

# EMPOWERING PEOPLE

IN CHALLENGING TIMES

## International Youth Conference

Final Report

November 16-19, 2020



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# Introduction

November 2020. As the pandemic was raging, old and new crises were being highlighted. Information, participation and governance were and still are under siege. Facing these threats, we were left with two choices: we could have minded our own business, made more urgent by the pandemic; or we could have taken on the challenges of our time, and be the change we wanted to see in the world. We chose the second path.

The International Youth Conference 2020 (IYC), organized by the International Youth Think Tank, brought together 22 young democracy entrepreneurs from all over Europe in a four-day online conference. For us, it has been an opportunity to lift from the quicksand of the COVID-19 crises, to the solid rock of hope and collaboration. For the world, it will be a chance to freshen up with the novel propositions we have come up with.

Our ideas on democracy were collected under the guidance of four moderators. They were then refined with inspiring talks by renowned lecturers, both from the private and the public sector, and a new vision was formed: in times where democratic values cannot be taken for granted, justice, responsibility and solidarity are the keys to access a more open and democratic society.

We had differing views that clashed on occasion. But we focused on the threads that connect us, the threads that form the only flag we all stand for: the flag of democracy. This flag waves stronger when stormy winds are blowing, like in our times of crises. Of course, we recognized that the pandemic has undermined the very structure of our democracy, both in the governments, which often bypassed democratic processes in order to make urgent decisions; and in the people, who showed a declining trust for those institutions that failed to protect them.

Nonetheless, COVID-19 worked for us as a call to action. It revealed that our democracy is a tired body, fatigued with all the challenges it has overcome, but that it can be revitalized by an injection of fresh ideas: when we preserve the people's right to fair information; when we act so that people can feel they have a say; when we fight for a governance that listens to the voice of those who need it the most; this is when we stand up and get back on the road of justice. One of the leading proposals outlined in this report is the Global Charter of Truth which may be the key to the greatest positive change.

You might not agree with all the ideas presented, but this is what democracy is all about: open discussion. The ideas you are about to read are seeds, and you can act for their dispersal. Think about them, talk about them, write about them: one day, they'll end up on fertile soil, at just the right time, and change will begin to sprout.

# 1. Good information - education and media

In today's world, everything revolves around information and advancements. Information is all around us and is included in our daily life, for instance in media news feeds, Youtube algorithms and social media. There are a lot of different sources; however, this makes it even harder to verify its plausibility and accurateness. This era of information overload and unreliable sources can be faced in two ways: by regulating the lawless space of new media; and by building critical thinking in every individual, which still is not part of every educational curriculum. In many national educational systems nowadays, teachers and policymakers are aware of the importance of critical thinking as relevant soft skills but are not able to implement them systematically.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, we do not think that enough opportunities for international exchange between students from different countries are provided. However, this is a fundamental requirement to strengthen the dialogue between individuals in the European society and build up their European identity.

Building on that, the level of education influences many democracy-aspects in our life. More specifically, we want to acknowledge the fact that citizens with higher education are more likely to participate politically, both in national and EU-politics. Results conducted in the Eurobarometer 375 displays that people who left education aged 20 or over are more likely to validate their voting in the European Parliamentary Elections by the claim that democracy is important, compared to people who finished their education earlier. One can also observe a large distinction between these groups in the likelihood of even voting in the European Parliamentary Elections. 67% of those who completed their education aged 20 or over are aiming to vote in the European Parliamentary elections. The same number for people who completed their education at 15 or under is 48%.<sup>2</sup> Another phenomenon that is interesting to view from this perspective is the Brexit referendum of 2016. 74% of the voters with a university degree voted for the UK to remain a member of the EU. Meanwhile, 64% of the voters without any educational degree whatsoever voted to leave the EU.<sup>3</sup>

These statistics clearly show the importance of education not only about specific political topics but also higher education in general. We aim to provide European citizens in different age groups with information and education about the political systems and governing institutions, as well as create incentives for people to engage politically at any level. Furthermore, knowledge should not only be seen as an asset for individuals but also as a

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent-Lancrin, S., et al. (2019), *Fostering Students' Creativity and Critical Thinking: What it Means in School*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/62212c37-en>. [accessed 24.03.2021]

<sup>2</sup> European Commission (2013). *European Youth: Participation in Democratic Life*. Flash Eurobarometer 375, available online at [https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl\\_375\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl_375_en.pdf) [accessed 24.03.2021]

<sup>3</sup> Statista (2021). *Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?* <https://www.statista.com/statistics/572613/eu-referendum-decision-by-highest-educational-attainment-uk/> [accessed 18.11.2020]

collective feature that enhances democracy: This collective knowledge about political systems and institutions that we as citizens are run by is a fundamental condition for a functioning democracy.

In this part of the report, we will present several responses regarding the new media landscape and strengthen the European identity. We will start by addressing the problem of regulating the space of new media through a global charter. In the Global Charter for Truth we highlight the issues of alternative facts, fake news and individual's lack of data ownership as well as the risk journalists face today. We believe that the Global Charter for Truth, agreed by the UN or any international organization, could address several of the issues we today face.

## 1.1. Global Charter for Truth

### **Key issue**

The world is facing an unprecedented crisis of truth. The new, highly unregulated media landscape is permitting the spread of unreliable facts, political influence into independent media, and corporate profits on individual's data. When facing the challenges of today - including the COVID-19 pandemic and multiple political disruptions - citizens have a fundamental right to secure information and trustworthy media. We realize that truth has always been a mined ground, but in our times, the overwhelming volume of information is bringing a unique twist to its crises.

The new digital platforms of information sharing have led to rapid changes in the media landscape. Newspapers and television companies being allowed to distribute content online has led to an unprecedented abundance of information. Yet, with the traditional media undergoing those transitions and social media amassing more power to reach audiences, a lack of regulation of media, in general, has become visible. This has given ground to unreliable news being spread at a gradually larger scale, without accountability being executed. The phenomenon of each individual being able to have their own version of the truth has led to a situation, where truth has lost its meaning and power. This is fertile soil for social conflict and hatred since there is no more solid base to debate on. We, therefore, believe that there is a need for distinguishing unreliable information and facts-based news.

Furthermore, with the increase in the influence of undemocratic political initiatives, journalistic independence and safety are at risk. Ruling parties have been raising their influence on the narratives published in the press. Alongside the enforcement of specific narratives through the media, multiple cases of attacks on journalists have been carried out. These attacks range from threats, public harassment to physical attacks during political events. Therefore, journalists need further protection to retain freedom of speech and cover stories that may not align with the governmental agenda.

Additionally, with the exponential rise in usage of digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Google and Instagram, there are no international regulations for how data should be handled. Moreover, there are no international regulations on how privacy should be respected. Free apps are not free, we pay with our data and the digital media companies are making a profit out of the reckless usage of it. The profit is both in terms of economic gain and political power. The exploitation of our personal data has been used for manoeuvring political consensus. That is why we call for the personal ownership of data. We are stakeholders in those companies, and we should be recognized as such.

## **Response**

One charter to combat three key issues: The UN and other international organizations need a new charter. Similarly to the charter of human rights, the charter should be agreed upon globally.

First, the charter would address the issues of unreliable news by holding the companies accountable for the information they distribute. By trademarking each publication with “news”, “research-based information” or “opinion”, the transparency of the information provided on the platforms would be improved. Technologically it is feasible since instant algorithms can research each publication in milliseconds. However, there are ethical implications to such a mechanism that would have to be considered, as it remains to be settled who should have the power to decide what is an opinion and what is not. The Charter would not be intended as a means to limit the variety of opinions circulating the public discourse, but rather to eliminate statements that contain clear falsehoods. The Charter would not grant the authority for persons or institutions to give verdict on what opinions can and cannot be widely spread.

Second, this charter would provide frameworks for the prevention of political and governmental influence on independent media. This would be done two-fold:

- 1) By accrediting chosen journalists with “journalistic immunity” - a status equivalent to diplomatic immunity - journalists could be protected from any form of attacks and be given full opportunities for independent reporting. Given the fact that journalists play as crucial of a role as diplomats in sustaining the structure of a democratic society, they should be provided with an official protection and full freedom of speech.
- 2) By creating a global support network of intergovernmental organizations for journalists and whistle-blowers, people would have access to unfiltered information that spells out the truth about governments’ actions.

Both actions could be initiated and conducted by international organizations that remain impartial concerning national affairs. As journalists may be targeted by their national authorities, we advise such journalistic support should not be provided just at the national level, but form an organ at a higher, non-national level.

Third, the Charter would provide an urgently needed clarification on the data ownership issue. Free apps and services are not free. Users lose much more than they can grasp. They give up control of their data. Our suggestion would be to give back the power to the users. The data is currently used by tech companies to gain profit and political power. This



has to change. The issues of data ownership and freedom of speech are strictly intertwined: if the individual is free to speak and express ideas, would it not be coherent to claim that the individual is the owner of the ideas? The newly proposed Charter would push towards more transparency and de-commodification of users by tech companies.

## **Result**

The expected result of the proposals is to ensure that citizens globally have safe access to true, reliable information through the media. Through systemic trademarking of the media publications, readers would be pushed to approach the content critically, which could thus initiate a safer and more rational usage of media and would provide citizens with key information to make suitable decisions as part of the civic society. Moreover, the support next for journalists and the journalistic immunity would lead to more accurate reporting since the journalist would not need to fear repercussions from the governments. The data ownership would give users more power over their privacy and have more control over what their data is used for.

# 1.2. Reshape Education

## **Key issues**

Looking at the current education system, we identified a couple of problems that require a response. In order to maintain critically-minded citizens, there is a need for thoughtful individuals who are equipped with a set of tools to guide them through a democratic and developed society. In a changing society with an enormous amount of information circulating it is not easy to sort out the facts and perceive them critically. Furthermore, critical thinking is a key instrument for voting in elections, understanding political processes and functioning in a democratic society.

The European Commission defines critical thinking as consisting of the following key elements: the ability to analyse information, problem-solving capability including the identification of a problem, collecting information about it and working on solutions, self-regulatory thinking as well as being curious and asking questions.<sup>4</sup> In our opinion these elements must be included consequently in schools and universities, so the students can apply them not only in the academic context but also in their daily lives. We would like to point out that solely having a critical attitude towards established political institutions and proven scientific facts, as many of the current demonstrations against COVID-19 policies are based on, is not what we mean with critical thinking. We value science and research, and we want to open up for critical discussions regarding societal issues in a rational and science-based format.

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<sup>4</sup> Velickovic, Uros (2019). *Critical Thinking Skills*. Available online at <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/critical-thinking-skills> [accessed 24.03.2021]

Furthermore, with the globalization of the world, there is a need for multilateralism and developing good relationships with other states. Knowing this and looking at the international sphere, knowledge about the EU is essential for a citizen living in Europe. We must educate the European citizens on what rights and duties they have, the power they have to influence the European decision making and what programs and opportunities might be available for them in Europe.

We believe that education is supposed to be inclusive at its core. Each student must be seen, heard and included in the educational process. Many European countries today have educational systems which cause segregation and polarization. Most of the children never get the chance to interact with people from different socioeconomic backgrounds or ethnicities. This is an enormous issue. Furthermore, we do not believe that education is solely for young people. As of today, most people do not continue educating themselves after they have received some form of educational degree. This is also a large problem. It should not be rare or stigmatized for adults to enter educational programs - it should be encouraged.

In summary, the main issues which we have identified regarding the current educational system are exclusion, lack of teaching critical thinking, not enough knowledge about the EU, lack of different cultural perspectives during lectures and the need for more life-long learning programs.

## **Response**

To enhance critical thinking, we would like to reshape education methods. This reform should target all generations, as the goal is to reshape the system not only for youngsters but for individuals of all ages. With this, we would like to enable lifelong learning and make sure that everyone is in a constant self-development and is equipped with a “tool-kit” allowing them to navigate to a democratic world.

Taking a look at youth education, schools and teachers would need to implement the 4C's (Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication) in classrooms. This would allow more stimulative learning for the students, as instead of just memorizing, they would engage in active problem solving and discussion. This can be achieved by, for instance, discussion groups; classes are divided into smaller groups which allow the teacher to monitor how the student interacts in a discussion and pay more attention to certain traits of his/her personality. This way, the teacher can personalize the teaching method based on the individual student needs. Another interactive learning method is problem-based learning; a problem/question is presented to the students and they have to research by themselves, finding their arguments, their ideas on the matter and present them to the class who would discuss it. The goal is for the students to make their own opinions on the issues that they would face through life, to have the ability to research and critically analyse a certain situation, to be prepared and well equipped for the future.

Life-long learning is also developed in our program. Besides students, teachers also need to learn and self-improve in order to keep up with the world's developments and latest teaching methods. Therefore, we are interested in organising workshops on different political and



professional topics. The goal is to help individuals to perceive the media news correctly, see-through fake news, understand how to get information regarding political issues, and listen to presentations on complex political topics. For the workshops to be more effective, they would need to occur timely close to political events, as the attention would already be focussed on them and that would encourage people to join. These interactive workshops would be provided not only to teachers in schools but also to employees in diverse organisations and institutions who are interested in increasing their aggregated knowledge and awareness. In our opinion, this has the potential to improve employees' work and life conditions and at the same time, it is a way to gain experiences for the companies as well. If possible, a company should provide incentives, so there is another reason for the employees to join these seminars and workshops.

## **Result**

As a result of participating in these modernized learning methods in the forms of innovative classes, lectures, seminars and workshops we aspire to provide all European citizens with a tool kit for critical thinking and openness. With these learning methods, we strive to increase knowledge, awareness and participation among everyone situated within the European borders. We believe that when equipped with an open mindset and the ability to think critically, European citizens would ensure the maintenance and prosperity of democracy and human rights.

Additionally, we would like to stress that these outcomes would not solely apply to young students. We aim to ensure that our proposed changes would appear in educational programs for people of all ages, including teachers and employees in diverse organisations. As a result of not only in-class-education but also workshops for the corporate environment, we aim for achieving lifelong learning as well as a stronger feeling of a European identity.

In times of international crisis, misinformation and conspiracy theories, it is more important than ever to obtain the ability to think critically and the knowledge of how to make a difference in the world. In the long run, the result of implementing our proposal would lead to a more democratic, open and deliberate society where people would welcome and embrace cultural differences. People would desire to have rational, fact-based, open dialogues with individuals from different backgrounds and opinions, instead of turning against each other.

# **1.3. Intercultural Exchange**

## **Key issues**

Intercultural exchange is important for a mutual understanding of different cultures and thus promoting values for an open and democratic society. Exchange programs are highly important to get to know the world and its diversity. Intercultural exchange programs can help students overcome cultural stereotypes and are a substantial benefit in shaping their own identity.

However, when it comes to the current educational system in most European countries, we identified a hazardous lack of intercultural education. Furthermore, intercultural exchange programs most of the time have a limited scope and mainly reach privileged students and schools, widening the social gap and excluding a great number of disadvantaged students. Many students do not have the financial means to take part in exchange programs or do not have the necessary information about them and therefore, are not curious about them.

## **Response**

In order to tackle these problems and issues in the domain of intercultural exchange, we propose several measures to promote and foster the values of an open and democratic society. We want to suggest the **EdUcation+** program as a potential derivative to the ERASMUS+ program. This program would, as Erasmus+, receive a great amount of funding from the EU, as it is in line with its fundamental values of personal freedom, human dignity, solidarity, active civil society, democracy and the rule of law.

We want to revolutionize the EdUcation+ program and make it consist of two parts. Firstly, school classes would get to meet each other digitally over a long time period before the physical exchange would take place - perhaps for one or two years. This would make the students curious about the exchange and make them more eager to go. Additionally, they would get to know each other better and gain a deeper knowledge about the cultural differences between their countries. The second part of the programme would be a monthly lesson for all European students where they meet a random class from another country digitally during a class at school. In those meetings, the students would have different lessons accordingly adjusted to their age. Younger students would play games to overcome language barriers and to get to know a different culture in a gamified setting. Older students would discuss political themes, cultural differences and problems that the world might be facing.

Thus, we propose the introduction of a digital exchange platform with the ultimate goal of fostering long-term connection and interaction between classes. This platform should provide opportunities for discussions and workshops. It would also simplify for teachers to prepare for the digital exchange by offering games, vocabulary training or short films about what to expect from a cultural exchange experience.

For this digital exchange, we propose a dedicated class in school where students are provided with the necessary infrastructure such as a computer, notebook, a stable internet connection, etc. Moreover, we want to ensure that *all* schools in Europe have the chance to participate in such a program and not just the ones that are particularly interested in the topic anyway. One way of achieving this would be by randomly selecting a certain number of European schools and refrain from difficult application procedures. These procedures often present a vital obstacle for both teachers and students.

In concrete, this program would need to be fully funded by the European Union, as even small financial payments can present a hurdle for less privileged students and prevent their participation in such cultural exchanges. However, we do not expect that this would be a

significant problem. The new EU-budget includes funding for the existing EU exchange program ERASMUS+. Our proposals for EdUcation+ mainly focus on extending the exchange experience by having digital meetings, as well as writing emails and letters. This would not require a large amount of further funding.

## **Result**

We are convinced that by building up an exchange program like this, we would manage to create a strong European identity among young people in particular. In this new generation, we strive to include all Europeans, regardless of their socioeconomic background, ethnicity or religion. The use of technological infrastructure in the build-up phase of the exchange is designed to engage all age groups of students: This way, students would reflect upon and discuss Europe, the EU and European values from an early age. By interacting with students from different parts of Europe they would also gain knowledge about other cultures, countries and perspectives. Even if these students do not speak a foreign language, they would be able to communicate and work together on different projects online. We think that by making access to such programs possible people would become more open-minded and tolerant. The program would be very beneficial for the student's personality as well as for teachers and parents.

## 2. Empowering Political Participation

*Liberal democracy sets limits to the majority and protects minorities through “checks and balances”, nevertheless in a context where the populist narrative is gaining ground, liberal democracies need to innovate and bring solutions to the constant arising challenges.*

*Political participation does not lie in elections alone, since this is not the adequate solution to engage people, there is the need to make the decision-making processes accessible to people from all social layers and politicians need to listen and act upon it - “It’s not enough to say that you have a right to exist: there have to be clear interventions in your favour.”<sup>5</sup>*

When there is a lack of trust in institutions, misrepresentation and constant feeling of disregard towards each person’s voice, liberal democracy loses ground, however, a certain criticism towards state institutions is important in order to permanently check the governance. Nonetheless, institutions should be more inclusive, listen and take individuals’ sensing, so that they believe they can understand and influence political affairs. In order to improve the political institutions’ inclusiveness, we propose some measures to tackle some of the most urgent issues.

It is essential to have an anthropological view when we think about solutions for different challenges because each community is unique and perceives different understandings of similar ideas and concepts.

This question takes us further to analyse the realities in different levels since we might argue that local projects might be very limited in their impact and not match the scope of the challenges. Nevertheless, building trust needs to start on a smaller scale since when people do not see the powerful force of change, they can be on the local level, the decisions made at European level are perceived as far away and, perhaps, irrelevant.

### 2.1. Training for Political Participation

#### **Key issue**

Several issues have resulted in a lack of political participation. First of all, the current educational system, which is mainly focused on formal education, does not promote critical

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<sup>5</sup> Salter. 2011. International Idea.

thinking. Therefore, we inevitably walk towards a society of citizens that does not understand the political processes and therefore is not actively taking part in them. Moreover, the limited knowledge does not only result in a lack of interest, but also in a constant feeling that they do not have the capacity to intervene in the decision-making process that often presents itself as a field for the elite.

## **Response**

Active participation is scarce in a certain stratum of society and there is a clear need to improve the political engagement and the trust in the political institutions and respective representatives. In order to achieve better results for these challenges, we believe in the creation of a mentorship programme, which is not targeted to a specific group, but everyone weighing interest and diversity. Therefore, there should be a special focus on groups that have been excluded from the decision-making process, such as minorities, among which, first and second-generation migrants, LGBTQIAP+, and economically disadvantaged populations are included.

This mentorship programme allows mentees to be followed by mentors from different fields, which could be local politicians, relevant stakeholders and professionals in the area of interests for each participant. Overall, role models are important, and trust is at the centre of this scheme. Since there is often some stigma regarding the lack of understanding about political processes and also lack of opportunities to learn about it, these mentors would allow each mentee to expose questions, learn and put into practice concrete ideas and projects.

The mentorship programme is inspired by the best practices which are already implemented in different countries, such as local climate councils in Denmark, which gather groups of interested youngsters who write proposals to the mayor's office. This programme allows it to conclude it is easily replicable in different contexts and there are multiple opportunities to receive funding for its implementation, such as local, national or European funds.

Furthermore, since this is just one example out of many, further research on efficient ways of participation, inclusion and trust-building are needed in order to get a broader and substantiated overview. First knowledge is already provided in Jonathan Geib's ongoing research overview which concerns experiences from various examples of participatory measures taken to activate "mini-publics".

## **Result**

The scheme of mentorships programme is not limited to a specific time frame, since there is the constant need to reach different target groups, increase trust and raise awareness about political participation. This is the only way to have a society that lives up to its potential.

It is important to highlight that the project aims to start on a local level, due to the fact that when citizens feel that their voice is not being heard or promoting change on the closer scale, it becomes harder to involve people in national politics and European politics. At first, the multiple locations where the project is implemented would experience impact in different levels, such as increased understanding of the decision-making context, increased

representation and active participation.

As referred to previously, people with higher levels of education tend to be more politically active. Therefore, education through a non-formal education context would have a longer impact when it comes to involvement in national and international politics. This would therefore contribute to an increased representation and engagement on larger scales, contributing to more inclusive policymaking.

Overall, we can conclude that the mentorship programme positively drives policymaking on a local, national, European and international level among all scopes of society.

## 2.2. Equalizing Access to Highest Ranking Positions in the Public Sector

### Key issue

In powerful executive and political positions, certain groups are underrepresented, often based on gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, disabilities, religion and social class. The people in power are a largely homogenous group, who do not adequately represent the diverse communities in their town, region, or country. To ensure that policy-making truly serves the people, it is necessary to reflect diversity in our public institution and especially in executive positions. In contemporary democracy, it is of particular importance that everyone's voice is heard, and everyone feels represented in order to ensure a vivid and functioning democratic system. In addition, the underrepresentation of certain social groups generates a feeling of being left behind and hinders inclusion. Having powerful positions that are only held by a privileged few can lead to social alienation and increased biases. Alienation and biases can normalize xenophobia and hate speech which also endangers the safety of citizens and the functioning of our democracies.

### Response

In order to gain a more equal representation and to increase access to political positions we already proposed a mentorship programme in [2.1 Training for Political Participation](#). With this proposal, we want to address the representation in non-elected positions of public institutions and especially the highest ranked positions. Therefore, we propose an equal-opportunity program for all executive positions in the public sector.

As we learned from past discussions, implementing quotas for the recruitment of members of underrepresented groups is doubtful, because the focus should lie on competences and not solely on social background. However, we need a mechanism of affirmative action



embedded in recruitment structures in order to grant equality and a realistic representation. When there are two equally skilled applicants, one from an overrepresented group and another from an underrepresented group, the recruitment should be decided in favour of the member of the underrepresented group.

In this place, the crucial role of role models and their strong impact on society needs to be mentioned. In order to encourage more and more members of underrepresented groups, strong and dynamic role models in the highest-ranked positions are helpful so they need to be promoted to a higher rank.

In order to raise awareness of a broader audience, public sector agencies could be asked to actively portray individuals from under-represented social groups that have succeeded in reaching high-level positions. In addition, this addresses more members of underrepresented groups who in turn feel encouraged to pursue a career in higher office.

We hope that with those methods we will reach the positive effects described below.

## **Result**

A realistic representation of the diverse society in public institutions would begin to address structural inequalities and counter social alienation. Having role models with whom they identify, more members of underrepresented groups could gain inspiration, guidance, and visibility to seize powerful positions. An institutionalized equal recruitment process could prevent biases, that is deeply rooted in societies around the world, from skewing hiring processes. In the long run, programs that seek to correct past discrimination could lead to public institutions that truly reflect the communities they serve.

Concerning this matter, the important role of role models and its big impact on the whole society needs to be underlined. Easing the access of members of underrepresented groups to leading positions of public institutions would motivate others to follow their example and lower restraints, which leads to a fairer recruitment process.

Starting in public institutions, we hope that this will impact the private sector as well, which is no less important to the bigger picture. Equal representation in every aspect of the society would also avoid negative stereotypes and hate speech.

## 3. Supportive Governance

This section of the report can be viewed as a background or foundation to other sections already outlined. It also proposes some broader and more fundamental changes to global systems and institutions in order to aid equality and better governance on a larger scale.

The problems addressed in this section can be broken down into three categories or scales. The first is at the Individual scale: many people do not have suitable economic freedoms to entitle them to become independent and thrive without support or aid from governments or organisations. The second is at the social group level, identifying how and why different sects of (local, national and global) society are marginalised. The following proposals shall outline some of the steps that can be taken to improve and ensure legal and cultural equality. This can and does encompass socio-economic and political freedoms. The third is at the national and international level. There must be a reshuffle and reorganisation of current institutions and frameworks, as well as potentially the introduction of newer, better structures in the future. This top-down approach should address the structural problems that exist and persist, preventing individuals, social groups and countries from accessing certain basic human rights, as well as certain opportunities or services.

There must be better provisions in place to ensure systems, institutions and policies are more supportive of all people, aiding our fight for equality rather than simply reinforcing existing structures of dependency and inequality. Historical and geographic conditions have shaped the world and its institutions, resulting in unequal political and economic power. Now that power dynamics are changing with a number of developing and newly industrialised countries competing for a stake in decision-making, the suitable conditions should be in place to facilitate this transition to a New World Order.

### 3.1. True Legal Equality

#### Key issue

The main problem that needs to be addressed is the unequal representation and access to opportunities for women and minorities both through legal and social means. Our current legal, cultural and economic system are often unfairly manipulated to benefit only the dominant groups and discriminate against minorities. For example, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been socioeconomically disadvantaged groups that have been hurt the most.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, this includes unequal access to education, jobs, institutions, healthcare, justice, political participation and many more. There are discriminatory policies in place that exclude and categorize certain groups of people, thus invoking inequalities.

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<sup>6</sup>Tubadji et al. (2020) *Cultural and Economic Discrimination by the Great Leveller*. Available online at: <https://european.economicblogs.org/voxeu/2020/webber-boy-economic-discrimination-leveller> [Accessed 18.11.2020]

Moreover, commonly the needs and problems unique for the specific minority groups are completely overlooked and ignored. These inequalities are products of social biases based on people's gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, disabilities, religion and social class. Furthermore, these problems affect the homeless, senior citizens, persons living in poverty, military combat veterans, refugees and immigrants, persons with a serious and persistent mental illness and substance abusers.

As far as gender equality is concerned, women are not treated the same as men, one of the most pressing examples arising in the workplace. In many cases, even though men and women are in the same profession and position, women's pay is lower than that of their male colleagues. At the same time, women very often have fewer career opportunities to begin with. To some extent, this is a result of the societal bias under which the figure of the caregiver is still associated only with women. They are expected to take care of the children and the house. As far as the figure of the father as caregiver is concerned, it is subject to several negative stereotypes, in fact, it is normal that in some countries, after the birth of a child it is only the mother who takes care of it. These stereotypes do not negatively influence only women but also others, this includes those on the non-binary spectrum and transgender persons, as well as men, trapped within stereotype-based expectations. Furthermore, they affect non-heteronormative relationships and non-nuclear families. It is important to remember that each individual has a specific social and political identity, which creates different modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that identifies these advantages and disadvantages as a combination of factors to help to understand each individual's experience.

## **Response**

We have several ideas for how to respond to the pressing issues outlined above.

Firstly, we believe there is a need for better enforcement of legal equalities. Despite the existing theoretical frameworks that claim to ensure that people have basic human rights, there has been a failure to accompany this with a solid enforcement plan. We must better protect and enforce these basic entitlements, and if successful, will help many millions (maybe billions) of people globally.

Some of the most important basic rights we believe are largely ignored currently are one's right to: privacy, movement and residence, nationality, social security, social services, and an education.<sup>7</sup>

We believe that one potential idea could be for the United Nations to be the final arbiter of these rights, having the ability to punish states financially or otherwise deemed appropriate for not adhering to these rights. The right to privacy has been partially addressed in the Global Charter of Truth, however, we want to reiterate the importance of this so that there can be better regulation and information regarding how personal information is used and how people can have control over what is shared or distributed. There should also be a

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<sup>7</sup> *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (n.d.) available online at [https://opseu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/30\\_basic\\_human\\_rights\\_list\\_english.pdf](https://opseu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/30_basic_human_rights_list_english.pdf) [accessed 24.03.2021]

notion of Global Citizenship that protects asylum seekers, providing them with the right to basic services in whichever state they may currently reside or be based in, until they are able to find a more permanent residence. These rights do not have to be the same as national citizens, and the state does not have to solely fund this (as that would likely cause countries to force asylum seekers to move more quickly, having a hard-line approach in order to protect funds). This problem could in turn be solved by having an intergovernmental organisation that provides a certain percentage of funding agreed upon as suitable to survive on.

There should also be a removal of the assumption and expectation (legally) that women are primary caregivers or caretakers, which currently can prove problematic as it prevents many from receiving an education or other opportunities regarding employment in many countries. This could be resolved through equal parental rights to leave and financial support. There must also be a way of assessing whether the current legal responsibilities of non-state actors to respect human rights are sufficient. Many of the barriers that exist to attaining human rights for everyone lie in the differential legal repercussions and enforcement of rights for the public and private sectors. Local, national and international businesses, as well as other non-state actors must be held accountable when it comes to ensuring basic human rights for all are protected, with regulations in place to monitor treatment and protections in place.<sup>8</sup>

Our second category of responses falls under the idea of hastening cultural change. In order to reduce or prevent widespread resistance against asylum seekers' rights, we must ensure that all people (with and without a form of citizenship) must be aware of what rights Global Citizens are entitled to, so that they know what they are entitled to as an individual, but also what course of action those with citizenships can take to support asylum seekers. Through this large-scale education and re-education of rights, this should become more normalised and better understood, therefore warranting less resistance, in turn making it easier for asylum seekers to claim and fight for their basic rights.

There must also be more done to hasten and promote gender equality on a larger scale. Some countries already aid with promoting equality and ensuring rights to pensions or state aid through pension contributions for caretakers and homemakers, however, this must become a global practice. There must also be an acceptance and active encouragement of people who are not women to take parental leave (i.e. men, but also those in non-heteronormative or other non-traditional relationships). With businesses and other organisations or institutions advocating for such people to take parental leave, this will hopefully speed up the process of cultural acceptance of such practices, making it the social norm. This equality can also be achieved through financial aid and grants to support people with obtaining an education for their children. This would likely make a difference to low-income families, both in the developed and developing world, easing the economic pressures, alleviating the demands on children to contribute to family work or supporting parents in bringing income in, making them more available to attend school and obtain an

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<sup>8</sup> Peiris, Chanu (2018). *How Human Rights Law is evolving to address Inequality*. Available online at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2018/12/how-human-rights-law-evolving-address-inequality> [accessed 24.03.2021]

education. Finally, citizens should be able to sue their governments, states or companies if there are barriers or problems making it hard for people to access or claim social service.

## Results

By increasing representation and access to opportunities for minority groups and other such initiatives, we can increase participation by establishing a stakeholder society, help and encourage all people to voice their opinions. Pushing anti-discriminatory and affirmative laws will eliminate cultural barriers. For example, equality of care responsibilities in the law ensures that the father and mother can share equally the care of their children and consequently women would have the same opportunities as their male colleagues in terms of work and earnings. Furthermore, incentives in form of tax credits and non-economic such as free or subsidised healthcare and education would help normalise such practices and hasten the cultural shift.

Since equality is a fundamental human right, it is extremely important for these standards to be adopted on a global level. If citizens of all nations are treated in the same way and receive the necessary aid we have mentioned in the previous paragraphs, it would result in higher representation in public institutions, which will make women and minorities further empower them to get involved in politics as well as other fields. Their trust towards the government would increase and they will be able to take full advantage of their rights as citizens of a democratic society.

## 3.2. Enhancing economic freedom

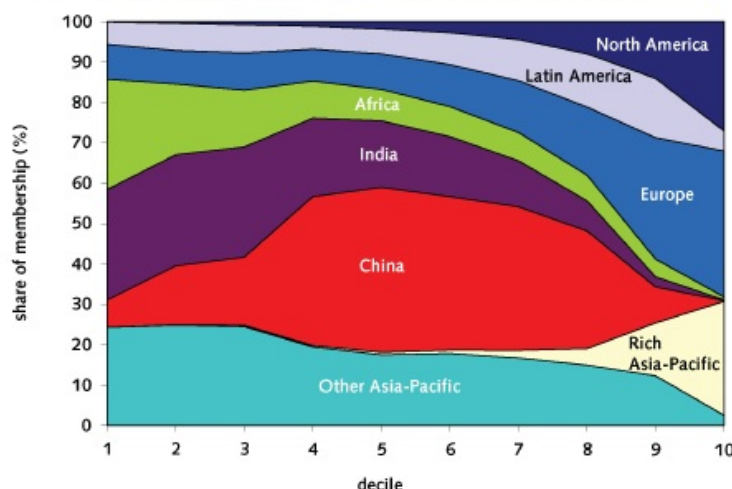
### Key Issue

Economic inequalities have been increasing within countries as the top ten per cent decile gets richer, and the bottom 50 per cent becomes poorer.<sup>9</sup> Both income and wealth inequalities represent a key problem when addressing the problems our societies face, as these issues increase the economic divide among citizens, and can result in social upheavals. Furthermore, as wealth inequality grows at a faster pace than income inequality, a handful of billionaires accumulate excessive amounts of money at the same time that hundreds of millions are barely able to survive under the extreme poverty line.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> OECD. (2015). "Why is income inequality rising?" Available online at: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264246010-5-en.pdf?expires=1605780896&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=F848EE730DD991EDC674AC072C6E34F5> [Accessed 19.11.2020]

<sup>10</sup> The Harvard Gazette. (2020). "How political ideas keep economic inequality going." Available online at: <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/03/pikettys-new-book-explores-how-economic-inequality-is-perpetuated/> [Accessed 19.11.2020]

Figure I: Regional Composition of Global Wealth Distribution.<sup>11</sup>

These staggering economic inequalities are caused by many societal issues, rooted in the structure of our economy. The lack of functioning education systems, structural racism and discrimination, large generational inequalities, among other issues are an impediment for minorities and less privileged groups to fully develop their economic freedoms.

A society with large inequalities and lack of equal economic opportunities tends to be more divided, and hence, the support for democracy becomes less straight-forward. The trust in democratic institutions tends to decrease when people do not feel considered in its policy outputs. Therefore, as inequalities arise, and as the social and economic conditions of the citizens worsen, the legitimacy of the democratic state may decrease.

In this way, supporting economic policies that aim at bringing back the 'left-behind' can have a potentially positive consequence in the support for democracy, and the development of inclusive and sustainable societies. The left behind may include a wide range of social groups. Therefore, our approach to tackling the lack of equal economic opportunities is through an intersectional and green perspective that takes into account the relevance of human diversity and the current environmental crisis.

## Response

### Solution 1: New Measures of Economic Success:

Within nearly all countries across the world, economic success is measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and its continual annual growth. We consider this measure of success to be inadequate. Increasing economic growth is a distraction for decision-makers, as it covers up a more detailed picture of what is actually happening within society. Simultaneously, the continual desire for economic growth leads to increasing pressures on

<sup>11</sup> UNU-WIDER. (2006.) "The Global Distribution of Household Wealth." Available online at: <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/global-distribution-household-wealth> [Accessed 19.11.2020]



our environmental and planetary systems, as it demands never-ending higher levels of resource use.

Taking inspiration from economist Kate Raworth's "Doughnut Economics", we propose an alternative model. Within this model, the economy is framed within the context of and as a dependent of the environment. Continual environmental degradation in the name of economic growth is destined to lead to wide-spread economic and political instability in the future. Moreover, the performance of the 'economy' shall be measured by an array of indicators that determine overall human 'wellbeing'. These indicators shall include access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, good quality housing, food, clean water, electricity, as well as income inequality and social equity. The definition of a 'good economy' and subsequent policy decisions should use these measures of wellbeing to understand economic success.

### Solution 2: Universal Basic Income (UBI)

We propose a Universal Basic Income, ideally funded via a wealth tax. This proposal can be implemented on any level of governance, regional, national, or (ambitiously) international. The specific amount required should cover the minimal living costs within a locality. This can be calculated using any kind of index that measures the cost of living, with reference to currency purchasing power parity (PPP).<sup>12</sup>

### Solution 3: Worker Empowerment

This solution suggests two changes to corporate structures and practices. First, we propose the expansion of a co-operative business structure, in which company profits are shared among all levels of the workforce rather than just an executive elite. Second, we want to promote greater democracy within internal international corporate structures. Expanding decision-making powers across the entire supply chain, so that the voices of those most exploited by predatory corporate practices are recognised.

## Result

The solutions proposed to cover a wide range of issues that are linked to each other and the reason for this is the intersectionality of social and economic issues. The main idea behind our proposed solutions is the integration and inclusion of all different communities and social groups into the economic system by allowing everyone to have equal opportunities. These equal opportunities may refer to equal access to good-quality education, labour market opportunities, health care, pension systems, among other issues.

All in all, the solutions proposed will redistribute economic power among all sectors and groups of the society. This means that the intergenerational inequalities will be addressed, as well as other inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, among other factors.

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<sup>12</sup> World Data. (2019). "Comparison of worldwide cost of living". Available online at: <https://www.worlddata.info/cost-of-living.php> [Accessed 19.11.2020]

The end-goal of leaving no one behind is that citizens can refocus from securing basic needs (such as food, shelter, or clothing) to higher psychological and self-fulfilment needs. This will in turn empower citizens to thrive, embrace their economic freedom, and understand that democratic systems work for the people and are in the interest of all citizens.

## 3.3. Global Governance for Real - United Nations in 21st Century

### Key issue

The world is currently facing several global challenges and crises: the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and the decline of democracy in several states. Additionally, states are turning away from global cooperation and are trying to come up with national solutions for global challenges. Consequently, it has become evident that the world is in desperate need of global solutions for these global problems. The best platform for global solutions is still the United Nations (UN) since most of the world's nation-states are members of the UN. However, the structure and functioning of the UN today does not have adequate tools to address the burning issues of today. While the UN provides a platform for states to meet and discuss these issues, the UN cannot address the changing world and the new urgent crises of today. Therefore, we propose a reformation and modernization of the UN.

### Response

The idea of the United Nations, or rather the League of Nations, came after World War I as an attempt to promote world peace. However, this attempt failed, and it was not until after World War II that the current UN was established. Thus, it is evident that wars and crises are the drivers for change and for establishing platforms for cooperation. However, since World War II, new challenges and global crises have emerged which the UN has not been able to address. Therefore, it is time to modernize the United Nations and bring the UN into the 21st century. A modernization and a reformation of the UN would allow the UN to more effectively respond to the global challenges ahead of us. Therefore, we are suggesting the United Nations 2.0, which includes a series of reforms that would bring the UN into the 21st century and more efficiently address the new challenges.

First, in order to make the United Nation more efficient and to improve the decision-making procedure, the first reform concerns the veto-powers, and we believe that the current veto-power that the five permanent Security Council members have (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and the United States) should be eliminated. The veto-power represents a different time and is an undemocratic tool that belongs in the history books, as these five member states can completely block necessary and pressing resolutions, sanctions,

proposals, and missions, which could still have the support of the majority of states. Moreover, not all five members are democratic countries, which makes it difficult to enforce, enhance and spread democracy. Additionally, the veto-power gives these five member states an unfair tool to pursue their political interests and agenda, which comes at the cost of public interests and in some instances human rights and democracy.

Second, the current veto-powers reflect the time of the founding of the UN and not the global powers of today. Thus, the veto-powers are not only an ineffective and undemocratic tool, but it is also not reflecting the current world. Therefore, the second reform is to increase regional representation and update the UN to the current state of the world. As of now, several continents do not have permanent representation in the Security Council. Since it is inevitable that every region will experience different consequences and effects of climate change and pandemics, it is important that there is a regional representation that could represent the interests of that specific region. Moreover, the regional representation would also improve the equality within the UN and improve the disproportionate power that currently exists.

The third reform is to make the agreements more binding than what they currently are. While the resolutions are legally binding, most experts agree that the General Assembly resolutions are in practice non-binding and are more similar to recommendations. Therefore, one measure should be to improve the mechanism which would ensure that the resolutions are implemented and make the agreements in practice binding. We as humanity need stronger international guidelines and measures to deliver a global response to global challenges. Making agreements more binding would ensure that the member states implement the agreed proposals. Moreover, a mechanism that follows up whether states have implemented the necessary agreements and solutions should also be considered.

## **Result**

We believe that these three reforms could ensure that the United Nations enters the 21st century and is equipped to respond to the challenges that the world face today. Therefore, we strongly encourage more in-depth research on how the UN as an organization can meet the requirements of the world today. The UN has great potential to be a collective action problem solver by increasing global cooperation on the pressing issues of climate change, pandemics, security et cetera. Through modernizing measures, the UN would be strengthened both in global governance and as a democratic institution. Moreover, by promoting political equality and individual human rights, the UN of the 21st century will work as a catalyst for democracy.

# Concluding Remarks

This report is the outcome of democratic processes: discussing and debating our own ideas, whilst simultaneously listening to and respecting opposing views. We hope that while reading this proposal, we have sparked new ideas, thoughts, and discussions within yourself. Even if you do not agree with all of our proposals, or question how attainable the proposed outcomes are, we believe the first step to make a change is to open the discussion on what we want to change, and how we plan to do so. Therefore, we urge you to join the conversation, to discuss these topics within your local community, and to raise awareness on the topics and problems you regard the most pressing nowadays.

In this report, we focused on what we agreed were some of the most urgent issues related to democratic consolidation. Hence, we discussed matters related to social media regulation, journalism, education systems, intercultural exchanges, political mentorship, socio-economic representation, legal equality, economic inequalities, and global governance. After discussing each problem, we gave a proposed solution followed by the desired outcome one could expect. Therefore, we took a solution-based approach in which we are convinced that regardless of how many constraints democracies are facing, there is always the possibility to build solutions if we - as humans - interact and cooperate based on a common good. In any case, we acknowledge that our ideas need to be further developed through academic research in combination with practical policymaking.

We, the youth, would like to invite you to think about the roots of the society that you live and work in. What is this society based upon? What kind of values are relevant to the way of living and understanding the world in your society? How would you like this society to change or evolve? Based on the answers that you give to these questions, we encourage you to join this report's discussion. Let us kickstart this conversation and ask you, the readers: what is the next step you are taking?

# Appendix

Attached are the slides from the final presentation of our proposals.

An illustration on the left side of the slide. At the top, two white fists are raised against a blue background with a small white circle. Below the fists are two white classical columns. The background of the entire slide is a light gray.

# EMPOWERING PEOPLE THROUGH

▶ SUPPORTIVE  
GOVERNANCE

▶ GOOD INFORMATION -  
MEDIA AND EDUCATION

▶ IMPROVED AND EQUAL  
PARTICIPATION





21st CENTURY  
UNITED  
NATIONS

GLOBAL  
GOVERNANCE  
FOR REAL



## KEY ISSUE

**GLOBAL  
COOPERATION  
IN CRISIS**

## RESPONSE

**UN 2.0.**

## RESULTS

- **REGIONAL  
REPRESENTATION**
- **END VETO**
- **BINDING  
AGREEMENTS**



FREEDOM OF  
SPEECH IN A  
DIGITAL WORLD



GLOBAL  
CHARTER FOR  
TRUTH



## KEY ISSUE

**TRUTH  
CRISIS**

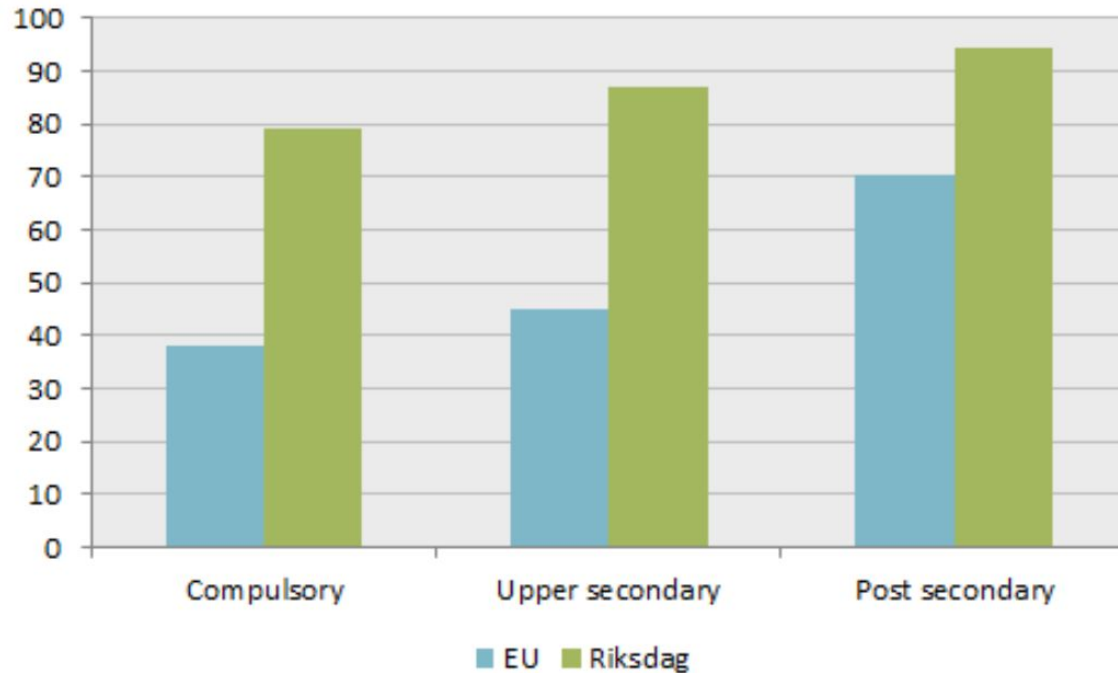
## RESPONSE

**A GLOBAL  
CHARTER  
FOR TRUTH**

## RESULTS

- INFORMATION TRADEMARKS
- JOURNALISTIC IMMUNITY
- JOURNALISTIC SUPPORT
- DATA OWNERSHIP

## VOTER TURNOUT BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



**BUILDING A  
EUROPEAN  
IDENTITY  
THROUGH  
EDUCATION**

Source: Statistics Sweden: *Big differences in turnout by level of education*





RESHAPE THE  
EDUCATIONAL  
SYSTEM





## KEY ISSUES

### UNDERSUPPLY:

- CRITICAL THINKING
- KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE EU

## RESPONSE

- INTERACTIVE TEACHING METHODS
- POLITICAL WORKSHOPS

## RESULTS

- “TOOLKIT” FOR CRITICAL AND OPEN MINDED CITIZENS
  - KNOWLEDGE
  - AWARENESS
  - PARTICIPATION
- LIFELONG LEARNING



# INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE



## KEY ISSUES

- LACK OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION
- DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS EXCLUSION

## RESPONSE

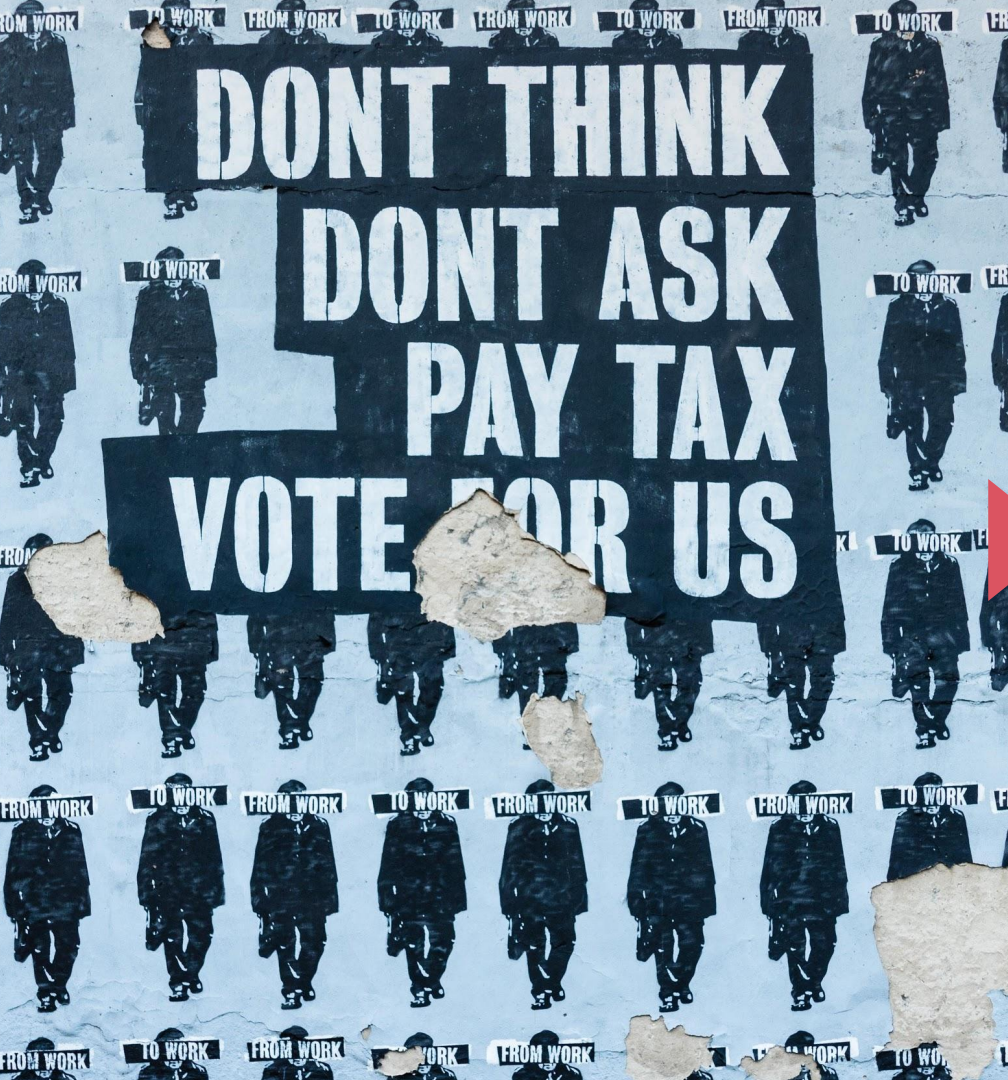
- **EDUCATION+** AS A DERIVATIVE OF ERASMUS+
- DIGITAL & PHYSICAL EXCHANGES
- DIGITAL EXCHANGE PLATFORM

## RESULTS

- A FEELING OF EUROPEAN IDENTITY
- INCLUSION
- BENEFICIAL FOR STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND ADULTS

**EDUCATION IS NOT A PRIVILEGE, IT IS A  
FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT.**

Article 14. Right To Education - EU Charter of Fundamental Rights



EMPOWERING  
POLITICAL  
PARTICIPATION

**“IT’S NOT ENOUGH TO SAY THAT  
YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO EXIST: THERE HAS TO BE  
CLEAR INTERVENTIONS IN YOUR FAVOUR”**

- SALTER. 2011. INTERNATIONAL IDEA





# TRAINING FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION





## KEY ISSUE

**LIMITED  
KNOWLEDGE  
AND CAPACITY**

## RESPONSE

**MENTORSHIP  
PROGRAM**

## RESULTS

- **INCREASED  
REPRESENTATION  
(LONG RUN)**
- **LOCAL IMPACT  
(SHORT RUN)**



**EQUALIZING ACCESS  
TO HIGHEST-RANKING  
POSITIONS IN THE  
PUBLIC SECTOR**



## KEY ISSUE

**UNDER-  
REPRESENTATION**

## RESPONSE

**INSTITUTIONAL  
PLAN FOR  
DIVERSITY**

## RESULTS

- **DIVERSITY**
- **COMPENSATION  
FOR  
STRUCTURAL  
INEQUALITIES**
- **BROAD IMPACT**



TRUE LEGAL  
AND  
CULTURAL  
EQUALITY



## KEY ISSUE

**UNEQUAL  
SOCIETAL  
REPRESENTATION**

## RESPONSE

**LEGAL EQUALITY  
AND INCENTIVE  
POLICIES**

## RESULTS

- **BREAKDOWN OF  
LEGAL AND  
CULTURAL  
BARRIERS**
- **EXPANDING  
MINIMUM  
STANDARDS  
GLOBALLY**
- **INCREASED  
STAKEHOLDERS**



# ENHANCING ECONOMIC FREEDOMS



## KEY ISSUE

**“LEFT BEHIND”  
COMMUNITIES**

## RESPONSE

- NEW MEASURES OF SUCCESS
- UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME
- WORKER EMPOWERMENT

## RESULTS

- A HOLISTIC ECONOMIC POLICY
- COMBATING INTERGENERATIONAL INEQUALITIES
- ENHANCING ECONOMIC FREEDOMS
- REDISTRIBUTING ECONOMIC POWER



INTERNATIONAL  
**YOUTH**  
THINK TANK

FINAL  
REPORT:

<https://iythinktank.com/>

