



Report from the
Catholic Youth Convention on the Future of Europe:
'Our Dream of Europe'

July 2021

In the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, COMECE believes that the contribution of young people is fundamental to consolidate European democracy and to meet the ecological digital transitions while recovering from the COVID-19 crisis.

For this reason, COMECE organised the “*Catholic Youth Convention on the Future of Europe*”: a series of three webinars held on 3rd, 10th and 17th June 2021. The Convention brought together over 100 young Catholics, delegated mostly from the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union and from the members of the COMECE Youth Platform, a network of over 10 European Catholic Youth organisations.

Young people reflected and formulated concrete proposals to shape their ‘*dream of Europe*’, listening to Pope Francis’ message. In particular, they focused on three thematic areas: the *Just social recovery*, the *Ecological and Digital transitions*, and *Democracy & European values*.

This report provides the main outcomes of the Convention and brings to light the wishes and concerns of more than 100 young Catholics from all over Europe regarding the Future of Europe, their future.

1

Just social recovery: Building a Europe of solidarity and fraternity



a) Boosting Youth employment and innovation in a rapidly evolving labour market

i) General considerations

At EU level, some economic rules have proved effective for growth, but not for integral human development. Most young people pointed out the importance of a **fluid communication** between European citizens and European Institutions and Members States. They believe that Media across Europe should ensure that young people are **better informed** about EU programmes, in particular the ones offering opportunities of employment, training, apprenticeships or upskilling opportunities so that everyone, especially the most vulnerable, can benefit from them.

Furthermore, participants brought to light their concern about their professional careers. Many of them expect the EU to **encourage exchanges** between countries, as well as further **stimulate and facilitate the access to youth employment**. Some participants claimed that they would like to be able to participate in trainings where they could get the **digital skills** required in the labour market.

Finally, some participants emphasised the importance of **supporting smaller companies** and **regulate digital work**, in order to find a balance between the opportunities and risks of digitalisation.¹

¹ For further information:
http://www.comece.eu/dl/kMknJKJKkLMoJqx4JK/COMECE_Secretariat_Feedback_on_the_DSA-DMA_April_2021.pdf

ii) Recommendations

- a) **Build platforms** for young workers across Member States to share their work experiences and to exchange best practices, with the possibility of interacting among users, to address questions or formulate proposals to relevant political stakeholders.
- b) **Promote and increase interactions between students and companies with a dedicated fund** that stimulates youth employment.²
- c) **Offer digitalisation programmes and courses** allowing citizens to upskill and reskill with digital competences and adapt to the current needs of the job market.

b) Supporting Education, upskilling and life-long learning in the aftermath of COVID-19

i) General considerations

As mentioned by Pope Francis, “education, as we know, is meant to be transformative”.³ In this context, many participants expressed their willingness to receive **quality education**, also responding to the real demands of the labour market. They would like to bring education closer to the world of enterprises by **sharing educational practices** at EU-level. In addition, participants argued that **European children should enjoy the same opportunities**⁴, receiving a **common education on Europe** (i.e. European history and literature) from early stages of schooling.

In the field of Education, most young people pointed out that teachers have a great impact on society. However, participants were concerned that **the role of teachers is often undervalued**, and thus the educational mission is not as desired or appreciated as it used to be. Finally, participants stressed the importance of all European citizens receiving sufficient **financial support to participate in Erasmus+ exchanges**, regardless of their economic background.

² Although the Youth Employment initiative (YEI) already exists and supports the implementation of the Youth Guarantee under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), it should be better linked to concrete and measurable targets of the Youth Guarantee

³ Pope Francis, 15 October 2020, Video message of His Holiness Pope Francis on the occasion of the meeting organised by the Congregation for Catholic Education: "Global Compact on Education. Together to look beyond"

⁴ For further information: <http://www.comece.eu/join-online-event-on-vocational-education-and-training-in-europe>

ii) Recommendations

- a) **Revalorise the teaching profession** and support teachers to perform their educational mission in all EU Member States.
- b) **Provide greater financial support for young people** from all Member States, especially the most disadvantaged, to participate in exchange programmes like **Erasmus+** and simultaneously **tackle brain-drain** within the EU by means of support to EU Member States' education systems.
- c) **Promote exchange programmes for young workers**, fostering their inclusiveness and favouring upskilling and reskilling opportunities for all types of jobs, especially through vocational education and training.
- d) **Develop common European high-school programmes** about history and literature, in order to spread knowledge about the past of our continent and enhance the teaching of European languages.

c) Promoting inter-generational and inter-regional solidarity in an ageing continent, leaving no one behind

i) General considerations

In his encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis recalled the undervaluation of people considered 'not useful anymore', such as the elderly.⁵ Young participants emphasised the need of an **inter-generational dialogue** at the EU-level. They believe that initiatives should be further developed in order to encourage **inter-generational living together** and communities, such as flat sharing or common voluntary activities. These actions would enable to create both **decent living** and **social bonds**.

Participants also seek to ensure the **strengthening of individuals, families and communities** through sound public policies involving young and older people. Furthermore, some of them recalled the importance of the **right to disconnect**⁶ i.e., to find the right balance between **working hours and free time with family, friends and/or spiritual activities**. In their exchange, some young people also brought up the importance of a **common day of rest**, which should be further promoted at the EU-level.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020

⁶ For further information: <http://www.comece.eu/join-the-esa-webinar-on-the-right-to-disconnect-and-the-need-for-a-european-weekly-common-day-of-rest>

Participants shared their concerns about the **rural-urban divide**. They argued that there should be **better interconnectivity** between urban centres and rural areas. It is essential to give support to everyone in different regions in order to promote equal opportunities for all people.

ii) Recommendations

- a) **Develop intergenerational platforms** to share life experiences, bringing older and young people together, removing age barriers, promoting exchange and voluntary services to support each other as ‘neighbours’.⁷
- b) **Promote intergenerational living**, by raising awareness and adapting housing and fiscal policies: intergenerational flat sharing and community living should be particularly promoted⁸, as well as tax reduction for intergenerational living. Promote policies for the reuse and reconversion of non-inhabited buildings with facilitated renting conditions for disadvantaged people.
- c) **Encourage family-oriented policies** to allow people to share time with their family, for instance by strengthening the need for work-life balance and promoting a **common day of rest**.⁹ Since parents are the first teachers of their children, and families the first school, families should be adequately supported in this task to promote equal opportunities for all.
- d) Promote independent living and offer **spiritual support** for retired people (e.g., following the example of some facilities in [Portugal](#)).
- e) **Develop a culture of gratuity and support the creation of hospitality networks** between different parts of the EU territory to better welcome and integrate people coming from other regions, such as migrants.¹⁰ As we are all brothers and sisters, “*it matters little whether my neighbour was born in my country or elsewhere*”.¹¹

⁷ Pope Francis, [Fratelli Tutti](#), 2020

⁸ For further information:

http://www.comece.eu/dl/sLosJKJKkLNNJqx4JKK/Contribution_to_the_Green_Paper_on_Ageing.pdf

⁹ For further information: <http://www.comece.eu/the-european-sunday-alliance-releases-statement-on-synchronised-free-time-in-the-eu>

¹⁰ For further information: <http://www.comece.eu/dl/LOrJKJKkLMnJqx4JKK/Contributionff073357-a78a-4680-82d4-e71edc116ee5.pdf>

¹¹ Pope Francis, [Fratelli Tutti](#), 2020

- f) **Increase interconnectivity between urban centres and rural areas,** encouraging access for everyone to public transport, digital facilities and essential (health)care and social services, in partnership with relevant social stakeholders and the Church.

2

Ecological and digital transitions: Caring for our Common Home



a) Integral Ecology in our lives and society

i) General considerations

Answering Pope Francis' call for integral ecology in his encyclical letter Laudato Si', most young people wish the further **development of infrastructures** enabling citizens to **live more sustainably**. Some participants stressed the importance of considering not only Europe but the **global human community** when addressing this issue, also strengthening the correlation between human rights and the effects of climate change.

Young people addressed the need to tackle already **existing vulnerabilities and future inequalities caused by climate change**, as countries will not be equally affected by environmental changes. For this reason, most participants agreed on the need of green policies to regulate the current situation and guarantee ecological rights, aiming to foster better care for our Common Home, without leaving anybody behind during the process.

Young participants believe that they should lead by example and inspire older generations, by **adopting a more sustainable lifestyles** and **promoting intergenerational dialogue**, since caring for the world in which we live also means caring for ourselves.

ii) Recommendations

- a) **Contribute to the development of inclusive and sustainable infrastructures** that support community living and encourage citizens to opt for a development in human responsibility, values and conscience.

- b) **Contribute to the development of inclusive and sustainable infrastructures** that support community living and encourage citizens to opt for a development in human responsibility, values and conscience.
- c) **Encourage local consumption and production**, by fostering awareness-raising campaigns on sustainable consumption practices, so that a change of economic systems towards sustainability is culturally accepted.
- d) **In the context of COP26, the EU should play its role as global actor to build a more sustainable society**, as members of one human family. Green policies should have a global scope, while focusing on helping people most affected by climate change.
- e) **Reinforce carbon taxation** on companies and trade, while considering repercussions on the most fragile parts of society and use some of the resources of the Carbon border adjustment mechanism to **repay some of the ecological debt**.¹² This would be a beautiful collective effort that beyond saving our common home will make all of us become better human beings.¹³
- f) **Educate about integral ecology** starting from elementary school, with a positive narrative that raises awareness on ecology and encourages sustainable practices (i.e., climate change, integral ecology and circular economy).

b) Sustainable (digital) society

i) General considerations

Most of the young people argued that **companies** should be encouraged to use and **develop green digital technologies**. Advancements in technology, in fact, prove to be useful for people and favour better conditions for all citizens. However, they should be carried out in respect of people and the environment, granting the absence of harmful short- and long-term effects. In the words of Pope Francis, in fact, “technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems, in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others”.¹⁴

¹² For further information:

http://www.comece.eu/dl/OMupJKJKkkNLJqx4KJK/COMECE_Social_Affairs_Commission_-_One_year_after_What_place_for_justice_in_the_EU_recovery_package_final.pdf

¹³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2015

¹⁴ Ibid.

Participants also consider that the EU should **support scientific research** in green technology, enhancing funding and cooperation at European and global level. More support to research will also positively affect the labour market and help **creating (new) jobs**. They believe this action would encourage more **citizens to get involved** in the sustainable transformation of the economy and of our lifestyles.

iii) Recommendations

- a) **Encourage companies to implement practices of circular economy**, develop sustainable business models, green and recycled products.
- b) **Request companies to be more transparent** on the environmental impact of their products and reflect it on the price (e.g., discount in cafés with reusable cups), tackling greenwashing in all areas of production.
- c) **Ensure that the digital transition** does not have detrimental consequences for our common home and dangerous effects on people's health in the long-term, while **tackling digital inequalities** and ensuring that all can have access to basic digital infrastructure.
- d) **Regulate and reduce the manufacture of toxic products**, particularly chemicals and single-use plastics involved in food packaging.¹⁵

c) Protecting consumers and people's digital rights

i) General considerations

Many participants brought up the need to regulate and promote production across Europe in a way that **avoids overproduction** and supports **research into green technologies**. Indeed, some of them considered that digital policies should be launched as a tool to **reinforce European democratic processes** and make governance participative and transparent.

Furthermore, young people agreed that the EU must provide European citizens with a better understanding of digital dangers, also helping parents to **prevent children to access harmful digital content**. On top of that, some of them suggested the creation of a **compulsory national day** in each EU Member State, during which young citizens could

¹⁵ For further information: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/opinion/protecting-our-health-also-means-switching-to-toxic-free-food-packaging/>

learn key digital literacy principles and be awarded a **digital-literacy certificate**. They believe that this measure could intensify awareness-raising and help address digital online abuses.

ii) Recommendations

- a) **Create an EU certificate issued by an independent body that proves the credibility** of an e-commerce company selling online. This certificate should be granted by an independent agency.
- b) **Promote a unified digital tax-based system for gatekeepers worldwide** and prevent companies to misuse people's data to make more money. Clearer privacy settings should be applied and strictly monitored in the EU. The Union could support a European server architecture that embodies common digital values and compete with gatekeepers, allowing smaller actors to enter the market more easily.
- c) **Provide a basic, affordable and quality internet access kit** to make digital resources available to all, including the elderly who may experience digital anxiety, people living below the poverty threshold or suffering from in-work poverty, those without formal identity, persons with disabilities.
- d) **Launch an annual “EU Digital Framework Conference”**, bringing together public and private stakeholders to showcase in very concrete terms how complex legal and desirable ethical concepts can be practically taken into account in the creation and implementation of digital services.

3

Democracy and European values: Shaping tomorrow's Europe



a) Democracy and youth participation

i) General considerations

As Pope Francis states in the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*¹⁶, words like “democracy, freedom or fraternity prove meaningless if we do not ensure that each member of society is accompanied at every stage of life, respecting their dignity”. In the context of youth participation, young people would like to see more commitment by policymakers to **involve them in democratic processes**, especially in decision-making that directly impacts the youth. During the Convention, participants stressed that today’s **participatory platforms fail to be inclusive enough**, since they can be misused and are often not known enough by EU citizens.

Participants also stressed the importance of accessibility to information. Indeed, young people would like all European citizens to receive more information about the EU, so as to grant everyone **equal opportunities and avoid exclusion**. Therefore, they believe that developing educational programmes in formal Education institutions with **information on the EU and its work** could ensure and foster the participation of young people from different social backgrounds to the European project.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020

ii) Recommendations

- a) **Create a new Europe Direct (Youth) network** where young Europeans can become “ambassadors” of the European Union for 12-18 months. After specific trainings, several people from different countries will be in charge of promoting *“what Europe does for us”* in other Member States.¹⁷
- b) **Work more intensively on spreading information on EU competences and work and boost the involvement of young people** in existing EU platforms and policies. For instance, create more spaces and opportunities for young people at EU level to discuss issues they face in their everyday life, encouraging meeting and sharing experiences.
- c) **Educate about the true roots of the EU**, the advantages it brings to citizens’ daily life and its importance for everybody’s future
- d) **Highlight and enhance the presence of the EU in citizens’ daily life** (e.g. EU-funded infrastructure in cities, cultural initiatives and trips to European Parliament), in order to make the EU closer to real-life issues and decentralise EU decision-making.

b) Cross-border Democracy and European values

i) General considerations

Society is built on people. Therefore, many young people believe that positive values such as **solidarity** and compassion should be anchored in each one of us from the young age. In the words of Pope Francis, “as a moral virtue and social attitude born of personal conversion, [solidarity] calls for commitment on the part of those responsible for education and formation”.¹⁸ For the participants, the primary responsibility to support such values is in the hands of **families and schools**, which have to protect and valorise such principles in their important work with young people. For instance, teachers should be positive role models rooted in these values for children and students in the school environment.

Since charity comes from recognizing others as neighbours, EU institutions, anchored in democratic and Christian values, should foster policies that **promote European unity**

¹⁷ The European Youth Forum already exists, but it is composed by youth organisations. Hence, EU Ambassadors could be non-related to the European Youth forum and provide more “personal” experiences by spreading information about the work of the EU in its Member States

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020

and common identity, as well as human rights. Only then, solidarity and cooperation between European countries and people could become more authentic and spontaneous.

iii) Recommendations

- a) **Launch a fund supporting most disadvantaged young people** through organisations working in the area of non-formal Education and with a specific focus on (Christian) values and democracy.¹⁹
- b) **Support cooperation and dialogue between EU institutions, non-governmental or faith-based organisations** for the promotion of positive values such as solidarity, fraternity and respect, interfaith dialogues, exchanges between people from different nationalities and generations.
- c) **Ensure that EU values (e.g. solidarity) are promoted and supported**, for instance by keeping **borders always open for medical aid**, which is a key aspect of solidarity between EU Member States.
- d) **(Re)launch the process to work towards an EU Constitution**, ensuring that all Member States will respect EU democratic values.

c) Democracy, media and disinformation

i) General considerations

Participants believe that a great majority of people do not feel that their voice is being heard. Therefore, they claim that it is necessary to strengthen support for people to speak up and motivate each other to exchange on common values, which are also frequently associated to their beliefs and convictions. A balance should always be struck between measures **tackling disinformation and upholding freedom of speech**.

As stated by Pope Francis, “communicators also have a responsibility for education and formation, especially nowadays, when the means of information and communication are so widespread”.²⁰ For young people it is extremely important to **prevent disinformation and develop critical thinking**, both among young people and other age groups, such as adults, especially those with educational responsibilities. Stronger support to education, research and journalism could be a starting point to eradicate disinformation and tackle

¹⁹ This suggestion could be implemented by strengthening the already existing European Social Fund Plus, enhancing its cooperation with organisations and ensuring targeted assistance to most disadvantaged EU citizens

²⁰ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 2020

those “closed circuits [that] facilitate the spread of fake news and false information, fomenting prejudice and hate”.²¹

ii) Recommendations

- a) **Support European media initiatives to inform all citizens and enhance the visibility of national issues in the EU.** Ensure that all Member States are equally visible, since knowledge on such issues would increase the sense of solidarity and fraternity between EU peoples.
- b) **Reinforce young people’s critical analysis skills** in all types of Education programmes, for instance by training learners on how to compare different sources of information and select verified news in articles and social media.
- c) **Introduce a public EU information rating system**, in order to give value to ethical, transparent and true information, for instance by introducing measures to show news sources and check media authenticity. **Establish an EU-wide obligation** to show news’ sources, to achieve more transparency.
- d) **Support profit and non-profit organisations working on fake news** and raising awareness about disinformation.

²¹ Ibid.

In conclusion, we invite the EU to take into account the proposals of all young people in the EU and give them a voice when shaping their future. We strongly believe that the contribution of young people is fundamental. Therefore, we encourage the EU to listen to their voices and strengthen the dialogue with them.

This report will feed directly into the Conference proceedings and represent the voice of over 100 young people from across the EU.