Malta, was aimed at creating an open space for young people on the subjects of climate change, the green transition, the circular economy, sustainable development, and the policies necessary to achieve these objectives.

Throughout the course of its implementation, three big events were organised.

- The Air Pollution Hackathon – aimed at jointly coming up with creative solutions to fight air pollution in Malta.
- Our Sustainable Mediterranean – a traditional-format event with such speakers as Mr. Lorenzo Vella, Head of the European Commission Representation in Malta, Mr. Evarist Bartolo, former Minister for European and Foreign Affairs, Dr. Margaret Camilleri Fenech, lecturer at the Institute for Climate Change and Sustainable Development at the University of Malta, and Dr. James Ciarlo, a researcher at the Institute of Earth Systems at the University of Malta. It was followed by a networking lunch for participants and panellists.
- Malta's Green and European Future – a roundtable discussion between a panel of experts and participants on whether or not enough is being done in Malta to achieve its European Union green transition commitments. The event consisted of a discussion involving invitees from local environmental NGOs and policy-making entities in with the attendees.

The level of youth engagement and the feedback forms collected from participants showed that the events acted as a safe space for civic engagement, which allowed them to openly raise their concerns, opinions, and solutions to policymakers and experts in the field. This is particularly important in the context of the general disenchantment and resignation of young Europeans regarding taking democratic action to address the necessary green transition.

## Recommendations

on how to strengthen youth involvement in policy-making processes and increase their capacity to shape and lead the green transition

The following section builds on the barriers identified and offers a list of practical suggestions for local, regional, national and European Union authorities on how to successfully involve youth in policy-making processes and incorporate measures which would increase their active participation, capacity, knowledge and skills. The offered measures and tools are also backed up with lessons learned from the EUTeens4Green initiative, which successfully proved young people's willingness to not only shape but also lead the green transition of the European Union.





## Recommendations

# Youth representation bodies (youth councils, youth assemblies)

In the context of various decision-making processes, the establishment of youth councils, youth assemblies or other forms of formal structures of youth representation hold significant importance for the systemic flow of information and advice to decision-makers on specific policy topics important to youth. These structures have proven to be successful channels through which young people can raise their views and needs and, most importantly, advocate for specific policy demands.

The Council of Europe recognised the role of the youth councils as early as 2006 and encouraged ‘the member states to support the establishment of national youth councils in the countries where they do not exist yet and to create the necessary conditions for broadening the participation of young people in society and developing associative life to make the councils more representative of young people, including young people belonging to all kinds of minorities’.<sup>36</sup>

In accordance with this suggestion, the Council formed its own Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), consisting of 30 representatives of youth NGOs and networks. Its main goal is to advise the members of the Council of Europe on all matters related to youth, as well as to help with mainstreaming youth policies.<sup>37</sup>

At the national level, useful lessons can be drawn from the Flemish Youth Council, which is the official advisory body of the Flemish government on all matters concerning children and young people.<sup>38</sup> It is composed of 16 members – 8 youth advisers and 8 youth work advisers – and gives recommendations on all issues relating to youth policy and the wider strategies of the region.<sup>39</sup>

Other examples of youth councils in the European Union can be found on the website dedicated to this topic called Youth Councils, which has mapped such initiatives in the Czech Republic and Poland.<sup>40</sup> As for youth assemblies, the most successful examples can be found in Estonia in the Ida-Virumaa region, historically dependent on the oil shale industry and currently a beneficiary of the Just Transition Fund.



36. Council of Europe, [Recommendation on the role of national youth councils in youth policy development](#), *Council of Europe*, 2 November 2018.

37. Council of Europe, [Advisory Council on Youth](#), *Council of Europe*, 27 March 2024.

38. Vlaamse Jeugdraad, [Vlaamse Jeugdraad](#), *Vlaamse Jeugdraad*, 27 March 2024.

39. European Commission, [Youth representation bodies](#), *European Commission*, 27 March 2024.

40. Youth Councils, [Map of youth parliaments and youth councils](#), *Youth Councils*, 27 March 2023.

A Youth Climate Assembly was organised in autumn of 2021 in cooperation between the Estonian Fund for Nature and the Rohetiiger initiative.<sup>41</sup> It gathered 40 young people aged 16 to 29 to bring their perspectives to the Territorial Just Transition Plan and to mainstream such assemblies as a decision-making method for climate action. Their proposals were submitted to the Estonian ministries and the municipality with a request that they be considered in the national and regional just transition strategy.<sup>42</sup> They were mostly related to ensuring the educational opportunities in the county, providing social security for those affected by transitions, creating new opportunities, promoting local business development, and fostering greener entrepreneurship. According to the former Minister of Public Administration, most of the recommendations were either already covered by existing activities or were taken into account in the preparation of the Just Transition Plan. It was promised that the remaining ones would be considered based on future perspectives.

What is more, thanks to the initiative, a new youth organisation called People with Purpose was created, which joined the Steering Committee to monitor the implementation of the Territorial Just Transition Plan. The same organisation was also involved in the EUTeens4Green project called Environmental Hero Course, which created a modern ecology course for Estonian high schools using MOODLE with the aim of promoting environmental protection and changing society's attitudes.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the Estonian example shows a positive spillover effect of the youth assembly, which brought a whole range of positive youth-led actions, from the establishment of a new NGO to their involvement in the EUTeens4Green initiative.

While the creation of youth councils and assemblies marks a positive step, ensuring their success requires a well-structured and clearly defined strategy, along with consistent operational practices and meaningful engagement of youth without any youthwashing. This means that these forms of youth representation must function in such a way that shows that young people have real agency and that their opinions, comments and suggestions are taken on board by decision-makers.

Consequently, we encourage national and regional authorities across the European Union to emulate the example set by the Flemish Youth Council, as well as the Estonian Youth Assembly. Such youth involvement initiatives will foster transparency, youth perspectives, and the inclusivity of future generations in policy-making, tailored to local needs. By engaging with young people in this manner, authorities can cultivate stronger partnerships and foster a sense of co-creation, ultimately enhancing trust between youth and decision-makers. These initiatives should be coordinated and supported centrally, not only pushed by grassroots initiatives, as this approach will not only successfully improve public participation, co-creation and transparency, but will also foster youth empowerment and a sense of agency over the future of their own region. Practical guidelines for policy officials on how to successfully organise such initiatives can be found on the website of the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies.<sup>44</sup> This call also extends to European Union authorities, encouraging them to mainstream youth representation bodies into the programmes and platforms organised by European Union institutions (such as the Youth Taskforce under the Just Transition Platform), and ensuring that young people have real agency.



41. Burgerrat, [First climate assembly in Estonia](#), *Burgerrat*, 26 November 2021.

42. Eestimaa Looduse Fond, [Kuidas tagada, et üleminek kliimasõbralikule tulevikule oleks noorte jaoks õiglane?](#), *Rohetiiger*, 2021.

43. EUTeens4Green, [Environment hero course](#), *EUTeens4Green*, 27 March 2024.

44. McBride K., [Preparing for a climate assembly](#), *The Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA)*, 27 March 2024.

## The institutionalised role of youth in the monitoring committees overseeing the European Union funds

In order to achieve a meaningful and structured partnership, Member States must establish monitoring committees in which partners from diverse fields are represented, informed, and empowered to contribute to the design and spending of funds available under Cohesion Policy. Therefore, they play a crucial watchdog role in scrutinising the direction of Cohesion Policy. Legally, the involvement of public authorities at national, regional and local levels is required, as well as economic and social partners and bodies representing civil society in accordance with the partnership principle.<sup>45</sup> Yet, based on our research conducted with Generation Climate Europe, youth representatives, as well as other underrepresented groups such as women and LGBTIQ+ activists, still struggle to find a place on the monitoring committees overseeing programmes on the environment, climate, and just transition.<sup>46</sup>

It is important to remember, however, that meaningful participation in monitoring committees requires a lot of expertise and knowledge. If we want various stakeholders and citizens, including – more specifically – young people, to become key members of such bodies, they will need increasing amounts of support in order to build their capacities and will need expert networks in place that can help them navigate through the intricacies of preparing project selection criteria or monitor the spending of European funds. Specific recommendations in that regard were subscribed by more than 100 experts from the European Community of Practice on Partnership (ECoPP).<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, we recommend that the Member States, as well as the European Commission, show a commitment to integrate youth perspectives into European Union fund governance structures through the institutionalised role of youth within monitoring committees. This entails establishing formal mechanisms for youth representation within these committees, ensuring that their voices are consistently heard and valued in the discussions and developing schemes to ensure they are appropriately supported in building their capacities for meaningful engagement. Additionally, this should also mean incorporating youth input into the review and evaluation of existing plans, as well as future strategic planning. The institutionalised role of the youth can be applicable not only to monitoring committees overseeing specific programmes, but also to other levels of governance such as territorial and urban strategies and others, depending on the identified interests and needs of young people.



45. Canali F., [Monitoring cohesion policy funds in central and eastern Europe](#), *CEE Bankwatch Network*, December 2023.

46. Canali F., [Monitoring cohesion policy funds in central and eastern Europe](#), *CEE Bankwatch Network*, December 2023; Manca L., Schreuder J. H., [The state of youth engagement in the implementation of the Just Transition Mechanism of the EU](#), *Generation Climate Europe*, 4 October 2022.

47. European Commission, [European Community of Practice on Partnership \(ECoPP\)](#), *European Commission*, 27 March 2024.





## Recommendations

# Regular consultations with youth organisations to gather their perspectives on policy decisions

Youth-led initiatives tend to be talked about rather than actively engaged with. We know that, for the just transition process to be successful, all stakeholders need to have their voices heard and be able to influence the process. Youth consultations and involvement should be measured and encouraged through indicators for participation and awareness that can be part of the measured result of each programme under the European Union Cohesion Policy.

The European Commission developed a toolkit that gathers good examples from around Europe on how to achieve youth involvement in the just transition context. Citizen researchers can be supported by inviting young people to interact with policymakers, create debates about just transition in their schools, then come back with specific policy proposals for decision-makers. Youth ambassadors can be selected to spread awareness about the Just Transition Fund. Dedicated activities at schools can introduce the topic of just transition during regular classes; this could be supported by NGOs, policymakers or researchers. Participatory arts can be used by young people to express their feelings and opinions through photography, painting, music or film. Youth councils can organise debates on the just transition process within their networks. Online consultations can be used to prepare educational materials about the ongoing just transition process.<sup>48</sup>

The motivation for the activities mentioned above can be found within EUTEens4Green. Through this initiative, young individuals have organised workshops, debates, and conferences in their schools. Those who have taken the lead in these projects can be considered as driven youth ambassadors within their local areas. Additionally, the significance of participatory arts has been evident within EUTEens4Green, proved by such projects as the Green Art Festival in Romania<sup>49</sup> and Arte(sania)<sup>50</sup> in Spain. The activities under these projects showcased various forms of artwork, including digital pieces focused on themes such as the green transition, the climate crisis, waste management, selective collection, and other relevant topics.

Youth consultations mostly take place between policymakers and some structured form of youth organisation, such as youth councils. Still, if these youth organisations are non-existent, decision-makers need to support the creations of such structures through funding programmes, initiatives for providing know-how and awareness among students and young people, youth exchanges, or other means. Youth representatives need to be included in the working groups of all relevant policies that either directly or indirectly impact youth and should be given timely, accurate and complete information about future consultation processes and forums. In addition, the consultation of unaffiliated young people should be ensured through opinion polls and other forms of participation.



48. European Commission, [Youth for a just transition - a toolkit for youth participation in the just transition fund](#), European Commission, pp. 16, 29 January 2021.

49. EUTEens4Green, [Green Art Festival](#), EUTEens4Green, 27 March 2024.

50. EUTEens4Green, [Arte\(sania\)](#), EUTEens4Green, 27 March 2024.

## Clear follow-up process after consultations

Following the consultation process, it is crucial to ensure that there is a clear follow-up mechanism that proves that the input of young people has been valued and taken into account. This includes following through on consultation results and promises made during such processes and illustrating how the perspectives and priorities of youth have influenced decisions and fund spending.

Furthermore, it is important to communicate the outcomes of the consultation process back to participants. This can be done through a consultation document or other form of feedback that outlines how their input was considered and incorporated into final decisions or policies. By such means, authorities ensure transparency and accountability but also prevent young people from experiencing disenchantment and resignation by showing that their contributions have a real impact on shaping policies and initiatives.





## Recommendations

# Dedicated funding for youth-led and youth-focused projects

Introducing new funding mechanisms tailored to youth-focused and youth-led initiatives is crucial to empowering young individuals, enabling them to effectively realise their ideas, and fostering positive transformations in their respective regions. The youth toolkit established by the European Commission highlights the necessity for the 'allocation of funding for youth-specific projects'.<sup>51</sup>

EUTeens4Green is an example of such an innovative initiative, where dedicated funding for small-scale, youth-led projects combined with awareness and capacity-development facilitated the implementation of 70 transformative ideas across the just transition regions in the European Union. In a survey conducted at the beginning of 2024 involving the EUTeens4Green beneficiaries, numerous responses underlined the significance of such initiatives. The answers received included such comments as, 'It is a great initiative, and there should be more opportunities for young people to access funding opportunities like this one', expressions of gratitude like 'We are immensely grateful for the opportunity to be part of this impactful initiative. The journey so far has been enlightening and rewarding', and acknowledgements such as 'Thank you for involving youth in the transition'.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, we call on both European Union and national authorities to facilitate access to dedicated financial resources for young people to contribute to the sustainable development of their local communities. With youths' enormous potential to be the drivers of Cohesion Policy, it is essential to provide them with the necessary financial support, including targeted grants such as EUTeens4Green. At the same time, it is crucial to avoid overburdening them with administrative bureaucracy through the creation of training programmes by local and/or regional entities on how to develop successful proposals for the European Commission, thus increasing the interest and participation of youth in the European Union granting and funding system. The last section of this publication will provide more specific lessons learned from this project, as well as offer some suggestions for improvement.



51. European Commission, [Youth for a just transition - a toolkit for youth participation in the just transition fund](#), European Commission, pp. 16, 29 January 2021.

52. The survey was conducted in February and March 2024. [The results are available under this link.](#)



## Recommendations

# Youth-focused indicators measuring the success of Cohesion Policy

Without specifically measuring how the implementation of policy impacts young people and takes them into account, it is difficult to even observe what has changed in terms of youth participation in decision-making and fund spending. This need was already identified by the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ), which developed a 'self-assessment tool for the development of youth policy'. The tool was developed to help Member States to self-assess their compliance with the Council of Europe's standards for youth policy, and to serve as a basis for self-paced youth policy development'.<sup>53</sup>

The tool they have created, called 'Self-assessment tool for youth policy', shows the type of indicators that could also be implemented to measure the impacts Cohesion Policy has on youth. It includes six areas of intervention:

- participation
- information
- inclusion
- access to rights
- youth work
- mobility

These areas are further developed to 'provide specific and measurable indicators with which Member States can begin to gauge progress in implementing core Council of Europe standards'.<sup>54</sup> For example, in looking at the right to information, it mentions such indicators as 'youth policy facilitates the provision of relevant youth-friendly information, and access of all young people to it, both offline and online' and 'youth policy creates opportunities for young people to develop competences for the management of information',<sup>55</sup> which are similar to some of our own recommendations mentioned above.

As we begin to evaluate the implementation of Cohesion Policy throughout the Member States, it will also be important to provide recommendations for more specific indicators measuring the success of decision-making and fund-spending processes. This would entail measuring how the projects executed in the countries and regions impacted young people. For example, they could look at how much funding was directly applied for by people under the age of 26, which types of funds they most frequently used, what future-proof skills they gained through the available educational programmes financed through available European Union funds, how many new jobs were created that targeted and employed young people, etc. One interesting idea for such an indicator of the success of the Just Transition Fund was proposed by the Greek non-governmental organisation The Green Tank. They indicate youth drain retention as a possible indicator that could be established, for example, through a 'focus on data collection and keeping a meticulous record of the transition's social and economic impacts on the 15-29 age group'.<sup>56</sup> Depopulation and youth migration away from transitioning regions is a very real challenge faced by such regions, but few plans for the transition actually tackle this issue head-on. Therefore, it is necessary to check if any of the measures that are being implemented truly do bring any concrete results.

53. Council of Europe, [Self-assessment tool](#), Council of Europe, 27 March 2024.

54. Council of Europe, [Self-assessment tool](#), Council of Europe, 27 March 2024.

55. Council of Europe, [Self-assessment tool](#), Council of Europe, 27 March 2024.

56. Theodosiou I., Kaminaris O., [The role of Youth in the Just Transition: The case of Western Macedonia](#), The Green Tank, pp. 32, October 2022.

## Educational and training programmes and awareness-raising activities



More than EUR 33 billion has been allocated under Cohesion Policy for the 2021-2027 period to measures directly targeting education, training and skills development.<sup>57</sup> Yet, the report on the future of Cohesion Policy underlines the remaining issue of a development trap which still affects many regions (especially rural areas) in the European Union, leading to a declining working-age population, exacerbated by brain drain and population ageing. Limited educational opportunities can also hinder the successful involvement of young people in the local and regional decision-making processes. Direct investments and incentives in education are crucial in order to avoid being stuck in development, talent and structural traps, and to improve the competitiveness and attractiveness of the regions.

The projects under the EUTeens4Green initiative demonstrate how youth play a crucial role in raising awareness through tools like educational materials, interactive forums, and other innovative means. These projects seek not only to deepen understanding of the European Union Green Deal among young people, but also to engage a wider audience. Furthermore, the projects supported by the initiative serve as models of sustainable and cost-effective methods, leveraging the capabilities of young individuals and encouraging them to invest in their local communities.

In the survey conducted under the EUTeens4Green initiative aimed at policymakers and other professionals involved in the just transition process, multiple respondents underlined that one of the remaining barriers is a lack of awareness regarding available opportunities, as well as a lack of general knowledge about the green transition of their respective regions. As a means to overcome this, they offered several suggestions, e.g. 'campaigns to target young people and inform them about the opportunity to be involved', 'training and mentorship programmes to equip young people with the skills and knowledge they need to effectively participate in decision-making processes', and 'including funded opportunities in the school curriculum and train teachers so they can train/educate/inform students on these issues. Creating pedagogical kits and tools that can be used everywhere and spread rapidly to make these opportunities and this information available to everyone, even in rural areas'.

We urge regional and national authorities to adapt and improve educational programmes in schools and universities to reflect our evolving circumstances. This includes integrating such topics as climate change, the transition toward sustainable economies, and the explanation of benefits coming from Cohesion Policy and other European Union initiatives in official school programmes. The authors of the report on the future of Cohesion Policy stress the importance of regional policymakers prioritising skill development and education to meet market needs and the evolving demands of the workforce.<sup>58</sup> As for European Union decision-makers, we advise using the potential of European Union funds for the support of new skills or awareness-raising activities, especially in rural areas with more limited access to higher education as compared to metropolitan areas.



57. Littlewood M., Giorgi E., Bolognini R., Buinauskas D., Engels P., *Cohesion policy support to education, training and skills*, European Commission, 27 March 2024.

58. European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, *Forging a sustainable future together – Cohesion for a competitive and inclusive Europe – Report of the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy*, February 2024, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024.



## Recommendations

# Capacity-building and mentorship programmes dedicated to youth

In addition to formal education in schools and universities, it is essential for young people and youth organisations to have access to regional capacity-building training programmes. According to participants in the EUTeens4Green initiative, one of the most crucial steps governments can take to enhance young people's involvement in decision-making is to provide funding for training and capacity-building initiatives. Furthermore, they recommend extending these activities not only to young individuals, but also to the adults who support them. In the context of the EUTeens4Green initiatives, young people received hands-on support from local facilitators who were crucial in assisting in the preparation and implementation of projects. They guided the youth and help to address questions regarding project management, finances, and any other areas needing clarification.

The toolkit developed by the Commission emphasises the importance of knowledge-sharing and capacity-building techniques in levelling the playing field among participants, allowing less experienced voices to be heard and promoting well-informed outcomes.<sup>59</sup>

We therefore echo the guidance provided by both the Commission and the respondents of the survey, urging regional and national authorities to invest in capacity building and training for both young people and the adults who assist them. These activities are best conducted in person rather than through online platforms, as face-to-face interaction fosters more successful interactions and knowledge sharing.

The effectiveness of such initiatives can be further enhanced by ensuring continuity and predictability, possibly through the establishment of specific bodies tasked with managing logistics and facilitating communication.

Mentorship programmes can also be used as a tool for capacity building. Such programmes can improve outcomes across academic, emotional and social areas of young people's lives. Successful mentorship programmes create a long-term relationship between the mentor and the mentee. Mentors with professional backgrounds in working with vulnerable young people, such as social workers, tended to have better outcomes than those with no such background. Matching mentees and mentors who have similar backgrounds and taking cultural aspects into account are important ingredients of effective mentoring programmes.<sup>60</sup>



59. European Commission, [Youth for a just transition - a toolkit for youth participation in the just transition fund](#), European Commission, pp. 16, 29 January 2021.

60. Armitage H., et al., [What Makes for Effective Youth Mentoring Programmes](#), Nesta, pp. 11-13, June 2020.

## Lessons Learned from EUTeens4Green

### Strengthening the involvement of youth in policy-making processes as well as enhancing the capacity of young people to shape and lead the green transition

In the context of the EUTeens4Green initiative, the involvement of young people has shown their capacity to identify issues within their communities and propose innovative, creative and ambitious solutions. By making suggestions and participating in the projects, these young Europeans have highlighted their perspectives, creativity, and problem-solving skills, which is essential for addressing local challenges related to the green transition. Local, regional, national and European Union authorities should be inspired by their engagement, build on the results of the projects, and mobilise youth via dedicated structures, such as youth councils, youth assemblies, monitoring committees, and regular consultations with clear follow-up processes.

“

**Young people are not just passive beneficiaries of policies but are also active agents of change with valuable contributions**

”

Moreover, integrating youth into structures which are crucial for policymaking also fosters a more inclusive and representative governance structure. It recognises that young people are not just passive beneficiaries of policies but are also active agents of change with valuable contributions. Their involvement can lead to more effective, transparent and youth-centric approaches to addressing challenges, benefiting both the present and future generations.

The way the EUTeens4Green initiative was structured, leaving young people space for the implementation of their own projects that they created from scratch without any changes being imposed, proved that it is essential to trust them in the process and to allow for their creative expression. Therefore, dedicated funding for similar projects should be constructed around a similar idea of full youth ownership and freedom in the creation and implementation of their ideas.

The majority of EUTeens4Green projects fall under two categories that are perfectly in line with the above-mentioned recommendations: awareness-raising and campaigning activities as well as capacity-building actions.

#### **Awareness-raising and campaigning activities:**

These projects aim to inform and educate young individuals about environmental issues relevant to their respective regions, such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, etc. The goal is to raise awareness about these issues and motivate individuals to take action to address them. This might involve organising events, art festivals, creating educational materials, running social media campaigns, etc.

#### **Capacity-building actions:**

These projects focus on equipping young people with the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to actively participate in environmental initiatives and make a positive impact in their respective regions. This could include providing training workshops, mentorship programmes, networking opportunities, etc.

Thus, through the implementation of projects falling under these two categories, EUTeens4Green proved that by involving young people directly in the planning, decision-making, and implementation of environmental projects, they become more empowered and more capable of shaping and leading a green and just transition. By providing them with opportunities to engage in meaningful action, they become catalysts for positive change in their communities and beyond.

Among EUTEens4Green projects that could inspire decision-makers in the implementation of the above-mentioned policy recommendations, as well as activities based on awareness-raising and capacity building, are the following:

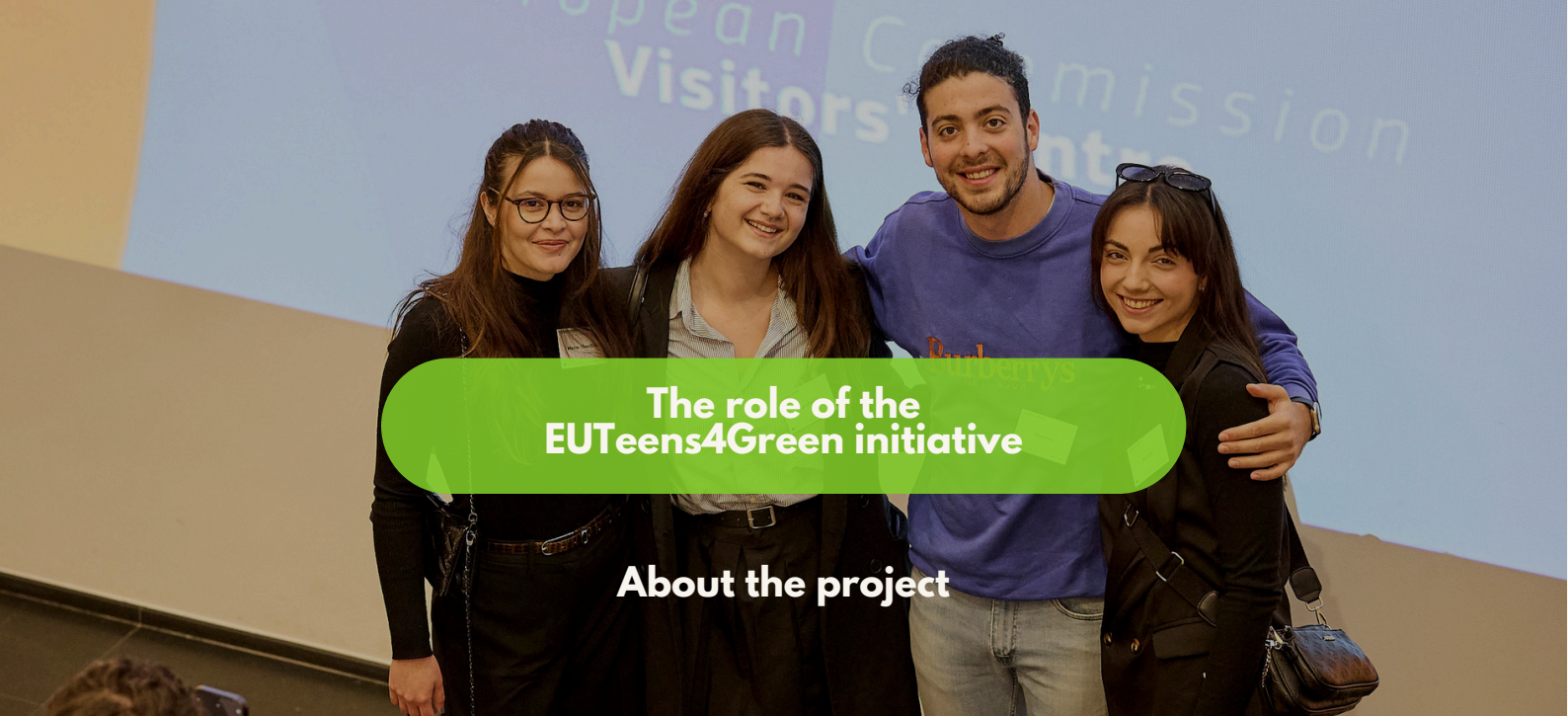
- CV workshops conducted in Eastern Wielkopolska in Poland ('Skills for future');
- educational application for young people in Greece ('Educational web application for raising teens' awareness about just transition');
- education youth meetings and e-book in Leon in Spain ('Educational youth meetings for social talent and green transition');
- educational centre for green energy, transition and new methods of energy production ('JusT4Youth in Western Macedonia');
- escape rooms in Bulgaria and Greece ('Ecotopia Caring Community', 'The Green Gate of Transition');
- camps on renewable energy in Slovakia ('NextGen Energy');
- photo albums on industrial heritage in Jiu Valley, Romania ('Identity in Transition!');
- school gardening and a fashion design club in Ireland ('The Garden of Eden');
- events and hackathons on climate policymaking in Malta ('Our Sustainable Europe');
- SWOT analyses for SMEs to assess their readiness for absorbing European green grants in Syra in Greece ('Syra - Smart Sustainable Island');
- workshops with experts, scientists and representatives of the city government in Chorzów in Poland ('Space for Change');
- recycling and litter collection in A Coruña in Spain ('Green Souls');
- living library meetings in Kozani in Greece ('Living Library Sessions: Kozani's Just Transition as an Open Book').

Further details about these and other projects can be found on the EUTEens4Green site.<sup>61</sup>



61. EUTEens4Green, [Selected Projects](#), *EUTEens4Green*, 27 March 2024.





## The role of the EUTeens4Green initiative

### About the project

The EUTeens4Green initiative, organised by the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) as part of the 2022 European Year of Youth, operates through a consortium of three organisations: the Startup Europe Regions Network (SERN), Youth and Environment Europe (YEE), and CEE Bankwatch Network (BWN), with support from Generation Climate Europe (GCE). Each partner organisation plays a significant role within the project, creating a logical and complementary division of tasks.

DG REGIO initiated this collaborative approach to empower young people to take charge and become agents of change by implementing initiatives aimed at the green recovery of their respective regions. The initiative targets youths aged 15 to 24 residing in regions covered by Territorial Just Transition Plans.

Aligned with several European Union initiatives<sup>62</sup> aimed at enhancing youth involvement in policymaking and bridging the gap between young people and policymakers, the project seeks to amplify young voices on critical issues such as climate change, employment, education, and training. It contributes to bolstering the civic engagement of youths, in line with the 2022 European Year of Youth and the Conference on the Future of Europe, encouraging young people to actively participate in discussions concerning Europe's challenges.

# EUTEENS4GREEN

A NEW GENERATION OF YOUTH AMBASSADORS FOR AN INCLUSIVE GREEN TRANSITION

62. Such as the European Year of Youth, a toolkit for youth participation, the Just Transition Platform or the Youth Taskforce established in 2024.

The project's objectives include:

- **co-designing and promoting a call** with support from key stakeholders at local, regional, national, and European levels;
- **leveraging external evaluators' expertise** to assess proposals and select predefined criteria;
- **mobilising a broad network** of supporting organisations to complement consortium efforts and promote the call;
- **establishing a collaborative process** which allows the youth to suggest their ideas and adjust them to the local needs, but also to get the necessary support from the consortium;
- **efficiently managing support schemes** and providing technical and financial assistance to selected projects to ensure successful implementation;
- **facilitating exchanges and cross-fertilisation events** to enable knowledge sharing, networking, and peer learning at various levels;
- **developing and executing an effective communication strategy** to enhance scheme visibility and reach;
- **engaging diverse stakeholders** in activities benefiting territories with Just Transition Fund characteristics and their inhabitants, thus promoting open and effective governance of Cohesion Policy;
- **establishing and maintaining an information portal** (a digital platform called Decidim) to showcase supported actions and facilitate collaboration among users;
- **monitoring actions' progress and evaluating scheme effectiveness** from both internal and external perspectives, estimating project impacts;
- **offering recommendations to policymakers** on incorporating youth participation in Cohesion Policy investments linked to the green transition, highlighting its potential for decision-making processes, and inspiring relevant authorities.



## Insights from the selection process

The initial stage of the project was focused on the preparation and promotion of the call through online consultations. They aimed to grasp the needs and expectations of potential participants across various regions eligible for funding. An online survey gathered 71 responses from individuals and organisational representatives. A think tank was subsequently created, which gathered 57 experts from the youth field and environmental organisations to share knowledge, provide insights and identify needs related to youth. Their input was crucial for the analysis of the survey, designing the call for projects, and preparing the final recommendations. During the think tank meeting that took place in July 2022, the members reflected on the types of activities that should be funded. These included (non-exhaustive list): awareness-raising and education; capacity building; campaigning; innovation; advocacy; and research.

The input received resulted in the preparation of the call, which was officially validated by the Steering Committee, set up to closely oversee the operationalisation of the scheme. Once the call was finalised, the consortium, with the inclusion of Generation Climate Europe (the supporting organisation), launched the dissemination and promotion of the call among its member networks, youth field stakeholders and platforms, schools, universities, and educational organisations, as well as European Union and national desks and agencies across the whole of Europe.

An information package about the call (including all relevant documents and the video tutorials prepared by the consortium) was forwarded to the stakeholders involved in the promotion of the call. By the time the call for projects had closed, Generation Climate Europe and Youth and Environment Europe had organised 23 webinars to provide information and clarifications about the selection process and eligibility to potential candidates.

The extensive promotion and outreach campaign resulted in the submission of 197 applications from 22 out of the 27 Member States (no applications were received from Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Italy, or Sweden). The proposals were reviewed by an evaluation committee (formed by external experts), and the final scores were validated by the consortium and DG Regio. Among the 164 of these that fulfilled the criteria (aged between 15 and 24 and residency/establishment in a just transition territory), a final list of 75 pre-selected projects was chosen. The selected projects had a maximum duration of 12 months and received funding of up to EUR 10 000.

In a survey assessing the evaluation committee's work, all respondents expressed satisfaction with the efficiency of the selection process, rating it as satisfactory or highly satisfactory.<sup>63</sup> They provided comments such as 'The selection process was quick and straightforward' and 'The evaluation process was clear and well-organised, with the team communicating effectively'. Additionally, they offered valuable suggestions for enhancing both the process and the call itself, which will be discussed further in the recommendations section aimed at further improving the success of such projects. This innovative sub-granting process implemented under EUTeens4Green was based on principles of co-ownership, inclusivity, transparency, and equity. The approach was proved by the participatory way that the call was designed – through an open consultation process with field experts. Feedback from applicants indicated that the majority of respondents agreed with the following statements: 'The application timeline allowed for adequate preparation and submission' and 'The submission requirements (including eligibility criteria, project scopes, and documentation) were clearly understandable'. However, respondents frequently cited concerns about the administrative burden, underlining excessive documentation and a 'tiring micro-management' approach.

63. The survey was conducted at the beginning of 2023. [The results can be found under this link.](#)

## Analysis of proposed projects and their results

The projects were clustered into five thematic areas.

- 1 Awareness-raising and advocacy**  
Projects include initiatives promoting circular economy or gardening, educational web applications for raising teen awareness of just transition, living library sessions, escape room games, workshops, and conferences.
- 2 Capacity-building actions**  
Projects under this category focus on educational, training, and mentoring activities. Ideas range from designing an eco-house, waste-collection activities, debates, and film screenings to field visits, modern ecology courses, climate literacy summer schools, and hackathons.
- 3 Innovative solutions or pilots**  
These projects involve testing innovative solutions. Examples include the installation of a vertical farm in a school, implementation of a green roof at the university campus, and non-formal educational approaches focusing on circular economy.
- 4 Research**  
This category encompasses projects focusing on research. For instance, one project is researching and developing biochars for sustainable wastewater treatment and reuse in agriculture.
- 5 Other activities**  
This category includes various activities beyond the themes mentioned above.

Detailed information about each project is available on the Decidim platform, which also serves as an interactive space for exchanges among the project leaders, consortium members and local facilitators.

The implementation phase kick-off for the youth-led projects started on 1 April 2023. The beneficiaries had the opportunity to present their ideas, interact with each other, and explore the features of the information portal during the first cross-fertilisation session, which took place in May.



The following months were all about putting into practice everything that was promised in the proposals. With the support of local facilitators, young project leaders all around the European Union translated their ideas into action. Their dedication, creativity and excitement were showcased on the official EUTEENS4Green social media accounts,<sup>64</sup> as well as in a series of interviews on the EUTEENS4Green podcast.<sup>65</sup> Young people involved in the project had the chance to discuss their initiatives and reflect on the transformational processes of their respective regions, shedding light on their concerns and on the remaining obstacles as well.

Based on the feedback received and the overall evaluation of this initiative, it has demonstrated success by empowering youth and enabling them to become actors for change within their communities. Through regular conversations with young project leaders, it became clear that they gained valuable practical skills in project management, including financial aspects, and created new friendships and connections with local authorities. The initiative not only inspired those directly involved in its implementation, but also a wider audience, emphasising that every individual voice and idea matters in the transition towards climate-neutral societies. Furthermore, it showcased practical examples of green actions, which hopefully will inspire further sustainable behaviours such as increased bike usage, recycling, and the creation of community gardens. The ambitious and creative young people who were part of this initiative are true multipliers of positive change in their communities all across the European Union.

Given this success, it is crucial to emphasise the importance of continuing such projects in other areas as well, especially those which are often marginalised and affected by issues such as brain drain, limited opportunities for youth, and depopulation. Drawing from our experience with this initiative, we have compiled recommendations aimed at improving the success of similar initiatives in the future.



64. Instagram: [EUTEENS4Green \(@euteens4green\)](https://www.instagram.com/euteens4green) • Instagram photos and videos X/Twitter: [EUTEENS4Green \(@EuTeens4Green\)](https://twitter.com/EUTEENS4Green) / X (twitter.com)

65. [The EUTEENS4Green Podcast | Podcast on Spotify](#)

## Recommendations for future improvement

### **Allocate a larger budget for internal management to support efficient project implementation and meet timelines effectively**

The management experience of EUTeens4Green showed the need for increased capacity and human resources to oversee all 73 projects, offer essential support, address inquiries, coordinate regular and ad hoc meetings, create promotional materials, and oversee the work of beneficiaries, as well as local facilitators and the think tank. To address this challenge, we recommend a substantial increase in budget allocation for internal administration, logistics, provision of support for grant applicants, and coordination efforts.

### **Organise preparatory meetings or training sessions for potential beneficiaries to provide necessary background information before proposal writing**

This recommendation comes from a survey of all applicants (both awarded and non-awarded).<sup>66</sup> The respondents underline the need to set up sessions which can offer guidance on project planning, proposal development, and understanding the requirements and expectations of the initiative.

### **Develop specific evaluation criteria tailored to distinguish between applications from youth and professional NGOs**

This recommendation comes from feedback provided by the evaluation committee, highlighting the challenge they faced in assessing applications from both young, inexperienced individuals or youth groups and professional NGOs. They observed a big gap in quality, while ideas from less experienced individuals were often equally inspiring and promising. To address this difference, the proposal was put forward to distinguish between the two groups and create distinct assessment criteria to ensure a fair grading system.

### **Introduce local facilitators earlier in the project and define their responsibilities more clearly to offer immediate assistance and guidance to young participants**

The local facilitators were crucial in assisting the preparation and implementation of projects, offering hands-on assistance. They were chosen to guide the youth and help address questions regarding project management, finances, and any other areas needing clarification.

We believe that the earlier engagement of facilitators with clearly defined guidelines and responsibilities, as well as higher remuneration, would further improve support structures for young people and enhance the clarity of their cooperation.

This was also underlined in a survey aimed at local facilitators conducted in February and March of 2024.<sup>67</sup> They highlighted that 'there should be more clear guidance on the role of the local facilitators. For instance, having X number of meetings, at least one interaction between projects, or something similar'.

What is more, we recommend that authorities creating such initiatives should add local facilitators as a necessary component of the call for proposals.



66. The survey was conducted in the first half of the 2023. [The results are available under this link.](#)

67. The survey was conducted in February and March 2024. [The results are available under this link.](#)

## Ensure more administrative and finance-related support for young leaders in the implementation of their projects

Young participants have highlighted significant challenges with administrative burdens, particularly in the signing and reporting processes. These obstacles divert their time and attention away from project implementation, necessitating close weekly support from the coordination team during specific phases. Additionally, such challenges have deterred some projects from proceeding with implementation, leading to cancellations. Therefore, we recommend streamlining bureaucratic processes for youth-targeted projects. For instance, consider providing lump-sum funding or prizes rather than relying solely on reimbursement for real projects costs.

## Create a platform that provides an interactive space for participants

Create a platform designed to enhance interactive engagement among participants, serving as a dynamic space for exchanges between beneficiaries, local facilitators, and the coordination team. Ensuring sustainability beyond the project's conclusion, it should effectively meet the evolving expectations and needs of the target audience, incorporating trends, technological advancements, and user-friendly features. The platform should be easy to use and be used as the main forum for creating connections between various projects, as well allow them to easily interact with their respective local facilitators.

The Decidim platform,<sup>68</sup> which was used throughout the course of the initiative, unfortunately proved to be rather unsuccessful in bringing participants together, and it was not actively used to network and connect with others. This was also confirmed by local facilitators, who repeatedly mentioned in a survey assessing their workplatform was not easy to navigate, the youth were not willing to use it, and it was more efficient to communicate via email.<sup>69</sup> One of the respondents also added that 'if the users of the Decidim platform were better connected from the beginning, I think the project would have enabled even more international networking between the participants. This could be a very beneficial networking experience for young people from each Member State'.

## Define the responsibilities of the think tank more clearly to ensure its successful involvement in the initiative

The think tank gathered 57 experts from the youth field and environmental organisations to share knowledge, provide insights and identify needs related to youth. While their involvement and input were crucial for designing the call for projects and preparing the final recommendations, there is still room for improvement. Firstly, we recommend defining its responsibilities in a clearer way and secondly, using its potential even more actively during the implementation of the entire initiative. It has great potential as an observatory body in assessing current statuses and suggesting measures beneficial for the project's objectives.



68. EU Teens4Green, [Welcome to the EU Teens4Green participatory platform!](#), EU Teens4Green, 27 March 2024.

69. The survey was conducted in February and March 2024. [The results are available under this link.](#)



## Conclusions

In conclusion, the EUTeens4Green initiative has not only demonstrated the potential of young people to drive sustainable change within their communities, but has also revealed critical barriers that hinder their full participation in the decision-making processes. Through the project's initiatives, young Europeans proved their creativity, problem-solving skills, and commitment to addressing the most pressing environmental and social challenges visible in their respective regions.

The findings of the project explained in this publication highlighted several key recommendations for policymakers and professionals involved in the just transition process. Firstly, there is a pressing need to enhance youth participation in decision-making processes at all levels, from local to European Union governance structures. This requires creating dedicated channels for youth engagement, such as youth councils and regular consultations, with clear follow-up mechanisms to ensure their voices are properly heard. Given the visible distrust and disenchantment among young people towards the political system and the multitude of crises affecting the world today, this becomes particularly important.

Additionally, efforts should be made to raise awareness among young people about opportunities for involvement in green initiatives and provide them with the necessary support and resources to initiate and lead projects. The success of the EUTeens4Green projects shows the importance of trusting young people and giving them autonomy in the design and implementation of their ideas.

Furthermore, integrating youth into governance structures not only promotes inclusivity but also leads to more effective and youth-centric policies. Recognising young people as active agents of change with valuable contributions fosters a more transparent and representative decision-making process.

Moving forward, it is essential to build upon the successes of the EUTeens4Green initiative and ensure continued support for similar initiatives. This includes dedicated funding streams that prioritise youth ownership and freedom in project creation and implementation. By investing in youth-led initiatives, we can harness the potential of young people to shape a more sustainable and just future for all.