

# eyes on europe

SUMMER MAGAZINE | N°44 |  
BILINGUAL | FR-EN |



**YOUNG, EUROPEAN AND FREE**

**RIGHTS, OPPORTUNITIES AND VOICES OF YOUNG EUROPEANS**



# The European Student Magazine

Created in 2004, Eyes on Europe is a non-profit student association (ASBL) run by students from the Université libre de Bruxelles and its Institut d'études européennes. Our main activities include publishing a bilingual (French-English) bi-annual magazine, weekly online articles on European affairs, and organising conferences, debates and podcasts about EU issues.

With more than 30 active members, Eyes on Europe publishes over 60 articles each year and distributes its magazine free of charge to European institutions, universities, think tanks and NGOs. Our mission is to provide students with a fresh perspective on European news while offering a real journalistic laboratory for young writers and creators.



Créée en 2004, Eyes on Europe est une association étudiante sans but lucratif (ASBL) gérée par des étudiants de l'Université libre de Bruxelles et de son Institut d'études européennes. L'association publie un magazine bilingue (français-anglais) deux fois par an, des articles hebdomadaires sur l'actualité européenne, ainsi que des podcasts, conférences et débats autour des enjeux de l'Union européenne.

Avec plus de 30 membres actifs, Eyes on Europe publie chaque année plus de 60 articles et distribue gratuitement son magazine auprès des institutions européennes, universités, think tanks et ONG. Notre mission est de proposer une nouvelle vision de l'actualité européenne aux étudiants, et ce en créant un contenu de qualité.



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Eyes on Europe



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## GRAPHIC DESIGN

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O

scar Wilde disait que la jeunesse était un art, à Eyes on Europe, on s'essaie à l'exercer. Alors quoi de plus naturel pour nous, association étudiante observant l'objet européen, que de choisir la jeunesse européenne comme thème de notre magazine ? Précisons tout de même que ce magazine n'est pas un compte rendu de l'ensemble de toute la jeunesse européenne, il n'a pas cette ambition et il serait simpliste d'assumer que la jeunesse européenne ne s'écrit pas au pluriel.

Ce magazine se contente de regrouper les perspectives d'une vingtaine d'étudiantes et d'étudiants qui ont eu accès à une éducation supérieure et qui, par leur simple présence dans ce numéro, montrent un intérêt marqué pour l'Europe. Au travers de ces lignes, on retrouve tout de même des thèmes et des enjeux que notre génération côtoie au quotidien: sa santé mentale, son rapport aux écrans, sa participation en politique, ou sa relation à l'Europe.

C'est donc en partie à cette génération, pas née pour Maastricht et qui apprend à lire au moment de Lisbonne, que sont peu à peu confiées les clés du projet européen. Ce magazine, c'est celui d'une génération qui a souvent entendu que pour elle tout était plus facile. Une affirmation que ces articles nuancent tout en relevant les aspects positifs d'être jeune sur le vieux continent.

Bonne lecture !

Éditeur en chef  
**Clément Levrat**



### ***"You are the future"***

A

sentence every generation of young people hears. A promise. A quiet way of saying "not yet".

This future is somewhere near, but conveniently out of reach. A waiting room where young people are asked to sit and wait as the decisions *about* them are being made. A waiting room where young people want to be involved in the present, for the future, but can't because they are *too young to decide* as one of our contributors writes.

Being too young is being protected without being handed a voice. It is being decided for.

What are the limits on a thirteen-year-old's screen? What doors or debts does a diploma open? What kind of help is provided for drug addiction in youth? These are not questions for future adults. They are being answered now, in rooms where young people are spoken *about* rather than being spoken *with*.

Eyes on Europe treats young people for who they are: citizens with a voice, an opinion, a judgement, citizens with a great deal to say about war and peace, climate and migration, work and pensions, identity and the digital world *they* didn't choose to live in. This magazine edition offers a place where *their* voice is carried across languages, across borders and across identities.

To our young writers and readers: you are the present, and the present is where the future is being decided.

Editor-in-Chief  
**Eva-Christina Delferrière**



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Over **60 years**  
of experience  
in **pedagogical  
innovation**  
at the heart of  
Brussels



# PART 1

**L'UE POUR  
SES JEUNES**

**THE EU FOR  
ITS YOUTH**

# LA COLLABORATION UE X UNICEF POUR PROTÉGER CHAQUE ENFANT À TRAVERS L'EUROPE

**U**n enfant sur quatre en Europe est menacé de pauvreté ou d'exclusion sociale. Bien que l'Union européenne (UE) soit l'une des régions les plus prospères au monde, la réalité des enfants contredit l'image de son modèle de protection sociale. La collaboration entre l'UE et l'UNICEF représente un moyen puissant de soutenir l'aide humanitaire en dehors de l'Europe. Cependant aujourd'hui, cette collaboration apporte aussi une réponse structurelle à la pauvreté infantile interne.



## L'état des lieux : une jeunesse européenne sous pression

L'Europe, loin d'être homogène, se caractérise par des inégalités entre ses États membres qui s'expliquent par la diversité de leurs contextes locaux. Selon où ils grandissent, les enfants seront ainsi plus ou moins exposés au risque de pauvreté. Outre ce problème majeur, la santé mentale des jeunes s'est imposée comme un enjeu croissant : plus de 11 millions d'enfants européens souffrent de troubles mentaux, les adolescents étant les plus touchés. Si les facteurs explicatifs restent mal documentés, une dégradation du bien-être mental a néanmoins été observée depuis la pandémie de COVID-19 en 2020. L'état de santé mentale des jeunes européens est directement lié au contexte social et local dans lequel ils grandissent. De ce fait, les personnes les plus vulnérables sont les plus exposées au

risque de troubles de santé mentale. Dès lors qu'un grand nombre d'enfants est exposé soit au risque de pauvreté, soit à des troubles de la santé mentale, l'UNICEF se doit d'intervenir.

## Le rôle de l'UNICEF : une influence au cœur des politiques européennes

L'UNICEF peut avoir un réel impact positif sur la vie des jeunes à travers le monde. Elle influence d'ailleurs les politiques européennes depuis bien longtemps. L'UE accorde une véritable confiance aux organisations comme l'UNICEF car leur consultation représente un bénéfice social solide. En 2021, l'UE a adopté sa première stratégie sur les droits de l'enfant visant à renforcer son rôle dans ce domaine, ainsi qu'à garantir des droits plus effectifs pour les enfants les plus défavorisés à l'horizon 2030.

Avec d'autres organisations, l'UNICEF a contribué activement à l'élaboration de cette stratégie, notamment grâce aux consultations avec de nombreux enfants et jeunes. La politique européenne de l'enfance a été conçue pour et avec les enfants. L'UNICEF ne s'est pas arrêtée à assurer une consultation effective des enfants dans l'élaboration de la stratégie pour l'enfance. Elle continue constamment de vérifier et surveiller la bonne application de celle-ci afin de garantir la protection de chaque enfant à travers l'Europe. Au-delà de ce rôle de vigie, l'UNICEF formule également des recommandations concrètes à l'UE. Elle plaide notamment pour le développement de services de santé mentale accessibles aux enfants les plus vulnérables, pour le renforcement des systèmes de protection de l'enfance au niveau national, et pour une meilleure collecte de données afin que les politiques puissent cibler efficacement les enfants qui en ont le plus besoin.

Son influence sur les institutions européennes est donc réelle et documentée, même si elle ne repose pas sur un accord formel, mais sur un rôle reconnu de conseil et d'expertise. Si ce rôle se montre efficace du point de vue de l'adoption de politiques européennes pour l'enfance, leur portée réelle dépend toutefois du budget qui y est accordé.

### **Le budget 2028-2034 : pour une Europe plus forte ?**

En 2025, la Commission européenne a présenté sa proposition de cadre financier pluriannuel (CFP) de près de 2 000 milliards d'euros pour la période 2028-2034. Plus qu'un budget, ce CFP est un acte politique qui révèle les priorités de l'UE : renforcer sa souveraineté, stimuler sa compétitivité et accroître sa résilience. Il prévoit également une plus grande flexibilité budgétaire et privilégie les partenariats régionaux pour un impact ciblé. Concrètement, près de la moitié du budget vise à réduire les écarts entre régions européennes, environ 20 % à renforcer la compétitivité économique, 10 % à consolider les partenariats



internationaux, et moins de 2 % à financer Erasmus+. Si la volonté d'investir dans la jeunesse est prometteuse, elle reste avant tout orientée vers les étudiants, et demeure distincte d'un engagement ciblé sur le bien-être des enfants et jeunes vulnérables.

Bien que le CFP 2028-2034 ne vise pas explicitement l'enfance, l'UNICEF le voit comme une opportunité en or de concrétiser la stratégie européenne pour l'enfance en mobilisant son budget le plus efficacement possible. Selon l'organisation, cette occasion prévoit une chance inouïe d'apporter des changements significatifs pour le futur des enfants, mais également pour le futur de l'UE dans son ensemble. Parmi les 2 000 milliards, 865 milliards d'euros sont prévus pour contribuer à combler l'écart entre les régions d'Europe, ce qui représente une part non négligeable du budget. L'UNICEF alerte cependant sur le fait que l'UE doit systématiquement évaluer l'impact de chaque grande dépense sur le bien-être des enfants, et plus généralement, sur les droits de l'enfant.

### **Pour chaque enfant, une Europe à la hauteur**

La collaboration entre l'UE et l'UNICEF pour la protection des

enfants en Europe est une promesse importante, mais elle n'est pas une garantie en soi. Elle déploie véritablement ses ailes lorsqu'elle se traduit en actes. Le CFP 2028-2034 représente une occasion fondamentale pour l'Europe de prendre les bonnes décisions et notamment celle d'octroyer un budget suffisant pour améliorer la protection, au sens large, des enfants. L'UNICEF, vu son poids sur le plan international, a un rôle capital à jouer dans l'accompagnement de cette prise de décisions. Grâce à la consultation directe des enfants et des jeunes européens, elle peut rapporter à l'UE les aspects qui méritent d'être prioritaires, ainsi que les régions où le besoin de protection se fait le plus ressentir par la jeune population. L'opportunité d'accorder une attention sensible à la jeunesse européenne via le CFP est d'autant plus primordiale car elle ne se représentera pas avant sept ans.

**Florya De Decker**  
MA2 en droit

# L'ESPACE EUROPÉEN DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR : IMPACT ET DÉFIS SUR LA MOBILITÉ ET L'EMPLOYABILITÉ DES JEUNES EUROPÉENS

**D**epuis la Déclaration de Bologne de 1999, le Conseil de l'Europe a réussi à construire un espace commun de l'enseignement

supérieur qui permet la circulation de nombreux étudiants d'un pays à l'autre. Cet espace de coopération éducative entre 49 États a évidemment un impact sur les étudiants et leur futur.

L'Espace Européen de l'Enseignement Supérieur (EEES) repose entre autres sur le processus de Bologne, qui a contribué à instaurer de nouveaux piliers pour l'éducation supérieure européenne. Nous pouvons citer le système Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) et le système européen de crédits (ECTS), facilitant la reconnaissance des diplômes entre États membres. Les crédits européens sont attribués sur la base d'heures de cours et de travail personnel. Ainsi, 1 crédit européen équivaut à 10 heures de cours et 15 heures de travail personnel.

Ce cadre permet désormais de comparer les diplômes entre les 49 États participants, à la fois dans l'optique d'une poursuite d'études à l'étranger, tout comme l'entrée dans un secteur professionnel qui nécessite des compétences académiques reconnues dans plusieurs pays à la fois. L'EEES se base également sur l'encouragement à la mobilité des étudiants, des chercheurs et enseignants, ainsi qu'une pédagogie axée sur des compétences et l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie.



## L'impact de l'EEES sur la mobilité géographique et l'employabilité

Cet encouragement à la mobilité a poussé vers le haut des programmes existants comme Erasmus+. Ainsi, en 2024, 150 000 mobilités ont été financées au départ de la France, dont 32 % des bénéficiaires viennent de l'enseignement professionnel. De même, la création de l'EEES en 2010 a encouragé d'autres projets comme les diplômes conjoints (comme ceux du programme Erasmus Mundus) ou d'alliances universitaires (comme CIVIS), créés par l'UE.

Les diplômes conjoints permettant d'étudier dans plusieurs pays pour obtenir un diplôme reconnu par toutes les institutions et pays partenaires. Ces parcours mettent en avant des compétences interdisciplinaires et interculturelles très recherchées par les employeurs

sur un marché du travail de plus en plus internationalisé.

Ces mobilités et les compétences qui en ressortent améliorent par ailleurs l'employabilité : selon une étude de la Commission européenne, 70 % des entreprises françaises recherchent des profils maîtrisant plusieurs langues et capables de travailler dans un environnement international. De même, les étudiants mobiles ont un taux de chômage inférieur de 23 % cinq ans après leur diplôme.

Cependant, cette mobilité facilitée présente aussi des défis. Ainsi chaque année, 1,5 million d'étudiants quittent leur pays pour étudier dans un autre État membre, souvent en raison de limites dans l'accès à certaines études (comme dans les filières de santé ou de droit), la recherche de meilleures opportunités d'études ou encore le manque de place du fait de la massification de l'enseignement supérieur.

C'est le cas notamment de plus de 1600 primo-étudiants français qui choisissent de partir chaque année, selon la Cour des comptes française, privilégiant des pays comme la Roumanie ou la Belgique (bien que le chiffre soit en deçà du réel selon plusieurs organismes). L'espace éducatif européen a même facilité l'apparition de véritables business pour attirer ces étudiants français, comme en Espagne où le nombre d'universités de soins dentaires privées est passé de 12 en 2008 à 2.310 en 2022 selon Les Échos. Cependant, certains des diplômes octroyés par ces écoles privées ne sont pas reconnus, amenant les étudiants dans une impasse à la fin de leurs études.

### Des défis persistants malgré l'EEES

Malgré les avancées, il existe des barrières qui subsistent et créent des inégalités dans l'accès à la mobilité au sein de cet espace éducatif commun. Le coût de la vie dans certains pays d'accueil, comme le Danemark ou la Suède, reste un frein pour les étudiants défavorisés. De manière générale, les étudiants financièrement défavorisés possèdent déjà un taux d'accès aux études inférieur à ceux issus des milieux aisés. Le changement de pays amène aussi de nouvelles problématiques, par exemple l'absence d'aides de

l'État ou les difficultés administratives concernant la résidence. De même, la maîtrise d'une langue officielle est généralement requise pour suivre les cursus universitaires. Mais la mobilité n'est pas la seule dimension qui soulève des défis. Ainsi, malgré le système de LMD, il existe des problèmes de reconnaissance des diplômes. Cela concerne surtout certains domaines, comme la santé ou le droit, où des conditions particulières doivent être satisfaites pour pouvoir exercer les professions liées. De même, les droits d'inscription sont de plus en plus différenciés entre étudiants européens et extra-européens, soulignant les limites d'ouverture de cet espace éducatif.

Enfin, concernant l'employabilité des jeunes, les États membres se doivent de prévoir le monde du travail tel qu'il sera dans 10 ans, en favorisant des cursus centrés sur des enjeux comme le climat ou l'intelligence artificielle, entre autres, pour assurer l'insertion professionnelle et les besoins du marché européen. Selon le Forum économique mondial, 39 % des compétences actuelles seront transformées ou obsolètes d'ici 2030, et 62 % des emplois des économies avancées européennes présentent une exposition élevée

à l'IA. Des initiatives sont d'ailleurs mises en place, comme l'EIT Manufacturing, qui illustre comment l'éducation européenne travaille pour s'adapter aux besoins de l'industrie, en intégrant des stages pratiques et des partenariats avec les entreprises. L'Union européenne a aussi lancé l'Année européenne des compétences en 2023, et mise sur les investissements dans la formation continue pour préparer les jeunes à un marché du travail en constante mutation, où la capacité à se reconfigurer et à acquérir de nouvelles compétences est nécessaire.

Ainsi, l'EEES constitue un levier majeur pour la mobilité et l'employabilité des jeunes Européens, en facilitant la reconnaissance des diplômes et le développement de compétences adaptées. Toutefois, il reste des défis quant à la réduction des inégalités d'accès, la reconnaissance des qualifications et l'anticipation des mutations économiques. Au-delà d'une cohésion des systèmes éducatifs, l'enjeu est maintenant de construire un espace inclusif et adapté aux défis futurs des étudiants européens.



**Antoine Bultel**

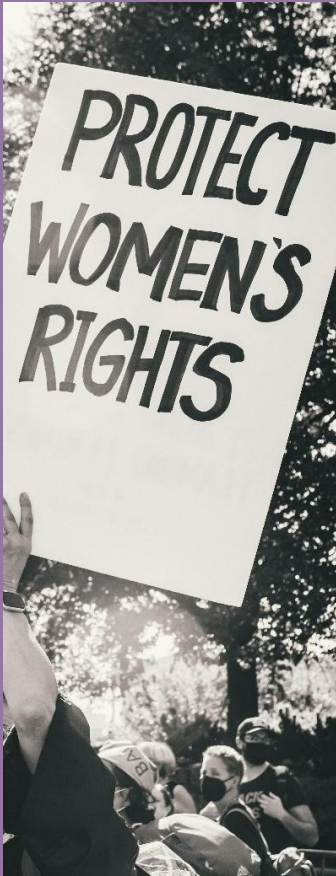
M1 in European Studies



# GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY 2026-2030: WHAT CHANGES FOR YOUNG WOMEN?

**A**cross the world and Europe, women are more educated, more visible in public life and more legally protected than ever before.

However, gender inequality continues to shape everyday life and experience, from verbal violence to online harassment, discrimination at work and unequal care responsibilities in society. For young women in particular, these challenges come during a fragile transition that occurs while entering adulthood.



In response to these persistent gaps, the European Commission drafted the Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 by outlining a broad set of actions to tackle the main spheres where inequality takes place the most. Yet, despite its wide scope and ambitions, one question remains: what will this document actually change for young women across Europe?

## What is the Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030

The European Commission adopted the Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 in March 2026. The strategy puts forward “concrete actions to embed gender equality into every aspect of life”, both online and offline. It enlarges the scope of the previous strategy by covering all the principles of the Roadmap for Women’s Rights with an in-depth analysis and key actions proposed, in order to tackle new threats such as gender-based cyberviolence, anti-gender narratives and AI-related risks. Rather than addressing isolated problems, it reads gender inequality as something structural, affecting multiple dimensions of life simultaneously.

The first key area is the work and pay gaps that still affect so many women today. Women still earn on average 12% less per hour than men in the EU – a gap that does not stop at the paycheck, but shapes a woman’s entire professional trajectory: her field of study,

her access to jobs, her career progression and eventually her pension. For young women, the moment of entering the job market is where many of these dynamics are set in motion. The document frames tackling this as not just a matter of fairness, but a legal obligation under the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. To address it, the strategy emphasises the implementation of the Pay Transparency Directive, adopted in 2023, which aims to make pay structures more visible and easier to challenge. The idea is that exposing hidden inequalities pushes employers toward fairer practices.

A second area of focus is gender-based cyberviolence, and it is one where young women are disproportionately affected. The strategy explicitly acknowledges the rise of non-consensual sexually explicit content, like deepfakes and deepnudes, as a direct threat to women’s dignity and autonomy online. The Commission commits to a structured regulatory dialogue with very large online platforms to strengthen compliance, and to building the capacity of trusted flaggers, organisations that can report illegal content more efficiently. Beyond violence, the strategy also addresses the risk that AI systems reproduce and amplify existing gender biases, from recruitment algorithms to medical diagnostics: a subtler but equally concrete threat for a generation entering a labour market increasingly shaped by automated decisions.

Finally, and for the first time in the history of EU gender equality strategies, healthcare is included as a dedicated policy area. The Commission plans to launch a flagship initiative with the World Health Organisation to improve the quality and accessibility of women’s healthcare. The proposed revision of the Clinical Trials Regulation will require new trials to reflect population diversity, including women.



This is a significant step given that drugs and treatments have historically been developed and tested predominantly on male subjects, with consequences for women that remain poorly understood. The strategy also mentions best practice exchanges on menstrual and menopause poverty and commits to working with the European Medicines Agency on gender-sensitive checks when medicines are approved and prescribed.

Taken together, these areas paint a picture of a Commission that has done its homework. The analysis is thorough; the ambitions are wide. But ambition alone raises a question that the document cannot answer by itself: who will actually make this happen?

### A strategy without teeth: the limits of a non-binding document

Ambitious in scope, the Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 is nonetheless a non-binding document. It cannot force Member States to act. And this is precisely where many civil society organisations draw the line.

WAVE, the European network of women's shelters and support services, identified the strategy's near-exclusive reliance on non-binding instruments like guidance, monitoring, best practice exchanges, and regulatory dialogue as its most significant structural gap. This makes implementation dependent on Member States' political will, yet it is precisely at national level that gender equality obligations have been most unevenly applied.

The European Women's Lobby was equally direct. While welcoming the Commission's analysis of current challenges as excellent, the EWL pointed out that the strategy falls short in one critical aspect: it does not propose legally binding follow-up measures, leaving implementation



largely voluntary. The numbers make this urgency concrete. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, at the current pace of change, it would take 50 years for the EU to reach full gender equality, with significant disparities among Member States persisting. A strategy relying on political goodwill in countries where gender equality is openly contested like Hungary, Italy, or Slovakia risks remaining a well-written document that changes little on the ground.

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) went further, criticising the binary framing that runs through every pillar of the strategy, which it argues structurally erases trans, non-binary, and gender-diverse people from employment, violence prevention, healthcare and access to justice. Intersectionality, ENAR noted, remains rhetorical rather than operational, with no mandates for data disaggregation by race, ethnicity, or migration status.

For young women in Europe, the strategy represents a map with good destinations but uncertain roads. Knowing where you want to go is necessary, but without binding mechanisms, the journey depends on who happens to be driving.

### Who's going to make things change?

The Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 is, above all, a political signal and signals matter. But for the young women it claims to prioritise, signals are not enough. The pay gap is still there. The deepfakes are still there. The medical studies that ignored female bodies for decades are still there. A strategy that cannot compel Member States to act leaves the most important question unanswered: who is actually responsible when nothing changes?



**Margherita Norbiato**

M1 in European  
Studies



# LA JEUNESSE EUROPÉENNE : MAL AIMÉE OU MAL ÉCOUTÉE ?

**E**tre né(e) dans une Europe stable, multiculturelle et prospère est un prétendu privilège, mais la réalité est récemment

devenue tout autre. Le suicide est la deuxième cause de décès chez les jeunes Européens, un jeune sur six souffre d'un trouble de santé mentale, sans oublier la hausse conséquente de 20 % des cas de dépression depuis 2020. Loyers inaccessibles, marchés du travail précaires, alimentation de qualité hors de portée et un sentiment croissant d'être ignorés par les institutions et les politiciens. La jeunesse européenne, pourtant censée reprendre le flambeau de la future gouvernance en Europe, fait face à des difficultés économiques et sociales structurelles qui détruisent à la fois son rapport à la démocratie et à la société.

Un toit, un rêve devenu luxe

Le logement est sans doute la plaie ouverte la plus profonde pour les

jeunes qui, pour certains, ne pourront jamais acheter de maison ou d'appartement. De 2015 à 2024, les prix de l'immobilier dans l'Union européenne ont bondi en moyenne de 53 %, selon le Parlement européen. Dans tous les États membres, à l'exception de la Grèce, les loyers ont progressé de 27,8 % entre 2010 et le premier trimestre 2025. À Dublin, Milan ou Lisbonne, les locataires consacrent entre 60 et 70 % de leurs revenus pour vivre sous un toit, soit deux à trois fois plus que la génération de leurs parents (1970-1980).

Ceci se traduit par une décohabitation tardive, des colocations forcées (même après 30 ans), ou un retour chez les parents. Cette situation touche les jeunes Européens de manière disproportionnée, particulièrement ceux issus de milieux moins aisés. De plus, la crise du logement creuse activement l'écart entre une demande grimpante et une offre limitée, surtout en milieu urbain. En 2024, l'Union européenne a nommé un commissaire au logement. Cependant, il s'agit d'une compétence d'attribution qui l'empêche réellement de légiférer en la matière.

Travailler, mais pour quoi ?

Sur le marché de l'emploi, les jeunes

sont souvent confrontés à une rhétorique réductionniste de la part de leurs aînés.

La déclaration d'Emmanuel Macron en 2018 « Je traverse la rue et je vous en trouve » avait déjà marqué les esprits, illustrant une déconnexion totale de la situation. Les jeunes sont surreprésentés dans des secteurs mal payés, avec des contrats courts, des temps partiels imposés ou des stages non rémunérés. Par conséquent, en 2020, on observait que 25,4 % des 15-29 ans européens (soit 18 millions de personnes) se trouvaient en risque de pauvreté ou d'exclusion sociale. On peut en déduire une volonté de travailler, mais une difficulté réelle à s'en sortir dans une Europe au coût de la vie croissant.

## Manger sainement : un privilège de classe

La chute du pouvoir d'achat s'invite aussi dans l'assiette. Depuis 2021, l'inflation alimentaire galopante contraint les jeunes à acheter des produits de moins bonne qualité ou, tout simplement, à sauter des repas. L'essor des fast-foods en Europe avec des prix attractifs n'arrange rien, augmentant l'exposition des jeunes à des risques sanitaires graves comme l'obésité, le diabète, ou les maladies cardiovasculaires. De plus, les files d'attente grandissantes devant les banques alimentaires étudiantes dans presque toutes les métropoles européennes interpellent sur la persistance de la faim dans les pays développés.

## La fracture sociale et le piège de l'extrémisme

Cette désillusion économique crée une fracture sociétale et politique profonde. Les jeunes s'orientent de plus en plus vers des partis aux extrêmes idéologiques. En effet, lors des élections européennes de 2024 en France, 32 % des 25-34 ans et 26 % des 18-24 ans ont voté pour le Rassemblement National, des chiffres en nette hausse par rapport à 2019. Aux dernières législatives portugaises, un quart des jeunes ont voté pour le parti d'extrême droite Chega, dont le slogan « Dieu, patrie, famille et travail » s'inspire directement de celui de la dictature de Salazar.

Des études du CEVIPOF et de Sciences Po le démontrent : ce n'est pas un cas isolé. La jeunesse européenne se polarise aux deux extrémités de l'échiquier politique. Bien évidemment, la jeunesse n'est pas un groupe homogène; elle est divisée selon le diplôme, le revenu ou le lieu de résidence. Selon Andrea Gerosa, fondateur du think tank Think Young, l'extrême droite capte les jeunes grâce au vide laissé par les partis traditionnels : « Les jeunes d'aujourd'hui sont plus

malheureux que les générations précédentes, car ils ont l'impression que les partis traditionnels n'ont pas réussi à résoudre les problèmes sociaux ». Ainsi, beaucoup cherchent des réponses à des problèmes endémiques dans les raisonnements simplistes de l'extrême droite, quitte à sacrifier leurs droits fondamentaux.

## Essayer d'entendre et d'écouter

Le taux d'abstention chez les jeunes reste le plus élevé de toutes les générations, témoignant d'un désengagement électoral. Cependant, ceci n'est pas forcément synonyme d'indifférence. Les jeunes ressentent une déconnexion entre leurs préoccupations quotidiennes et les réponses du système, ce qui entraîne un éloignement politique sans précédent, sans pour autant les pousser systématiquement vers d'autres sphères comme l'activisme ou le volontariat.

Mal aimée ? Peut-être pas. Mal écoutée ? Certainement. Des signaux institutionnels suggèrent cependant une intention d'agir. En mars 2025, la Commission européenne et la Banque européenne d'investissement ont annoncé le déblocage de dix milliards d'euros pour le logement abordable, ainsi que la création d'une commission spéciale au Parlement européen. De plus, le Fonds social européen+, doté de 88 milliards pour 2021-2027, vise à soutenir la jeunesse. Néanmoins, entre les annonces et le ressenti sur le terrain, il reste un fossé que la colère ou l'abstention comblent facilement.

Le vrai défi n'est pas de savoir si l'Union européenne aime sa jeunesse, mais si elle est capable de l'entendre avant que ce silence ne devienne une fracture intergénérationnelle définitive.



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# OVERQUALIFIED AND UNDERPAID: IS EUROPE WASTING ITS MOST EDUCATED GENERATION?

**Y**oung Europeans are the most educated generation in the continent's history. Yet for many, the transition from university to the

labour market is marked not by opportunity, but by instability. Internships, temporary contracts and underemployment have become common entry points into professional life. As education levels rise across the European Union, a key question emerges: is Europe failing to turn qualifications into real opportunities?

**A generation more educated than ever**

Over the past two decades, the European Union has made higher education a central pillar of its economic strategy and the results are striking. According to Eurostat, nearly 43% of Europeans aged 25 to 34 held a tertiary degree in 2023, a historic high and a significant increase compared to previous generations. This expansion reflects a clear ambition: to build a competitive, knowledge-based economy. Universities have grown, mobility programmes have

expanded, and access to education has widened across the continent. Yet this success story hides a growing imbalance. While education levels continue to rise, job quality and stability have not followed at the same pace.

## When diplomas don't pay off

For many young Europeans, a diploma no longer guarantees a stable or well-paid job. Instead, it often leads to a prolonged period of uncertainty.

Data from the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) shows that around 1 in 5 young graduates in Europe are overqualified, meaning they work in jobs that do not require their level of education. In practical terms, this means that years of study are not fully reflected in job responsibilities or wages.

The search for stable employment is increasingly visible in recruitment trends. According to recent EU Careers reports, more than 170,000 candidates applied to the AD5 concours, the entry-level competition for careers in EU institutions, with Italians representing the largest group of applicants (almost 80,000). For many graduates, secure public-sector careers are becoming more attractive as national labour markets fail to provide equivalent prospects.

At the same time, job instability remains widespread. According to Eurostat, young people are far more likely than older workers to be employed on temporary contracts, particularly in countries such as Spain, Italy and Greece.

This mismatch between qualifications and employment is not just a personal frustration but rather a structural issue affecting the efficiency of the European economy.

## Starting a career on shaky ground

Several structural factors help explain this disconnect. First, internships have become an almost unavoidable step in entering the labour market.



While often presented as opportunities to gain experience, many are unpaid or poorly compensated, limiting access for those without financial support, thus reinforcing social inequalities. Second, labour market structures in parts of Europe create a divide between protected permanent workers and precarious newcomers. Young people, lacking experience, are more likely to be confined to short-term contracts, with limited prospects for stability.

Third, regional inequalities across the EU deepen the problem. Youth unemployment remains significantly higher in Southern Europe, pushing many young graduates to seek opportunities abroad. What is often framed as “mobility” can, in reality, reflect a lack of viable options at home.

### The cost of delayed stability

The consequences of this situation extend far beyond employment statistics. Delayed access to stable work often translates into delayed independence. Across many European countries, young people are leaving the parental home later, postponing financial autonomy and long-term life decisions.

This dynamic is particularly visible in countries such as Portugal. Despite a highly educated generation, many young Portuguese workers face low wages and unstable contracts. According to Eurostat data, Portugal combines relatively high levels of tertiary education among young people with comparatively low wage levels, pushing many graduates to seek opportunities abroad. Mobility, one of the European Union’s core freedoms, therefore takes on a different meaning. For many, moving abroad is not simply an opportunity, but a condition for accessing better prospects, contributing to persistent patterns of brain drain within the EU. At the same time, economic insecurity shapes how young people relate to politics and institutions. The European Commission highlights that employment and economic prospects



remain among the top concerns for young Europeans, directly influencing their level of trust in the European project.

### More than a social problem

The underemployment of young graduates is often framed as a social issue, but it is also an economic one. By investing heavily in education without ensuring adequate labour market absorption, Europe risks underutilising its human capital. Skills acquired through years of study remain underused, productivity gains are lost, and innovation potential is constrained.

In this sense, the problem goes beyond fairness. It reflects a deeper inefficiency in the way the European economy translates knowledge into value.

### What needs to change

Europe’s challenge is no longer to expand access to education, but to ensure that education leads to meaningful opportunities. This requires improving the transition from university to work, strengthening links between education systems and labour market needs, and addressing structural inequalities between Member States. The European Commission has

acknowledged these challenges through initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee, which aims to ensure that young people receive a job, training or an education offer within a short period after becoming unemployed. Yet implementation remains uneven, and results vary significantly across countries, largely because labour market conditions differ sharply across Member States, public employment services vary in capacity, and funding commitments are not always consistent.

Europe has succeeded in creating its most educated generation. The next step is ensuring that this education translates into real opportunity. Otherwise, the risk is clear: a generation rich in qualifications, but poor in prospects and an economy that fails to make the most of its own potential.



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# THE LONGEVITY TRAP

**I**n many European countries pensions are notably generous, especially when compared with national average incomes.

After the Covid-19 crisis the share of GDP spent on retirement benefits grew considerably. As a result, young people find their expected retirement age pushed back each year, while governments struggle to manage the mounting pressure from an ever-increasing proportion of retired or near-retirement voters. This reveals a vicious circle in which the sustainability of public finances sits between a rock and a hard place: that of major discontent among today's electorate and that of a dim future for today's youth. And when, as in Italy, the oldest population in Europe meets a famously sluggish economy, the rock and the hard place are uncomfortably close.

## Three pillars, one crisis

The fact that the demographic crisis feeds into the fiscal crisis is no news, but even the small adjustments that the sense of urgency sometimes manages to get through are often quickly watered down by the shifting demographic. In pay-as-you-go systems – where current taxpayers finance current retirees – the increase of the ratio between retirees and workers has detrimental effects on the equilibrium of finances.

In order to understand this crisis, we must first define what the modern structural framework for social security is, what is commonly known as the “three pillars of pensions systems”. The first of these pillars is what we normally think of when hearing about social security, that is the public, or state, pensions. This is the mandatory public social security system, which is managed by the state and is funded through current contributions. The second pillar is that of occupational pensions; this represents a supplementary

pension, with funds that are linked to employment contracts or to specific professional categories. The third pillar is personal pensions, with individual private savings consisting of private pension schemes, insurance policies and personal investments.

## The Italian tightrope

In the case of Italy, recent data have confirmed that pension spending is among the highest in OECD countries. This amount reflects two characteristics of the Italian pension system: the fact that the effective retirement age is still relatively low despite the statutory one is increasing and the fact that the replacement rate, meaning the ratio between the pension and the last salary remains quite high. The latter reaches almost 91% in Italy, while the European average is at 63%. At the moment of retirement, life expectancy in Italy is around 20 years for men and 25 for women: this contributes to the high pension spending.



Furthermore, the Italian population is currently the oldest in Europe, which creates direct structural problems for the social security apparatus. We are witnessing a strong increase in the dependency ratio, which measures the number of individuals over the age of 64 relative to those in the working-age bracket. While the EU average ratio was recently 36%, corresponding to roughly three young people for every elderly person, Italy recorded one of the highest values at 41%.

Italy operates on a “pay-as-you-go” scheme. In this model, current workers’ contributions directly fund the pensions of current retirees. There is no accumulation of individual reserves, making the system highly dependent on the balance between active taxpayers and pensioners. Over the last 30 years, Italy has been subjected to many structural reforms, notably the Amato (1992), Dini (1995), and Fornero (2012) reforms, with four primary objectives. The first was expenditure control, aiming to stabilise pension spending as a percentage of GDP. The second was harmonisation, creating uniform rules across different professional categories to align public and private sectors. The third was sustainability through the introduction of the Contributory System (pension amounts based on total life contributions rather than final salaries). Lastly, the reforms sought multi-pillar development by encouraging the growth of supplementary private pensions.

However, the current situation remains precarious, as the “second pillar” remains underdeveloped, particularly

among public-sector employees where participation rates are strikingly low.

### The European contagion

Yet, Italy is not the only European country in trouble: in many others too the problem was not faced at its roots and the issue ended up expanding. John Burn-Murdoch, chief data reporter of the Financial Times, gives us two examples: France and the United Kingdom. In these two countries, the increase in the share of GDP spent on old-age benefits has been higher than in the average of other peer countries (among which Italy and Belgium). This is even more striking when we consider that French and British demographics are not as adverse as those of the peer countries.

In the UK, in the last 25 years,

public expenditure for healthcare for people aged 65 and over has doubled, while old-age benefits are regulated with the so-called triple lock: the British first pillar gets adjusted every year based on the highest rate between the increase in remuneration, inflation or a 2.5% constant. This pushes social security expenses higher and higher, leaving its mark on public finances.

But things are worse on this side of the Channel. French pensioners have, on average, higher incomes than workers! This is a unique situation both in the world and in French history. Twenty-eight percent of the French wages is used to sustain its pension system, which amounts to 420 billion euros every year, the largest expense for the French government: more than what we get by adding up defence, security, transport, research, justice and infrastructure.





French political analyst François Valentin highlights the absurdities which this system generates. In the public sector, retired senior bureaucrats often earn benefits higher than the salaries of their working successors.

At the same time, in 2024, those who are 70 or older save, on average, 25% of their income, while people in their 30s only save around 9%. This intergenerational inequality leads eventually to intra-generational inequality, between those who will inherit part of this wealth and those who will not. In future years, in Europe, we can expect a notable increase in wealth that will be transferred through heredity, making it politically hard, once again, to act and raise inheritance taxes.

### The future of the system

The European pension crisis is already here. What was once the

crown jewel of the European state is now so heavy that it risks crushing our economies under its own weight. Life expectancy is longer than ever on the Continent and the demographic pyramids that were meant to be served no longer exist. However, the pension crisis is first of all a political crisis. On the one hand, governments face electorates increasingly overshadowed by retirees who possess ever more wealth and voting power and are interested in maintaining the status quo. On the other hand, today's workers and youth are asked to subsidise a degree of wealth for the elderly that they themselves are unlikely to ever reach, all while hopes of their own retirements fade away into the distance, along large chunks of their salaries.

The future of our welfare states depends on their sustainability. If governments – and voters – continue to prefer short-term

gains over long-term responsibility, we will be awaited not just by financial difficulties, but by the erosion of the trust in the very system that allows for our welfare states to exist. The choice is simple: reform the system now or wait for it to be reformed by a crisis that will leave everyone worse off.



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# IS IT REALLY POSSIBLE TO REGULATE THE INTERNET? THE CHALLENGES OF THE EU IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

**A**s children use more digital tools while growing up, the EU is increasingly taking measures to protect young users online. European policymakers are working on content restrictions and age-verification systems to make the internet safer. However, these efforts bring up new worries about privacy, effectiveness and freedom, showing that keeping children safe online may be much more complicated than just passing laws.

## The efforts of the EU to implement digital regulations

In 2026, childhood is deeply digital. According to the European Commission, approximately 97% of young people in the EU go online every day, with 65% relying on social media as their primary source of information. The digital world is becoming a significant part of our lives, leading the EU to regulate the sector for young people, who are highly exposed to content on the internet. The EU has already set multiple pieces of legislation to first protect children's rights online and second ensure their safety on the platforms.

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights already sets the framework to secure citizens' rights to freedom of expression and information online. It has been complemented by the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles, to set broader guidelines that better fit the digital era we live in.

The EU also has multiple tools to help children have a safer online experience. The Digital Services Act (DSA) is one of the main laws setting rules for enhanced protection for minors such as limitations on gambling, pornography and any age-inappropriate content online. Other regulations also target children's safety. We can think of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the AI Act and multiple other initiatives, but the Better Internet for Kids strategy remains the most prominent one. It complements the DSA by developing media literacy and critical thinking for children to be able to navigate and safely express themselves online. It tackles topics such as algorithms, AI, cyberbullying, online harms, media literacy, healthy screen use and digital marketing tactics. It also remains central to the development of age-verification systems and provides a great source of transparency, making its documents accessible even for children to read.

However, looking at the latest monitoring reports of those regulations in the Member

States, we see that European citizens are still highly concerned about child safety on the internet, with about 58% of them considering that their country is not doing enough to ensure youth protection online. Children can also have a say in that regard, as polls show they also think they are not protected enough from online dangers.

## The circumvention of digital regulations and its risks

These concerns should not be overlooked, because progress has to be made for these efforts to actually become effective. As of today, those methods still have many loopholes. In the EU those methods of regulation are still very uneven. Some websites only use weaker verification systems, such as asking for the user's age before entering the website, where any child can input a fake birthday. But even in countries implementing strong methods like ID scans and biometric age estimates, children can still be quite innovative! For example, outside of the EU, the UK has introduced its Online Safety Act, which makes it impossible for children to access certain websites like Pornhub. Aylo, Pornhub's parent company, has stated that their website traffic has fallen by 77% after the implementation of the law. But kids are adapting quickly: they can use AI-assisted tricks, stolen IDs from parents, and even VPNs which allow them to change location

to a country that doesn't have a strong verification system. Moreover, serious protection issues can happen when children decide to bypass the law. They can choose more unregulated platforms on the internet, which not only don't solve the problem, but can expose them not only to harmful content, but exploitation and exposure to potential predators.

Studies also find that regulations on pornographic content can do more harm than help. Stardust et al.'s study (2024) on biometric age estimation shows that restrictions can seriously affect post-pubescent young people's development and put barriers on healthy sex education online. The legislation system proposed also includes significant data privacy risks, going against the GDPR's principle of data minimization, which means to collect as little data as possible to ensure online privacy and security. Age verification such as the biometric identification system also showed limited technical performances. The study emphasized the system's differentiated accuracy based on

racial and gender biases and concluded the impossibility of designing a single AI-based technology for age estimation. Overall, the EU faces multiple challenges in its goal of protecting children online for which they currently have no answer.

### **Is the cure worse than the disease? The end of anonymity on the Internet**

Despite their flaws and loopholes, these laws and regulations—meant to protect children from the risks of the digital world—still have a positive impact. Or do they? While it is clear that action must be taken in the field, there is an inevitable—and often overlooked—consequence of implementing age verification systems: they put online anonymity at risk. Anonymity on the internet is often said to have negative effects. Under a fake tag that makes them unrecognisable, users seem to engage in more aggressive, anti-normative and anti-social behaviours, as they don't have to directly face the consequences of their acts

(Zimbardo, 1969). However, the positive effects that anonymity has on online users should not be ignored. While Christopherson (2006) highlights the importance of strict privacy for our psychological well-being, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) goes even further, addressing the positive political implications of remaining unknown. The ECtHR has repeatedly acknowledged that anonymity is key for exercising fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and data protection, safeguarding citizens from abuse of power.

From this perspective, this issue does not only concern the effectiveness of measures in practice for the protection of minors online, but also raises questions about the effects that online identification could have for adults. Age verification often requires users to disclose personal information in order to access content, trading off privacy for safe access and, consequently, putting data protection at risk. Not only do these kinds of regulations often compel platforms to collect sensitive user data of both



children and adults, increasing risks of identity theft, data breaches, and surveillance, but the implementation of an identification system managed by the government—as is the case in China—inevitably limits the journalistic and political freedoms of citizens.

Ultimately, the question is not whether minors should be protected online or not, but at what cost. Children's protection in the digital world is essential, but doing so by eroding anonymity risks undermining the very freedoms the internet was meant to enable.

### The future of digital regulation

Throughout this article, we have provided evidence of the remaining challenges that the EU still has to address in order to better protect minors in the digital world. Although we are on the right track, more efforts must be made by policymakers, digital platforms, and legal guardians in order to create a safer online space for children and teens.

For instance, as Murray et al. (2025) argue, the EU still has work to do in terms of standardising regulatory requirements across jurisdictions. Currently, online protection remains unequal between Member States, creating legal uncertainty for platforms and making it more difficult to address systemic risks. Additionally, the Union should include more explicit provisions on the retention and use of netizens' data. New legislation should clearly state how verification data will be managed and for how long it will be retained by platforms. Finally, more effort must be made by European policymakers in endorsing technologies that are privacy-enhancing, as well as in conducting regular evaluations on the effectiveness of age-verification systems.

As for the role that adult content platforms have to play, Murray et al. (2025) also propose a series of

recommendations to address this issue more effectively. In short, platforms requiring an identity verification system should remain consistent with best practices in cybersecurity and privacy law, collecting only the minimum amount of data necessary to complete verification as well as vetting and monitoring third-party data vendors. Additionally, transparency should always be a priority. This could be achieved by providing users with clear disclosures and opt-out mechanisms, informing them about data management in clear, accessible language, and notifying them in case of a security breach that may expose their personal information.

Finally, legal tutors potentially play the most important role to solve the issue of online insecurity, as the solution to this issue inevitably lies in promoting a proper digital education among children (as correctly addressed by the EU). Although there is an undeniable generational gap in terms of digital knowledge between the older and younger generations, the years when this could be ignored are far behind us. Knowing about the irrepressible curiosity of children, and their ability to overcome any barrier placed in their way, it is now more necessary than ever to accompany and teach them about adult content in a respectful and educational way.

Overall, there is still work to be done to ensure children's safety online. In the face of this challenging task, the only solution is to advance toward a sustained collaboration between policymakers, platforms and citizens in order to make the internet a safer space for everyone.



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# QUI PENSE À EUX EN EUROPE? LES ENFANTS MIGRANTS EXPOSÉS AUX DANGERS DES FRONTIÈRES EUROPÉENNES

**D**e plus en plus nombreux à emprunter les routes migratoires vers l'Europe, les enfants, souvent seuls, font face à

des dangers extrêmes avant même d'atteindre les frontières. Une fois arrivés, beaucoup se heurtent à des systèmes d'accueil saturés et à des politiques migratoires de plus en plus restrictives. Entre impératifs sécuritaires et obligations humanitaires, la protection des mineurs migrants reste une promesse fragile.

**Des routes migratoires de plus en plus dangereuses pour les enfants.**

Lorsque l'on évoque la migration, l'image qui s'impose est souvent celle d'un homme jeune, adulte, migrant seul vers l'Union européenne. Même si cette image n'est pas fautive, elle ne constitue aujourd'hui qu'un profil parmi d'autres dans la diversité des parcours migratoires. La migration des mineurs prend des formes diverses : réunification familiale, fuite de conflits, recherche de meilleures conditions de vie, accès à l'éducation ou protection contre les violences, et souvent plusieurs de ces raisons à la fois. Mais la réalité des routes migratoires reste particulièrement préoccupante. Les dangers du trajet, l'exposition aux violences et le trafic d'êtres humains placent ces enfants dans une situation de vulnérabilité extrême.

Selon l'UNICEF, environ 3.500 enfants sont décédés ou ont disparu en tentant



de traverser la Méditerranée vers l'Italie entre 2015 et 2025. Près de 70% des mineurs effectuant cette traversée ne sont pas accompagnés par leurs parents ou un tuteur légal. Au-delà du risque mortel, les violences sont omniprésentes tout au long du voyage. Plus de la moitié des enfants et des jeunes interrogés déclarent avoir subi des violences physiques, et un tiers affirme avoir été retenu contre leur gré.

Regina De Dominicis, directrice régionale de l'UNICEF pour l'Europe et l'Asie centrale et coordinatrice spéciale pour la réponse aux réfugiés et aux migrants en Europe rappelle : *“Les gouvernements doivent protéger les droits et l'intérêt supérieur des enfants conformément à leurs obligations en vertu du droit national et international.”*

**Quand l'entrée dans l'UE implique des cas de violence physique et institutionnelle.**

Les dangers ne disparaissent pas une fois les mineurs arrivés en Europe.

Un rapport de Save the Children publié en 2025 met en lumière les violences subies par les enfants aux frontières européennes, parfois de la part même des autorités.

Malgré l'inscription dans le droit international et européen de l'interdiction de la détention des enfants pour des motifs liés à la migration, des failles structurelles et le manque de ressources permettent à de nombreux États membres de restreindre leur liberté de mouvement ou de les placer dans des structures s'apparentant à des centres de détention, souvent pour des durées supérieures à celles prévues par la loi. En Italie, en Pologne ou en Grèce, la surpopulation des centres d'accueil constitue un problème majeur qui amène un manque de privacité, des tensions entre les enfants et une dégradation de la qualité des soins fournis. Par ailleurs, le nouveau Pacte européen permet, dans certains cas, la détention de mineurs âgés de plus de 12 ans, notamment s'ils sont considérés comme une menace pour la sécurité nationale.

Des ONG et des organisations internationales dénoncent également les difficultés d'accès aux enfants. En Espagne, des professionnels du droit indiquent que leurs consultations avec les mineurs se déroulent sous surveillance : "Nos conversations ne sont pas privées, mais surveillées par la police ou les gardiens. Ce n'est pas une assistance juridique de qualité", témoigne un avocat. De plus, ces professionnels n'ont pas non plus accès aux mineurs non accompagnés placés sous tutelle publique. Ces conditions portent atteinte au droit à une représentation juridique et entravent l'identification précoce des vulnérabilités.

### L'opposition entre le durcissement des politiques migratoires et le discours humanitaire.

La migration des enfants est encadrée par plusieurs textes européens, dont le plus récent est le Pacte européen sur la migration et l'asile, qui entrera pleinement en vigueur en juin 2026.

Ce texte introduit de nouvelles mesures, telles que la mise en place des procédures d'asile accélérées ou un "screening" initial des personnes arrivant aux frontières

extérieures de l'Union. Il affirme prendre en compte le principe fondamental de l'intérêt supérieur de l'enfant, notamment pour les mineurs non accompagnés, censés avoir des garanties spécifiques. Néanmoins, de nombreuses ONG, dont Save the Children, ainsi que des chercheurs, alertent sur les risques que cette législation fait peser sur les enfants. Dans son article *Between migration management efficiency and enhanced child protection (2026)*, Padilla Espinosa souligne que le pacte s'inscrit avant tout dans une logique de contrôle et de sécurisation au détriment potentiel du bien-être des mineurs.

Selon ces analyses, la législation actuelle répond davantage à des défaillances structurelles du système d'accueil qu'à une volonté d'en traiter les causes profondes. Le durcissement des contrôles des frontières extérieures, la généralisation des procédures accélérées et certaines ambiguïtés juridiques pourraient ainsi compromettre l'intérêt supérieur de l'enfant. Le screening, étape d'identification pouvant durer jusqu'à dix jours, illustre ces limites. Sa brièveté et sa standardisation risquent d'empêcher une évaluation

approfondie de la situation de chaque enfant. À cela s'ajoute un facteur crucial : le manque de confiance des mineurs envers les autorités, susceptible d'affecter l'évaluation.

En conclusion, la situation des enfants migrants en Europe met en lumière une contradiction persistante. D'un côté, des cadres juridiques qui affirment protéger les plus vulnérables; de l'autre, les difficultés sur le terrain à garantir ces droits. Aux dangers de la traversée s'ajoutent les obstacles institutionnels une fois arrivés sur le continent. Face à cette situation, la question n'est plus seulement celle du contrôle des frontières, mais bien celle de la responsabilité, car au-delà des chiffres et des dispositifs, ce sont des vies d'enfants qui se jouent souvent dans l'angle mort des politiques européennes.



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# YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY: A NEW PILLAR FOR EUROPE'S DEFENCE POLICY?



**A**s the European Union strengthens its defence following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a key question

remains largely absent from policy debates: where are young people in these discussions? Despite endorsing the Youth Peace and Security agenda since 2015, European institutions still struggle to include youth in security decision-making, raising concerns about the long-term legitimacy of Europe's defence strategy.

A global agenda Europe has endorsed

In 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2250, formally launching the Youth Peace and Security agenda. The resolution marked a shift in how institutions view young people in conflict: not only as victims, but as actors in prevention and peacebuilding. The framework promotes participation, prevention, and partnerships between institutions and civil society. European institutions have repeatedly supported this approach. Young people are "essential partners

in building sustainable peace and preventing conflict," according to the European External Action Service (EEAS) on its Youth, Peace and Security policy pages. This commitment was reinforced in the Youth Action Plan in EU External Action 2022–2027, presented jointly by the European Commission and the EEAS, which aims to strengthen youth participation in EU external policies. Yet turning these commitments into concrete policy within Europe remains difficult.

A defence debate that still excludes youth

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has forced the EU to rethink its security priorities. Defence budgets are rising, and new initiatives aim to strengthen military cooperation and industrial capacity. According to the European Defence Agency's Defence Data 2023 report, total defence spending by EU Member States reached €279 billion in 2022, marking the eighth consecutive year of growth and a sharp increase compared to previous years. At the same time, the EU has launched new instruments such as the European Defence Fund to support joint research and capability development. However, these debates remain largely confined to institutional actors. Young Europeans are rarely present in the spaces where defence strategies are shaped, whether in ministries, expert groups, or

EU-level consultations. This absence raises a structural issue: if young people are excluded today, how can they be expected to support and sustain these policies tomorrow?

Prevention starts with the next generation

The Youth Peace and Security agenda places strong emphasis on prevention, a dimension that is becoming increasingly relevant in Europe's evolving security environment. Security threats today extend beyond traditional military risks. The EEAS has repeatedly warned, through its EUvsDisinfo platform, that foreign information manipulation campaigns target European societies through digital channels. At the same time, the European Commission has made combating disinformation a priority through initiatives such as the Code of Practice on Disinformation, which focuses in particular on large online platforms. These developments highlight how security challenges increasingly affect the information environment in which citizens form political opinions. Recognising youth as partners in prevention is therefore not symbolic. Younger generations are among the most active users of digital platforms, making their role particularly relevant in understanding how such threats evolve and spread.

## The paradox of Europe's defence workforce

The limits of youth inclusion are also visible in the labour market. Europe's defence ambitions rely heavily on highly skilled professionals in areas such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and engineering. However, ensuring a sufficient workforce is becoming a growing concern. The European Commission has identified skills shortages in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields as a key challenge for Europe's industrial future, including sectors linked to defence, in its European Skills Agenda. At the same time, recent policy discussions at EU level have highlighted the need to make defence-related careers more attractive in order to support long-term capability development. This creates a structural tension: while investment in defence is increasing, maintaining these capabilities will depend on the ability to attract and retain a new generation of skilled workers.

## From consultation to genuine partnership

European institutions have started to acknowledge the importance of youth engagement. The EEAS regularly organises dialogues and events bringing together young peacebuilders and policymakers. At the EU Youth Peace and Security Conference held in Brussels in 2022, participants called for stronger youth participation in global governance. According to the conference conclusions published by the EEAS, they emphasised specifically the universality of rights such as dignity, freedom, and peace. However, these initiatives remain largely consultative. While they provide spaces for exchange, they do not systematically translate into participation in decision-making processes. Moving from consultation to partnership would require more structural inclusion, such as integrating youth perspectives into advisory mechanisms or policy development processes.

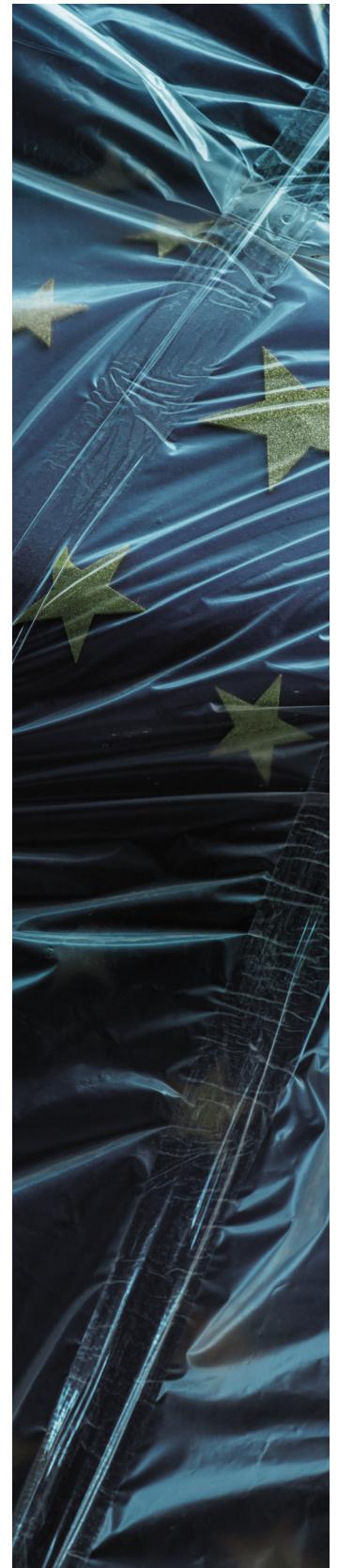
## A question of legitimacy for Europe's security strategy

Europe's renewed focus on defence reflects a changing geopolitical reality. But long-term security depends not only on military capacity, but also on public trust. According to Eurobarometer Standard Survey 100 published in Autumn 2023, over 75% of Europeans support a common defence and security policy among EU Member States, one of the highest levels recorded. Maintaining this support over time will require policies that resonate across generations, including younger citizens. The Youth Peace and Security agenda offers a framework for doing so. Integrating youth into defence thinking could strengthen both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of European security policy. Europe may be rediscovering the importance of defence. The real test will be whether it recognises that young people are not only its future, but already one of its essential partners.



**Sara Boanini**

M2 in European Studies



# MAJORITÉ NUMÉRIQUE : LE POINT SUR UNE OFFENSIVE DISPARATE DANS L'UNION

**L**e 26 novembre 2025, la question de la majorité numérique s'est officiellement imposée dans le débat européen.

Le Parlement européen adoptait à cette date-là un rapport non-législatif qui exprimait tant des inquiétudes quant aux risques auxquels faisaient face les mineurs en ligne en étant exposés à des contenus violents ou nuisibles, qu'une volonté d'agir pour les protéger au moyen d'une majorité numérique harmonisée. Concrètement, plusieurs seuils étaient envisagés, allant de l'interdiction totale des réseaux sociaux pour les mineurs en deçà de 13 ans, jusqu'à un accès libre pour les adolescents de 16 ans, en passant par un accès conditionné au consentement parental pour la tranche d'âge de 13 à 16 ans. Depuis cette résolution, une accélération politique s'est déclenchée en

quelques mois au sein de plusieurs États membres. Entre annonces gouvernementales et propositions de loi, des initiatives se multiplient dans les capitales européennes. Le point sur une mobilisation européenne certes engagée mais qui demeure dispersée.

**La France « pionnière » en tête du mouvement et face aux premières contraintes.**

Parmi les 27 États membres, la France est celle qui a le plus avancé vers la concrétisation de la majorité numérique sur son territoire. L'Assemblée nationale a adopté, le 26 janvier 2026, en première lecture, la proposition de loi (PPL) qui interdit l'accès aux réseaux sociaux aux moins de 15 ans. Elle a été approuvée par le Sénat le 31 mars après un examen du texte ayant fait l'objet de modifications.

Les changements substantiels apportés comportent un risque d'incompatibilité avec le Digital Services Act (DSA), le règlement européen sur les services numériques. En effet, comme l'avait

rappelé fin janvier Thomas Regnier, un porte-parole de la Commission: « *la Commission européenne est la seule entité qui peut imposer des obligations supplémentaires aux très grandes plateformes telles que désignées dans le cadre du DSA* ».

La proposition de l'Assemblée nationale avait d'ailleurs elle-même initialement fait l'objet d'amendements pour se conformer au DSA à la suite d'un avis critique du Conseil d'État. En cause, une interdiction d'inscription pour les mineurs de moins de 15 ans imposée aux plateformes qui étaient, suivant le texte, contraintes de prévoir des outils d'authentification de l'âge. Comme l'avait également rappelé Thomas Regnier, il s'agit d'une prérogative de la Commission. Dans cet état de fait, il a été décidé de notifier à la Commission le texte adopté par le Sénat.

Cette proposition soutenue par le gouvernement, si bien qu'elle fait l'objet d'une procédure accélérée, s'inscrit dans un objectif bien ambitieux affiché



par la France : faire appliquer cette majorité numérique pour les nouveaux comptes dès la rentrée scolaire prochaine. Il reste à déterminer si ce dispositif pourra éviter le sort de la loi Marcangeli de 2023, qui instaurait déjà une majorité numérique à 15 ans mais qui est restée inappliquée faute de conformité avec le droit européen.

#### **Une vague réglementaire hétéroclite**

D'autres États membres ont engagé des réflexions ou des démarches similaires. Le Danemark suit de près la France. Un projet de loi annoncé en octobre 2025 prévoit d'interdire l'accès aux réseaux sociaux aux Danois de moins de 15 ans, avec un usage possible dès 13 ans sous consentement parental. Un accord politique a été trouvé, mais les modalités d'application restent à préciser. En Espagne, un projet de loi à l'étude vise à fixer l'âge à 16 ans, avec des exigences renforcées de vérification de l'âge.

En Grèce, une interdiction des réseaux sociaux pour les moins de 15 ans a été annoncée par le gouvernement, avec une entrée en vigueur prévue en janvier

2027. En Italie, un projet de loi examiné au Sénat prévoit des restrictions pour les moins de 15 ans, en complément de règles déjà adoptées, comme le consentement parental pour les enfants de moins de 14 ans.

Le Portugal envisage une majorité numérique à 16 ans avec accord parental entre 13 et 16 ans. La Slovénie et la Tchéquie préparent des lois similaires autour d'un seuil de 15 ans. Enfin, l'Autriche a conclu un accord politique pour interdire l'accès aux moins de 14 ans.

#### **Une harmonisation européenne nécessaire ?**

Les récentes condamnations des géants du numérique Meta (Instagram) et Google (YouTube) dans l'État de Californie viennent renforcer le bien-fondé de cette dynamique réglementaire. Ces plateformes ont été reconnues pour la première fois comme étant responsables de la mise en danger de mineurs et responsables de leur mal-être au moyen de leurs algorithmes. Ces verdicts inédits confortent les inquiétudes exprimées par les institutions

et les capitales européennes quant aux risques auxquels sont exposés les mineurs sur les réseaux sociaux et confirment l'insuffisance des dispositifs actuels de contrôle d'accès de ces derniers.

Il reste néanmoins que, sans véritable coordination européenne, cette offensive risque surtout de produire des normes nationales difficilement applicables à l'instar de la loi Marcangeli. Avec des États désireux d'agir rapidement, au risque de se heurter au droit de l'Union, la majorité numérique ne peut être mise en œuvre efficacement qu'avec une harmonisation à l'échelle de l'Union. La Commission qui, à ce stade, ne privilégie pas l'adoption d'un cadre harmonisé fixant un âge minimum d'accès aux plateformes, changera-t-elle d'avis sous la pression réglementaire des capitales ?

**Safae Abdelouhabi**  
M1 en Droit

# POLICY STUDY

POLICY STUDY  
April 2026

## EQUALIZE

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN POLITICAL OPINION  
AND VOTING AMONG GENERATION Z

Amy Alexander, Elena Avramovska,  
Nicholas Charron, Matteo Dressler,  
Lea Gronenberg, Gefjon Off, Tobias Spöri



ON  
ETERON

Friedrich  
Ebert  
Stiftung

FEPS  
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



A new **political gender divide** is often said to be defining Gen Z in Europe: young women moving left; young men moving right. But is this really the case?

Launched at the Global Progressive Mobilisation in Barcelona, this policy study shows that **gender differences among young Europeans are real but vary significantly across countries and issues.**

The study combines data from the European Social Survey data across the EU and beyond with insights from focus groups conducted with young people in Germany, Greece, Poland, Spain and Sweden.



*This policy brief was published by FEPS, in collaboration with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Eteron and Dpart.*

ON  
ETERON

FEPS  
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



Friedrich  
Ebert  
Stiftung



# PART 2

## LA VOIX DES JEUNES

## YOUTH VOICES



## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ON CLIMATE ISSUES: ACTIVISM IN DECLINE OR JUST A CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE?

**W**hat were you doing for the climate in 2019? And how are you engaging against climate change now? For everyone involved in youth

activism against climate change, 2019 was the peak year, but now, youth engagement on climate seems to be in decline. Is this actually the case, or did the forms of engagement simply change?

**Youth engagement on climate change in the past and present**

When thinking about youth engagement on climate issues, one thinks of the new activism of *Fridays for Future* and *Extinction Rebellion*. The former mobilized one million protesters during their first Global Climate Strike on 15 March 2019 and was initiated by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. By the third global event, the Global Week for Future from 20 to 27 September 2019, an estimated six million strikers took to the streets. And while the latter was more direct and more involved in civil disruption to raise awareness, it

also accomplished the goal of capturing the public's attention in 2019, according to de Moor (2021).

While COVID-19 harmed these movements massively, it is now 2026 and still, young people do not seem overly concerned with climate issues anymore. Why is that? What has changed? And will it change back?

### Current issues in youth engagement

According to the EU Youth Report 2024, the European youth see climate change as the most pressing issue of our time. In light of current global and European priorities on defense rather than climate, this seems especially dire. This raises the question: if the European youth are so invested in the topic, why are they still disengaged?

In truth, it seems to be a combination of several factors, ranging from climate fatigue to structural inequalities and regional differences within the EU. Rising economic pressures seem to be another reason for disengagement. One major argument seems to be the so-called "eco-anxiety", a deep feeling of doom connected to constant climate news, especially prevalent among young people. This feeling of helplessness when facing an insurmountable issue limits activism at

its roots. In addition to youth being less active on issues, associations that do tackle climate issues face another, diverse set of difficulties.

Orsini and Kang, researchers in international relations at UC Louvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles, explain how youth associations run on a voluntary basis, implying a lack of resources and also exclusion from important decisions. Moreover, there is slow institutionalization: some countries established youth delegate programs very early on, while others have not done so. On higher levels, such as the EU level, change has been slow. This matches the gaps between high expectations of youth organizations and the slow progress of governments.



## The European Green Deal, the solution for all?

According to the EU Youth Report 2024, the majority of European youth looks to the European Union to tackle climate issues, with 59% saying so in 2023 compared to 35% in 2013. The institutions reacted relatively fast in 2019, when the Commission launched the European Green Deal as a response to global youth protests. This flagship project of Commission President von der Leyen enabled her to get elected, making a statement on climate in the process and putting climate issues on the forefront of the agenda, marking a success for climate activists.

The European Green Deal includes cutting emissions to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and a carbon pricing system while guaranteeing a just and fair transition. However, critics claim that the European Green Deal is seen as the ultimate solution by policy makers, taking complicated technocratic steps towards a greener future while ultimately not doing enough groundwork. The critique of “greenwashing” of the European Green Deal follows this logic.

Therefore, it is difficult to criticize it, since the institutions can present the project as a great solution for all, while already discussing how to amend the guidelines. Several aspects of the EGD are currently under discussion, notably the international carbon market which is considered a “loophole”, by allowing countries to offset their carbon emissions instead of reducing them. Therefore, the promise of reducing the emissions by 90% by 2040 cannot be kept. In connection to the deal, the phase-out of fossil fuel vehicles seems to be another point of discussion among policy makers, worrying the European youth about keeping the EU's goals ambitious enough.

### A shift – not a decline? What's next?

Organisations like *Fridays for Future* and *Extinction Rebellion* are still active but shifting to different aims, sometimes engaging in large-scale, highly visible public awareness strategies but also in



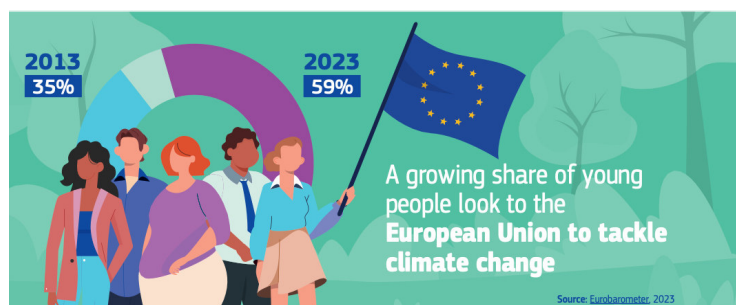
regional engagement and allying themselves with other social movements. Additionally, more and more active youth can shape policies from the inside, as seen in cases like the EU Youth Dialogue; therefore, they do not engage in visible activism on the streets anymore. Getting a seat at the table is, consequently, an essential addition to grassroots movements.

In conclusion, the youth have not given up on engaging in climate issues – they have simply changed their way of operating, for a multitude of reasons. Some questions remain unanswered: how can European youth work with current policy makers? How can we go beyond the Green Deal, if it is not ambitious enough? These are questions that concern all of us, and they must be answered together, by young European activists and policy makers.



**Fiona Tiekötter**

M1 in European Studies





# PROTECTEU STRATEGY: NAVIGATING THE ‘ONLIFE’ REALITY OF MODERN RADICALISATION

**A**cross the European Union, pathways into extremist violence are becoming increasingly difficult to trace. The boundary between digital and physical life has all but disappeared, merging into a singular ‘onlife’ reality. This shift places young people at the centre of a rapidly evolving security landscape. In 2024, nearly one-third of terrorism suspects arrested in the EU were aged between 12 and 20, accounting for 29% of all terrorism related apprehensions. Exploiting digital dependency and psychological vulnerabilities, leaderless networks are transforming the internet from a communication tool into an immersive environment where radicalisation and mobilisation occur simultaneously.

**The virtual invisible hand: shifting toward leaderless networks**

In response, the European Commission unveiled the ProtectEU strategy on 1 April 2025. The initiative marks a shift

away from reactive law enforcement toward a ‘whole-of-society’ approach to security. It also lays the groundwork for a future EU Agenda on preventing and countering terrorism as well as violent extremism, alongside the proposed European Democracy Shield aimed at safeguarding democratic processes from foreign interference.

**Recruitment without recruiters: the rise of ‘Salad Bar Extremism’**

Traditional hierarchical terrorist structures are increasingly obsolete. According to the 2025 Europol TE-SAT report, investigators often find no identifiable moment of recruitment and no direct handler guiding individuals toward extremism.

Instead, today’s threat landscape is defined by diffuse networks of lone actors and small peer groups, sometimes described as a ‘pack of lone actors’ or a ‘swarm wolf’ model. These individuals are loosely connected through online spaces that normalise and reinforce violent intent.

This transformation is driven by ‘toxic hybridity’ and what experts term ‘Salad Bar Extremism’. Rather than advertising a single ideology, young individuals assemble personalised

belief systems by combining fragmented (and often contradictory) elements from jihadist, far-right accelerationist, and niche online subcultures.

One example is the so-called ‘White Jihad’ narrative, which merges themes of hyper-masculinity, martyrdom, and rebellion found in both Islamist and far-right ideologies. Such hybrid narratives often resonate with young men experiencing identity uncertainty, where personal grievances and a search for belonging outweigh any deep engagement with political doctrine.

**The dark frontiers: gaming and ‘digital community policing’**

Extremist actors are increasingly ‘gamifying’ radicalisation, aligning their strategies with the digital habits of Europe’s youth to create immersive environments for grooming and recruitment. Within these spaces, young users engage in ‘adaptive hybridization’, incorporating extremist symbols into their online identities to gain visibility or ‘clout’. In response, the EU is moving toward a model of Digital Community Policing.

Initiatives like the ‘Gaming Police’ in Finland and Sweden involve law

enforcement interacting directly with young users in virtual spaces to build trust. While these countries are often perceived as 'safe', they serve as pilot projects to refine proactive engagement before these methods are scaled up across the EU. This is critical because the 'onlife' reality means radicalisation is now diffuse and leaderless; a threat can emerge anywhere there is digital dependency and social isolation, regardless of a country's physical crime rate.

The necessity of this approach was underscored in 2024 when Swedish authorities arrested four individuals for a conspiracy to commit terrorist offences linked to IS Somalia, proving that even quiet regions are active fronts in the digital landscape. To support these local efforts, the EU Internet Forum is now fostering direct cooperation between the gaming sector and law enforcement, while Europol is developing a dedicated capability to monitor and analyse the misuse of gaming platforms for recruitment.

### The Malicious Use of Artificial Intelligence (MUAI)

MUAI is reshaping the radicalisation process. Beyond accelerating propaganda production, Artificial Intelligence (AI) enables the creation of personalised ideological ecosystems (so-called 'experience layers') built around emotionally engaging synthetic content. This development can drastically shorten the pathway from initial exposure to violent mobilisation, sometimes reducing it to a matter of weeks.

AI tools also facilitate automated recruitment through chatbots capable of bypassing traditional moderation systems. These systems exploit linguistic and cultural gaps, making detection more difficult.

While AI-driven interactions have shown potential in reducing belief in conspiracy theories, the opacity of Large Language Models (LLMs) presents a critical vulnerability. Hostile state actors can leverage these systems to embed subtle narratives shaped by philosophical or cultural bias, particularly among younger audiences.

### A digital-first, whole-of-society response

The EU has already strengthened its legislative framework through the Terrorist Content Online (TCO) Regulation, which requires the removal of illegal content within one hour. However, ProtectEU signals a broader strategic shift toward 'Safety by Design', embedding preventive mechanisms directly into digital platforms. These measures aim to guide user behaviour toward safer interactions while identifying high-risk patterns before they escalate into violence.

Prevention strategies are also evolving. Rather than focusing solely on debunking misinformation, policy-makers are increasingly prioritising

'prebunking', equipping individuals with the tools to recognise and resist disinformation before encountering it. This form of 'cognitive immunity' is seen as a crucial democratic safeguard against foreign ideological influence.

Ultimately, protecting young people requires a comprehensive effort where local authorities, schools, and families act as equal partners. Concrete support is now arriving through the Community Engagement and Empowerment Programme (CEEP), which equips practitioners with digital skills for online intervention. New models for hotlines and call centres are also being developed to help families 'act on signs of radicalisation' in a supportive environment. Central to this approach is the principle of 'nothing about us without us', ensuring that young people are not just subjects of security policy but active agents in building resilient, democratic communities.

**Camille Houyoux**

Third year Bachelor Political Science



# YOUTH POLICY AS AN AESTHETIC: THE ERASMUS+

**T**oo little, too late: Erasmus+ is back, but Brexit's damage to europhile, British youths and EU students hoping to study in the UK is done?

This June marks a decade since the Brexit referendum of 2016 and its infamous 52-48% split result. On 17 December 2025, five years on from Britain's official withdrawal from the EU, the UK government announced it would be rejoining the EU's Erasmus programme in 2027. 15 April 2026 the agreement was officially finalised. The return of Erasmus+ is being celebrated as a pivotal step in rapprochement designed specifically for young people in the UK and EU. However, this announcement raises a profound, continent-wide debate: do politicians advocate for the European youth, or merely perform doing so? This announcement is a useful lens through which to examine a potential broader pattern of addressing symbolism without enacting structural change.

## Back in the (class)room

The UK left the Erasmus+ programme in 2020 with association as a third (non-EU) country still possible. While provisions for UK participation within EU programmes were included within the finalised UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), the UK did not seek association with the Erasmus+ programme. This was led by the then Conservative government who did not consider "Erasmus+ participation to be value-for-money and in the



interests of the UK taxpayer", citing "a net cost in the region of £2 billion (€2.2 billion) more than we received".

The new deal, confirmed via a joint UK-EU announcement, integrates the UK into the Erasmus+ programme starting January 1st 2027 alongside progress in energy market integration and trade. The new Labour government has estimated 100,000+ people in the UK could benefit from the scheme in just its first year with "careful analysis of value for money" remaining central to the debate.

At a contribution cost of £570 million (€657 million), the UK has negotiated financial terms at a 30% discount compared to the default terms under the TCA. It is worth noting, however, that the current agreement pertains to the 2027-28 academic year only as a new EU budgetary framework and Erasmus+ scheme is due for 2028-2034. Thus, any participation beyond

that will require fresh negotiation under the Commission's next long-term budget cycle.

## A rebrand?

When the UK left Erasmus+, EU student "numbers halved" says Nick Hillman, Director of the Higher Education Policy Institute. Chart 6 published by HESA who collect, assure and publish information about UK higher education shows a stark plummet in EU students enrolled at UK universities. This was primarily driven by higher tuition fees, increasingly complex visa requirements and the emergence of competitive English-speaking course alternatives across Europe.

Erasmus+'s replacement came in the form of the Turing Scheme, introduced in 2021. This one-directional, outbound-only programme funded UK students going

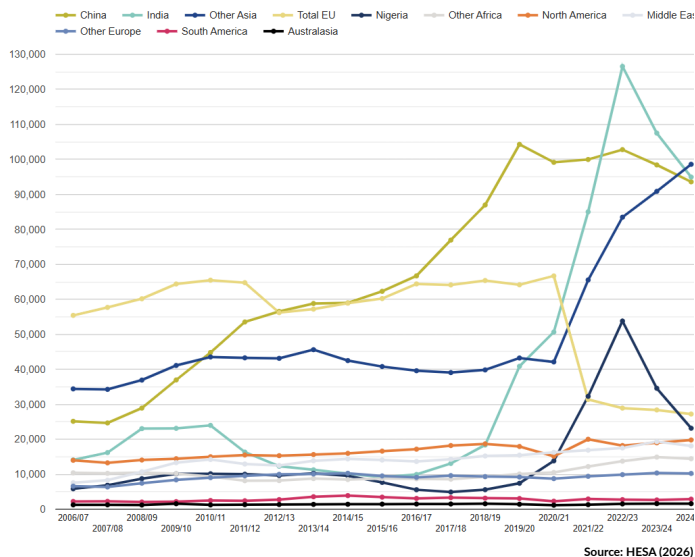
abroad but, critically, did not fund incoming students nor cover tuition fees at host institutions. Fox and Beech's 2023 analysis of the genesis of the Turing scheme evidences how "large-scale geopolitical re-framings, like Brexit, lend themselves to much broader disarray, of which 'smaller' contingencies, like enabling International Student Mobility (ISM), might be considered an afterthought". They argue that rather than offering a coherent stance on educational policy for UK youth, the Turing Scheme can be regarded as a "skeleton" of Erasmus performing for Eurosceptic ideology anchored in the original pro-Brexit campaign that Erasmus+ was a target of.

Moreover, the Turing Scheme did not meet the expectation of stable, multi-year funding cycles established by Erasmus+. The government's own first year evaluation, published in January 2024, found that 79% of Higher Education institutions encountered difficulties with the application process, and that the timing of outcome communications in July was flawed as some participants were already required to be present by then and were therefore forced to gamble on committing to their placement abroad without having confirmed whether funding would actually be available. Naturally, this disadvantage fell disproportionately on less affluent students, who were less able to absorb uncertainty or front costs while awaiting said confirmation. And yet, in the UK, the Conservative government heralded the Turing Scheme as a success.

### Performative politics for the Youth?

The Erasmus+ saga provides a case study in potentially performative youth politics. That is to say, the tendency of governments and international institutions to ostensibly offer young people tailored policies through visible, celebratory interventions, programmes and summits, while declining to address structural, entrenched concerns. The Turing Scheme was originally announced as

## Entrant students with a permanent address outside the UK by permanent address and academic year



an improvement on Erasmus+. However, its hushed defunding and re-replacement, framed as an improvement upon an improvement, despite a return to the past, exemplifies the nature of 'Youth-centric' policy cycles being completed without accountability. The gap between rhetoric and reality, a gulf perhaps? The answer becomes evident in numerous articles within this magazine.

### Or proof of progress?

Of course, the UK re-joining Erasmus+ will benefit many students from 2027 onwards (est. 100,000 in the first year), and the political effort required to secure the deal, navigating financial negotiations, EU legal frameworks, and domestic political resistance, should not be dismissed. The UK's International Education Strategy update hopes to increase the value of British education exports to £35 billion (€40.2 billion) per year and aims to increase the number of international higher education students hosted in the UK to 600,000 per year, both by 2030. Indeed, the embrace of reciprocity in Britain hosting students is key as it gestures to a major advantage for the youth of EU member states now able to access British campuses, unaffordable and

complicated in terms of bureaucracy since Brexit.

### The real question of Youth Policy

The question is not whether this new educational opportunity will come as a benefit to youth in Europe or whether politicians are thinking of them in their policy debates and outcomes. The question is whether the opportunities being currently presented to young people are symbolic or truly transformative. Crucially, that distinction matters. A genuine youth politics might include stable funding structures immune to annual budget reviews and democratic mechanisms that are not scheduled to be undone by the next election cycle. When and through what policies will institutional concern for young people shift from seasonal to structural?



**Artemiz Van den Broucke**

M1 in Political Sciences

# UNDERSTANDING THE DRUG MARKET: ADDRESSING DRUG ADDICTION IN EUROPE

**N**owadays, a teenager scrolling on his phone can now access almost anything within a few seconds, including drugs. In today's

Europe, such substances are more available and diverse than ever before, blurring the line between legal and illegal consumption. Young people are exposed to a wide range of addictive products that may have an impact on their early habits and behaviors. As the EU becomes both a major transit hub and a consumer market, the question is no longer simply about controlling drugs but about understanding why and how young people use them.

The EU as a drug market, between transit and consumption

Generally speaking, the term "drug" refers to any substance, whether

natural or synthetic, that alters a person's state of consciousness or mental activity. This definition therefore includes cannabis, cocaine, alcohol, sugar, tobacco, and certain medications. There is therefore not just one type of drug, but several, both legal and illegal. This is why the generic term "drugs" used in this article encompasses both legal and illegal drugs such as cannabis and tobacco but also alcohol and certain medications.

The EU isn't just a place where drugs pass through, it's one of the world's largest consumer markets. For a long time, it was mainly seen as a transit zone but today, there is no doubt that the EU has become an entry point for cocaine too. In recent years, record seizures have been observed with hundreds of tons intercepted annually. It shows how massive the traffic really is, with large amounts of drugs still reaching the market. At the same time, Europe is also producing drugs. Synthetic drugs like MDMA (also called "ecstasy") and amphetamines are often manufactured

in the EU itself, especially in countries like the Netherlands and Belgium. This situation has a direct impact on young people because drugs are more available and prices have decreased in some areas.

Youth and addiction, a broad spectrum of substances

When it comes to drug addiction among young people, it's important not to focus only on illegal drugs. In reality, youth consumption includes a wide range of substances. Indeed, some are illegal but others are fully legal. On one side, there are illegal drugs, like cannabis and cocaine that are categorized as natural. On the other side, some are manufactured and artificially produced like MDMA. According to the European Union Drugs Agency, cannabis remains largely the most used and popular drug among young Europeans, with surveys suggesting that around 1 in 5 young adults have tried it at least once.



Although less widespread, cocaine use has been rising in several countries, especially in nightlife settings. But legal substances play a huge role too. Tobacco and alcohol are still among the most consumed addictive substances. According to several Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) surveys, the average age at which young Europeans try alcohol for the first time is around 14, but this varies from one country to another. Despite prevention campaigns, many teenagers experiment early and some develop long-term habits.

Then there is the special case of sugar. It's not classified as a drug, but studies in neuroscience supported by the National Institute of Health show that it can activate the brain's reward system in ways similar to addictive substances. Young people are heavily exposed to sugary products through marketing, sodas and ultra-processed foods. Even though it's very different from cocaine, it still raises questions about addiction and long-term health effects.

### The dominance of security rhetoric

Drug policies in the EU have long been dominated by security rhetoric. Governments and institutions often focus on fighting trafficking, strengthening borders and concentrating on police operations. The "war on drugs" logic is visible in public discourse and media coverage tends to highlight drug seizures as well as criminal networks. But even with stronger repression, drugs remain widely available across Europe. Above all, it often overlooks the social and psychological factors behind youth addiction like stress, peer pressure or social environment. In short, a solution would be to treat drugs as a public health issue and not only a criminal one. Focusing only on security risks misses the biggest issue, especially when it comes to young users.

### New drugs, new risks

One of the most worrying trends in the EU is the rise of New Psychoactive Substances and synthetic drugs. These are often designed in laboratories to imitate the effects of traditional drugs

while avoiding legal restrictions. Their compositions are highly versatile, which makes them very difficult to regulate and even harder to understand. Compared to older drugs, these can be less predictable and more dangerous for inexperienced users. For example, synthetic opioids can be dozens of times stronger than heroin. Even drugs like MDMA are now often sold with much higher purity levels than in the past, increasing the risk of overdose. With the internet, drugs can now be bought through social media or the dark web, sometimes being delivered directly to users.

### What solutions for youth drug addiction?

Thus, addressing youth drug addiction in the EU requires a more realistic approach. Most experts like Alex Wodak, doctor and leading researcher in the field of addiction, agree that repression alone isn't enough and must be accompanied by prevention, harm reduction and public health strategies. Prevention starts with education: young people need clear information about the effects and consequences of drugs. For example, the Unplugged Prevention Program developed by the EU has shown measurable positive effects. It involved more than 7000 students between the ages of 12 and 14 across seven countries. As a result, participation in the program reduced substance use by 25 - 30% for daily smoking, episodes of drunkenness and cannabis use in the short term.

Moreover, follow-up results showed that some effects persisted over time. After one year, episodes of drunkenness were still reduced by about 20% and regular drunkenness by up to 40%. Thus, this kind of approach may significantly delay or reduce substance use among adolescents. At the same time, harm reduction aims to limit the negative consequences of drug use, even when it actually occurs. Measures such as supervised consumption spaces or access to decent medical support can significantly reduce overdoses and health issues. However, it is not simply a matter of prevention. Addiction is rarely a simple choice; it's a combination of psychological factors

such as stress or depression, and social factors such as the family environment, or peer pressure. Support and care must address the root causes of addiction.

Finally, many countries are increasingly treating addiction as a public health issue rather than a criminal one. For example, Portugal has decriminalized drug use and invested in treatment and support systems that put emphasis on psychological care and social reintegration. This approach is crucial for young people, as early intervention can help prevent long-term addiction and reduce the broader impact of drug use.

### Lessons can be learned

In the end, the European drug market reflects a complex and evolving reality where the increased availability and diversified substances directly affect young people. From traditional drugs like cannabis to legal substances like alcohol, addiction must be understood as a broader social and health issue rather than a strictly criminal one. The EU seems to continue to emphasize security and repression, but this approach has shown its limits, especially regarding the root causes of youth drug use.

The emergence of new synthetic drugs and the role of digital technologies have further intensified the risks, hence the importance of prevention. Therefore, tackling youth drug addiction in the EU requires a shift towards more comprehensive strategies in order to better protect young people and respond effectively to the realities of today's drug market.



**Hippolyte Vaneecloo**

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# FREE TO MOVE, FORCED TO LEAVE

**P**ut down roots in your hometown or seek new opportunities elsewhere? Invest in your own region or in a more prosperous one? Move or stay? These are some of the questions young Europeans ask themselves when it comes to establishing their adult life, after completing their education and at the crucial moment of entering the job market. The problem is that many of them leave their hometowns, regions, or countries, not deliberately, but because they are forced to by a lack of opportunity.

## The freedom to move: a fundamental but uneven right?

When freedom of movement was first introduced into the legal order of the European Community, the possibility for people to move freely across borders in search of better job opportunities marked a fundamental step towards a more integrated Europe. This remains unchanged. What has changed, however, is the realisation that besides offering people the invaluable chance to build a better life

across national borders, this freedom is draining the demographic, cultural, and economic potential of certain European territories. In fact, even though the Single Market proved pivotal in boosting the European economy and competitiveness, it inevitably directed wealth towards Central and Western urban agglomerations, deepening the economic disparity with other peripheral and rural regions.

According to a report published by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission in November 2025, *“Demographic Outlook on Right to Stay – Beyond the Letta Report”*, youth migration is a complex phenomenon resulting from a *“set of factors and motivations that vary across different contexts and life stages”*.

The report outlined two key observations. The first is that migration rationales depend on the stages of life. At ages 20-24, broadly speaking, people migrate for educational purposes; at 25-35, to enter into the labour force; and at 30-34, to establish families. The second is that the main element driving youth migration is the economic gap between origin and destination regions. In other words, young workers from regions that are declining, demographically and

economically, tend to concentrate in more affluent cities and regions either within or outside of their country of origin. In this regard, the JRC’s analysis pointed out that inter-regional migration prevails over international, with a higher share of inter-regional emigration for poorer regions rather than richer regions. This means that most young workers – save those from Lithuania, Romania, Croatia, Poland, Greece, and Bulgaria – tend to remain within their country of origin.

## The Implications for “the Right to Stay”

The JRC’s analysis was conducted after the concept of the “right to stay” – as introduced by the Letta Report – began to take hold in the political and public debate at the European level.

Far from questioning the importance of the freedom of movement, Letta stressed that only high skilled, multilingual, young workers are truly able to “take full advantage of education and employment opportunities in the Single Market”, leaving others behind.

This imbalance risks unevenly distributing Single Market benefits, exacerbating the gap between regions further, enriching some while depleting others.

However, the freedom of movement ceases to be exercised freely when driven by necessity. The reality is that young people moving from lagging Eastern and Southern areas towards certain richer regions – either within or outside of their countries – are attracted by the quality of education, job opportunities, and services they can't find at home.

This exodus, often referred to as “brain drain”, has deep negative consequences: it undermines young people's trust in institutions and deprives regions of origin of their most valuable resources, accelerating demographic decline and economic stagnation.

### Is there a way forward?

Some regions' inability to offer adequate opportunities is a major issue that is weakening a lot of territories that people call home. This recent migration pattern is deepening the negative demographic trend which risks worsening socio-economic disparities between European regions. In the meantime, those who are forced to migrate lose contact with their

roots, experiencing increased resentment, and a sense of isolation.

The EU already has an in-house tool designed to address these challenges and support social, territorial, and economic convergence: the EU Cohesion Policy. As suggested by Letta in his report, empowering regional and local development is crucial in this regard. Partnership governance and a bottom-up approach can strategically tackle the unique difficulties that peripheral, rural, and insular regions are facing, finding tailored solutions to overcome development traps and retain human capital. Financial and technical investments should be made to improve infrastructure, digital and innovation skills in order to allow everyone to access economic opportunities without necessarily having to exercise their freedom of movement. These investments should be framed within an institutional context capable of providing citizens with high-quality

services of general interest, which is the fundamental element required to ensure the right to stay.

Providing local communities with the right instruments to develop according to their capacities, strengths and needs can break the vicious cycle of limited opportunities, inadequate services, and outward migration. However, these efforts will prove insufficient if not properly supported by national initiatives aimed at reducing domestic disparities that underpin economically driven youth migration across Europe.

Ultimately, the right to stay should not be understood as an antagonist to the freedom of movement, but as its necessary complement: mobility is only truly free when staying in the place you call home does not require sacrificing opportunity for belonging.

**Cristina De Leo**

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# SANTÉ MENTALE ET DÉVELOPPEMENT DES JEUNES À L'ÈRE DU NUMÉRIQUE

**A**u cours des trois dernières décennies, les technologies numériques ont transformé la société, révolutionnant la manière dont les individus interagissent, travaillent et perçoivent le monde. Ces évolutions ont créé un écosystème numérique touchant tous les aspects de la vie quotidienne, entraînant ainsi des conséquences profondes. Parmi les plus vulnérables à ces changements figurent les jeunes, dont la santé mentale a été affectée. La pandémie de COVID-19 a encore mis en évidence ce problème : l'isolement, l'augmentation du temps passé devant les écrans et la forte dépendance aux plateformes numériques ont exacerbé les difficultés existantes en matière de santé mentale.

## La politique numérique de l'UE

La santé mentale des jeunes constitue une préoccupation urgente au sein de l'Union européenne (UE). Plusieurs études, dont celles du psychologue américain Jonathan Haidt, ainsi que des rapports de l'OCDE, mettent en lumière les nouveaux risques liés aux technologies numériques. Parmi ceux-ci figurent une augmentation de l'anxiété, de la dépression, des troubles du sommeil et des cas de TDAH, ainsi que des comportements problématiques, comme la dépendance, particulièrement chez les adolescents.

L'UE a accompli des progrès considérables dans l'élaboration de sa politique numérique depuis l'Agenda numérique pour l'Europe, lancé en 2010 dans le sillage de la stratégie de Lisbonne, jusqu'à la création d'un espace numérique unifié. Cependant, à mesure que le monde numérique s'étendait, des domaines sociétaux clés, dont la santé mentale, ont été négligés, laissant des lacunes exigeant une attention urgente.

Malgré ces changements, les cadres réglementaires européens peinent à prendre en compte les conséquences de cette situation sur la santé mentale. Certes, des initiatives telles que le « Digital Services Act » réglementent les plateformes en ligne, luttent contre les contenus illicites, et protègent la confidentialité des données, mais ils occultent une question cruciale : l'impact d'une exposition prolongée aux écrans sur les jeunes générations.

## La communauté scientifique identifie les menaces

Deux études menées en France en démontrent les effets. La première, intitulée « EnCLASS », réalisée en 2024, révèle l'augmentation des troubles de santé mentale chez les élèves et les adolescents, exacerbée par l'isolement pendant la pandémie de COVID-19. La seconde étude, commandée par le gouvernement, porte sur les très jeunes enfants, âgés de 0 à 6 ans. Une exposition excessive aux écrans durant les années

formatrices aurait des conséquences graves. Retards de langage, difficultés de concentration, voire repli social, les risques identifiés sont multiples. Face à ces constats, les experts recommandent des mesures radicales : une interdiction totale des écrans avant trois ans, et un encadrement strict jusqu'à l'entrée en primaire.

Les adolescents sont confrontés à des défis qui leur sont propres. Des plateformes comme TikTok ou Instagram, conçues pour capter l'attention à tout prix, exacerbent la dépression, l'anxiété et le stress tout en encourageant des comparaisons sociales malsaines et en alimentant le cyberharcèlement. Leur algorithme, conçu pour des contenus courts et stimulants, érode la réflexion critique. La situation est encore plus préoccupante s'agissant des contenus circulant sur les réseaux sociaux. En l'absence de modération rigoureuse, les jeunes sont rapidement exposés à la désinformation, à la propagande, à la violence et à des contenus inappropriés. Une exposition qui suscite de vives inquiétudes quant aux répercussions durables de ces contenus sur leur développement.

### Un manque de préparation

Plusieurs causes profondes contribuent à la prévalence de ces problèmes. La plus importante d'entre elles est l'insuffisance des réglementations existantes. À cela s'ajoute l'incitation économique qui pousse les plateformes de réseaux sociaux à privilégier les indicateurs d'engagement au détriment du bien-être des utilisateurs, encourageant ainsi des pratiques de conception addictives et des restrictions minimales sur les contenus. Pour de nombreux jeunes, l'écran a remplacé le face-à-face, soulevant des inquiétudes quant à leur développement émotionnel et social. En parallèle, les systèmes éducatifs ont du mal à suivre le rythme, les programmes d'éducation numérique variant considérablement d'un État membre à l'autre. De nombreuses écoles ne parviennent pas à doter les élèves des compétences nécessaires pour évoluer dans les environnements en ligne,

exposant ainsi les jeunes aux dangers du monde numérique.

### Les problèmes d'une réponse au problème

L'absence d'une approche unifiée laisse des lacunes dans la gestion de ces défis transfrontaliers. Les plateformes de réseaux sociaux et les entreprises technologiques, en tant qu'acteurs influents, s'opposent souvent à des réglementations plus strictes, privilégiant le profit au détriment du bien-être des utilisateurs.

La sensibilisation du public constitue un autre défi. De nombreux parents et jeunes sous-estiment les conséquences à long terme d'une utilisation excessive des écrans, la considérant comme inoffensive, voire bénéfique. Les contraintes économiques jouent également un rôle, car de nombreux États membres peuvent avoir du mal à allouer des ressources à des programmes à grande échelle en matière de santé mentale et de culture numérique.

S'attaquer à ce problème représente un défi de taille. L'un des principaux obstacles réside dans la diversité des cadres réglementaires entre les États membres de l'UE, qui complique la mise en place d'une solution harmonisée. Si certains pays ont déjà adopté des règles strictes encadrant l'utilisation des écrans par les enfants, d'autres peinent à suivre.

Bien que l'UE dispose de leviers pour réguler certains aspects de l'espace numérique, comme le démontre le Digital Services Act ou le projet Chat Control, des domaines clés tels que la santé publique, le médical ou la sensibilisation relèvent principalement des compétences des États membres.

Quoi qu'il en soit, une réponse efficace à ce problème nécessitera une collaboration étroite entre l'UE et les États membres.



**Nathan Doude van Troostwijk**

Third year Bachelor Political Science



# DISCOVEREU : LE VOYAGE PEUT-IL VRAIMENT CRÉER UN SENTIMENT D'IDENTITÉ EUROPÉENNE ?

**A**vez-vous déjà rêvé de tout quitter l'espace d'un instant et de partir voyager à la découverte de l'Europe ? Pour beaucoup de

jeunes de 18 ans, ce rêve n'en est plus un mais plutôt une réalité compostée sur un billet de train chaque année. En 2023, j'ai moi-même fait partie de ces "backpackers européens". Sac à dos et Pass Interrail en main, j'ai parcouru le continent, des capitales à la mer Adriatique en passant par les Dolomites. Cette expérience a durablement bouleversé ma manière de voyager et de concevoir mon appartenance à l'Europe.

Pourtant, au-delà de l'aventure personnelle, que nous dit ce programme sur la jeunesse européenne ? Pour le comprendre, j'ai complété mon propre ressenti par une série d'interviews menées auprès d'anciens jeunes backpackers qui ont participé à l'aventure entre 2021 et 2024. Entre statistiques de réussite et réalités de terrain, l'analyse révèle un projet aussi ambitieux que perfectible.

## L'expérimentation de Bruxelles

Lancé sous forme de projet pilote en 2018 avec une première édition offrant 15 000 titres de transport, DiscoverEU est né d'une idée simple : offrir aux jeunes majeurs la possibilité de découvrir la liberté de circulation. Le succès est immédiat, avec plus de 100 000 candidatures dès la première année. Intégré depuis 2021 au programme Erasmus+, le dispositif s'est structuré : deux fois par an, les résidents de l'UE et des pays associés, ayant eu 18 ans dans l'année, peuvent postuler en répondant à un questionnaire sur l'Europe. Les lauréats, sur base de tirage au sort, reçoivent un pass Interrail leur permettant de voyager jusqu'à 30 jours.

Sur le plan analytique, DiscoverEU semble agir comme un "stabilisateur" de la diversité culturelle. En facilitant la mobilité, l'Union européenne tente de créer un marché intérieur de la culture et de la rencontre, en espérant que le rail tisse les liens que les institutions peinent parfois à incarner, particulièrement auprès de la jeunesse. Une manière également de concrétiser des notions parfois abstraites comme la liberté de mouvement. Car il faut bien l'avouer, traverser 11 pays en 3 semaines et sans une seule fois montrer son passeport, c'est bel et bien

une performance européenne.

## Une identité forgée par le rail, loin de la « propagande »

Une crainte revient souvent face aux initiatives jeunesse de Bruxelles : celle d'une communication descendante, perçue comme de la propagande institutionnelle. Les témoignages recueillis balayaient cette idée. Pour Laura, jeune Autrichienne partie en 2023, ou Mateo, jeune Français parti la même année, le programme est perçu comme une opportunité concrète de voyager, et non comme un outil d'endoctrinement européen. Le sentiment d'identité européenne qui en découle est subtil. Il ne s'agit pas d'une fusion homogène, mais de la découverte d'une "union de la diversité".

Comme le note Emma, partie en 2023, l'expérience permet de réaliser que, malgré les langues différentes, nous partageons des codes communs. Le voyage transforme la perception de l'Europe d'un concept bureaucratique en un espace physique familier. C'est dans les "galères" de correspondances manquées et les rencontres fortuites, comme celles de Margaux avec un couple polonais dans un train bloqué, que se construit cette aventure si particulière et qui justifie l'émotion à chaque fois que nous en parlons.

## Le paradoxe de l'accessibilité : un sésame pour initiés ?

Toutefois, l'analyse des entretiens révèle un angle mort majeur : l'inclusivité. Si l'expérience est décrite comme "mémorable" par l'ensemble des participants et constitue un "souvenir cher", elle n'est pas accessible à tous de la même manière, et ce pour plusieurs raisons.

D'abord, l'accès à l'information. La plupart des répondants, à l'instar d'Emma ou Robin, ont entendu parler du programme par le bouche-à-oreille universitaire ou des proches déjà sensibilisés aux enjeux européens. L'information reste cependant peu diffusée dans les milieux moins connectés aux réseaux de la mobilité internationale. Les répondants ont confirmé à l'unanimité que très peu de personnes de leur entourage connaissaient ce programme, faisant eux-mêmes figure d'exception.

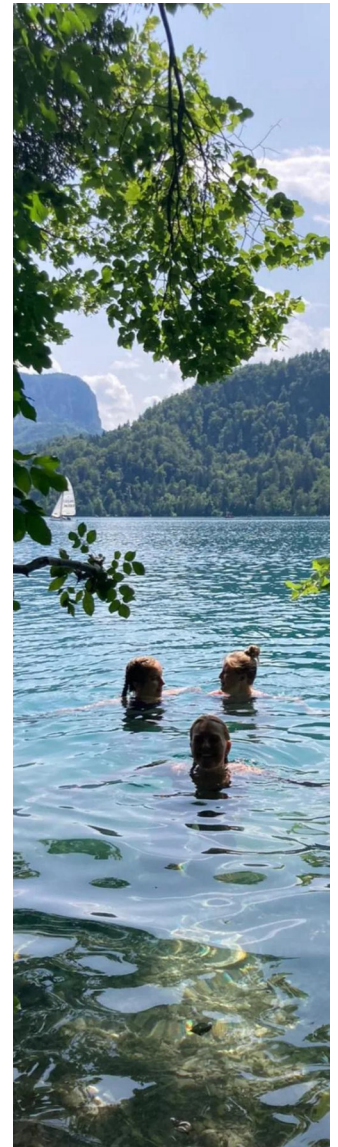
Une autre raison est le poids financier, et c'est le point de friction principal. Le pass est offert, mais le voyage ne l'est pas pour autant. Frais de réservation obligatoires sur certaines lignes (dans plusieurs pays, le billet ne garantit pas de place assise), hébergement, dépenses du quotidien : le budget réel peut vite grimper, et doit être anticipé, même pour les voyageurs les plus aguerris et débrouillards. À 18 ans, l'envie de partir ne manque pas, mais les moyens, eux, font souvent défaut. Robin, parti en 2023, le souligne d'ailleurs sans détour : "C'est un truc de gens qui ont déjà un capital culturel et financier". Sans aide complémentaire ni revenus propres pour financer le projet, DiscoverEU risque de rester un privilège pour une jeunesse souvent déjà acquise à la cause européenne.

**Discover EU, terminus ou simple correspondance vers l'identité européenne ?**

Il me semble que DiscoverEU réussit parfaitement son pari émotionnel : il

marque une vie et change radicalement notre rapport au voyage et à l'Europe. Pour preuve, la plupart des répondants ont repensé leurs manières de voyager, en adoptant un modèle plus durable. J'ai d'ailleurs souvent dit pour décrire mon périple que DiscoverEU m'avait permis de comprendre que le voyage n'était pas qu'une question de destination mais que le trajet en valait autant la peine.

En définitive, pour que le sentiment d'appartenance européenne ne soit pas réservé à une élite, le programme devra, dans les années à venir, relever le défi de sa propre démocratisation. Car si le voyage forme la jeunesse, l'Europe, elle, ne se construira véritablement que dans l'équité des chances. Et dans ce cas précis, la chance de pouvoir, un jour, monter dans ce train.



**Ludivine Doussot**

M1 in European Studies



# EUROPEANISM AND FAR-RIGHT AMONG EUROPEAN GEN-Z

**I**dentify and sense of belonging have shifted sharply among European youth. If in previous decades nationalism and Europeanism

could still be described as opposite political horizons, that distinction is now much harder to sustain. Among parts of Europe's Gen-Z, the nation and Europe can coexist within the same political imagination.

## Evolving attachment among youth

Young Europeans are still broadly attached to the European project: 61% say they are optimistic about the future of the European Union, while 60% think the EU has a positive impact on society. In the TUI Young Europe 2025 study, 59% of respondents aged 16 to 26 described themselves as at least partly European, while 66% judged their country's EU membership positively.

That broad attachment has not prevented the rise of the far-right among younger voters. In the 2024 European elections, far-right parties gained ground among youth in several countries, including Germany, France, Poland and Spain. Reuters

reported that Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) reached 16% among under-25s in Germany, National Rally reached 25% among 18-to-24-year-olds in France, and Confederation reached 30.1% among 18-to-29-year-olds in Poland. These figures complicate an older assumption that pro-European feeling naturally belongs to liberal or centrist politics. A section of young voters can remain attached to Europe while supporting parties that are nationalist, anti-immigration, exclusionary, and openly hostile to liberal norms.

## A different Europe

What is changing, then, is not the relevance of the European project, but its meaning. For part of Europe's Gen-Z, Europe no longer stands primarily for openness, mobility, or post-national integration. It can also stand for protection, borders, order, and cultural cohesion. In this framework, Europe is not imagined against the nation-state, but around it. National identity remains central, while Europe becomes the wider political space within which that identity is defended. The evolution of the far-right reflects that shift. In March 2024, Le Pen no longer advocates a French exit from the EU, while Giorgia Meloni's strategy has centred on increasing influence within European institutions rather than confronting them from outside. The question is

increasingly less whether to leave Europe than what kind of Europe should prevail.

The appeal of this harder idea of Europe has to be read against the background in which this generation has come of age. Pandemic, inflation, housing pressure, labour insecurity, and war on the continent have all shaped the political horizon of younger Europeans. The latest European Parliament youth survey shows that rising prices and the cost of living are the top concern for 40% of respondents aged 16 to 30, followed by climate and environment at 33%, jobs and economic conditions at 31%, welfare and healthcare at 29%, housing at 23%, and defence and security at 21%. Under these conditions, Europe can be read less as a liberal horizon than as a structure of protection. That does not automatically produce far-right support, but it does make a more defensive and exclusionary language of belonging more plausible.

## The new political and media environment

This tendency is also reinforced by the media environment. The same European Parliament survey found that social media is now the main source of political and

social information for 42% of young Europeans, while 76% say they were exposed to disinformation in the previous week. The far-right's gains among youth are influenced by exposure to political content on social media and by its ability to present itself as anti-establishment, culturally current, and emotionally direct.

Political identity is no longer formed only through parties, schools, or traditional media, but more through platforms that reward speed, simplification, antagonism, and repetition. In that setting, nationalism and Europeanism no longer have to appear as opposite poles, and can be part of the same worldview: one in which Europe is still valued, but valued as a harder, more selective, and more exclusionary political community.

**National and European identity**

European youth is not turning away from Europe. What is changing is the way Europe is politically imagined. The old opposition between nationalism and Europeanism no longer captures this

development with enough precision. Among parts of Europe's Gen-Z, the two can coexist within the same framework of belonging. National identity remains strong, but it no longer excludes attachment to the EU. The problem for the European political mainstream is that this shift cannot be answered only by defending the EU in institutional terms. Support for Europe no longer automatically implies support for liberal democracy and pluralism. The political content of

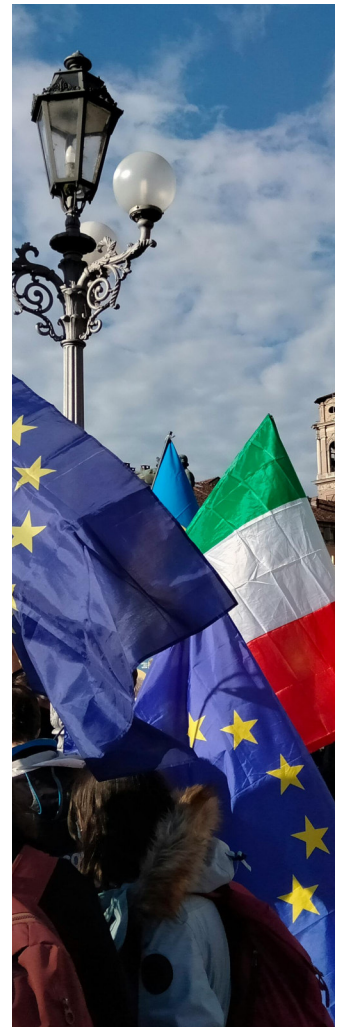
European identity has become less stable, and therefore more contested. That meaning is being shaped in a context marked by economic pressure, housing insecurity, labour precarity, and distrust in institutions. Under these conditions, a more defensive and selective idea of Europe has become politically available in ways that were less visible a decade ago.

The relationship between nationalism and Europeanism among young Europeans therefore needs to be read differently. The tension between the two has not disappeared, but it no longer defines the whole picture. Europe remains part of the political horizon of Gen-Z. The question is

what kind of Europe is being imagined within that horizon, and why a harder and more exclusionary version of it has gained traction among parts of the new generation.



**Antonio Cardone**  
Specialized Master in EU Interdisciplinary Studies



# ACCESS DENIED: ITALIAN YOUTH AND THE STRUGGLES TO EXERCISE VOTING RIGHTS

**Y**oung people are often told: “The future belongs to you!” However, the decisions that will shape their – our – future are already being taken

today, most of the time without youth representatives sitting at the table. But the issue with youth’s political participation is not only a matter of representation (or, in other words, of passive voting rights). It is also a matter of active voting rights – hence, a matter pertaining to the formal and material conditions that are necessary to take part in political life by voting in elections. Doing something as simple as casting a vote can in fact turn into a major generational struggle when the electoral system is designed to exclude certain parts of the population. Italian youth knows something about it...

This article presents an overview of some of the obstacles that lead to a systematic exclusion of a large part of Italian youth from voting in elections, namely minimum age to access voting rights and territorial voting.

**Sweet 16: old enough to work, not old enough to vote**

The Constitution of the Italian Republic originally prescribed 21 as the minimum age to vote for the Chamber of Deputies (then lowered to 18) and 25 for the Senate. Later, the constitutional reform of 2021 set the minimum voting age at 18 for both chambers. However, some believe that in order to further include youth in democratic participation, voting rights should be obtained at 16. While this is not among the hottest points in the mainstream public debate, it does cause some tensions whenever it is brought up: those who oppose this reform, regardless



Photo credits : Yari Russo - The Good Lobby

of the right-left cleavage, do not consider 16-year-olds to be ready to be granted such a right. This is how the conversation shifts towards a wider problem concerning Italian youth, which is the insufficient knowledge about the political system of the country (and of the European Union). This is the reason why many prefer to advocate for educational reforms ensuring that new generations can better understand politics and institutions, before considering expanding the voting population.

In any case, the issue has been repeatedly appearing in the public debate in the country for over a decade. A remarkable call to move in this direction was made in 2019 by former President of the Council of Ministers Enrico Letta (2013-2014). His statement came during the massive wave of school strikes for climate that demonstrated that young students were eager to have a say in defining their future. However, this did not generate momentum for a reform to actually happen. Currently, some small steps are being taken: in February 2026, the political party +Europa launched the petition *Voto16*.

The premise is that if 16-year-olds are considered old enough to work and pay their taxes, as well as to appear before criminal courts, they should be considered old enough to vote too. The timing of this campaign is not coincidental: the governing majority is currently working on a reform of the electoral law ahead of the 2027 national elections. Therefore, the promoters hope to encourage the Parliament to include in the “reform package” a modification of Article 48 of the Constitution, which sets the minimum voting age. As the campaign is still ongoing, the number of collected signatures is not available yet. It is remarkable, however, that political leaders are fiercer advocates of lowering the voting age than young people themselves.

**Pay-per-vote: the cost of going home to vote**

An issue that young people are much louder about is the electoral rules that prescribe that citizens are only allowed to vote from the city of their legal residence. A considerable number of Italians (the data from 2025

estimate the total to be around 5 million people) live in a city other than the one stated on their voting card. In most cases, they are young people aged between 18 and 35 who moved to either attend university or work, with a greater incidence of southerners moving to the north seeking better opportunities. This is the population of the so-called *fuori-sede* (literally, “out of place”). In order to cast their vote, they have no option but to go back to their hometown, which is particularly costly in terms of both money and time. For this reason, many of them give up voting, contributing to the already alarming data on abstention rates: at the last national elections in 2022, the voter turnout was only around 64%, the lowest in the history of the country.

Over the past two years, some “pilot initiatives” were launched in order to test a mechanism that lets *fuori-sede* people vote. However, it has been highlighted how this was politically instrumentalised by the right-wing ruling majority. In 2024, when European elections took place, only *fuori-sede* students were included in the pilot, excluding workers and care-seekers; since *fuori-sede* students overwhelmingly voted for progressive parties, with the Greens-Left coalition leading the polls at the dedicated voting booths, there was no follow-up to institutionalise the mechanism.

When Italians were called to vote on five referendum questions in June 2025, a second “pilot initiative” was launched to allow *fuori-sede* students, workers and care-seekers to vote. However, their participation was considered to be overall negligible on the final result, because abrogative referenda require a minimum participation quorum of 50% plus one of eligible voters for the results to be valid. On this premise – considering that in Italy it is not mandatory to vote – voters who were against the proposed reforms did not show up to the polls to vote “no” but rather boycotted the referendum altogether, ultimately invalidating the results and sinking

the reform. Leaving aside this specific dynamic, the case of the 2025 referendum is relevant because it can be compared to the case of the 2026 referendum to demonstrate that the ruling majority makes political calculations on a case-by-case basis rather than following up on the “pilot initiatives” to institutionalise such special voting procedures.

The 2025 referendum was abrogative (therefore it had to obtain a certain quorum) and, most importantly, it had been organised because of a grassroots signature collection by collectives of citizens and workers’ unions that are notably opposed to the policies of the ruling majority. Recent history has already shown the ineffectiveness of this legal instrument to change laws in Italy. This ineffectiveness is due to the tendency to boycott the vote to invalidate the results. Indeed, it was already predicted that although the 2025 referendum would have likely obtained a majority of favourable votes, those votes were not going to be enough to pass the quorum. Thus, expanding the possibility to vote to *fuori-sede* people – which is a segment of the population with progressive tendencies – did not constitute that much of a risk for the ruling majority, which was itself advocating for the voting to be boycotted.

Instead, the 2026 referendum was of the confirmatory type, meaning that it was aimed at confirming the constitutional reform to change the setup of the judiciary that the majority had sponsored and successfully approved in the Parliament. Confirmatory referenda do not require any quorum. The progressive tendencies of *fuori-sede* people therefore posed a higher risk, since the reform was vastly criticised by most progressive forces for altering the balance of powers. This is how the opposition motivates the decision of the ruling majority not to continue with “pilot initiatives” on this specific occasion, hence the importance of foreseeing a structural reform that ensures voting rights of *fuori-sede* people at every election, without leaving discretion to whoever is governing.

Discretionality causes uncertainty until the last minute, puts people in a situation where voting comes with economic trade-offs, and ultimately reinforces the North-South divide. Initiatives such as *Voto dove vivo* and *Io voglio votare fuori sede* are pushing in this direction through citizens’ legislative initiatives, signature collections and mobilisation. However, proposals of this kind have been stuck on parliamentarians’ tables for years.

### Owning the country of the future

The results of the 2026 referendum were determined by the 18-34 age group that massively voted against the reform, ultimately blocking it. This includes also many people who bore the burden of travelling home to vote, facing costs up to hundreds of euros, days of leave from work and trips that could take even half a day. But, again, this excludes all those who could not afford to do so. At the end of the day, it appears evident that this is more a political than a logistical matter: the pilot initiatives with the dedicated voting booths overall functioned well and, if anything, there is always the option of postal voting which has been in place for decades for the constituencies of Italians abroad. Simultaneously – although with less widespread agreement – another segment of the population is asking for the minimum voting age to be lowered. These battles and many others tell the story of young adults who are fighting for more public space and rights. This is more than reclaiming the right to vote; it is a strong desire to own the future of a country that often overlooks youth’s perspectives and fails to provide opportunities to build a sustainable life, career and family without emigrating.



**Alessia Ruta**

M2 in European Studies

# THE INVISIBLE BURDEN: UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH IN EUROPE

**B**

ehind the statistics of anxiety, depression, and loneliness lies a quieter truth: mental health is not just an individual struggle, but

shared burden that Europe must carry together. As the numbers rise, the question shifts from recognition to action: how can a continent respond to a crisis that touches so many lives?

## One in Seven Facing Mental Health Challenges

Mental health is becoming an increasingly prominent topic in public debates, especially among younger generations. According to a 2025 World Health Organization report on Child and youth mental health in the European Region, one in seven children and adolescents aged 0 to 19 is affected by a mental health condition. Anxiety disorders affect over 15 million young people, followed by depressive

disorders (4.4 million) and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders (3.7 million). Between 2010 and 2023, the rate of mental health conditions for those aged 15 to 19 rose by 41.55%.

The picture is further darkened by a 2023 Eurobarometer survey on mental health showing that almost half (46%) of the respondents had experienced an emotional or psychosocial problem, such as feeling depressed or anxious, in the previous year. This data is even more concerning when considering that one in two individuals dealing with a mental health issue did not seek assistance from a professional. A 2025 report by the Eurofound (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions) showed that the most common cause of death among 15-29-year-olds in the EU is suicide (18.9% in 2021), followed by traffic collisions. Europe is facing a mental health crisis, and young people are especially vulnerable.

## A matter of vulnerability

Vulnerability is not evenly distributed. Marginalized groups, including

homeless people, refugees, healthcare and social service workers face higher risks of poor mental health. Geographically, the picture varies considerably across the continent. Young people in the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Denmark report the highest levels of mental well-being, with 77%, 75%, and 72% respectively describing their mental health as good. At the other end of the spectrum, the lowest rates are recorded in Ukraine (43%), the Czech Republic (46%), and Hungary (47%).

These results point to how political instability and economic precarity influence mental health outcomes (European Union Drugs Agency report, 2024). Among young people, gender is another critical dimension: according to World Health Organization data, young girls in Europe consistently score lower on life satisfaction and mental well-being, and higher on loneliness, than boys. Countries such as Italy and Poland present bigger gaps than others, where around two-thirds of boys report good mental health compared to only one-third of girls.

Artist: Stella Levi



This gap could be explained by the heavier burden many young women carry, from household responsibilities and financial insecurity to domestic abuse and the weight of social expectations. At the same time, while women are more likely to seek professional help, men are 3.7 times more likely to die from suicide, an unsettling paradox rooted in stigma around vulnerability and help-seeking behavior among men (Eurofound report, 2025).

### The drivers of the crisis

The causes are multiple and interconnected. The ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as disrupted education, reduced social contact, and heightened stress at home, have continued to affect younger generations. These effects are combined with other pressures: the rise of unregulated digital environments, such as social media, the weight of climate anxiety, and the trauma generated by armed conflicts in and around Europe, according to a 2024 Eurofound report.

Economic insecurity, concerns about housing affordability, and work-life imbalance add further layers of stress, particularly for young adults wanting to reach independence. Mental health issues do not constitute simply an individual struggle; they are shaped by structural conditions, such as

inequalities and disadvantaged living conditions. Therefore, they need to be addressed as collective, societal issues. The economic consequences reflect this scale: poor mental health is estimated to cost the European economy over €600 billion annually, representing more than 4% of GDP.

### Policy response

The EU has taken meaningful steps to address the crisis, even though a lot still has to be done. The EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027) launched by the European Council in 2018 is a framework for youth policy cooperation that sets out eleven goals, its fifth focusing on mental health and well-being of young people. The strategy promotes a cross-sectoral approach to self-awareness, anti-stigma campaigns, equal access to education and employment for young people with mental health conditions. It is implemented through programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. While it is a first important step, mid-term evaluations found that it had little impact on mental health outcomes, mainly because it is a non-binding initiative and relies on indirect funding.

More ambitious is the European Commission's Comprehensive Approach to mental health launched in June 2023. This initiative is particularly relevant because it recognizes that mental health policies must involve other policy areas, such as

environment, culture, education, employment and research, amongst others. Described as a "comprehensive, prevention-oriented and multi-stakeholder approach to mental health", it promises financing opportunities worth around €1.3 billion, to directly and indirectly support Member States in turning framework into action. More than that, the Commission, under the EU4Health 2023 work programme, provided funding of €18.5 million to address mental health problems. The EU4Health three guiding principles are "adequate and effective prevention, access to high quality and affordable mental healthcare and treatment and reintegration into society after recovery".

Breaking the stigma and building resilience in Europe

The steps taken by the EU mark an important shift from the treatment of mental health as a merely medical condition towards recognizing it as a social issue. However, challenges remain. While the dedicated funding is symbolically important, it doesn't seem enough to address such a large-scale issue. Additionally, like much of the EU social policy, the Comprehensive Approach to mental health and similar initiatives depend heavily on how Member States and their governments choose to act on the issue. As is often the case, some countries will act and others will not, creating a gap in which good intentions risk quietly fading.



**Ludovica Avalle**

M1 in International Relations

# WOMEN WAVE PROJECT : CAP SUR LA COP30

**E**lles sont six. Elles sont jeunes. Elles sont activistes. Et elles ont décidé de traverser l'Atlantique à la voile. En octobre 2025,

Camille Étienne, Adélaïde Charlier, Lucie Morauw, Maïté Meeûs, Mariam Touré et Coline Balfroid ont largué les amarres depuis Saint-Nazaire, en France, pour rejoindre Belém, au Brésil. Leur destination : la COP30, la 30e conférence des Nations unies sur le climat, organisée aux portes de l'Amazonie.

## Un pari presque impossible

Tout a failli ne pas se faire. Le premier bateau tombe en panne quelques jours avant le départ. Le suivant, déniché dans l'urgence, s'appelle L'Esprit d'Équipe. Un vieux voilier de course des

années 80, sans pilote automatique, sans GPS satellite. Aucune des six militantes n'a d'expérience en navigation. Peu importe, elles partent quand même, accompagnées de quatre skippeuses professionnelles. Trente-quatre jours de mer, des tempêtes à 35 nœuds, des nuits fractionnées en quarts de deux heures, des seaux d'eau salée en guise de douche, et un objectif, rejoindre les côtes du Brésil où se déroule la COP30.

## Féminisme et écologie, même combat ?

Le Women Wave Project n'est pas qu'une simple aventure maritime. C'est un acte politique, pensé, revendiqué et assumé. Les six femmes représentent des causes distinctes : justice climatique, droits humains, féminisme ou encore l'activisme de quartier. Elles partagent le même constat, on ne peut pas parler de crise climatique sans parler de genre, de race ou de classe.

Selon l'ONU, 80 % des déplacés climatiques

sont des femmes. Pourtant, lors des négociations internationales, elles ne représentent que 35 % des délégués, et 10 % des chefs de délégation. Comment espérer des politiques climatiques justes, si la moitié de l'humanité est mal représentée à la table des négociations ?

Pour ces six militantes, la réponse est claire, la crise climatique est avant tout une crise des droits humains et ses premières victimes sont celles que l'on entend le moins, les femmes, les minorités ou encore les communautés des pays les plus exposés au dérèglement climatique.

## Dans les coulisses des négociations

Une fois arrivées sur place, les six militantes, munies d'accréditations au sein de la délégation belge, ont pu participer directement aux négociations à Belém. Leur objectif était de peser sur les financements de la transition, interpeller les États historiquement responsables du dérèglement, et faire entrer une



une perspective féministe et intersectionnelle dans ces espaces qui en manquent cruellement. En effet, aujourd'hui, les lobbies de l'industrie fossile comptent plus de représentants dans une COP que n'importe quelle délégation nationale. Selon la coalition d'ONG Kick Big Polluters Out, plus de 1 600 lobbyistes de l'industrie fossile étaient présents à Belém, soit une personne sur 25 parmi l'ensemble des participants. Pour mesurer l'absurdité de la situation, ces 1 600 représentants sont plus nombreux que l'ensemble des délégations des dix pays les plus vulnérables face au dérèglement climatique. La délégation française elle-même comptait 22 accréditations pour des lobbyistes, dont le président de TotalEnergies et celui d'Engie.

### L'Amazonie, terrain de lutte

La COP30 ne s'est pas tenue par hasard à Belém, à l'orée de l'Amazonie. Pour la première fois dans l'histoire des conférences climatiques, un nombre record de représentants des peuples autochtones était présent aux négociations, une nouveauté saluée, mais jugée encore insuffisante par de nombreuses organisations de la société civile.

Car sur le terrain, la réalité est brutale. Les communautés autochtones du Brésil subissent de plein fouet la déforestation, l'accaparement de leurs terres et les violences contre ceux qui osent les défendre. Selon Global Witness, le Brésil figure parmi les pays les plus meurtriers au monde pour les défenseurs de l'environnement. En juin 2022, le journaliste britannique Dom Phillips et l'expert indigène Bruno Pereira ont été assassinés dans la Vallée de Javari en Amazonie. Le mobile principal du meurtre était lié à la protection de la forêt et à une photo prise par les victimes de la pêche illégale. Des mesures de justice ont été entreprises, mais des ONG exigent de meilleures mesures de protection.

En parallèle de la COP, le Sommet des Peuples réunissait à Belém mouvements sociaux, syndicaux et autochtones avec des objectifs communs : zéro déforestation, une transition énergétique juste, et la reconnaissance des droits des peuples premiers. Pendant quatre jours, le campus de l'Université Fédérale du Pará s'est transformé en fourmilière de débats populaires, réunissant plus de 20 000 personnes issues de 1 100 organisations du monde entier. Pour rappel, les peuples autochtones, qui ne représentent que 6 % de la population mondiale, assurent la

protection de 80 % de la biodiversité mondiale, selon les Nations Unies.

### L'après-COP30, que reste-t-il ?

Sur le fond, la COP30 a abouti à plusieurs décisions en matière de financement climatique, avec un appel à mobiliser au moins 1 300 milliards de dollars par an et à tripler les financements pour l'adaptation. Mais le texte final est resté prudent, aucune obligation claire n'a été adoptée pour sortir des combustibles fossiles. Au-delà de l'engagement politique, la traversée du Women Wave Project a aussi eu une dimension scientifique. À bord, des données ont été collectées sur des espèces marines pour être analysées par l'université de Montpellier. Coline Balfroid, la vidéaste du groupe, a filmé l'intégralité du projet pour un documentaire attendu fin 2026.



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Photos: Coline Balfroid

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