



THE POLICY LANDSCAPE

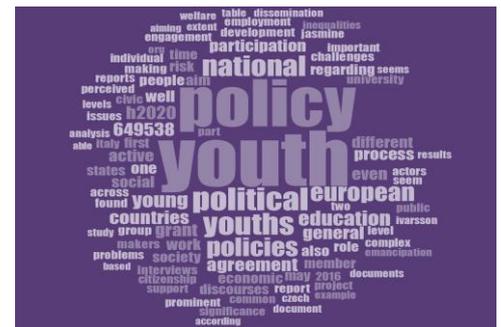
Blue Paper



Where	Who	What
8 Countries Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden and the UK	112 policy makers, youth organizations' representatives, and public officials	Interviews and policy documents analysis and 5 key recommendations

Perspectives of policy makers on EU and on youth active citizenship

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Young people, and the problems facing them as a cohort, as defined in the national and local youth policy documents, are generally framed in similar ways across the eight countries, with notable national exceptions. Integration into the labour market, adequate training, avoiding crime and addiction, mitigating the effects of economic exclusion, socialization through sport, and young people's contributions to future national economic and cultural life are repeated themes of these documents. To a large extent young people are viewed as vulnerable and in need of protection, but also as potentially problematic if not managed properly, and as national assets. Unsurprisingly, the expert interviewees from civil society organisations,

youth policy spheres, local and national government provide a more complex picture of youth policy, of young people as a group, and of the possible solutions to problems facing youth. They do so by explaining the histories behind certain national and local policies and perceptions of young people and by pointing at risks and paradoxes in practical youth policy work and youth work. Based on our comparative analysis we are suggesting five recommendations in order to improve the progress of your policies.



Recommendation #1 Do more to support the development of evidence-based general national social, educational and cultural policies aimed at eradicating structural inequality amongst youth populations!

Amongst the documents analysed and the interviews with stakeholders, we identified two broad perspectives on the issue of active citizenship. The first one values political participation *per se*, while in the second perspective political participation is discussed primarily as an instrument for achieving education, jobs, health, empowerment, etcetera.

An underlying, **limited conception of political engagement** emerges across most of the policy documents. **This** was also evident in many of the interviews. Respondents refer repeatedly to young people's normative and dutiful political participation. Dissident, critical

and unconventional forms of civic and political participation amongst youth are usually not referred to at all, and when referenced are often – though not always – described as undesirable and harmful. Further, there is an ambiguity found regarding the types of issues about which, the ways in which, and the extent to which young people are and *are expected to be* involved in the policy making process. Even though both policy documents and expert interviewees showed an open willingness to 'involve' young people, the nature and level of this participation differed considerably from country to country and between stakeholders.



Recommendation #2

The next generation of European Youth Policy should take its point of departure in the significant differences between the lives and contexts of groups of young people in Europe (heterogeneity) and their relative inclusion or exclusion in opportunities for participation in civic and political life (inequalities).

In the long run, it is in the best interests of *all* groups of European youth to be provided with the instruments and resources to become active European citizens – should they wish to do so. Across the policy documents analysed, common distinctions are made between those who are in education and those who are not, between youth of high and low socio-economic status, and between active and non-active young people. The policy-documents' dual definition of young people as a **group at risk** and in need of various actions to avoid radicalization, criminality or dependence on welfare support, *and* as a **resource** for societal development able, to partake in the decision-making process was brought into question by several of our expert interviewees. Some even questioned if it remains relevant to make policies specifically for young people since almost every policy in the arenas of housing, national budgets, employment, or gender and sexuality, to give examples, affect young people as part of society.

Consequently, several expert interviewees **blamed youth policies for failing to reach the target group and even for further excluding certain groups of youth, who do not fit into stable categories**. They warned of the risk of some national youth policies consolidating unequal social positions even further. To elaborate, with regard to policies on **youth participation, youth parliaments, youth panels or youth representatives, who are thought to engage resourceful youths, are often unrepresentative** or representative only of the most economically secure and/or highly literate young people. In fact, some of our expert interviewees fear that the assumption that such bodies represent all young people will widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots further.



Recommendation #3

Place the role of critical political and civic education centre stage in youth policy.

The potential of schools to develop civic and political competencies – skills, knowledge, efficacy, and attitudes – should not be underestimated. Quite strikingly, civic education is as yet often left out policy discussions. The issue of how schools – as unique venues for meeting peers across various social boundaries – should be developed to promote knowledge, skills, and values ought to be explicitly included in youth policy making.

One innovative of taking measures against the lack of representation available to vulnerable young citizens in institutions with a remit to represent them, would be the establishment of prestigious research-based schools aiming at recruiting young participants from all walks of life who are willing to consider future involvement in political s and civil society organisations. Such schools would, of course, be subject to the same regulations as other schools in the areas of technology, arts and humanities.





Recommendation #4

The risk of isolating youth policy to those working in the public sector should be mitigated through partnerships with civil society organisations and networks.

In general, participation, independence, the ability to chart one's own life course are central themes in the policy documents examined. **Education, job, mobility and an ability to raise ones own voice all are seen** as contributing to the objectives and cross-sectorial policies are maintained **as important for social success. Paid work is in general perceived as a cornerstone of independence and social inclusion**, and conversely to belong to the group of NEET¹s for an extended period of time is seen as a risk for mental illness, radicalization, criminality and dependency of social welfare support. The importance of work and education are hence prominent throughout the policy documents of the member states but with little reference to the specific historical conditions, and real contexts of unemployment or low employability which specific sub-groups of youth might find themselves in.

For this reason youth policy is viewed by many of our expert interviewees as a complex and multifaceted policy domain that integrates with multiple other policy areas such as criminal justice policy, health policy, labour market policy, housing and education policy, etcetera. This fact also makes it even harder to define *what is* and *what is not* a **youth policy**. At the national levels there are also tendencies to deprioritize major issues – such as housing, mental health provision and family respite care – affecting young people due to an exclusively economic focus.

What is striking, especially regarding the emphasis on employment and education, is the relatively marginal role ascribed to civil society, who are mentioned briefly

by just a few of the reports. Further is the notable absence of any policy discussion of the **media, which is considered by several experts as central in the framing national conceptions of 'youth' and 'youth issues'**. Additionally, political parties and their relationship to the private sector and to civil society organisations are generally left out of the discussions about promoting young peoples' presence at labour market as well in the political institutions.

It is therefore necessary to **build multiple bridges. These should aim, on the one hand, at making transparent, motivating and regulating how private firms and markets actors are invited as partners in empowering young people** (for instance through training schemes or apprenticeships). They should also, on the other hand, aim at **learning from civil society organisations – where many young people are active – and closing the gaps with representative political institutions where young people are remarkably unrepresented.**





Research methodology

The CATCH EyoU project investigates the different contexts and ways in which different stakeholders are thinking about and enacting the idea of **active youth citizenship** in Europe. Following several overlapping strands of research with young people, youth organisations, schools, media texts and in the policy arena, the project sets out to **connect ideal and real-world policies towards youth active citizenship**. Our intention is to build a strong model with theoretical and practical value.

The aim of this segment of our research was to examine contemporary youth policy discourses in the EU-member states by:

1. identifying and analyzing key policy discourses on young people at the European, national and regional level,
2. investigating potential coherence or tension between these levels and
3. investigating congruence and/or conflicts between formal youth policy documents and the views of youth policy actors.

The overall intention is to offer an additional perspective to the project by recognizing the views of public authorities and how these affect the policy outcomes. In this blue paper we report the key recommendations of our **detailed and systematic analysis** of the language of national policy documents regarding youth and citizenship, and our **in-depth interviews** with key policy and political actors in the fields of youth citizenship in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden and the UK.

Recommendation #5 Widen and develop good practices like structured dialogues and Erasmus+

Structured dialogue and Erasmus + were mentioned by some expert interviewees as policy components that seem to work well in serving and promoting the development of a pan-European identity. However, they are currently too exclusive, and not accessible for hard-to-reach and low income young people. Therefore, they need continuous maintenance as well as systematic evaluation. There is as well an overall recognition of the EU as a source to create a favorable milieu in itself for active youth. **The Erasmus+ project with its concomitant ability to move, study and live in different European countries are all seen as facilitators and a privilege of the young people of our times.** The fact that these opportunities are distributed unequally amongst young people and furthermore, means that sometimes the EU is even blamed for assisting well educated young people to move from their home countries, and thereby draining member states of particular types of civic competence.

In addition, **structural dialogue is widely appreciated in theory as a meaningful instrument, although it often seems to fail in reaching the ambitious objective** and instead is accused of consolidating current social positions. Therefore, an urgent question is who are the representatives representing and how are we able to secure satisfactory representation? The expert interviewees tend to divide young people according to socio-economic status, but what would equal representation across socioeconomic class look like, and is simply an equal distribution of representation between these groups satisfying? What does such categorization generate and who does the discourse exclude? We need to raise these questions more often if we really want to improve youth participation and increase the political engagement among young people.



YOUTH POLICY FOR EUROPE: A FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGE

Basing youth policy on principles of transparency, fairness and social justice to close gaps between and amongst young people and to reduce inequalities at all levels of society is a fundamental challenge. Our research suggests that this might be about the future of democracy both in member states and in the EU more widely. Despite a unity in the formal language used across the youth policy documents in member states, actual youth policies were found to be diversely shaped by structural variations due to an underestimation of the importance of political context and history to youth policy and of youth policy itself, poor funding, unrepresentativeness of youth representatives, missing systematic frames on local levels, limits in cooperation, unsustainability, and missing evaluation or dependence on enthusiasm of individuals.

Finally, our work, particularly the interviews with expert stakeholders, repeatedly echoes the main message of the 2015 EU Youth Report, where the situation of young people was described in



the following unpolished way:

The gap is widening between young people who study, are confident of finding a job and engage in social, civic and cultural life, on the one hand, and those with little hope of leading a fulfilling life and who are at risk of exclusion and marginalisation, on the other hand.¹

Therefore we want to call for a more thorough reflection. This would encompass the question of whether youth policies are, to any extent currently capable of constructing and acting as instruments powerful enough to avoid a development towards a future Europe marked by even worse political, social, civic and cultural inequalities that will jeopardize the welfare of every European. And if young people, for good reasons, cannot **consider the EU as a reliable and trustworthy actor** in assisting them in getting equal and decent living opportunities, how will we avoid the legitimacy and credibility of the EU from being severely damaged, and how will be maintain the **conditions necessary for any identification with the EU project** at large? Or, we wonder, would such disenchantment with the EU potentially **fuel young Europeans' motivation to get activated** – as rebels at either end of the political spectrum?



Bansky's street art



PROJECT NAME	Constructing AcTive CitizensHIp with European Youth: Policies, Practices, Challenges and Solutions (CATCH-EyoU)
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FUNDING SCHEME	Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020) , Societal Challenge 6 – Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", call YOUNG-5a-2014, topic "Societal and political engagement of young people and their perspectives on Europe"
DURATION	September 2015 – August 2018 (36 months)
BUDGET	EU contribution: 2,498,786.00 €
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Catch-EyoU has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement (G.A NO 649538). The views and opinions expressed in this publication are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.