



# ACADEMY OF CHANGE

– for a democratic and  
sustainable transformation

# PREAMBLE

## ***WHAT IS YOUNG EUROPE?***

Young Europe started in 2019, where 200 Young Europeans from all over Europe met in Denmark to discuss the future of Europe and form a common manifesto. The participants experienced a week of living, learning and working together, which shaped ongoing friendships, working groups and common projects all over Europe.

In 2022, it is the European Year of Youth, as declared by President of the Commission Ursula Von Der Leyen, and we continue the initiative aimed at connecting and empowering young Europeans to become change-agents and participate in shaping their future.

Throughout Young Europe, the participants work together to form recommendations for change. Contributing with different insights, perspectives, cultures and backgrounds, participants learn from each other as they get different perspectives on the topics and see how the challenges are both alike and different across borders.

# CLIMATE JUSTICE

Climate is at the heart of everything and must be mainstreamed into every decision-making process. In order to fight climate change, we need to implement laws that are a lot more ambitious than what already exists. We also need a legal instrument requiring all producers to label how much CO<sub>2</sub> their products has emitted during the production of it. This also has to include the shadow carbon and the social costs of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

## CALL TO ACTIONS

**1** Right now the economy is at the heart of decision-making, this needs to change. Climate needs to beat the heart of decision-making as it is connected to everything and the health of us all.

- We demand that climate is taken into consideration in every decision-making process - just like the economy is thought into everything right now. We must ensure local and indigenous communities as well as civil society are heard and part of all decision-making.

**2** Education about climate (with all its consequences, but also its possibilities for change) should be mandatory in all educational systems.

- Climate affects everything and therefore needs to be taught and included in all subjects within the educational system. It is however very important that it doesn't become too depressing, but also focuses on what can (and has to!) be done in order to engage the youth in an inspirational way.

**3** Climate change hits the people that are less responsible for it the most. Therefore, we need to implement ambitious carbon taxes, so the ones polluting the most are the ones who pay the most. This requires that we measure pollution and harming the climate in a better way. Ending offsetting schemes.

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**4** We also need a legal instrument requiring all producers to label how much CO<sub>2</sub> their products has emitted during the production of it. This also have to include the shadow carbon and the social costs of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

- If we can be even more ambitious, we would encourage the inclusion of more greenhouse gases on the label depending on the industry and products.

# INEQUALITIES AND ECONOMICS

We call for a paradigm shift in the long-term societal goals from growth-based approaches towards wellbeing and sustainability approaches. In this way ensuring that planetary boundaries are respected and no one is left behind. In order to achieve this long-term goal, important shifts need to be made in the areas of economic policy and social policy.

In order to achieve this long-term goal, specific objectives and action must be developed and implemented. The group has considered 5 overarching objectives under 2 interconnected areas: economic and social policies. The former must introduce and promote greater flexibility and enable necessary mechanisms that would ensure the success of the latter. In the same vein as the proposed “green golden rule” for investment, a “social golden rule” must be put in force to allow for the exemption of certain types of sustainability-focused investment. Tools to measure social (and environmental) progress within economic and fiscal policies should be developed (also in the EU: the indicators from the revised Social Scoreboard). GDP should be accompanied with an alternative set of indicators to measure economic, social and environmental progress.

We call for coherence between the economic, environmental and social policies as a stepping stone towards building wellbeing and sustainable societies. The 5 objectives are explained more in detail below:

## AREA 1: ECONOMIC POLICY

*Objective 1: Human rights and the environment at the the centre of economic policy*

- **On a global level:** Public finance must adapt to a future economy where human societies relate in a radically different way to the environment and the use of resources. This includes the relationship between the countries in the so called global north and global south. Therefore, we call for public finances to align with environmental goals in order to truly become sustainable.

This includes but it is not limited to:

- To cease following approaches that limit investment in public services towards fiscal frameworks that address overall societal and environmental needs in the most equitable and balanced manner.
- On one side, increase public spending related to climate change adaptation and social investment (education, health, employment, gender equality, etc). On the other hand, take this type of investment out of measurements of public debt sustainability after a holistic evaluation (including economic, social and environmental criteria).
- **At EU level:** The measures mentioned above could be supported by a revision of the fiscal rules such as the Stability Growth Pact among others which were based on the context of the Maastricht Treaty and do no longer offer enough flexibility to face the challenges of the 21st century. At EU level we call for:
  - The European Semester process to be used as a stronger mechanism for the achievement of social goals (education, employment, health, gender equality, etc) by making clearer the link between financial incentives and/ or punishments and the achievements of these goals (i.e. European Pillar of Social Rights, the respect of the Rule of Law, etc).
  - Equally strong reforms in environmental regulations, in monetary policy and trade regulations (i.e. EU Green Deal, Fit for 55 package, etc).
  - A harmonisation of taxation policies between the member states: go beyond growth-friendly towards wellbeing and sustainability-friendly taxes: give preference to progressive taxes and targeting of practices that encourage tax avoidance and evasion.
  - Ensure that all reforms are done taking into account the national, regional and local contexts, avoiding as much as possible one-size-fits-all solutions.

## *Objective 2: Reform international trade and value chains*

- We call for reforms in international trade agreements with the objective to ensure that any environmental and social protections introduced by the EU are automatically mirrored by equally strong protections in partner countries. This includes but is not limited to the upcoming global value chain regulations and the regulations on the compensation mechanism at the EU border.
- We call for mechanisms to be implemented to ensure access to justice is not limited to those individuals or companies who have the means to engage costly legal support. More specifically:
  - We call for the European Union to continue the process of establishing legislation on Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence (HREDD). These laws are already ratified in some European states (e.g. France “Corporate Duty of Vigilance” law from 2017, Germany “Corporate Due Diligence in Supply Chains Act” from 2021), or announced (e.g. The Netherlands in 2021) .
  - Strong HREDD legislation would require (large) businesses to ensure that no human or environmental rights are being violated with regards to their business operations and along their value chains; requirements for businesses would include to assess, prevent and remedy human rights and environmental risks and impacts, e.g. through implementing risk management approaches and regular reporting, as well as establishing complaint mechanisms.
  - We call for decisive measures as part of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism proposed by the EU Commission in order to prevent the risk of carbon leakage and support the EU’s increased ambition on climate mitigation, while ensuring compatibility with the principles of the World Trade Organisation on global trade.

## AREA 2: SOCIAL POLICY

### *Objective 3: Fight against poverty and right to decent employment*

- We call for a thorough review and reform of social policies: ensure adequate social protection and social security policies so that everyone, without distinction, is able to develop their personal and professional potentials. This must include:
  - Changes in housing policies, including but not limited to affordable and accessible social housing.
  - Foster the dialogue around universal basic income and decent wages across the EU. Develop policies taking into consideration national realities and avoiding a one-size-fits-all solution as it was done with the fiscal rules in the early 1990s.
  - Supportive active labour market policies towards quality employment, including adequate training and life-long learning. This must encompass ensuring the access to training and lifelong learning to all who need it regardless of employment situation.
  - We call for proper implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the EU Gender equality strategy. Inclusive and just gender equality policies are key to fighting poverty and achieving sustainable development. These policies have proven to increase both girls and women's quality of life as well as boys and men. There is no building of sustainable societies without gender equality.
  - In the same note: a proper monitoring and accountability processes should take place in order to ensure the success of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Recovery and Resilience Facility.
- We call for an alignment between these policies addressing inequalities with measures against climate change (i.e. fight against energy poverty). It must be ensured that poor people do not end up paying for the transition towards greener energy.



#### *Objective 4: Right to quality education and training*

- We call for education to be considered as an investment not as an expense since it is the basis for a thriving society. Therefore, education should remain a public good where private interests do not prime over societal needs but act as complementary to public spending in terms of funding. Some measures include but are not limited to:

- Investing in teachers and all educators is key as they are among the most important factors for achieving learning outcomes. This includes from the selection of teacher candidates, their teacher training, adequate wages and opportunities for continuous professional development as well as appropriate representation in policy design and decision making processes.
- Reforming the curricula to integrate and mainstream sustainability not just as a topic but as a core principle with learners' needs at the centre. This encompasses the transformation of learning environments, the recognition of all types of learning (formal, non-formal and informal) and ensuring inclusion and gender equality at all levels.
- Involving civil society, learners, parents and educators in education policy making at all stages (including in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the European Education Area, Skills Agenda policy packages and well as the Recovery and Resilience national plans).
- Investing in better infrastructure (physical and digital): with physical infrastructure conforming to environmental guidelines and investment in digital infrastructure is done first and foremost according to the needs of the learners and educators.

#### *Objective 5: Right to quality universal healthcare*

- We call for protecting the right to quality social services, including accessible, affordable and inclusive preventive and curative healthcare and long-term care. This includes through:

- Learning the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring the voices from all sectors of the society are heard (especially disadvantaged groups). This includes strengthening European agencies to be able to respond better to future pandemics and make sure all Member States receive fair treatment as well as ensure resources are fairly distributed with other regions of the world.
- Ensure that funds are adequately allotted and efficiently invested in recovering from the pandemic and widening the access to and quality of health services (at EU level this includes the funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility).
- Reform policies to prevent profit-based goals priming over wellbeing and sustainability goals. This includes the commercialisation of vaccines and other preventative and curative medicinal products.

## CALL TO ACTIONS

**1** Human rights and the environment at the the centre of economic policy and the international trade and value chains must be reformed.

- We call for human rights and environmental limits to be put at the centre of economic policy. These changes will be implemented by among other actions aligning public finances with environmental and societal goals, changes in calculations of public debt sustainability, increased spending in climate change adaptation and social investment (employment, housing, education, health and gender equality).
- We call for European Union institutions to conduct a full revision of the fiscal rules in order to offer Member States the flexibility to face the challenges of the 21st century. These changes require actions such as the strengthening of the European Semester process, social and environmental justice reforms in tax regulations and environmental/climate regulation, the effective implementation of the Rule of Law and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

- We call for trade agreements to be reformed to ensure environmental and social protections in each country as well as to ensure access to justice in trade matters to everyone regardless of economic background.

## 2 Fight against poverty and right to decent employment, right to quality education and training and right to quality universal healthcare.

- We call for increased efforts in the fight against poverty and the right to decent employment through housing, employment, gender equality and social protection policies that are inclusive and just.
- We call for education and training to remain a public good from early age to adulthood through a lifelong learning approach. These include investment in teachers, reform curricula with the learners at the centre, and investment in environmental-sound and age-suitable physical and digital infrastructure. The reforms should have at their core the achievement of gender equality at all levels of education and training.
- We call for governments to ensure the right to quality universal health care (preventative and curative) services for all regardless of background, including migratory condition.

# TECHNOLOGY AND DEMOCRACY

In some ways, the definition of democracy has shrunk down to just having free & fair elections - for us, this is not enough. To be democratic, the EU must include and invite the youth to participate around decision making processes. Our vision is to use technology & easy-access media to enhance democracy and not degrade it. For that we want to create a union, where everyone is included equally in democratic processes and decisions. For this to succeed, the youth must be properly informed on how to participate in advocacy networks. Now is the time that EU must make use of online resources and the EU must open its doors to the public.

## BACKGROUND

- According to Freedom House and other media defenders since early 2010s the media freedoms have declined around the world and also in Europe.
- Non friendly regimes and other groups have promoted fake news which is damaging the democracy all over the world.
- In order to have a free press EU has to invest on innovation and digital media, by providing strategic grants to initiatives that support young journalists and free media that is free from big cooperations influence.
- Another important point is to offer support to investigative journalism which is crucial in safeguarding democracy and citizens rights.

# CALL TO ACTIONS

**1** We recommend the EU to create a platform with a series of tutorial videos and other tech tools that could be shared with students and used by them. The technology can be used in order to offer youth clear and easy explanation of the functioning of EU bodies and the channels that we can use to get involved in decision making processes. The website could also work as a platform for young citizens to propose ideas and vote on what they think is the most crucial. Young people can start petition on EU legislative agenda. The most voted proposals could then be considered by the Commission and their opinion added. By using technology this step would provide young people with a direct tool that can help make their voice heard and reshape EU. This can be done in three easy steps;

- Creating a modern web page dedicated primary to children and young people.
- Making the platform accesible and easy to nagivate. The platform can be used for informative purposes having tools for both students and teachers in order to understand better hoe EU function and ow they can get involve in decision making processes
- In order for the platform to be successful young people need to be informed about it and also this platform can be used during classes.

**2** Ensuring and supporting independent online media that promotes freedom of speech. Providing support for journalists especially those who are young in order to raise their capacities and make them independent. (trainings,financial support for scholarships).

# RULE OF LAW

Today young people all around the world are facing numerous challenges – some new to the judicial system, and some old, however with different contours and in different contexts. The corona virus outbreak has brought new (and many) obstacles for the youth in fields such as work, health, and education. At the same time the wave of democracy backlashes throughout Europe (that one can defend has increased after the pandemic) put the youth in a difficult position regarding the political spectrum and their political and social rights. In this context, the Rule of Law is inalienable. The Treaty of the European Union (TUE) foresees the Rule of Law as one of its founding principles (art. 6), which means the EU must guarantee the principles of the Rule of Law are protected. As youth, we call the European Union to act in accordance with the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – that establishes that “In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall aim to combat based discrimination based on for example age” – and guarantee that the rights of the youth under the Rule of Law are protected, are not forgotten and are in use. Then, this recommendation emphasises the role of the youth and the attention the EU has the duty to give to our specific needs, that are correlated with the Rule of Law inherent principles.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESSIBILITY***

Young people can often feel excluded from politics and decision-making processes. A lot of young people don't know how the political processes are made and find them inaccessible. Information about these matters is rarely communicated towards young people. Therefore, the inducement to engage is narrower for young people. New technologies hold enormous potential for facilitating civic participation.

We suggest ensuring meaningful engagement by young people in promoting the rule of law also requiring that opportunities for their positive development, wellbeing, and rights to health, education, and support are covered, allowing them not only to focus on making positive contributions to society (rather than struggling to survive), but also to have trust in their institutions and in the delivery of justice.

## **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

Political participation (and equal political participation) is one of the main principles of the Rule of Law. In recent years, there has been an increased recognition in policy frameworks of the importance of involving young people in policymaking.

However, there are still insufficient opportunities for a meaningful engagement of young people in promoting the rule of law in the shape of political participation. To enhance young people's trust in the political system, justice, institutions and the rule of law, it is important to promote the realization of full social-economic, cultural, civil and political rights of young people, address issues of injustice and unfairness, and create opportunities for their free, active, accessible and meaningful participation. The right to participate in public affairs is indivisible, and young people bring a voice of change, and our role can be a powerful force for reforming the judicial and political system.

To ensure such opportunities, renewed efforts are needed, and the EU has to create space for the young voices to be heard. In this sense, we also highlight the need to create space for non-EU youth at a European forum level. This is so because if the EU wants to keep a pioneering position in regard to Human Rights protection, it can lead in a way through a more inclusive and aware future. The EU cannot deny the role its policies have in other countries, especially in the global south. In this sense, we believe it to be of the most relevance to have a forum where non-European youth are also represented.

Nevertheless, EU's youth doesn't see its representation often at a European level and, a big portion doesn't see themselves represented in politics (as it so often happens with the responses to the climate crisis) and politicians as well.

## **CALL TO ACTIONS**

**1** In this sense, and due to all the factors stated above, as young people from 5 different countries, we:

Call for governments and international institutions to effectively involve young people and youth organisations throughout all policy-making processes. In the decision-making processes, relevant youth representatives must have a genuine influence. When relevant, this also accounts for non-EU youth, who might be (negatively) impacted by the new policy or legislation. Especially

youth from the global south should not only be consulted but included in all relevant processes and decisions.

Furthermore, all governments should lower the voting age to 16 in all elections.

There has to be more chairs and positions for young people in the EUP parties (which the Member States have to commit to) and there should also be an investment in youth-led initiatives at the local, national and international levels, in which young people are actively shaping their communities and the EU.

- Related to the voting age: if we lower the age, we also have younger people running for election.
- Intergenerational decisions.

**2** Call for governments and international institutions to take active measures to raise the number of young people voting and running in elections. This includes straightforward and accessible information and sharing, about political processes, that especially targets youth. Strategies for this should be made in partnership with youth organisations.

- Inclusion must be ensured
- Assurance of representation
- Accessible information and communication targeted at youth
- Impartiality as connected to transparency in the judicial system

EU member states have to push other states to live up to this level!



# GLOBAL POLITICS

Certain global policies should be agreed upon and created to ensure that countries and communities can respond to future conflicts in a unified manner. This includes creating an organization that acknowledges and helps with the challenges that EU Member States are facing in adopting, optimizing and improving EU immigration policies, calling for the establishment of an organization within the EU with representatives from asylum seekers, refugees, community leaders, scholars and Member States representatives. Furthermore, there need to be a procedure of acting on a global level on injustices acted out on minorities. This calls for specific measurements regarding China's persecution of the Uyghur minority, including sanctions on companies using Uyghur labour, regulation of textile companies, investigation of genocides, and of supporting civil society groups in their work on securing human rights.

## CALL TO ACTIONS

- 1** Our recommendation is to create an organization, which works within the European Union that will consist of representatives from asylum seekers, refugees, community leaders, representatives, scholars, as well as creating a platform for representatives of each member state at a country level. Under the guidance of the EU governance, each branch will, in creating research-led policy recommendations and interdisciplinary discussions, identify and seek to overcome the challenges faced by the member states in adopting, optimizing, and improving EU immigration policies. Far from acting as an enforcer, this organization will provide de-politicized insight and advice for local and national governments, valuable data for the EU, and critical resources for the asylum seeking communities and will help the EU -and its member states- to respond to future conflicts in a unified manner.

*The main idea behind this organization is to include all actors – the EU, the Member States, the civil society and the refugees, and bring them together in order to link the EU immigration policies to the Member States.*

- It will strengthen the representation and voice of refugees on issues that concern them the most

- It will help slowly break down and respond to the anti-immigrant sentiment in certain EU member states; it will provide more understanding both on refugee issues and EU immigration policies
- It will offer concrete recommendations and solutions for crisis management and will therefore quickly respond in such cases in order to help with solving the conflicts
- It will be able to raise awareness about any future conflicts e.g. climate refugees and by that help in preventing them on time
- It will contribute to the EU leading a more common and consolidated immigration policy

**2** In last quarter of 2021, the European media was circulated with reports about China 's Persecutions on the people of Uyghur origin through forced birth control measures, forced labor under consecration camps and negative pronounciation against their faith, beliefs and culture. The Uyghurs are a minority group with a population of close 12 million predominately of Muslim faith with Xinjiang, which is officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) majorly being the state of residence. With various reports published by the various Human Rights activists, groups and humanitarian organizations, However, no steps have been taken up by most European governments to bring China to account for this abuse of the rights of the minority. The US through her Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, proclaimed that "China is committing "genocide and crimes against humanity" and to this effect a handful of countries have taken little steps to pronounce themselves on the injustice. The countries include Netherlands, Canada, United States, Lithuania and the UK. Despite the numerous reports published including the BBC investigation on the subject matter, China has continued to deny the allegations claiming that the established re-education camps are meant to combat separatism, prevent terrorism and Uproot Islamic extremism.

**2.1** The EU bloc should caution Chinese government to uphold the civic, cultural and labor rights enshrined in China's Constitution and domestic laws, end its extrajudicial detention of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, and ensure that all citizens can freely determine the terms of their own labor and mobility. The EU should support civil society groups who have identified opportunities to increase pressure and awareness of Uyghur forced labor and extrajudicial detentions by the Chinese government.

- We demand MEPs and EP to keep putting Human Rights concerns regarding the treatment of Uyghur people on the agenda until the European Commission acknowledges the open letter from the Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region as well as the findings of the Independent Uyghur Tribunal.
- In this, we ask for the support of Independent Civil Society Organizations.

**2.2** The EU bloc should seek assistance of the UN Security Council to persuade the International Criminal court (ICC) to launch investigations into the genocide of the Uyghur people. China does not have a subscription with the ICC, but the court is mandated under the establishment of the UN security council to take on cases approved by the body.

- We demand the ICC launch a thorough investigation into the genocide of the Uyghur people. This investigation should be backed by the UN Security Council and based on the 2018 Human Rights Watch report.
- We expect to achieve a mobilization with the support of the European Parliament and EU member states.
- If mobilization fails, the EU should launch an investigation themselves.

**2.3** The EU parliament should sanction or prosecute companies using forced Uyghur labor in their supply chains as they are in breach of laws which prohibit the importation of goods made with forced labor or mandate disclosure of forced labor supply chain risks. This will compel the identified companies to conduct immediate and thorough human rights due diligence on their factories/outlets in China to avert the forced labor.

- We demand a complaint be filed to the European Commission against Member States for failing to enact the Rule of Law (Art. 5 ECHR) on identified companies benefitting from human rights exploitation operating within EU Member States.
- In determining whether this is a feasible approach, we ask for the legal support of Independent Civil Society Organizations.

**2.4** We demand more regulations on textile companies as well as more transparency in the supply chains of companies. These actions should include intensifying pressure to ratify the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Convention on Forced Labor, 1930 (No. 29) and Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labor Convention by China and other countries which haven't ratified the Conventions.

- We demand that a failure of China to ratify this convention is followed by sanctions.
- We demand the European Commission increase pressure on companies operating in the EU to comply with human rights due diligence, potentially linking to an EU-wide seal of approval for goods sold in the EU.
- We demand the European Commission to use soft law in order to prohibit brands from advertising products for commercial reasons if brands violate ethical standards as set by the ILO convention no 29.

# THE PROGRAMME IS INITIATED BY



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