



October 2025

YOUTH SHAPING EUROPE'S TOMORROW

TRAINING IN DRAFTING IMPACTFUL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (1ST SESSION IN BULGARIA)

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 40 young participants from nine European countries for an intensive two-day capacity-building experience in Sofia. 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, aims & success criteria

9:50 Getting to know each other

10:20 Team topics & roles

10:40 Policy cycle + SMART+E

11:10 Coffee break

11:25 EU participation tools & advocacy channels

12:10 Micro-demo: choosing the right EU route

12:30 Lunch

13:30 Policy analysis lab: problem tree + stakeholder & pressure map

14:20 Populism & policy pressure

14:30 Expert talk: Kameliya Dimitrova, Dignita

15:15 Coffee break

15:25 Co-creation Sprint: Drafting recommendations + advocacy targets & tactics

16:30 Legislative theatre: Denislava Lyubomirova, Creatosphere

17:15 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

10:50 Creative Lab

11:30 Presentation of Results

11:45 Next steps, evaluation & close

12:00 Lunch

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

Improve the Impact of the Local Youth Council Consejo Juventud in Cordoba, Spain

A pilot case for Youth Councils all over the EU

Evidence:

Many youth councils are purely advisory and have no real power to influence municipal policies. A UNICEF from 2022 (G. Lansdown & V. Sedletzki: Effective Representative & Inclusive Child Participation at the Local Level: A Study on Child & Youth Councils) study shows that many councils work like tokens/performative action/youthwashing, while their recommendations were often ignored.

Recommendation:

- There are ca. 71,000 young people between 18-35 in Cordoba. Our recommendation is 1 representative per 10.000 young people plus 2 paid main representatives/spokespersons who are voted by the youth council.
- The 2 spokespersons will be members of the city council and take an active part in the municipality's decision-making processes.
- The members of the youth council should represent the diversity of youth in Cordoba concerning age, gender, race, migration, disability, sexual orientation, class etc. These factors will be included in the formation process.

- The Youth Council will have their own budget for projects for Youth (1% of the municipality budget)
- Project ideas can be proposed by the public youth in participation forums.

Timeline: until the end of 2026

Free access to mental health support services across the EU

The EU should introduce a basic right to free mental health support for all residents by ensuring that each Member State provides a core package of no-cost services, including initial psychological assessments, a limited number of counselling sessions, and access to crisis help. This should be supported by EU funding and common minimum standards, while allowing countries flexibility in how they deliver services. The policy would reduce inequalities across the Union and guarantee that every person - regardless of income, location, or background - can access timely mental health support.

Youth day governance and open days

This policy consists of creating Youth governance and open days in all public institutions, local, national, regional and European. Young people will be both able to visit the institutions but also take over certain positions for the day by working with the administration. It will allow all young people to understand better the democratic process and also get a hands-on experience of the institutions. We propose that by 2030 – 100 % of the European Institutions and 50% of the national and local institutions implement a strategy for a one open day and youth governance.

MEPs minimal percentage of youth meetings

This policy consists of giving MEPs a minimum amount of 10 % of their working meetings dedicated to young people initiatives, NGOs, schools and other institutions working with young people. Meeting your representative in the European Institutions in a very good way to understand their work and also know who to address when in need. We recommend that by 2030 each MEP should aim for 10% of their meetings to be dedicated to the youth sector.

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, 40 participants from nine 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.