

Mindchangers Youth Declaration

Appeals and Proposals by Young People
for a Sustainable Future

**MIND
CHANGERS.**

**International
Youth Meeting**

2023 Stuttgart





“The future of humanity and of our planet lies in our hands. It lies also in the hands of today’s younger generation who will pass the torch to future generations.

We have mapped the road to sustainable development; it will be for all of us to ensure that the journey is successful and its gains irreversible.”

(Paragraph 53, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development)

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established in 2015 by the international community as part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, are a universal call to action to all countries, companies, organisations, and individuals to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere.

A preliminary assessment for the halftime progress on the 169 targets shows that only about 12% are on track¹. Poly-crises have exacerbated already faltering progress.

Therefore, renewed efforts and coordinated solutions are urgently required at all levels and in particular with regards to migration, as a key part of our society, and climate change, as global emergency, as young people from all over the world have repeatedly called for. Youths are advocating for change. They are already involved in daily actions to take a stand against global inequalities and long to engage more efficiently and effectively in favour of a more sustainable and fairer world.

“Mindchangers - Regions and Youth for Planet and People”² promotes cooperation by encouraging Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Local Authorities (LAs) to work more closely with young people in order to mobilise the latter more effectively as active agents of change at local and international levels, particularly on the key issues of climate justice, climate change and migration.

As part of the project’s main activities, a scientific study was conducted in all the project regions with the aim of better understanding youth engagement and formulating recommendations for LAs and CSOs on how to cooperate with youth on the 2030 Agenda topics. The research report, entitled “How to shift from awareness to active engagement on the 2030 Agenda” has

served as the basis for a practical guide³, which identifies and addresses a series of barriers to engagement as experienced by young people themselves across Europe and outlines solutions to future project implementers.

In addition to the study and the guide, the Mindchangers International Youth Meetings are acting as platforms to connect and share the different experiences, voices, and perspectives of young people across Europe and use this momentum to create comprehensive outputs.

Among the outputs, the International Youth Meeting held in Turin in 2022 resulted in a toolkit, which was developed by the participants as a flexible instrument using media, local actions and advocacy methodologies to address migration and climate change related issues.

At the Mindchangers International Youth Meeting held in Stuttgart in 2023, the young delegates drew up concrete proposals to address the barriers to youth engagement. The Mindchangers Youth Declaration that has subsequently been adopted puts forth ambitious appeals and recommendations for action as a strong statement from the European youth.

¹ See https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/SDG%20Progress%20Report%20Special%20Edition__1.pdf

² Find out more about the scope of Mindchangers on the website: <https://www.mindchangers.eu/what-is-mindchangers>

³ The “Youth Engagement on the 2030 Agenda - A Practical Guide for Local Authorities and Civil Society Organisations” can be downloaded here <https://www.mindchangers.eu/publications/>



Having met at the Mindchangers International Youth Meeting in Stuttgart, from September 25th – September 27th, 2023, young people who were active in this year's Mindchangers projects have worked on proposals to resolve barriers of youth engagement with their international experiences and expertise from the project regions Piemonte (IT), Baden-Württemberg (DE), Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (FR), La Rioja (ES), Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (BE) and Dolj County (RO), taking into account, that the impulses were consolidated on a European level with regional deviations due to given structures, and adopted this declaration, which seeks to act as an impulse and catalogue of measures for local, national and international authorities and institutions, civil society representatives and networks from public and private sectors,



Acknowledging the mid-term review⁴ of the 2030 Agenda, which shows us that as a global community, we need to work together even more closely to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda,

Emphasising that youth engagement, together with civil society engagement and the interaction of all actors at the local level, is a fundamental key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

Recognising the need to resolve barriers to youth engagement to unfold the full potential of young people to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs,

Drawing attention to the lack of inclusive representation of young people within policy-making processes and institutions,

Deeply concerned about the lack of political determination on climate-related issues,

⁴ The mid-term review of the Sustainable Development Goals can be accessed through this link: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf>

Highlighting the lack of suitable and safe spaces to discuss and share opinions and information and its hindering effect on political participation from young actors,

Noting young people often lack fair access to information,

Deeply concerned about the growing financial inequalities at a global level especially affecting the youth,

Highlighting the difficulties, such as the limited number of grants and information on grants' accessibility, of small and new Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to access funding and building competencies in managing funds, particularly by young people,

Remaining aware of respective governments' lack of financial support to civil society initiatives due to external economic and administrative factors,

Acknowledging the high entry barriers into formal CSO structures for young people, as in the legal framework that governs the CSO and dictates its purpose,

Concerned about the difficulties in creating flexible formal structures for CSOs,

Alarmed by the lack of participation of young people in CSOs,

Noting with deep concern the physical and mental stress young people are subjected to,

Conscious of the insufficient collective awareness of the magnitude of mental and physical health problems,

Alarmed by the inadequate level of funding for physical and mental health therapy,

Recognising the need to increase the number of trained professionals regarding mental and physical health,



Recognising that current educational systems are mostly based on non-participative decision-making processes,

Expressing concern that our modern-day formal educational systems have not significantly changed over the past decades and thus do not keep pace with the challenges of our time,

Also noticing the need for educational systems to incorporate student perspectives and individual needs into their approaches,

Emphasising the need for providing more training to educators on specific democracy- and sustainability-related topics (e.g. ecological, intercultural, critical thinking, and other soft skills),

Observing that as a result, these systems fail to give students and teachers the tools and skills they need to engage and contribute to the SDGs to tackle global and local challenges,

Taking into consideration that one of the main reasons holding young people from engagement is the perception that society lacks trust in them,

Noting with regret the lack of information about the possible ways in which the youth can act,

Acknowledging the need for guidance, and technical and financial support to achieve concrete results of their engagement,

Viewing with apprehension the lack of recognition of their role in society,





Calls upon decision-makers and civil society representatives to work towards reducing barriers to youth participation for a sustainable development in the following thematic fields :

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RECOGNITION

1. Urges the need for strengthening laws that **protect the standing interest and voice of the youth**, professionally involved in both the public and private sectors, including student workers;
2. Stresses the need for financial support for **local youth groups**, with the goal of empowering these groups;
3. Calls upon respective councils, for the creation of **youth councils at municipal** levels, that can provide recommendations to municipal entities, regarding youth matters, to further integrate youth perspectives in policy-making at the local level;
4. Encourages integrating **youth perspectives within businesses** in specific project scopes, in project implementations, and their related policies;
5. Suggests for increased state incentives towards businesses to lead **social impact projects** that involve the youth;



FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

1. Calls for the **consideration of a general income for youth**, including the expansion of existing programs at a national level;
2. Suggests the expansion of **volunteer programs to develop skills**, such as the European Voluntary Service⁵, to promote inclusive youth participation in professional fields and skills development;
3. Advocates for the further **allocation of small grants** to new and small CSOs for program implementation that includes training focused on project management and fundraising;
4. Stresses the need for **greater transparency and democratic participation** in allocating public funds and in long-term financial planning;

⁵ The European Voluntary Service is a contact point for young people and organisations to conduct international volunteering projects. For more information visit: https://youth.europa.eu/evs20_en



CSO STRUCTURES

1. Calls upon public institutions and lawmakers to **lower administrative entry barriers** in the form of registration and funds to allow for CSOs to more easily form as well as softening bureaucratic barriers to allow for more flexibility inside existing CSOs;
2. Calls for **more cooperation between CSOs and educational institutions** e.g. schools, vocational schools, or universities, as well as increase the networking opportunities offered through CSOs to ease the entry of youth into civil engagement;
3. Recommends local authorities to retain lawyers for the possibility of **free legal advice** for CSOs and youth initiatives;
4. Emphasises the need for CSOs to have easier **access to general forms of funding**, for example in the form of annual unconditional funds for necessary expenses;
5. Recommends the introduction of **less formal legal entities** in a similar form to CSOs, analogous to the French model of the “junior association”, consisting mainly of, and allowing youth under the age of 18 to engage with diverse cultural fields in a less formal setting, under the supervision of relay persons;
6. Suggests that the **“junior association status”** is made publicly known to raise awareness of it as a possibility for youth engagement;



PHYSICAL & MENTAL STRESS

1. Recommends that respective governments **lower administrative barriers** to give CSOs easier access to funding opportunities, in order to prevent mental stress, e.g. in the form of grants;
2. Calls for respective governments to **increase the budget** allocated to the health ministry in order for it to implement policies more effectively, as well as help facilitate increased cooperation for funding access with CSOs;
3. Suggests that governments allocate funds to CSOs to implement **mental and physical health awareness campaigns**, e.g. through specific grants;
4. Encourages national and local governments to launch campaigns incentivizing the private sector to carry out regular **mental health awareness workshops**;
5. Emphasises the need for governments to allocate more funds to the health ministry specifically for mental health research, as a basis **for capacity buildings** focusing on mental and physical health awareness;
6. Further recommends governments to invest in **better-targeted training opportunities for educators and community leaders** including cooperation with CSOs and the ministries of education and health, to better equip people who have to deal with mental and physical health issues, to raise awareness in their communities, and to facilitate access to relevant resources;
7. Urges governments to increase **cooperation between relevant ministries** e.g. health, education, labor and employment, and finance, to recruit better-trained experts on mental and physical health to solve staffing needs;



EDUCATION

1. Asks ministries for education and schools to incorporate new methods (e.g. Universal Learning Design) based on the real needs of students and their communities in order to **reduce inequalities and empower students** to identify and tackle current challenges at global and local levels;
2. Calls upon policy-makers to recognise and promote the valuable role of students, parents, and civil society organisations in **identifying youth's and society's real-world challenges, needs, and demands**;
3. Emphasises the need for providing more training to educators on **specific democracy- and sustainability-related topics** (e.g. ecological, intercultural, critical thinking, and soft skills);
4. Urges ministries for education to **support educators** in terms of human resources and time to deal with students' needs, such as education for sustainable development, and value their strengths, for instance, through teams of field experts;
5. Expresses the need for more ways to acknowledge, award, and promote **innovation in teaching**;
6. Recommends the establishment of boards to take the responsibility of **creating physical spaces and time** for every actor to be involved, participate, and share knowledge;



TRUST IN YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Encourages policy-makers to effectively involve **young people in decision-making arenas** at all political levels (e.g. youth quota);
2. Further recommends that this involvement should not be limited only to a few measures and activities but **continuously encouraged and adapted**, in particular, to the youth's local context and needs;
3. Calls for the promotion of engagement opportunities through **communication campaigns and events with peer testimonials** and a strong focus on the inclusion of **young people who are not usually engaged**;
4. Suggests the creation and continuous development of **local support structures with trained staff** that provide facilitation, financial, and technical support to young people for the implementation of their projects and ideas.



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