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YOUTH SHAPING EUROPE'S TOMORROW

TRAINING IN DRAFTING IMPACTFUL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (2ND SESSION IN BRUSSELS)

YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

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I. INTRODUCTION

The project U4EU 2.0: Youth Shaping Europe's Tomorrow aims to empower young people to actively shape the future of Europe, with a primary focus on enhancing youth engagement, democratic participation, and policy advocacy. U4EU 2.0 features a series of youth summits, thematic workshops, training sessions, policy development, and advocacy efforts conducted in nine EU countries. These activities address critical challenges faced by young people, including limited engagement in policy-making, awareness gaps regarding EU institutions and policies, digital literacy deficiencies, and disparities in gender and diversity participation. Through transnational collaboration and leveraging insights from extensive research and prior experience, U4EU 2.0 equips young participants with essential skills, knowledge, and opportunities to become active stakeholders in shaping a more inclusive and democratic Europe. The project intends to promote a greater sense of belonging to the EU and its core values among young Europeans.

The project runs between May 2024 and April 2026. It is funded by the European Commission, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme.

A. Description of the training

The international training “Drafting Impactful Policy Recommendations” brought together 26 young participants from ten European countries for an intensive two-day capacity-building experience in Brussels. The programme aimed to strengthen participants’ understanding of how EU institutions function, how citizens can influence policymaking, and how evidence-based recommendations are developed and communicated.

Throughout the training, participants explored the full journey from identifying policy challenges to formulating concrete, actionable proposals suitable for European-level advocacy. Guided by experienced facilitators and guest experts, they engaged in a balanced mix of theoretical input, practical exercises, and collaborative group work. Special emphasis was placed on EU participation tools, strategic communication, stakeholder engagement, and the challenges posed by populism in shaping public debates.

The training fostered cross-border cooperation, peer learning, and creativity, providing a dynamic environment where young people could experiment with new tools, test their ideas, and learn from real-world case studies. By the end of the programme, participants co-created a set of focused policy recommendations, demonstrating their enhanced capacity to contribute meaningfully to inclusive and forward-looking EU policymaking.

B. Agenda

Day 1

9:30 - Welcome

9:40 - Getting to know each other

10:10 - Project presentation, aims of the training & success criteria

10:30 - What is Europe for me?

10:45 - Team topics & roles

11:00 - Coffee break

11:30 - Policy cycle + SMART+E

12:00 - EU participation tools & advocacy channels

12:30 - Micro-demo: choosing the right EU route

13:30 - Lunch

14:30 - Policy analysis lab: problem tree + stakeholder & pressure map

15:00 - Populism & policy pressure

15:30 - Coffee break

16:00 - Drafting recommendations + advocacy targets & tactics

16:30 - Best practices from the EU

17:00 - Feedback and closure of the day

Day 2

9:30 - Good morning, feedback from yesterday

9:45 - Populism Stress-Test Clinic

10:00 - Advocacy tactics sprint: targets, ladder of engagement, coalition & timeline

10:30 - Coffee break

11:00 - Creative Lab

11:45 - Evaluation & next steps

12:00 - Lunch

14:00 - Departures

C. Methodology

The training applied a participatory, practice-oriented methodology designed to build both knowledge and practical competencies in EU-level advocacy and policy development. The approach combined expert-led input with experiential learning, ensuring that participants were not passive recipients but active co-creators throughout the process. A competency-based framework guided the structure of the training, focusing on analytical thinking, evidence-informed decision-making, communication for advocacy, and collaborative problem-solving. Short theoretical segments were followed by immediate application through structured exercises, enabling participants to internalise key concepts and tools.

The methodology integrated several complementary components:

- Interactive lectures to introduce core concepts, such as the EU policy cycle, participation mechanisms, and principles of effective recommendations.
- Hands-on labs and clinics, including a Policy Analysis Lab and a Populism Stress-Test Clinic, to help participants deconstruct real policy problems using tools such as problem trees, stakeholder mapping, and pressure mapping.
- Co-creation sprints in mixed-nationality groups to simulate real-world policy development processes and strengthen peer-to-peer learning.

- Expert contributions offering concrete case studies and professional insights from the fields of campaigning, anti-trafficking policy, and participatory legislative methods.
- Creative facilitation methods, including elements of legislative theatre, to encourage innovative thinking, inclusive participation, and new approaches to public engagement.
- Feedback loops, reflective sessions, and peer review to consolidate learning and promote continuous improvement.

The training was deliberately structured to foster cross-cultural exchange, teamwork, and cooperation across borders, reflecting EU values of participation, dialogue, and inclusive policymaking. By the end of the programme, participants had collaboratively produced concrete policy proposals, demonstrating the effectiveness of the methodology in strengthening youth engagement in European public policy processes.

II. YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

Minority Endangered Language Preservation in the EU

This policy proposal calls on the European Commission to strengthen and implement a comprehensive EU-level approach to the preservation of minority endangered languages over the next 20 years, through the development of a dedicated and coordinated policy framework.

The proposed policy actions include:

- Collaboration between native language speakers and university researchers to develop dictionaries, grammars, and translations of books, traditional tales, and cultural materials in endangered languages.
- Joint work between traditional educators and language researchers to train language teachers, using a combination of online and offline tools and teaching methodologies.
- Municipality-level language courses delivered by a pedagogical duo consisting of a traditional educator and a qualified language teacher, ensuring cultural sensitivity and deeper understanding of linguistic and cultural nuances.
- Creation of accessible public spaces for language use and practice - such as libraries, ludotekas, and community clubs - with a particular focus on children and young people.

- Promotion of university-level elective courses dedicated to endangered and minority languages.
- Organisation of artistic and creative competitions (e.g. video projects, social media campaigns) requiring the use of endangered languages, combined with material incentives to encourage participation and visibility.

Strengthening Cycling in EU Cities

The European Union recognises cycling as a sustainable, healthy, and affordable mode of transport. The European Declaration on Cycling (2024) confirms this commitment, but implementation across Member States remains uneven and largely non-binding. Stronger EU action is needed to ensure that cycling is fully integrated into urban mobility and EU-funded infrastructure.

This recommendation proposes three key measures.

1. Minimum Cycling Standards for EU-Funded Urban Roads

We call on the European Commission to require that all EU-funded road projects in urban areas include safe and continuous cycling infrastructure, ensuring that cycling is systematically integrated into transport investments. This requirement should apply to urban areas with more than 100,000 inhabitants or functional urban areas, with scaled obligations for smaller cities. Minimum standards should include physically separated cycle lanes on roads with speed

limits above 30 km/h, safe intersections and crossings, connections to public transport (such as bike parking, secure storage, and charging facilities), and integration with existing cycling networks. By setting clear minimum requirements, EU funding can support coherent and safe cycling networks and ensure that cycling is not treated as an optional add-on in urban road development.

2. Dedicated EU Cycling Fund

We call on the European Commission to establish a dedicated EU Cycling Fund as a ring-fenced budget within the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034) to support the development of urban cycling infrastructure, innovation, and better integration with other transport modes. The fund should co-finance cycling network expansions in eligible cities, support pilot projects in active travel innovation (such as e-cargo bike logistics, smart infrastructure, and secure parking hubs), provide technical assistance to local authorities for planning and implementation, and incentivise safe design training and enforcement measures. An initial budget of €5–8 billion for the funding period would be proportionate to other EU mobility and climate investments and consistent with existing Commission estimates, while a dedicated funding stream would improve predictability, visibility, and equity, encouraging Member States and cities to prioritise cycling and reducing regional disparities in cycling infrastructure development.

3. EU-Level Binding Modal-Share Targets for Cycling in Urban Areas

We call on the European Commission to introduce binding EU-level modal-share targets for cycling in urban areas within existing policy frameworks such as the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy and relevant climate and transport legislation. These targets could include achieving a 10% cycling modal share by 2030 and 15% by 2035 in cities with more than 250,000 inhabitants. Targets should be established at EU, national, and city levels, with clear reporting requirements, and Member States should be required to include cycling modal-share indicators in their national transport plans. Although current EU policy recognises the value of cycling, it does not set binding targets; introducing them would strengthen accountability, support strategic planning, and help mobilise resources to accelerate the shift towards sustainable urban mobility.

EU Digital Defence

We call on the European Commission to develop a binding EU directive integrating Digital Defence into the high school curricula of all Member States by 2027. This is necessary because recent studies (e.g. PNAS) show that formal media literacy training can reduce belief in disinformation by up to 26%.

In parallel, we call for the operationalisation of the European

Democracy Shield through the establishment of a joint EU AI task force to detect and counter coordinated disinformation campaigns and bot networks in real time.

To strengthen Europe's democratic resilience and security, we further call for the formal integration of frontline partner countries, including Ukraine and Georgia, into this data-sharing and early-warning framework by 2028, ensuring a proactive and coordinated response to hybrid threats targeting European democracies.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The international training “Drafting Impactful Policy Recommendations” demonstrated the transformative potential of investing in youth engagement in EU policymaking. Over two dynamic days, 26 participants from ten European countries immersed themselves in an intensive learning process that combined expert-led inputs, hands-on analytical exercises, creative facilitation methods, and collaborative group work.

The training not only deepened their understanding of how EU institutions function and how policy decisions are shaped, but also equipped them with a practical toolkit to analyse problems, craft evidence-informed recommendations, and plan targeted advocacy strategies.

A key achievement of the programme was its ability to foster meaningful cross-border cooperation. By working in mixed-nationality teams, participants exchanged diverse perspectives, challenged their assumptions, and learned to co-create solutions in an inclusive and constructive way. The contributions of external experts further enriched the process, offering real-world insights into campaigning, anti-trafficking policy, and participatory legislative practices. These inputs helped participants understand the complexity of policy change while also showing that citizens - especially young people - can play a direct role in shaping public debate and influencing EU priorities.

The training culminated in the co-creation and presentation of concrete policy recommendations, demonstrating both the quality of the work accomplished and the participants' strengthened confidence in their ability to act. Beyond the tangible outputs, the programme built long-lasting skills in critical thinking, communication, coalition-building, and participatory policymaking- all essential for active, informed citizenship in today's Europe.

Overall, the training demonstrated that when young people have access to knowledge, mentorship, and collaborative learning spaces, they can make meaningful contributions to inclusive, future-oriented European policies. The experience reaffirmed the importance of youth participation as a cornerstone of a vibrant, democratic, and resilient European Union.