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Diversity Europe Newsletter



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EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH 2022

FOREWORD

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European Year of Youth 2022



As a youth worker in my earlier career, I had the privilege to witness countless young people deal with the many

challenges presented to them. I saw young people come to terms with difficult situations. Situations determined by an environment, which they inherited and one that they had no say in shaping. During this European Year of Youth, the European Union has announced that its key objective is **'To empower, support and engage with young people in a post-pandemic perspective.'** While everyone is coming to terms with the post pandemic, it must be said that young people have had their lives changed dramatically. From school, social life and sporting, to health and the health uncertainty of their loved ones, especially that of their grandparents, all these factors have contributed to the development of towering anxiety.

In terms of the facts, the following are widely known:

- One in six Europeans is between the ages 15 to 29.
- One in three young people reported spending two or more weeks abroad for work, training or education in 2019.
- Three quarters of young people have a positive view of the European Union and democracy.
- One in three reported having difficulties coping with COVID-19 measures.
- Unemployment among young people increased from 11.9% in 2019 to 13.3% in 2020.

- 40% feel fear for their own health and 66% for the health of their families and friends.

We can take a lot of comfort from some of these figures. For others, we must take great heed. While the EU has launched many good initiatives, which seek to improve areas of training and wellbeing, as well as the opportunity to get to know other EU countries, the EU really cannot relax and will need to continue to actively listen to young people. The fact that 66% of them fear for the health of their family and friends strongly obligates all policy makers to design a health system that is capable of rapidly adapting to the likely threats in terms of pandemics and diseases in the future. And let's not forget that the looming consequences of failing to act more decisively on climate change are beginning to materialise, which will create enormous challenges for the next generation.

In June last year, our Group reached out to young people across Europe in a webinar, which explored the **impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the mental health and employability of young people**. I call on policymakers at all levels, be it at the local, national or European level, to take account of the recommendations¹ stemming from this event.

The urgent necessity for youth employability, participation and good mental health should determine future policy formation, mainly because they are part of the articulated statements coming from young people themselves. But also because they represent an unselfish desire to look to the future, a future where they will become the adults and will have to deal with the mistakes

of this generation.

The youth perspective will certainly play an important role in the work of our Group both over the year ahead and in the future. The Chinese proverb comes to mind: "One generations plants the trees, so future generations can sit in the shade."

Séamus Boland

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1. EESC, webinar, recommendations and conclusions, <https://europa.eu/irq887R>

EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH 2022

Interview with Biliana Sirakova, EU Youth Coordinator at the European Commission, on the European Year of Youth

Why did the European Commission propose the European Year of Youth?



Biliana Sirakova

The designation of a European Year draws attention, resources and actions towards addressing a particular need.

unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, who are underrepresented in decision-making and who were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and are likely to suffer its negative consequences for years to come. And within this large group of European citizens, 16% of the EU population (73.6 million¹), the situation for young people with fewer opportunities,

from disadvantaged backgrounds or vulnerable groups, is particularly dire. This is why the Commission has proposed to make 2022 the European Year of Youth (EYY²). As President von der Leyen said in her 2021 State of the Union address “Europe needs all of its youth”. We need the vision, engagement and participation of all young people to build a better future for them and for our society at large.

Currently, in Europe and globally, we have a segment of our population who are at a higher risk of

What are the objectives of this initiative?



With the European Year of Youth, the EU aims to create a long-term positive impact for young

people by:

1. listening to them and drawing

inspiration from their ideas;

2. empowering and supporting young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, to become active citizens and actors of change;

3. promoting the various opportunities available to young people at Union, national, regional and local levels;

4. including the youth perspective in relevant policies and all areas that matter to young people.

How will the initiative develop? What actions are planned?

The Year was prepared with active involvement from all EU institutions, Member States, youth organisations and young people themselves. We took into account what young people wanted³ from this year, and

citizen input in the Conference on the Future of Europe⁴ and the EU Youth Dialogue⁵. We identified hundreds of activities that will contribute to the objectives, ranging from ALMA⁶, a new initiative for young people

not in any kind of employment, education or training, to the On the Green Track⁷ campaign and youth focus in the EU Anti-racism summit⁸.

How can organised civil society contribute to the success of the initiative?

We encourage organisations and citizens to:

- participate in the activities of the Year and organise their own events, projects and initiatives (making sure to submit them to the new European Year of Youth page⁹ so that they are visible on the activity map),
- follow developments on the page or follow our social media accounts (@EuropeanYouthEU¹⁰ on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook),

- get engaged in discussions using the hashtag #EuropeanYearOfYouth¹¹

Civil sector organisations who work at European level across Member States, and who have a strong focus on youth issues, are welcome to express their interest to join the European Year of Youth stakeholder group. They can contact us at EYY2022@ec.europa.eu.

1. European Commission, Eurostat, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20220105-1>
2. European Year of Youth 2022, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en
3. European Youth Portal, EYY online survey results, https://europa.eu/youth/news/european-year-youth-online-survey-results-are-out_en
4. Conference on the Future of Europe. <https://futureeu.europa.eu/?locale=en>
5. European Youth Portal, EU Youth Dialogue, https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/euyouthdialogue_en
6. European Commission, Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve initiative (ALMA), <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1549&langId=en>
7. European Commission, On the Green Track Campaign, https://ec.europa.eu/environment/thegreentrack_en
8. European Anti-Racism Summit, <https://www.antiracism-eusummit2021.eu/>
9. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en
10. Twitter, @EuropeanYouthEU, <https://twitter.com/EuropeanYouthEU>
11. #EuropeanYearOfYouth, https://twitter.com/search?q=%23EuropeanYearOfYouth&src=hashtag_click

Young people need to have a real say in the decision-making process

An interview with the rapporteur for the EESC opinion SOC/706 on “European Year of Youth 2022”.

Michael McLoughlin (IE)

Head of Advocacy and Communications, Youth Work Ireland

EESC representative at the national coordinators’ and stakeholders’ group for the European Year of Youth 2022

Your opinion was adopted by the EESC plenary in December 2021. What are the three main findings of this opinion?



Michael McLoughlin © EESC

We want the [European Year of Youth](#)¹ to be meaningful and to have a long-term impact on policy and ultimately

the lives of young people. Young people suffered most in the COVID-19 crisis in their education, employment, and impact on their mental health. The needs of young people need to feature in all major policy areas consistent with the aims of the [EU Youth Strategy](#)². We

need to see concrete improvements in policies by the end of the year. There is an unfortunate tendency to deal with young people and decision-making as a PR opportunity with photos and once off events, this needs to be avoided.

How could these issues be addressed? What are your three main proposals?

We need better participation policies locally, nationally and at European level to ensure young people have a real say in decisions. Some Member

States and areas do better but there is a long way to go. We need concrete ways to ensure the impact of decisions on young people are examined and

weighed up in the decision-making process. The [European Youth Forum](#)’s³ proposal for a “Youth Test” has a lot to recommend itself regarding this issue.

After the adoption of the opinion, what have you done to promote the opinion and to make civil society’s voice heard?

Colleagues and I have been very active in our informal networks in the Committee, which draw on young people, professional youth workers and those who have a great interest in youth issues. I have also been

attending the European Commission’s network of national co-ordinators and international organisations on the European Year of Youth and have presented the EESC opinion and some of the Committee’s plans there. I, along

with colleagues, have engaged with the [EU Youth Coordinator](#)⁴, Biliana Sirakova, and the European Youth Forum on these issues and the future work of the Committee.

What are the next steps, do you plan any further activities?

A lot of work is planned, and several colleagues are active in this field across the Committee. We are

EESC’s [NAT Section](#)⁶ has taken the lead in work on young people and the climate and hopes to map good practice in youth participation.

about young people and sustainability and young people in the Western Balkans. Our Group also plans more work in the area and is considering a Group own-initiative opinion.

examining the coordination of efforts during the Year under the auspices of the Committee’s [SOC Section](#)⁵ and enhancing the work of its Communication Commission on outreach activities for the Year. The

Personally, I will be working on an own-initiative opinion on [The Equal Treatment of Young People in the Labour Market](#)⁷ and other own-initiative opinions have been agreed

Find out more about the EESC opinion SOC/706 on ‘European Year of Youth 2022’ at: <https://europa.eu/!qvtBwn>

Young people are our future – will we continue to let them suffer?

Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL)

Vice-President, Diversity Europe Group
President, Greek National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP)

President, European Disability Forum (EDF)
President, International Disability Alliance (IDA)

Member, Economic and Social Council of Greece (OKE)

Member, Greek National Commission



Ioannis Vardakastanis © EESC

of Human Rights (EEDA)

More than a decade ago, Europe was brought to its knees by an

unprecedented **economic crisis**. The first to suffer, and last to recover, were young people. The **COVID-19**

pandemic has come as another blow.

1. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en
2. European Youth Portal, EU Youth Strategy, https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_en
3. European Youth Forum, <https://www.youthforum.org/>
4. European Youth Portal, EU Youth Coordinator, https://europa.eu/youth/news/eu-youth-coordinator-has-been-nominated_en
5. EESC, Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC), <https://europa.eu/!xW46cK>
6. EESC, Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT), <https://europa.eu/!yq33Bv>
7. EESC opinion SOC/721, <https://europa.eu/!6wpV6j>

It has left young people, often lacking experience or employed in the service industry, highly exposed to job loss. Recent figures show that in Greece, for example, 33.2% of working-age people under 25 are neither in **employment, education or training**¹. The pandemic also called into question young people's ability to continue their education and to take part in **formative experiences and leisure activities** that make being young such a special time of life.

It is therefore timely that 2022 will be the

European Year of Youth², but what exactly will it mean for the young people of the EU? Key to the empowerment and emancipation of young people are education and quality employment, the building blocks to enable each young person to forge their own path in life. This is where **we need the EU to offer support**, guiding the Member States towards investing more in training and assistance for employment. We also need 2022 to be the year in which the European Commission, through the **EU Semester**³, clearly calls out Member

States that are not doing enough to support their young people.

Finally, we should not lose sight of the fact that **not all young people face the same barriers**. Youth in certain Member States, those with disabilities or from minority backgrounds, are particularly likely to miss out on opportunities. The EU, in its effort to support young people, must **target these groups** in particular, **and not only with short-term, one-off initiatives**.

Big things often start with small steps



Katrina LEITĀNE (LA)
*Advocacy expert,
National Youth
Council of Latvia*

**The European
Year of Youth**⁴

is a time to kick-start long-term change that will bring about greater understanding and a more strategic approach to the youth sector, whose existence determines all our futures.

Given the highly cross-sectoral nature of the youth sector, it is crucial to achieve effective and targeted **intergenerational cooperation in policy designing** so that every decision today is taken with tomorrow in mind. I believe that **youth policy should be a horizontal priority** that is reflected in all EU policy fields and that it should also be a vertical reference point at all levels of policy planning and decision-making.

Let me highlight the **role of youth organisations** in working with youth, especially when promoting civic awareness and involvement. It is particularly important to boost the capacity of structures for working with youth, so that young people, youth organisations and everyone involved with them can become more knowledgeable, capable and focused for our shared future.

Success is where preparation and opportunities meet. It is important to ensure that there is a **horizontal approach to the Year of Youth**, including coordination, planning, cooperation and mutual trust, as well as appropriate funding. National youth councils, youth organisations and young people must be equal partners in coordinating, co-creating and implementing the Year at national, local and European level.

The National Youth Council of Latvia⁵ brings together 38 participating



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organisations from around Latvia. The Council intends to **take a leading role** in the European Year of Youth to use advocacy to boost its current positions, raise awareness among the public and decision-makers about the youth sector and youth participation in policy-making, and boost the capacity and development of youth organisations. For example, one of the **planned activities** is a cycle of discussions on the **11 European Youth Goals**⁶ in the post-pandemic period. The aim is to **draw up proposals for policy-makers** together with young people and youth organisations about **how to implement these goals** effectively in the emerging global situation.

2022, the year of Generation F



Klaas Johan OSINGA (NL)
*Senior International
Affairs
Advisor, LTO
Nederland*

The European Commission has designated 2022 the **European Year of Youth**⁷. The

aim: to **give young people new hope, energy and confidence in the future**, especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged, particularly in rural areas. It is understandable if they haven't heard the news from Brussels yet, because there is so much going on.

The European Year of Youth should

1. Eurostat, Unemployment statistics, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment_statistics#Youth_unemployment_trends
2. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en
3. European Commission, European Semester, https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester_en
4. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en
5. National Youth Council of Latvia, <https://ljp.lv/index.php/national-youth-council-latvia>
6. European Youth Portal, European Youth Goals, https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/european-youth-goals_en
7. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en

be about 2030 and 2050. That is what Brussels is all about. It has to appeal to young people: their future. You often hear the big word “transition”. This is about **green ambitions** clashing with the harsh realities of today. By the same token, the constantly changing nature of COVID-19 is fascinating. Every day there is something new. The **pandemic** confronts us with our lack of knowledge. The more experts there are, the more difficult it becomes. And then, a lot of knowledge is still no guarantee that it will be dealt with sensibly.

This contrast between knowledge and uncertainty, the short and the long term, is also the kind of discussion we

have in farming. **You can't always wait until everything is clear.** Entrepreneurs know that and **young people can learn from it.** Because why should our times be any different from those of our ancestors? In one century, they went from horse-drawn carts to Elon Musk. It just happened.

And when I talk to **young farmers and market gardeners**, I see that they are familiar with the big issues. They don't have blinkers on. And yet **they want to stay** in agriculture and horticulture. Sometimes against all logic. You can wait a long time for certainty, but then you get lost in doubt. So you follow your gut feeling.

After all, **entrepreneurship is about taking risks.** It takes courage and energy, then moving ahead one step at a time and, above all, taking pleasure in the small successes.

Just before Christmas 2021, the LTO Members' Magazine *Nieuwe Oogst*¹ (New Harvest) produced a nice edition about 'farmers' culture'. What this means is that, in addition to Generations Y and Z, there is now also **“Generation F”** (for Farmers), which will not be deterred and will roll up its sleeves. Go for it, Generation F!

1. LTO Members' Magazine, New Harvest, <https://www.nieuweoogst.nl/>

OP-ED

How can we make the Year of Youth meaningful?



Silja Markkula © EYF

Silja MARKKULA
President, *European Youth Forum*

Young people have different experiences, backgrounds and world views, but there is one thing we all have in common: we begin our own journey in the world. We leave our parents' homes for new adventures. We start families; we start our careers; we discover who we are.



© European Youth Forum

This period of transitions is full of opportunities but it is increasingly a source of anxiety for my generation. In the aftermath of a decade-long financial crisis and the coronavirus pandemic, the youth unemployment rate in Europe is more than double that of the general population. Research by the European Youth Forum¹ revealed that decision makers have paid little attention to young people's employment prospects,

education, wellbeing and mental health. As a result, we are suffering and we are paying the price.

Women, as well as young people from backgrounds subject to racial prejudice, are disproportionately affected. Left behind by structural discrimination, communities are held back still more by the pandemic and by recovery programmes that do not meet their needs.

The EU has dedicated the European Year of Youth² to boosting governments' focus on young people. If we want it to have a meaningful impact, it is time to take meaningful steps.

First, the EU should adopt a Youth Test, ensuring that no legislative act has an unmitigatedly negative impact on young people. Young people are underrepresented in political processes - a problem which could be addressed by a consultative Youth Test.

Second, we must collect more information regarding young people's experiences. If we are to

design effective budgets and policies, we must understand the barriers that young people face when seeking a job or searching for housing. This information must be disaggregated according to social factors, so that we expose the disproportionate allocation of risks and privilege.

Third, we must help young people start their careers. Unpaid internships have all but replaced paying entry-level positions, becoming a barrier to dignified employment. Young people are increasingly required to labour for years in so-called learning opportunities, before employers even consider them for a minimum wage position. During this time, some can rely on their parents' financial resources, but many others are forced to give up on their dreams. The practice of unpaid internships must end.

All young people deserve a bright future. The European Year of Youth is the opportunity to keep this promise.

1. European Youth Forum, <https://www.youthforum.org/>
2. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en

The integration of young people with disabilities: a priority in the context of the European Year of Youth



Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna © ONCE Foundation

PhD Miguel Ángel CABRA DE LUNA (ES)
Member of the Board of Directors and President of the International Relations Commission, Spanish

Confederation of Social Enterprises (CEPES)

Director of Alliances and Social and International Relations, Fundación ONCE

The decision of the European Parliament and of the Council of December 2021 designating 2022 as the **European Year of Youth**¹ aims to ensure a green, digital and inclusive future for all Europeans under 30.

[The Decision](#)² reflects the third Youth Goal, which forms part of the [EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#)³, aimed at **creating inclusive societies** that ensure the participation of all youth in society. However, young people with disabilities are scarcely mentioned in the Decision. The expressed mention of youth with disabilities in Article 2(b) should be welcomed. It states that the European Year of Youth shall aim to **help young people**



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with disabilities, as well as young people **from other disadvantaged backgrounds**, to acquire relevant knowledge and competences and thus become active and engaged citizens and actors of change. However, given that people with disabilities account for 15% of the population, a **greater focus** on young people with disabilities **would not have gone astray**.

The European Year of Youth offers the **best opportunity to increase the spotlight** on people with disabilities. This is not only an opportunity, but a must, given the [Council Recommendation](#)⁴ of 30 October 2020, replacing that which established the Youth Guarantee in 2013, which states that those who have any form of disability are at a disproportionate

disadvantage, as employment rates of people with disabilities are considerably lower than those of people who do not have any kind of disability. In turn, this **employment gap** is especially noticeable when speaking about young people with disabilities.

To address this issue, the Recommendation proposes strengthening the focus on people with disabilities, offering inclusive **education and training**, ensuring **accessibility**, and **combating stereotypes around disability in the workplace**. I strongly believe that these are the courses of action to which the European Year of Youth should dedicate the majority of its efforts. This would ensure that people with disabilities are effectively incorporated at the core of a future European society that is inclusive, environmentally friendly, and predominately digitalised.

I have no doubt that the EESC and all other European institutions will continue working towards this goal to ensure a fully inclusive future for our youth.

The European Year of Youth should raise interest in the professions and address the shortage of young talent



Rudolf Kolbe

Rudolf KOLBE (AT)
Vice-President, Diversity Europe Group
President, Austrian Federal Conference of the Liberal Professions

President, Austrian Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineers

The Commission has declared this year the **European Year of Youth**⁵ and this comes not a minute too soon. The aim of the initiative is to restore young people's optimism and confident

outlook for the future after years of challenging restrictions brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.

However, it is not only young people in general that need this initiative. As a long-standing representative of the concerns of the professions within the EU, issues such as supporting **talent development** and the **shortage of young talent** have featured prominently in my work. We are seeing shortages of doctors and workers with technical expertise left, right and centre. So how can we build the bridge between these two needs?



© Photographee.eu, Shutterstock

1. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en
2. EU, Decision of the EP and the Council on a EYY (2022), <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/PE-81-2021-REV-1/en/pdf>
3. European Youth Portal, EU Youth Strategy, https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_en
4. EUR-Lex, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020H1104%2801%29>
5. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en

While pre-pandemic support for young talent focused on recruitment, the challenges have become much more complex after two long years of distance learning and restrictions on freedom.

It is clear from the current developments in climate protection that young people – quite justifiably – do not feel sufficiently heard and taken seriously. We, as the older generation, will have to question many of our beliefs, move out of our comfort zone and make way for the “new”, in order

to engage with young people on an equal footing and restore enthusiasm and trust.

As a link between the EU institutions and civil society, the **EESC** in particular must make use of the European Year of Youth and be open, as an institution, to much **broader involvement of young people** and their ideas and visions. Only on this basis will we be able to design funding programmes and measures in a way that ensures they are both used and useful.

We need to make genuine **efforts to generate enthusiasm for the professions** – from healthcare professions to legal professions and technical professions! These professions have such great potential to serve the common good and help deal with crises more effectively. We need to show the significant contribution that **meaningful work** makes to **life satisfaction**. In this way, the European Year of Youth can become a win-win for all of us.

EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH – a lovely Christmas gift or a unique opportunity?



Neža Repanšek

Neža REPANŠEK (SL)
Trainer and Facilitator, National Youth Council of Slovenia

In early December 2021, the **European Year of Youth**¹ announcement came as an early Christmas gift – or like a bolt out of the blue. The **initial excitement** of all of those who dedicate their lives to improving the lives of young people, was suddenly overwhelmed by **substantial concern**. Developing a new, unique, “never heard of” initiative to implement in 2022 (that was only two weeks away), felt like mission impossible. After years of struggling for the spotlight in the EU, we were given a strong blast of attention out of nowhere.

In reality, **we were not unprepared**. Topics relevant to young people are not outdated – they are even more focused in light of the ongoing pandemic. Mental health, labour market rights, housing challenges, independent living – challenges of our daily realities.

In September 2021, as part of the [Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU](#)², the [European Youth Conference](#)³ looked at the whole cycle of [EU Youth Dialogue](#)⁴. It evaluated the intermediate results of the 8th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue and, most importantly, what is still missing in order to create “Spaces and Participation for all”. [Joint recommendations](#)⁵ of the 8th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue “YOUth for Europe and Europe for YOU” requested that both the Member States and the European Commission always give **concrete feedback**

In the European Year of Youth, efforts will focus on synergies and complementarity with other EU programs for young people in all policy areas.

The Year will offer an **ideal opportunity for the EESC** to get even more involved in topics essential to future generations. In collaboration with the [European Youth Forum](#)⁶, we want to create an **EU Youth Test**. This idea resulted from consultations with young people and youth organisations, who consider a clear need to include young people in policy-making, meaningful engagement, impact assessment and follow-up. The Youth Test provides a platform for all these.

Let us find concrete ways to overcome our indifference and contribute to this unique opportunity the European Year of Youth brings.



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to young people, and ensure a **mutual evaluation process** whenever they involve them in their decision-making process, to make sure that participation is real.

1. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en
2. Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2021, <https://slovenian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/>
3. Slovenian Presidency, EU Youth Conference, <https://slovenian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/events/eu-youth-conference/>
4. European Youth Portal, Previous cycles of the EU Youth Dialogue, https://europa.eu/youth/get-involved/eu-youth-dialogue/previous-eu-youth-dialogue-consultations_en
5. Slovenian Presidency, Recommendations 8th EU Youth Dialogue, <https://irp.cdn-website.com/66e920f6/files/uploaded/EUYC-Joint-recommendations-of-the-8th-Cycle.pdf>
6. European Youth Forum, <https://www.youthforum.org/>

A successful European Year of Youth leads to enhanced political participation among young people



Vertti Kiukas © EESC

Vertti KIUKAS (FI)
Secretary-General, SOSTE Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health

Europe has managed the COVID-19 crisis much more successfully than the financial and euro crises of a decade ago. Bold and decisive action was taken, and it seems that we will avoid the lost decades observed across Europe after previous crises. We saw less emphasis on balancing budgets and more emphasis on balancing the whole of society.

The [European Year of Youth](#)¹ is a reaffirmation of the principle that Europe does not only strive to avoid public debt, but also a social and skills debt. **Europe succeeds or fails with the well-being economy** – with social investment in education, social protection and health. Our

future is built on productivity achieved by a skilled, healthy and protected population. In this way, we can not only achieve growth, but also safeguard social cohesion, and in doing so preserve our social structures whereby those who can work support those who cannot.

In this project, **we need the voice of young people**. The youth of today will have to bear the burdens of tomorrow, but the investments of today are crucial in order to enable them to do so. Young people must be heard when we make choices between investing or saving today.

It is worrying that young people see traditional political participation as less important. Youth activism and participation in social movements are



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necessary and welcome. Strong states require strong and autonomous civil societies to ensure states act in the public interest. However, we also need young people to see how it is possible to channel their concerns directly into the political process. We need not only to **listen to youth activists**, but also to **enable young people to rise into decision-making positions** in society. The European Year of Youth will prove a success if it enables permanent changes in this direction.

The European Year of Youth is sounding a bell. That bell should echo across years and decades.

NEWS FROM THE CATEGORIES

Consumers and Environment Category discusses climate change, energy and sustainability

A meeting of the [Consumers and Environment Category](#)² was held on 7 February 2022. The morning session focused on the presentation of **ongoing opinions and other work of the Category**.

Co-spokesperson Bernardo Hernández Bataller reported on the passing of José Pegado Liz, a former Member of the Category and Diversity Europe Group. The intervention was followed by a minute of silence. A letter of condolence will be sent to his family.

The meeting then moved on to the presentations of current opinions: Lutz

Ribbe, rapporteur for opinion [TEN/761](#)³ on *Energy prices*; Martin Mordechaj Salamon, rapporteur for opinion [TEN/763](#)⁴ on *Revision of the Directive on the energy efficiency of buildings*; Cillian Lohan, rapporteur for opinion [NAT/843](#)⁵ on *'Fit for 55': delivering the EU's 2030 Climate Target on the way to climate neutrality*, and Arnaud Schwartz, rapporteur for opinion [TEN/760](#)⁶ on *What conditions are necessary for the social acceptability of the energy and low-carbon transition?* Kęstutis Kupšys, Member of the study groups [ECO/566](#)⁷ on *Solvency II and* [ECO/549](#)⁸ on *Taxonomy of Sustainable*

Finance - Climate Change presented the work of both study groups.

The afternoon debate was devoted to the subject of **planned obsolescence**. Laetitia Vasseur, General Delegate of the association *Halte à l'obsolescence programmée (HOP)*⁹, recalled the history of planned obsolescence and its evolution

1. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en
2. EESC Consumers and Environment Category, <https://europa.eu/INF36rW>
3. EESC opinion TEN/761, <https://europa.eu/IRYjJQ>
4. EESC opinion TEN/763, <https://europa.eu/!hPHhWk>
5. EESC opinion NAT/843, <https://europa.eu/!UbjcWb>
6. EESC opinion TEN/760, <https://europa.eu/!G8gcRt>
7. EESC opinion ECO/566, <https://europa.eu/!mbG4GM>
8. EESC opinion ECO/549, <https://europa.eu/!mUn7BM>
9. Halte à l'obsolescence programmée, <https://www.halteobsolescence.org/>

since 2012. HOP was created in 2015 to fight against planned obsolescence and, more generally, to promote the extension of the life of products. The association is currently preparing a study on the reparability index, which will be available in April 2022. The repair fund and the concept of labelled repairers have also recently been implemented.

In the last part of the meeting, Marie-Laurence Drillon, responsible for consumer affairs in the EESC [INT Section](#)¹, gave an overview of past and future events. She presented the conclusions of the [European Consumer Day](#)², which took place on 10 December 2021. Ms Drillon informed Members about

the organisation of the [Consumer Summit](#)³ on 10 February 2022.

The **next meeting** of the Category is scheduled to take place on 20 June and will be devoted to the subject of **environmental health**.

The Farmers Category discusses CAP strategic plans and gives an update on the Fit for 55 package

On 11 February, the EESC [Farmers Category](#)⁴ held the first meeting of the year chaired by the two spokespersons Arnold Puech d'Alissac and John Comer. Members discussed how EU countries will implement the **new European Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)**⁵ with a CAP strategic plan at national level, and received an update on the ongoing EESC opinions on the proposed [Fit for 55 package](#).⁶

The first part of the meeting saw the Category Members **Andreas Thurner** (AT), **José Manuel Roche Ramo** (ES) and **Joe Healy** (IL) present the different Strategic Plans submitted by their home countries. **Alexander Bartovic**, Head of the CAP Strategic Plans Coordination Unit at the European Commission,

explained the process and where it stands at the moment: EU countries were given until 31 December 2021 to submit their **national CAP strategic plans**. Following this, the Commission now has six months to approve the plans ahead of their implementation in January 2023. The presentations were followed by a lively debate between all Members.

In the second part of the meeting, Mr Thurner gave an update on the ongoing EESC opinions related to the **Fit for 55 package**. Mr Puech d'Alissac encouraged Members to be more actively involved in future opinions in order to make clear the key role of farmers and their need for support in implementing the [Farms to Fork](#)



[Strategy](#)⁷, the [Biodiversity Strategy](#)⁸ and the [Green Deal](#).⁹

Finally, Mr Thurner presented the [EESC organic awards](#),¹⁰ which acknowledge different actors along the organic value chain who have developed an innovative, sustainable and inspiring project producing real added value for organic production and consumption.

The next meeting of the Farmers Category will take place on 6 July.

MEMBERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Your Europe, Your Say! 2022 kicks off for Dutch students with a visit by Vice-President Jan Dirx

Jan DIRX (NL)

*Vice-President, Diversity Europe Group
Liaison Officer, Groene 11 (Green 11), Dutch
nature and environmental organisations*

Since 2010, the Committee's annual youth event **Your Europe, Your Say!** (YEYS¹¹) has been bringing together around a hundred secondary school students and more than 30 teachers from all of the EU's Member States and its five candidate countries each year to debate a topical issue that affects young people. Pre-pandemic, the event took place in

person in Brussels. Unfortunately, for the second year running, this year's event will have to take place fully remotely, on 31 March and 1 April.

YEYS 2022 is entitled *The truth about lies. Youth challenging disinformation*. The focus will be on fake news, getting young people thinking, and encouraging them to think critically to combat disinformation.

The vice-president of the Diversity

1. EESC, Section for Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT), <https://europa.eu/!pk46ky>
2. EESC, European Consumer Day 2021, <https://europa.eu/!CUdMfp>
3. European consumer Summit 2022, <https://european-consumer-summit-2022.b2match.io/home>
4. EESC Farmers' Category, <https://europa.eu/!QWU9UT>
5. European Commission, The news CAP 2023-27, https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/new-cap-2023-27_en
6. European Commission, Fit for 55 package, <https://europa.eu/!Yxy44r>
7. European Commission, Farm to Fork strategy, https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en
8. European Commission, Biodiversity strategy for 2030, https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en
9. European Commission, A European Green Deal, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/>
10. EESC organic awards 2022, <https://europa.eu/!HtRHym>
11. EESC, Your Europe, Your Say! 2022, <https://europa.eu/!MYg99T>

Europe Group, **Jan Dirx**, had recently the privilege to present YEYS at the school selected in the Netherlands for this year's event – **Rotterdam International Secondary School**. Some 70 students and two teachers gathered on a rainy Tuesday morning in a large space in the school building, where they could **hear about the event and ask questions**, at a distance from each other.

The meeting with Mr Dirx also marked the **start of the selection process** for the school's YEYS participants. Per school only **three students** can participate, in addition to one teacher. The teachers had devised a fully fledged selection procedure for this, partly to enable the students to gain experience of such a process. Students must first submit an application letter



Jan Dirx and students from the Rotterdam International Secondary School

setting out why they want to take part, their knowledge of the topic and their own qualifications. From the applications received, the teachers will select a number of candidates

to be interviewed. The teachers will then make a final choice of the three students to represent the school in YEYS 2022. This will undoubtedly be a strong Dutch delegation.

The 2022 edition of Your Europe, Your Say

"Your Europe, Your Say!"¹ is the EESC's annual event for young people. Schools from all of the 27 EU Member States, the 5 EU candidate countries and a Brussels-based European school are invited to apply to take part and one school from each country is then selected by drawing lots. The selected schools then each choose three pupils and one accompanying teacher to meet virtually and discuss, debate and draw up recommendations addressed to the EU institutions. In 2022, a total of 99 students and 33 teachers will be invited to attend the event.

This year, **the discussions will focus on disinformation and fake news**. The goal of the event will be to raise awareness of the dangers of disinformation and to encourage the participants to become more



active in the fight against fake news. It will focus on helping youngsters to detect disinformation easily and act against it. This EESC activity will be linked to the youth chapter of the [Conference on the Future of Europe](https://futureu.europa.eu/?locale=en)² and flagged as one of the main youth events for the [European Year of Youth](https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en)³, because a European youth that can make choices on the basis

of trustworthy information is vital to our shared future.

You can follow the [#YEYS2022](https://twitter.com/YEYS2022)⁴ event live on **30 March and 1 April** on the [Your Europe, Your Say! Facebook page](#).

For **more information** please visit the YEYS webpage here: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/yeys2022>

1. EESC. Your Europe, Your Say! 2022, <https://europa.eu/IMYg99T>

2. Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://futureu.europa.eu/?locale=en>

3. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en

4. [#YEYS2022](https://twitter.com/YEYS2022), https://twitter.com/search?q=%23YEYS2022&src=hashtag_click

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST PLENARY SESSION

The European Year of Youth must be more than a tokenistic photo opportunity for decision-makers

The **European Year of Youth (EYY¹)** was discussed during the January plenary session.



Miriam Teuma © EESC

Miriam Teuma, president of the [European Steering Committee for Youth²](#) at the Council of Europe, discussed the **negative impact of COVID-19** on young people and called for youth empowerment based on respect. She highlighted the importance of **youth work**, which led to active citizenship, civic engagement, and social action. She concluded by drawing attention to the [“Democracy Here, Democracy Now”³](#) campaign, which focused on meaningful youth participation in democracy.



Joe Elborn © EESC

Joe Elborn, secretary-general of the [European Youth Forum⁴](#), spoke of his wishes for the EYY 2022, stating that there was a need to embed real and lasting change in policy-making, to improve the **availability of data** related to youth, and to **reinforce institutions active in the youth sector**. He indicated that the EYY had

the potential to be a catalyst for youth involvement and consideration at all levels, if risks were taken, money was invested, and the EU was redefined for young people.



Anne Kjaer Bathel © EESC

Anne Kjaer Bathel, representative of the [European Young Leaders⁵](#) programme, spoke about the work of the [ReDi school⁶](#), which she had created to educate refugees in Germany. She urged that European young people be given a voice for the future.

EESC Diversity Europe Group Members contributed to the debate.

Michael McLoughlin said this Year was about the sustained involvement of young people in decision-making and that youth participation had to be ongoing and real. **Katrina Leitāne** said that it was crucial for youth participation to begin at a local level, and emphasised the role of grassroots organisations in laying the groundwork for this. In her view, the Year should promote a narrative that addressed all aspects in order to “stay true to the dreams of European young people for our Europe”. **Jarmila Dubravská** highlighted young people as the driving force in agriculture.



Jarmila Dubravská © EESC

Svjetlana Marijon expressed her resentment about the fact that the EYY had been decided upon only after the adoption of the 2022 budgets, and **Vladimír Bálež** addressed the issues facing young Roma people in Central and Eastern Europe.

Ms Teuma stated that the Council of Europe was trying to use the Year to break down barriers between entities and young people at the EU level.

Mr Elborn suggested introducing a youth test or some form of obligatory mechanism to assess the impact of policy from a youth perspective.

Ms Bathel said it should be less bureaucratic for young people to engage with Europe and called for more young social entrepreneurs.



Svjetlana Marijon © EESC

All participants emphasised that the Year must be much more than a tokenistic photo opportunity for decision-makers.

A video recording of the plenary debate is available at: https://fb.watch/b6oZs_3mkA/

EESC backs priorities of French EU Council Presidency

The Secretary of State for European Affairs in the French Government, **Clément Beaune**, joined EESC Members for a **debate on the priorities of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU⁷** during the January plenary session. The French Council Presidency

started on 1 January 2022 and will last for six months and focus on the following **watchwords**: resilient, strong, sustainable and inclusive Europe. **Mr Beaune** outlined the presidency's priorities, which include **a sovereign Europe**, for instance with regard to challenges related to

1. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en

2. Council of Europe, European Steering Committee for Youth, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/cdej>

3. Council of Europe, Now campaign, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/democracy-here-now>

4. European Youth Forum, <https://www.youthforum.org/>

5. Friends of Europe, European Young Leaders, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/initiatives/european-young-leaders/>

6. ReDi School of Digital Integration, <https://www.re-di-school.org/>

7. French Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/>



Clément Beaune © EESC

migration, and the [Schengen Area](#)¹. He also spoke about the need for a social and fair green transition, for instance

with regard to the **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**² and rules for imports and exports. Mr Beaune highlighted the success of [Erasmus+](#)³ and the [European Civic Service](#)⁴ in allowing young people to have a true European experience. Initiatives like that needed to be continued and built on.

The Diversity Europe Group president, **Séamus Boland** and Group Member, **Thierry Libaert** participated in the general debate. **Mr Boland** welcomed



Séamus Boland © EESC

the ambition, optimism and confidence of the French Council Presidency. He said that people need assurances that Europe will stand by its fundamental values. Mr Boland stressed the need to face up to the responsibilities of climate change and relations with China. There was more room for manoeuvre on EU approaches, especially in social policy areas.

Mr Libaert saw a need to revitalise and promote civil society organisations. He hoped that the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#)⁵ would lead to meaningful decisions so that proposals from European citizens



Thierry Libaert © EESC

were heeded. It was a question of credibility. Mr Libaert called on the French Council Presidency to **speak more**

about Europeans and less about European Union in order to bring populations together.

In his reply to the comments by EESC Members, **Mr Beaune** recognised the Committee's input in the areas of digitalisation, climate change and society. He concluded by saying that fundamental rights need to be activated in Europe and around the world.

The full debate can be watched at: <https://fb.watch/b6oW9xXxuh/>

OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK

The last EESC plenary session took place on 19 and 20 January 2022, in a hybrid format. The EESC plenary adopted 16 opinions, 5 of which were drafted by Members of the Diversity Europe Group. A list of the recent work can be found below.

Giuseppe GUERINI (IT), rapporteur, [INT/965](#)¹ Innovative financial instruments as part of the development of social impact companies

Joël DESTOM (FR), rapporteur, [ECO/567](#)² The benefits of the outermost regions for the European Union

Juraj SIPKO (SK), rapporteur, [ECO/568](#)³ Euro area economic policy 2022

Miguel Ángel CABRA DE LUNA (ES), rapporteur, [SOC/687](#)⁴ Towards a New Care Model for the Elderly: learning from the COVID-19 pandemic

Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL), co-rapporteur, [INT/947](#)⁵ Next Generation SME Strategy – Enhancing Effective and Swift Delivery

The **complete texts** of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's [website](#)⁶.

The **next EESC plenary session** will take place on **23 and 24 March 2022**. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website](#)⁷.

A list including all **new work appointments** of Diversity Europe Group Members is available on the Committee's [website](#)⁸.

1. European Commission, Schengen Area, <https://europa.eu/lyFhhkC>
2. European Commission, CBAM, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ganda_21_3661/smo
3. European Commission, Erasmus+, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>

4. Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://future.europa.eu/?locale=en>
5. EESC opinion SOC/323, <https://europa.eu/lkjpvvx>
1. EESC opinion INT/965, <https://europa.eu/lrU7KGg>
2. EESC opinion ECO/567, <https://europa.eu/lQrhdGU>
3. EESC opinion ECO/568, <https://europa.eu/lpvc7vC>
4. EESC opinion SOC/687, <https://europa.eu/l4kQmHM>

5. EESC opinion INT/947, <https://europa.eu/lT7DNPT>
6. EESC opinions, <https://europa.eu/lwF86wY>
7. EESC plenary sessions, <https://europa.eu/lDg84qG>
8. EESC, New work appointments – January 2022, <https://europa.eu/lQDpnM8>

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE EESC OPINION SOC/699?

An interview with the rapporteur for the opinion on “Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States”.



Marina Elvira Calderone
© EESC

Marina Elvira CALDERONE (IT)
Co-spokesperson, EESC Liberal Professions Category
President, National Council of Labour Consultants
President, CUP association for the professions

Your opinion was adopted by the EESC plenary in September 2021. What are the three main findings of this opinion?

Opinion SOC/699 is devoted to guidelines for Member State employment policies for the year 2021. The first result relates to the enhancement of the guidelines to boost the demand for labour, increase the supply of labour and improve access to employment, skills and competencies, improve

the functioning of labour markets and the effectiveness of social dialogue, promote equal opportunities for all, foster social inclusion and combat poverty. The second main result is related to the affirmation that the coordination of effective employment policies is a fundamental action to improve the

level of cohesion between Member States and reduce the conditions of social and economic disparity. The third result relates to the fact that this very important opinion was discussed and approved with high levels of agreement and unity of purpose.

How could these issues be addressed? What are your three main proposals?

In order to increase labour supply and improve access to employment, skills and competences, effective coordination between training and labour market investment measures in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs¹) and the Structural Funds² is crucial. It will also be necessary to promote the creation of effective national activation systems for work, which

allow for the integration, retraining and relocation of workers. To this end, the opinion contains a proposal for the creation of a European digital platform for matching labour supply and demand, which would constitute a standard shared between Member States and employment services, in order to promote active policies and European mobility, not least by strengthening both public and

private employment services. Finally, in order to promote equal opportunities for all, social inclusion and the fight against poverty, it is important to set up systems shared by the Member States that are able to promote gender policies, the integration of people with disabilities and people in particularly fragile conditions.

In the opinion, what do you recommend with regard to youth employment policies?

Talking about the future means talking about young people and about getting them onto the labour market. When it comes to innovation for the European social fabric, the impetus from the younger generations, who must be guaranteed access to quality and stable jobs, is crucial; the mobility of workers between Member

States must also be promoted. In the opinion, we felt we could only agree with the content of the Porto Declaration³, which states that “young people are an indispensable source of dynamism, talent and creativity for Europe”. To this end, it is also important to stimulate States’ ability to promote measures to support self-employment,

intellectual and professional work, especially for young people, including new business activities and innovative start-ups.

2022 will be the European Year of Youth⁴ and it is crucial to discuss and analyse initiatives and tools to ensure we have an inclusive labour market with skills that are adapted to evolving and digitalised processes.

1. European Commission, NRRPs, <https://europa.eu/jit78Jr>
2. European Commission, European Structural and Investment Funds, <https://ec.europa.eu/regional>

[policy/en/funding/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/en/funding/)
3. Council of the EU, Declaration of Porto, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/05/08/the-porto-declaration/pdf>

4. European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en

After the adoption of the opinion, what have you done to promote the opinion and to make civil society's voice heard?

The active and structured involvement of social partners and civil society organisations is essential for implementing the NRRPs and achieving the objectives of the action

What are the next steps?

There is a need to establish effective dialogue procedures that facilitate real exchanges with national governments and institutions and encourage effective consultation

plan. To this end, my organisations, *Consiglio Nazionale dell'Ordine dei Consulenti del Lavoro*¹ (National Council of Labour Consultants in Italy), organised several meetings

and participation of civil society. To this end, we will continue to promote the debate on employment policies at the international level and in the EU institutions.

and congresses where the SOC/699 opinion and its important contents were discussed, also promoting the dissemination of its principles through the press.

Find out more about the EESC opinion SOC/699 on 'Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States' at: <https://europa.eu/!FRQTKy>

UPCOMING EVENTS

01-02/03/2022 – Extraordinary meeting of the Group in Paris

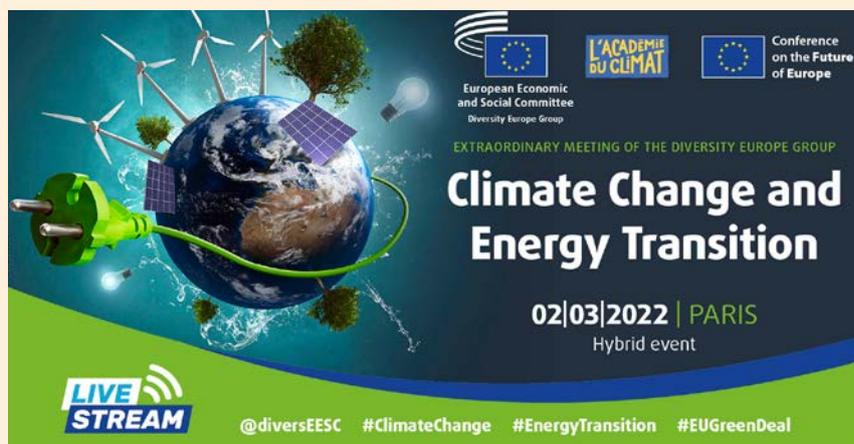
16/03/2022 – Meeting of the Social Economy Category

Extraordinary meeting of the Diversity Europe Group in Paris

On 2 March 2022 and in the context of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Diversity Europe Group will organise a conference in Paris entitled '**Climate Change and Energy Transition**'.

The hybrid event will take place at the French *Académie du Climat* and will bring together some 120 persons representing EESC Members, academia, French civil society organisations and representatives of the French local and national authorities. Topics to be discussed will include:

- The social dimension;
- Geopolitical and military challenges;
- Attitudes of citizens to climate change and the transition to clean energies;
- The perspectives of European youth;



- The role of finance;
- The role of advertising.

The **key note speaker** at the conference will be **Ms Emmanuelle Wargon**, Secretary of State to the French Minister for Ecological Transition, with particular responsibility for housing.

The conclusions and recommendations of the conference will be

part of the Group's contribution to the ongoing [Conference on the Future of Europe](#)². Simultaneous interpretation will be available from FR DE EN and into FR EN.

For more information and registration (Deadline: Friday, 25 February, midday) visit our website: <https://europa.eu/!C9WNNxT>

1. Consiglio Nazionale dell'Ordine dei Consulenti del Lavoro, <http://www.consulentidellavoro.gov.it/>
2. Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://futureu.europa.eu/?locale=en>

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