10 IDEAS TO #YOUTHUP THE 2019 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

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I. **INTRODUCTION**

The European Union is one of the most successful political projects in recent history. It has brought long-lasting peace, economic prosperity, and respect for human dignity, among many other improvements in people's lives. However, inadequate responses to the financial and economic crises, to combating climate change, poverty, and to addressing rising inequalities, have put its future at risk. People, especially the younger generations, are growing frustrated and disengaged with politics in Europe. Brexit and rising populist political forces across Europe are a worrying indicator of harder times to come if the European Union carries on with business as usual. The European Union needs to be reinvented, injected with fresh ideas and visions, to transform itself into an entity that young people want to engage with.

Young people especially have been let down by bad political decisions in recent history. We were made to bear the brunt of the consequences of financial and economic crises, created by an unsustainable political and economic system focused on economic growth at all costs. The current generation of young people in Europe are the first generation expected to be worse off than our parents. Precarious jobs, a lack of affordable housing, and mental health issues are a daily reality for many young people in Europe. We are facing increasing challenges and barriers in accessing our rights, and in being able to have a say in shaping the communities we live in.

In such circumstances, engaging in politics, which takes time and energy, becomes of secondary importance. Young people are thus also participating less and less in elections, making us less of a priority in the minds and the political programmes of politicians seeking votes. We continue to be politically active nevertheless, just in ways that traditional politicians and institutions fail to engage with. It is vital however, that young people's concerns and issues be put high on political agendas, as young people might otherwise look to populists for answers.

The 2019 European elections will take place at a pivotal time for the European Union, as its future is questioned and challenged more and more. While young people remain the most pro-European generation, European politicians should be mindful of their responsibility to offer positive visions for the future, rather than disappoint and further alienate us. Young people will get behind political leaders who are ambitious and forward looking, and who consider the long-term implications of their decisions. More crucially, we will support politicians who represent our interests and who offer concrete and credible solutions to our issues – leaders who inspire us, who defend our rights, and who not only give us hope of a better future, but also take actions to make it a reality.

II. 10 IDEAS TO #YOUTHUP THE 2019 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

Young people care about sustainable development.
We have the most at stake in the future, as we and our children will be the most affected by the impact of political decisions made today, including decisions on actions related to climate change. We support responsible politics and sustainable policy-making.
Did you know? 48.8% of young people (18-35) rank climate change and the destruction of nature as the most serious global issue (Global Shapers Survey 2017).

➔ **Idea 1: Prioritise the wellbeing of people, future generations and the planet in all decisions and policies.**
Promote the comprehensive and integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement as a priority within the EU. Look beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and economic growth when measuring progress.
Looking for inspiration? See "Position on the Comprehensive Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Europe", "Policy Paper on Sustainable Development", and "Youth Progress Index 2017" (European Youth Forum, 2018).

Young people still cannot get quality jobs in Europe.
Young people still struggle to find jobs. When we do, we face low wages, short-term or part-time contracts, forced self-employment, and unpaid internships. Non-standard work – such as work in the gig economy – is also on the rise amongst youth, but corresponding protection of workers' rights targeted for young people and newly emerging jobs is still inadequate.
Did you know? 44% of young people are caught up in temporary forms of work, the highest of any age group in the EU (Eurostat 2017).

➔ **Idea 2: Ensure young people have access to our right to quality and secure jobs.**
Support measures that ensure a quality school-to-work transition. Invest strongly in the Youth Guarantee and in improving its effectiveness, so that it can offer a future for all young people, in particular the most vulnerable. Support rules on decent working conditions that apply to all forms of employment, including non-standards forms of employment, taking into account the changing nature of work.
Looking for inspiration? See "Updated position on the Implementation of the Youth Guarantee" (European Youth Forum, 2018)

Young people in Europe are most at risk of poverty and social exclusion.
Youth homelessness and precarious housing conditions are on the rise, with young people making up between 20-30% of the total number of homeless people in most European countries. Generational income inequality has increased; undeclared work and barriers to accessing social protection mean that in-work poverty is a growing phenomenon amongst young people. Barriers to accessing quality jobs and social protection, moreover, leave young people unable to save or contribute towards their pensions and to welfare systems, as and unable to benefit from such forms of support.
Did you know? 1/4 young people in Europe are at risk of social exclusion (28.8% of 16-29 year olds, Eurostat 2016).

➔ **Idea 3: Defend young people's social rights and access to social protection.**
Ensure that every young person has access to adequate housing, to quality standards of living, to state-provided welfare, and to health.
Looking for inspiration? See "Excluding Youth: A Threat to our Future" (European Youth Forum, 2016).

Young people are the biggest users of new technologies, which exposes us to the risks associated with rising disinformation online.
We use social media, i.a. for political purposes, to read the news, and to network with like-minded peers and build communities mobilised around a common cause. We are also however, one of the groups most exposed to the risks associated with the shift towards data-driven online-targeted advertising in political campaigning, and with the lack of effective regulation of this rapidly growing sector.
Did you know? A third of 18–24s (33%) say social media are their main source of news, which is much more than other age groups (Reuters Institute 2017), and 83% of Europeans consider fake news to present a problem for democracy in general (European Commission 2018).

➔ **Idea 4: Give young people a say in the policies shaping the new digital realities.**
Include young people in the policy making, and prioritise research and assessments of the impact of technological development on young people's lives and future. Listen to the voice of young people when assessing legislation that could have an impact on the way the internet functions, or is being used. Promote the teaching of critical thinking skills related to media and social media content, such as fake news and junk news.
Looking for inspiration? See "The Pineapple Report: Youth in Europe Face the Fourth Industrial Revolution" (European Youth Forum, 2018).

Young people are more open towards migrants and more inclusive than other age groups.
Despite being exposed to a high politicisation and to negative populist discourse in the media, including online and on social media, that too often relies on disinformation, myths, and fear-mongering, young people are more likely to rely on facts and evidence of the positive contribution of migrants and of diversity to society.
Did you know? 40% of young people say management of migration and the inclusion of refugees should be an EU priority, compared to one third (35%) who say the same about security and defence (Flash Eurobarometer 455, 2017).

➔ **Idea 5: Implement a rights-based and human response to migration, and promote a focus on the benefits of living in open and diverse societies.**
Adopt policies that ensure migrants and refugees feel welcome, are included, and feel appreciated for their contribution to European societies. Act to counter the rise of racist, misogynistic, xenophobic, and homophobic narratives in political discourse in Europe.
Looking for inspiration? See "Resolution on the Protection and Integration of Young Refugees in Europe" (European Youth Forum, 2015).

Young people's interests are being ignored by politicians.
They tend to favour those of other societal groups, leading to policies that fail to address the increasing challenges young people in Europe face in accessing our rights, such as our right to participation, to decent work, to education, or not to be discriminated against.
Did you know? Politicians' and political parties' unwillingness or inability to address young people's concerns and interests in a non-tokenistic way is one of the most cited barriers to their participation in elections" ("Young people and Democratic life in Europe", European Youth Forum 2015).

➔ **Idea 6: Provide opportunities other than elections for young people's interests to be heard in European policy making.**
Prioritise dialogue with young people, and the contributions to policy making of representative youth organisations, as a means to redress the imbalance caused by the political exclusion of young people and other marginalised groups.
Looking for inspiration? See "Building an impactful and open EU Youth Dialogue, A proposal by the European Youth Forum" (2018).

Young people in Europe are rejecting 'politics as usual'.
Young people are participating less and less in elections, especially European elections. We are choosing new political movements over more established political parties. This leads to us being under-represented in key political institutions.
Did you know? Only 28% of 18-24 year olds voted in the 2014 European Elections, and only 2% of the elected Members of the European Parliament were below the age of 30 (European Youth Forum 2015).

➔ **Idea 7: Make it easier for young people to vote in elections, and to run as candidates**
Support the lowering of the voting age to 16, combined with advocacy for comprehensive and political, economic and citizenship education in schools. Encourage political parties to promote youth within their own structures and to field young candidates. Make laws that ensure transparency in political campaign funding and spending. Reform European and national electoral laws to ensure every vote counts, and elected seats match the votes they received.
Looking for inspiration? Have a look at "Youth & Political Parties: A Toolkit for Youth-friendly Politics in Europe" (European Youth Forum, 2018).

Young people care about life in society and politics, and have a lot to say.
We are more cause-oriented, and engage when we feel we can make a difference. We volunteer for youth organisations, for example, to fight social inequality and environmental injustice. Young people are let down by politicians and political systems that fail to engage with us, and education systems that fail to recognise these experiences for their contribution to personal development.
Did you know? There is a clear positive relationship between data on young people's volunteering and participation in activities of civil society organisations and data on social progress, which shows the overall benefits for society of promoting and supporting active citizenship among youth (Youth Progress Index 2017).

→ **Idea 8: Support and encourage reforms to education systems to help young people become active citizens and ensure we can contribute to societal progress**

While recognising degrees in formal education, in addition to employability, set a focus on providing quality citizenship education for all, so that young people develop critical thinking and enhance political and media literacy. Support and encourage reforming education systems so that volunteering, activism and non-formal education experiences provided by youth organisations are recognised for their educational and societal value. Support a better recognition of the contributions of youth work, volunteering and non-formal education to young people's lives and to society more broadly.

Looking for inspiration? See "Youth Organisations' contribution to Citizenship Education" (European Youth Forum, 2016).

Young people are affected by all policies and political decisions, not just those that are typically understood as "youth policy".

Our everyday lives are affected by environmental quality, different forms of inequalities and multiple discrimination, the impact of austerity policies, access to healthcare, amongst other aspects of life and society. We face most challenges in terms of opportunities. We have to shape, and be fully included in, the societies and communities we live in.

For reliable and comprehensive data on young people's well-being globally, see "Youth Progress Index 2017: Measuring Young People's social progress globally".

→ **Idea 9: Make youth rights and dialogue with young people a priority across all policy fields**

The realisation of young people's rights should be at the core of all policies affecting youth. Young people should have a say in all decisions and policies that affect their everyday lives and the future of the societies we live in, not just those typically associated to youth. Make it a requirement to not only consult, but to decide with young people, to use a rights-based approach in all policy-making, and to assess the impact on young people's lives of all future EU policy-making and legislative proposals, not just those typically associated to youth.

Looking for inspiration? See "An Investment in Europe's Youth: Position of the European Youth Forum on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework" (European Youth Forum, 2018)

Young people and the organisations that represent them are being silenced by governments.

Government measures, such as restrictive laws, funding cuts, and even direct threats to individual activists, are restricting the capacity of youth organisations to operate and carry out their activities.

Did you know? 42% of youth organisations in Europe do not feel completely free from government interference. 1/4 of youth organisations experience undue restrictions and interference into their functioning (European Youth Forum, 2018).

→ **Idea 10: Protect young people's civil society and civic space in Europe**.
Increase the funding available for youth organisations in European programmes, such as Erasmus+ and its successor, and prevent and penalise any attempts to restrict their activities and capacity to operate.
Looking for inspiration? See "The Shrinking Space for Civil Society in Europe: its impact on young people and their organisations" (European Youth Forum, 2018).

It's time to #youthUP Europe!

Representing 105 youth organisations and bringing together tens of millions of young people from across Europe, the European Youth Forum is the largest youth-led network in the world. As such, it is recognised by the European Union, Council of Europe, and United Nations institutions as the most legitimate and representative voice of youth in Europe. We will continue to advocate for these policies, and our Member Organisations will continue to provide young people with the opportunities to make a difference in Europe.

For candidates to the 2019 European Elections, political parties and future Members of the European Parliament and European Commission leaders who want to engage young people, engage with us, and get out the youth vote, committing to this Policy Platform is a good place to start!