

**Outcome document – Discussion with EU candidate and potential candidate
youth organisations
14th meeting of the EESC Youth Group on 13 July 2026**

Key Recommendations

The EESC Youth Group and the participants of the debate recommend the following actions:

1. Ensure that independent youth organisations, legitimately recognised by the youth sector, from EU candidate and potential candidate countries are systematically involved in the EU accession process, including EU initiatives, consultations, Youth Conferences and relevant EESC activities.
2. Protect civic space, democratic checks and balances, the right to protest, and the formal recognition of independent youth structures, including national youth councils and non-formal youth organisations.
3. Remove administrative, financial, and practical barriers that limit access to Erasmus+, EU traineeships, exchanges and other EU programmes for young people and youth organisations in the enlargement region.
4. Strengthen youth employment, housing, entrepreneurship and support the Youth Guarantee measures to reduce emigration pressures and enable young people to remain, work and participate in their communities.
5. Provide sustainable funding, institutional capacity-building and improved access to grants so that youth organisations can operate independently and collectively beyond short-term projects.

Explanations

Ensure structured youth participation in the EU accession process

- EU integration should be treated as a values-based process that requires meaningful youth inclusion, not only as a technical accession exercise.
- Independent youth organisations should be represented in EU initiatives and consultations, including EU Youth Conferences, to ensure that young people's priorities are reflected in accession-related work.

Protect civic space and recognise youth organisations

- Youth organisations reported shrinking civic space, weak democratic checks and balances, restrictions on protest and limited recognition of independent youth structures.
- Particular attention is needed where youth representation and civic participation face restrictions, including contexts where national youth councils and non-formal youth organisations lack formal recognition.

Improve access to EU programmes, Erasmus+ and youth mobility

- Young people and youth organisations need full and effective access to Erasmus+ and other EU programmes, but administrative, financial and practical barriers remain significant.

- Financial support and simpler procedures are needed to make EU traineeships, exchanges and mobility opportunities more accessible.

Address youth employment, housing and brain drain

- Unemployment, uneven access to opportunities, housing challenges are major factors driving youth emigration.
- Stronger support for the Youth Guarantee implementation, youth entrepreneurship support and better conditions for work, study and participation can help young people remain active in their communities.

Provide sustainable funding and institutional capacity-building for youth organisations

- Short-term, project-based funding does not give youth organisations the stability needed to plan, retain capacity and represent young people effectively.
- Sustainable financial support and improved access to grants can reduce competition between member organisations and strengthen the collective role of youth councils.

Participants

The debate took place during the 14th meeting of the EESC Youth Group on 13 July 2026 and brought together EESC Youth Group members and representatives of youth organisations from EU candidate countries.

The discussion included representatives from the Albanian National Youth Congress, Friends of the Earth Georgia, the National Youth Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the National Youth Council of Moldova, the National Youth Council of North Macedonia, the Network for Youth of Montenegro, the National Youth Council of Serbia, the National Youth Council of Türkiye (GoFor), and the National Youth Council of Ukraine.