

CALL TO ACTION BY THE FEDERAL YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

November 2021

STRENGTHEN YOUTH POLICIES IN EUROPE NOW – RECOGNIZING THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

This call to action by the Federal Youth Advisory Board (in short: FYAB; in German: *Bundesjugendkuratorium/BJK*) asks people to look beyond national boundaries and put the spotlight more on policies for Europe's youths¹. Last summer, the German government assumed the presidency of the EU Council – a time when crucial agreements were pending regarding youth policy. On the one hand, it was pivotal to implement these prior agreements while on the other hand it was important to recognize that the preceding months had given rise to new changes in Europe that were of relevance to youth policy and had intensified existing social challenges for Europe's adolescents. Especially young people currently in diverse stages of transition in education, training, careers, social cohabitation, mobility, etc., are affected by the coronavirus crisis across Europe. This pandemic has blocked their access to key institutions for education, social contacts, exchange with their peers, and mobility across Europe.

■ **The young generations are the ones that will have to cope with the long-term effects of the coronavirus crisis. At the same time, however, they will be severely impacted by the economic consequences, since people are financially more vulnerable in their early working years than at the end of their working lives.** ■

A cross-sectoral effort is necessary to ensure that the consequences of the coronavirus crisis are socially acceptable for adolescents in Europe. Joint national and pan-European efforts are required in all fields of policy and civil society, supplemented by solid youth-centric affairs. The goal is to define new youth policy challenges in Europe, and determine a European response to the coronavirus crisis and its consequences for young people.

The current key concepts that define European policies for adolescents – “Engage, Connect, Empower” – point to the fact that a European youth policy initiative that goes beyond the pre-existing framework is both possible and necessary, an initiative that sustainably addresses the living conditions of young people during and after the coronavirus crisis.

Coping effectively with the coronavirus crisis will primarily depend on how we manage to enable the young generation in a socially fair manner, and assist youths in mastering economic and social challenges. Presently, there is much talk of solidarity in Europe. Hence we need to ensure that the young generation, impacted severely by the crisis in some European nations, can experience precisely such solidarity, particularly within the framework of financial negotiations in the EU. Moreover, this must occur in a manner that allows many of the youth policy efforts across Europe in recent years to be upheld, and thereby ensures that the young do not have cause to question the European project.

¹ This call to action was published in German in June 2020. It has been translated into English, revised and updated as was necessary.

■ **We must strengthen youth policy efforts and their organizations, secure them financially, and set up a cohesive program to empower youths across Europe. This should offer prospects for education and employment too, especially for adolescents in hard-hit countries such as Italy, France, and Spain. Sending a clear signal along these lines should arise from the presidency of the European Council.** ■

Youth exchanges and transnational mobility continue to be at the core of youth-relevant policies in Europe. The coronavirus pandemic has brought European mobility among the youth almost to a standstill. This is still the situation even now that the borders have largely reopened. We must prevent the coronavirus pandemic from creating a lasting impact on the attitudes of the youth and transnational mobility within Europe.

■ **We must send a strong political signal regarding youth mobility, to guaranty that youth mobility programs will assist European adolescents in coming together again after this crisis is over.** ■

For instance, one such signal could be to set up a system whereby adolescents would have the right to transnational mobility for education, or the right to partake in voluntary services across Europe.

Politics barely even recognizes young refugees. However, this is an extremely pressing issue; it is essential to come to the aid of young people who lack even children's rights and are living under extreme conditions in refugee camps. The consequences of the coronavirus pandemic have further severely exacerbated the situation of refugees along Europe's outer borders. Young refugees are especially in want of protection and empowerment, since their

special circumstances call for greater political impetus to enable and involve them. The current situation in particular highlights the urgent need to create and achieve living conditions in Europe that are commensurate with human rights and children's rights and which also provide opportunities for young refugees to participate and have perspectives.

■ **A display of solidarity via concerted action by the EU must focus on those most in need of protection while offering young refugees some concrete perspectives on life with a future.** ■

In recent years it should have been a clearly discernible goal of youth-relevant policies to enhance the involvement of youths in civil society and democracy, not just through various forms of youth-centric affairs, but also through all segments of social life.

One can never overemphasize the importance of participation by the young generation. The coronavirus crisis should not be used as an excuse to curtail basic democratic rights of adolescents in some countries while reinforcing undemocratic forms of government and turning nationalism into a socially acceptable platform. Such moves will put pressure on independent civil society structures for the young, thereby leading to a loss of support for independent youth organizations. We must reinforce civil society measures on young people's co-determination, particularly during crises – a call that behooves us to seek out new paths and processes.

■ **One must listen even more closely to young people for a way out of the crisis, particularly during the present policy consultations in Europe and Germany – precisely because it is also their future that is being negotiated.** ■

THE FEDERAL YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD/FYAB (BUNDESJUGENDKURATORIUM/BJK)

The Federal Youth Advisory Board (FYAB; in German: *Bundesjugendkuratorium/BJK*) is an expert panel commissioned by the federal government. It advises the federal government on fundamental issues of child and youth services and cross-cutting issues in child and youth policy. FYAB is made up of up to 15 experts from the spheres of politics, administration, associations and research appointed by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth for the duration of the current legislative period.

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