



# YOUTH MANIFESTO YOUTHOPIA PROJECT

Empowering Youth for  
Cohesion



## Introduction

We, the [Youth Regional Network](#), a cross-regional youth platform promoting active youth participation at regional level, firmly believe that the active involvement of youth is essential in shaping the path towards a more cohesive, inclusive, and prosperous future for all. As the leaders and active citizens of tomorrow, we recognise our responsibility in defining the future of cohesion policy and ensuring that it reflects the needs and aspirations of our generation.

This Manifesto presents youth recommendations and expectations on Cohesion Policy, exchanged and collected during the **3-session Workshop on “Unboxing the EU Cohesion Policy”**. Organised in the framework of the [YOUTHopia project](#) in July and August 2023, the workshop was attended by around 100 young people including YRN members and Presidium. This manifesto outlines our shared commitment and principles for the importance of youth involvement in the development and implementation of Cohesion Policy.

It is mainly addressed to policy-makers at EU, national, regional and local levels, as well as to Cohesion Policy Managing Authorities and project beneficiaries, organisations interested in EU cohesion, policy-making, youth, and citizens.

## I. Understanding Cohesion Policy

Cohesion policy is not just an abstract concept; it is the bridge that connects regions and communities across our diverse landscapes. It is the mechanism through which we address disparities, foster sustainable development, and promote social inclusion. To effectively shape this policy, we must:

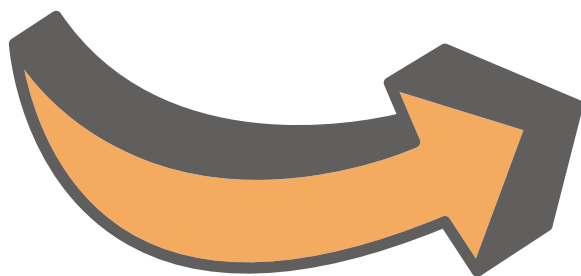
- **Educate and Advocate:** Encourage young people to understand the intricacies of cohesion policy through education and awareness programmes. Attractive and accessible information about the policy's impact on our lives is crucial. To encourage the involvement of young people, digital platforms should be leveraged, relevant social media such as Instagram and TikTok, and move away from monotonous institutional communication filled with extensive political rhetoric. A potential way would be establishing collaborations with educational institutions like schools and universities, granting young people the opportunity to contribute articles to their blogs or university publications on topics related to successful cohesion stories and cohesion-related issues.
- **Demand Transparent Governance:** Demand transparency and accountability in the management and allocation of cohesion funds, ensuring that they directly benefit our communities.

We should establish a more consistent and ongoing conversation between young people and EU staff, young people and their regions, as human beings who exist behind the bureaucratic documents and regulations. It is essential to arrange transparent interactions between youth and policy-makers on a more frequent basis.

## II. The Power of Youth Involvement

Youth is increasingly becoming a part of Cohesion Policy funding and initiatives ( such as Teens4Greens, Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY) and ALMA Programmes), but much more can and should still be done to involve them in the planning and decision-making phase. We firmly believe that the involvement of young people in the decision-making processes surrounding cohesion policy is not an option but a necessity.

Here's why:



- **Fresh Perspectives:** Young minds bring innovative and fresh perspectives to the table. We can identify emerging challenges and propose creative solutions that reflect our generation's unique experiences and aspirations. As an example, young participants in the YOUTHopia workshops recommended the use of Cohesion funds to value and develop young people's skills, for example by supporting affordable language certificates mutually recognised across Europe, and financing paid traineeships, especially in green jobs.
- **Long-term Commitment:** As the effects of policy implementation unfold over time, young people are the ones who will be the most affected by and live with its consequences. Our involvement ensures a long-term commitment to the objectives, success and sustainability of Cohesion Policy. Online consultations and in-person deliberative assemblies following the exercise of the Conference on the Future of Europe or the EU Children' participation platform could be a way to ensure regular dialogue and make sure young people groups are equally represented and composed of different backgrounds, including youth from less favoured backgrounds and peripheral regions, youth of different sexes, genders, ethnicities, and with disability.

### III. Youth-Driven Initiatives

To make youth involvement in cohesion policy a reality, we commit to the following initiatives:

- **Advocacy:** Participate on equal footing in the upcoming AER Taskforce on Cohesion to provide input into cohesion policy development, and advocate for the appointment of youth representatives in decision-making bodies related to cohesion policy at local, regional, and national levels.
- **Capacity Building:** Invest in programs that build the capacity of young leaders, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to actively participate in policy dialogue.
- **Inter-generational Dialogue:** Promote meaningful interactions between generations to foster mutual understanding, collaboration, and the integration of diverse perspectives in policy-making processes.
- **Digital Inclusion:** Recognise the importance of digital tools and platforms as enablers for youth participation, ensuring that no young person is left behind in the decision-making process.

### Conclusion

We, the Youth Regional Network, stand firm by the commitment to actively participate in defining the future of cohesion policy. Our vision is rooted in the belief that by working together with decision-makers, institutions, and our communities, we can create a more cohesive, prosperous, and inclusive future for all. We urge governments, institutions, and youth organisations to join us in leveraging the power of youth involvement as a driving force behind positive change. Together, we can build a brighter and more cohesive future that empowers every individual, regardless of their background or circumstances.



# Youth Manifesto | YOUTHopia Project



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## Contacts

**Lorène Weber: Programmes  
Coordinator -AER**  
[l.weber@aer.eu](mailto:l.weber@aer.eu)

**YRN Presidium:**  
[presidium.yrn@aer.eu](mailto:presidium.yrn@aer.eu)

