ORGANISE YOUR OWN ASSEMBLY

This is a toolkit to help you discuss your ideas for the future of Europe. It can be used by classes, in large groups of up to 40 people, or just by a few students who want to discuss together. We've tried to make it as flexible as possible so feel free to adapt it to your own context.

Why doing an assembly?

Secondary school students can shape the future of Europe!

For sure it does not always feel like that: decisions taken by others largely shape your days, shape your education, and have shaped the polluted planet you inherit.

But think about it: you have the longest life ahead of you and see most clearly how the future might look; you have energy, ideas and enthusiasm; and despite everything you have some freedom to decide how you spend your lives.

It might not happen quickly, and it certainly won't happen easily, but people currently at school are still in the best starting position to make changes for the better. You might not be able to change much on your own, but by working together you will be able to change everything. It can seem like a big task, and it is. But you are not alone.

So, what are you going to change?

How does this work?

Running an assembly is easy if you take the time to clarify what you want to discuss, how you will discuss it, and what outcomes from the discussion you want.

Think of all the participants in the assembly as a team: everyone is working together to achieve the common goal of three ideas for improving the future of Europe.

We suggest the following steps for your assembly:

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democracyrally.eu

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BEFORE the assembly

Before anything, you should list down what you want to get out of organising this, and you should convey the message to the participants you engage.

1. Gather together the people who want to take part in the assembly.

What topic do you want to talk about? Do you all want to discuss the same thing, or are some of you interested in climate change, others interested in ensuring decent jobs, and others in something else? Each assembly should be on one topic: so, either divide the group, or plan to have one assembly on one topic and one on another that everyone takes part in.

2. Plan a time, date and place for the assembly:

it could be in a classroom, in a sports hall, online via video-conferencing or in the public square - anywhere that is sufficiently calm to discuss. At least 2 hours are required, we recommend sessions between 2-3 hours, potentially divided into several sessions. Try to be clear about the time you want the assembly to last: knowing when it will end helps keep the discussion focused, and ensures the moderator can move the discussion from ideas to solutions!

3. Read the resource sheet on the topic that we have prepared in advance of the assembly.

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DURING the assembly

- Check if everyone who wants to take part is present and give a few minutes for people to arrive.

- See how big the group is: if you are more than 10 people, you may want to split into smaller groups of 5 or 6 to hold the discussion.

- In each group, nominate a moderator and a notetaker. These two roles are important to ensure that the assembly runs smoothly. (See below "Roles in the assembly" for more). Whilst these two people should stay the same throughout the discussion, or change halfway through for example, everyone else will alternate between being an active speaker and an active listener - you can also read about these behaviours below.

- Invite everyone to take 5 minutes to write a couple of sentences about how they see the future of Europe related to the topic you are talking about, and why they care about this topic enough to come to join the assembly.

- Recap the resource sheet and choose an exercise or two to think about together.

- Plan your time: roughly half the time should be used for exploring the topic, and half the time focused on coming up with ideas that can be solutions.

- Don't forget that good ideas for solutions can pop up at any time - perhaps it is the very first thing someone said at the beginning of the conversation! - this is why active listening and the role of the note-taker is so important! The instructions for each role are provided below.

- Ensure that everyone has a chance to express themselves, and that no one is dominating the conversation.

- Once you have spent half the assembly exploring the topic, the moderator should move the discussion towards finding solutions. These could be really big and difficult changes you think are necessary, or really small changes you think could make a big difference. For example, you might think that every student at school should be taught the importance of recycling (a small change that could perhaps make a big difference to carbon emissions), or that Europe should move from being a representative democracy with parliaments to making decisions through e-democracy and holding referenda (a big change, that you might think will make Europe more democratic). These ideas can be local, regional, national or Europe-wide

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- Think about how different ideas could be combined. Choose 3 from everything you have come up with. If possible, agree by consensus, finding ideas that complement each other and cover different aspects of the topic. If you can't agree by consensus, hold a simple majority vote. If you can't choose between some ideas, it is fine to come up with around 5 ideas.

Roles in the assembly

It can be useful to think about different roles each person plays. Like on any team, each person has an equally important role to play.

MODERATOR:

The moderator is responsible for ensuring each person who wants to speak has an opportunity, that the discussion stays focussed on the topic, and that the discussion moves from exploring an issue to coming up with ideas for solutions. We have prepared a specific guidance sheet for the moderator. We recommend that the moderator is more or less the same age as the participants. Make sure there is a pre-meeting before the assembly with the organisers and the moderator. The point of the pre-meeting is that: 1) organisers and facilitators finalise logistics and invitations together to ensure a smooth event, and 2) facilitators meet beforehand to get to know each other which ensures everyone knows their role, nobody steps on each others toes and in this way participants know who is in charge of what.

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NOTETAKER:

This role is important to keep track of what has been said, and particularly useful when trying to come up with conclusions. This role can be played by one person or more and could rotate through the discussion. Some suggestions for the notetaker are: 1) to note down bullet points first which however are complete enough to make sense, so that one is able to follow the conversation without missing any important points. 2) Notes must be clear, complete and legible. 3) Be mindful of the importance role you are engaged in. 4) Transmit notes within 24 hours of the assembly period. 5) Discuss with the moderator and the rest of the team if any specific format on the report is needed.

During the assembly, at different times each participant will play the following roles:

SPEAKER:

when you speak try to continue from where the last speaker stopped, so that the conversation moves forward. Share your thoughts honestly and with courage, and don't be afraid to say you are unsure or you don't know - thinking about the future is hard and no one knows exactly what to do or what will happen!

LISTENER:

listening to the person speaking is very important. You may write down what the person is saying, and even help them to fully explain what it is they want to say. When it comes to the end of the discussion, your memory of what you heard and found interesting is going to be crucial for coming up with the ideas you want to propose as a group.

GUARDIAN:

the assemblies should take place in a respectful, collaborative way in which each person feels like they can express themselves. Guardians of the assemblies ensure that these principles are respected and speak up to the group if they feel not everyone is getting an equal chance to speak, or if the discussion is not respectful.

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A draft timing for the assembly

We propose planning around 2 hours and 30 minutes. Below we propose a detailed time plan that you could use (to adapt according to how much time you have). It is often useful to remind everyone where you are on the agenda and how long you have been discussing each point, saying for example 'we've been talking about topics for around 10 minutes now, let's give ourselves 5 minutes more than move on to our ideas for solutions!'

1. Introduction of the assembly and the EU Democracy Rally - 5 MINS

2. Rules and roles setting - 10 MINS

3. Presentation of the topic (using the resources from the resource sheet) - **10 MINS**

4. Discussing - 30 MINS
Discussing one exercise on the resource sheet in the big group or in smaller groups if you have more than 15 participants. (During the break-out session of the assembly, make sure that 10 people = 30 minutes minimum for the discussion.) - 30 mins

5. What solutions do we have? - 50 MINS
Coming up with ideas in the big group or in smaller groups (depending on the number of participants) and presentation of those ideas - 50 mins: Guide participants in summarising and synthesising by providing time for reflection (individually and in groups) and rather than asking one person to do the work, distribute the task, potentially using a funnelling approach, where the individuals reflect on their own, and then at tables participants share their reflections and come up with 3 key points, and then these 3 key points are shared in plenary.

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6. Polishing recommendations - 15 MINS

Make sure there is a proper time period dedicated to polishing the recommendations before getting to the voting stage. This can include: reviewing together the proposal, reading them outloud to the whole group, explaining the different recommendations with different words.

7. Deciding on three top solutions using a voting method (multivoting, majority vote, consensus, etc.) - 20 MINS

Either the voting needs to happen 1) a few hours after the actual assembly 2) even the day after or 3) online voting later on.

The voting process should be accompanied by some moments of exchange on the recommendations, if the group decides so. Participants should be given the opportunity to voice their concerns and questions.

Once you have the listed solutions clearly listed, it is time to vote. You can decide on your voting method (1,2, or 3) and you should lead the group to voting by reading clearly out loud what are the proposed solutions and summarising the votes. Also, participants should be given the chance (if they wish), to comment on the voting process.

8. Closing the session and wrapping up - 5-10 MINS

Ending a conversation can often be a bit uneasy. What is something that can help here? We suggest that the closing "tone" is not over the top—but business-like and professional. First, use nonverbal cues to signal that the conversation is over. Change your position, gather your things together, finish your tea or coffee and so on. Then, have a little summary ready in your head. Include the most important decisions and resulting action points.

To find a conclusion, you can let the participants speak on how they perceived the activity, the voting process, and what they would like everyone to remember. You can take note of this experience and take them into account for your next assembly.

Finally, always remember to thank participants for their time and input.

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AFTER your assembly

Share and communicate about your assembly
In this section we are sharing a few tips for a clear, simple and healthy online communication strategy.

1. Identify your assembly objectives and communication Goals
Your objectives are the big picture, the big ambitions you have for your assembly and the results of effective communication efforts. Ideally your communications objectives align with the objectives of your organisation or initiative as a whole.

2. Determine your audience groups
This is the part of the communications plan where you determine with whom you wish to communicate. Whether it's youth, government officials, potential donors, or partner organisations, this is the chance to brainstorm what you know about each of these groups.
The idea is this: if you understand who your audience groups are and what motivates them, you are better able to tailor your message to achieve the goals and objectives listed in part one of your communications plan. In connection with this, you are also able to choose which is the best channel to reach your target audience group (Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and Facebook; press, newsletters, local actions, or others).

3. How to make the assemblies of solidarity visible on your social media.
I. We recommend that you use mostly accounts of partners' organizations or personal accounts with high reach. You can rely on Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and Facebook.

II. We recommend creating a Facebook event. For this you need to have: date, title of event, location, description and link to register

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III. Write a short blog post for your website that can be republished on your partners website (for example, on Euroalter, CTOE or EUDRally. You can add:

- Assemblies of Solidarity logo (link here)
- Short text description
- Illustration or photo; you can access some free credits photos here:
https://creativecommons.org/
- Writing a blog post to update your audience about the Assemblies of Solidarity in your country and in Europe

IV. Create social media posts with the instructions in the next point.

4. Social media instructions

A. Graphics and visuals

Social media visuals made on Canva, that can easily be adapted with different text language including: Event cover, Quote of a person, General statement (text with and without photo), Basic infographics, Flyer event, Poster event.

B. Suggested copy to use

"We invite citizens and civil society organisations to discuss the political urgency for the future of Europe, starting from the reforms that the European Union needs to make through a European Citizens Assembly!"

D. Hashtags and handless partners

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/citizenstakeover/

Twitter: https://twitter.com/takeover_europe

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/citizenstakeovereurope/

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Handles partners:

Facebook:
Alliance 4 Europe, Citizens Initiative, Another Europe is Possible, Civico, Democracy International, European Alternatives, EUmans, European Democracy Lab, European Civic Forum, Mehr Demokratie, New Europeans, Pulse of Europe, Take a Break from Brexit, The Good Lobby, We Move.

Twitter:
Alliance 4 Europe, Citizens Initiative, Another Europe is Possible, Civico, Democracy International, European Alternatives, EUmans, European Democracy Lab, European Civic Forum, Mehr Demokratie, New Europeans, Pulse of Europe, Take a Break from Brexit, The Good Lobby, We Move.

Hashtags

- Primary Hashtags: #AoS #AssembliesOfSolidarity #NotWithoutUs

- Additional Hashtags: #euRALLY #FutureofEurope #EUDR #DemocracyRally

E. Examples posts and proposed timeline

TIMELINE
(4 posts to announce the event + 8 about the discussed topics + 3 posts post-event)

5. Press
Reaching out to press: press release template + writing tips

If you decide to write a press release to promote your event, we have a few tips for you:

- Write a good headline, something that attracts the attention of journalists.
- Try to connect to an ongoing global happening or actions that have some relevance to your community

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- Write in your local language.
- Use the 5 Ws: An effective press release needs to answer the what, when, who, where and why. What is happening? Where and when? Why is it happening? Who's involved? A good press release must include this information.
- Include a quote when possible.
- Include the contact information, including a phone number when possible.
- Provide if and when possible visuals.

6. Video production instructions

- one video for social media. Film <u>vertically</u> and the video should be 2 minutes maximum.
- one video for the final documentary of the project. Film horizontally and the video should be 3 minutes maximum.

1. How to record a short video (for final video, for your own channels and for CTOE channels)

Tips and tricks for homemade videos:

What you need is:

- a phone with a good-quality camera
- a tie-mic:
  - <u>Cheap option</u>
  - <u>Wireless for android</u>
  - <u>Wireless for I-phone</u>

- film horizontally
- use a tie-microphone

Recording inside
Pros: clear sound, no interruption
Cons: artificial lighting, static

Recording outside

Pros: natural lighting, engaging and moving visual

Cons: outdoor noises (cars, people talking around) can be disruptive *(usually not with a tie-mic)*

Tip: try to have the major light source in front of the speaker, not behind.

7. Evaluating your communication actions.

Here are a few questions you can ask to determine whether your communications and communications plan have been impactful:

- Were your communications activities adequately planned?
- Did the recipients of the messages understand them?
- Did they follow your call to action?
- Were you on track with the timeline?

These have been the key tips for developing a successful communications strategy for your assembly.

Share & Communicate

1) Write down your top ideas on paper, thanks to the work of the notetaker

How would you change Europe to make it better in the future? Write your top three ideas as a sentence here:

Idea 1: ☐ _____

Idea 2: ☐ _____

Idea 3: ☐ _____

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2) Do one or two of you want to talk about the discussion and ideas you had in a short video? You could film this post the short videos online on Instagram, TikTok and Facebook and use #euRALLY #EUDR #DemocracyRally so we can repost them!

Tag these accounts:

	Instagtram	Facebook
European Alternatives	instagram.com/euroalter	facebook.com/euroalter
TechSoup	https://www.instagram.com/techsoupitalia/	https://www.facebook.com/TechSoupItalia

3) Share the short sentences of each participant that you wrote at the beginning of the assembly, perhaps with a **portrait photo** of each participant who wants to and send them here.

Once you send your ideas, we will set up online assemblies between your group and other groups of students discussing similar ideas.

4) You can also send your ideas via email at: info@euroalter.com or team@democracyrally.eu

Ground rules for an inclusive use of social media

1. Go to people

Change up how you gather community input. Go to where people hang out whether it is a physical gathering space, like a coffee shop or community centre, or a "virtual" space like Facebook or online neighbourhood forums. Try also to make it fun! When you bring people together for a project discussion, think about how you can make it a social opportunity too.

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2. Understand local power dynamics

Design project activities in a way that provides dignity to everyone and offers a safe space to people's direct concerns and interests.

3. Engage around interests

Sometimes you have to participate in community issues that matter to others before making a connection to your own project

4. Ask for people's personal story

Encourage people to express their experiences and opinions in their own words first. Don't expect them to understand "plannerese" or technical jargon.

5. Translate your message when possible

Make sure you translate your message to relevant local languages and even try to adapt it to the blind and deaf communities, using subtitles or voice overs whenever possible.

Find out here more information about 10 Tips for Inclusive Community Engagement.

EXAMPLES & USEFUL RESOURCES

USEFUL RESOURCES

- Assemblies of Solidarity explained
- Assemblies in the context of Transeuropa Festival
- Assemblies of Solidarity explained by Laura Parker
- Outcomes of Assemblies of Solidarity: The Palermo Climate Declaration

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EXAMPLE 1 - Addressing Climate Change

The planet is heating up, and that is causing extreme weather events, the melting of the ice-caps and is causing species of animals to go extinct. It even threatens continued human life on earth.

The Paris agreement made in December 2015 by 190 countries from all over the world aims to limit global warming below 2°C, but there are few binding measures countries are obliged to follow, and progress towards reducing emissions has been slower than the heating up of the planet.

Plenty of young people and others have been calling for the European Union to do more to address this global problem.

So what is it currently doing?

EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

The EU plans to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. That means that the European Union would not emit more greenhouse gases (the kind that cause the planet to heat) than it absorbs. It aims to reduce its greenhouse gas emission by 55% lower than the 1990 levels by 2030.

It plans to do this by a combination of:
- **An emissions trading scheme: This means that industries that produce a lot of CO2 emissions have to buy the right to make these emissions by buying credits. Industries have a strong incentive to avoid emissions as much as possible, if the credits are expensive enough. If they 'save' emissions, they can sell unused credits to another industry or factory. This scheme has been applied to factories, power stations, and other highly polluting industries since 2005. Now it is being extended to aviation, the building industry, road transport and maritime transport.**
- **Requiring EU member states to come up with their own plans to reduce emissions**
- **Protecting and expanding Europe's forests and protecting biodiversity**
- **A Climate Social Fund: This will provide money to support people who might lose their jobs as the economy is made more green, and will provide money for countries to invest.**
- **A Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism: This means that goods produced in countries outside of the EU (for example, China or the US) will be taxed when they are imported into the EU if they have created a lot of emissions.**

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POINTS OF VIEW

If it is probably fair to say that the EU is currently more ambitious in addressing climate change than any other part of the world, its plans are criticized for many reasons:

Some critics say that the EU countries have historically created more carbon emissions than anywhere else and have become rich compared with most other countries as a result. Perhaps the EU could go faster in cutting emissions to account for its historical role.

Other critics say that the target of carbon neutrality by 2050 is misleading: the EU does not plan to reduce its emissions by so much, but rather to use technology to absorb emissions. This technology is unproven, and may require large amounts of land.

Some people say the EU has nice ambitions, but when you look at what it actually does it is a different story. A good example could be the Common Agricultural Fund, which gives money to farmers around the EU and accounts for nearly 40% of the EU's budget. Nearly 80% of this money currently goes to very large farms, whereas more sustainable farming is usually done on smaller scales. Attempts to reform the Common Agricultural Fund to limit subsidies to large-scale livestock farms or factory farms, or to introduce conditionality so that farmers are only paid subsidies if they manage to reduce emissions have largely failed.

Many people fear that the Green Deal will increase economic inequalities: with people already more at risk of poverty because of lower education levels, being older, those people unable to afford newer cars that have less emissions, or people working in highly polluting industries will lose out with the changes. In order to address some of these fears, the EU is creating a 'Climate Social Fund' with money generated by the carbon trading scheme. The idea is this fund will provide support to vulnerable people, as well as provide funds for investment by member states in roads, energy efficient buildings and low emission buses and trains. Many people doubt this social fund will be able to address all the problems in a fair way.

Exercises (choose any to discuss in your group)

A) Imagine you have spent years working as a coal miner, and your adult son does not have a job: where you live there just aren't many other jobs than the coal mine. You understand that climate change is an important issue and that coal is highly polluting, so you know things have to change but you do not want to to lose your job and you would like your son to have a job.

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What would your priorities be for the future of Europe? Think about topics like training schemes for people who move from one job to another, creating new jobs, or even giving money to people who might lose their jobs in order for the economy to become more green.

B) Imagine you will be 16 years old in the year 2050: when you learn about what people did in the year 2021 to deal with climate change, what would you want it to say?

C) Imagine you live in a part of the world where there is not enough water, and where it is difficult to make crops grow. What would you think the EU should do to help you?

D) Do you think that a solution to the climate crisis could be just to reduce the amount we each consume? Eat less meat and only fruit and vegetables grown nearby in season, travel less, buy less things? How would this work to ensure everybody does it?

EXAMPLE 2 - The Right to Quality Education

Article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union says that everyone should have access to education and vocational training, that everyone has a right to free compulsory education, and that schools can be founded in accordance with democratic principles to ensure that parents can ensure the teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented disruption to education: UNESCO estimates over 85 per cent of all students around the world have been affected by school closures. In the EU, many students had to follow classes online, in a context where many students and teachers were badly equipped and trained for this, and where few clear guidelines and standards were developed, leading to very unequal access to quality education and uncertainty about the value of evaluations conducted online. Concerns have been raised about the reliance of schools on online tools developed by private companies. Both the mental and material health of students has been affected, highly unequally, with those relying on schools to provide food and an alternative to difficult home circumstances suffering most.

If the Covid-19 pandemic circumstances were exceptional, the experience has revealed underlying problems in the education system in Europe. The pandemic is not over, and it is not clear how it will end, and further ecological and public health emergencies may happen in the future.

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THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA

The European Union only has limited competences over education, which is largely the responsibility of national governments. Still, the European Union has always tried to promote coordination and learning between countries to improve education and training, often by promoting common standards.

Since 2017, the European Union has committed itself towards building a 'European Education Area' which should achieve 6 priorities:

- **Quality:** improve basic skills, entrepreneurship, creativity and civic engagement. Promote international exchange, language learning, and a European perspective, and ensure schools are safe, inclusive and free of disinformation
- **Inclusive:** challenging gender stereotypes, promoting gender equality, and promote social mobility (ie. whatever your background, you can be successful)
- **Green and Digital:** investing in green education, including learning about sustainability in natural and human sciences, and ensuring individuals have digital skills
- Improve teacher training and recruit more and better teachers
- Promote cooperation between European Universities and lifelong learning
- **Address global challenges:** promoting international cooperation between schools and universities, and encouraging reform of education systems in the Western Balkans and South Mediterranean

To evaluate the effectiveness of the European Union's Education policy, the Commission plans to publish a report in 2022 and 2025

POINTS OF VIEW

Education is the responsibility of the member states of the European Union; still, many people feel that that European Union did not use the influence it has over the coordination and quality of education effectively during the Covid-19 crisis by for example establishing common standards for online learning, or by targeting resources towards students most at risk of losing access to quality education. Slow progress means many of the details of the European Education Area are still to be worked out, most crucially how the Commission will coordinate between national governments.

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Some aspects of the objectives of the European Education Area are controversial with national governments. Disagreements between the EU and national governments have emerged when it comes to the teaching of national history for example, and the inclusion of points of view from other European countries in history textbooks, and also regarding gender, with some governments saying schools should promote a 'traditional family' model, or even, in the case of Hungary, that in order to protect young people there should be no education about LGBTQ rights. These disagreements go beyond the European Education Area and its objectives, and call into question some of the fundamental values of the European Union as such.

Some students and civil society groups have said that the European Education Area does not focus on all the areas that need attention, notably topics like mental health of students, civic education, and student participation in decision-making in schools and in education policy-making are all areas that could need more prioritisation. The European Union also has little to say on the inclusion of refugees in schools and lifelong learning.

Exercises

A) Do you think all students in Europe should learn the same thing at school? Or it should be different by country, or by region? Why?

B) Imagine you are a secondary school student called 'Rob' and you find it very difficult to do your homework at home because the house is very small, your younger brothers and sisters make too much noise and your parents are too busy working to help you. You used to go to the local library to do your homework, but it hasn't been open since the Covid-19 pandemic, and you don't think it will ever open again. Some of your friends have it much easier: they have bigger houses, no siblings, and a parent helps them understand their homework. What can be done to ensure you have a fair chance at getting a good education?

C) Imagine you are just about to finish secondary school in your small town in the countryside. Your teachers tell you you are clever and should go to a university in a big city. But you feel unprepared, and intimidated by the idea of moving far away, so you are thinking of maybe trying to find a job closer to home. What could be done so that you feel you have the same opportunity to go to university as other people coming from the city?

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D) Have you ever been on a school trip to another country, or part of an exchange with students from another country? Do you think online exchanges with students in other countries could be a good idea? How could online and offline exchanges be best combined?

EXAMPLE 3 - Jobs for Young people

According to the EU's statistics, nearly 3 million young people under the age of 25 who could work are currently unemployed in the European Union, which is about 17% of this age group. These statistics only count people who have actively been looking for work in the last four weeks, and not all of those who might have given up looking – so they are almost certainly a big underestimate. This is a much higher rate of unemployment than for other age groups, and the last big economic crisis of 2009 showed that economic crises hit younger people harder than other age groups and they are more likely to lose their jobs, or not be able to find a job.

The European Union was slow to take initiatives to address youth unemployment in the financial crisis beginning in 2009, and youth unemployment in some countries like Spain and Greece reached well over 50% by 2013, and in the EU as a whole the rate got nearly to 25%.

The EU was quicker to act when the covid-19 pandemic hit, by renewing and extending the policy measures that were created during in 2013. Still, in 2021, there were nearly 14 million people aged 20-34 who were not in employment, education or training (so called 'NEET's).

EUROPEAN YOUTH GUARANTEE

In 2013 the EU introduced a European Youth Guarantee to address high youth unemployment. This Youth Guarantee was intended to guarantee that any young person in the EU under the age of 25 would receive within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education:
- A good quality work offer that matches their skills and experience
- A chance to continue their studies
- An apprenticeship or professional traineeship

The European Union made a budget of 6.4 billion euros from 2014-2016 as part of the 'Youth Employment Initiative' and then a further 2.4 billion euros from 2017-2020 available to countries in the EU that would apply for funds, on submission of a plan to ensure the youth guarantee in the country.

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According to the European Commission's own review in 2016, 14 million young people had entered the scheme, and 9 million took up an offer of employment or training or education. By 2020, the Commission claims there were 1.7 million fewer unemployed young people, and that 24 million young people registered in youth guarantee schemes had taken up an offer.

However, the European Court of Auditors found in 2017 that whilst some progress had been made in implementing the Youth Guarantee, it fell well short of providing a good offer to all NEETs within 4 months, and that the Youth Employment Initiative budget had played almost no role in achieving these objectives.

The Court of Auditors, and organisations such as the European Youth Forum, recommended that the Youth Guarantee should be more targeted to labour market gaps, and have a much greater outreach to different young people outside of employment, education or training, appreciating that these young people are very different one from another and not a homogenous group.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in July 2020 the European Commission proposed the reinforcement of the Youth Job Guarantee, and this was adopted by the European Council in November 2020. The major changes addressed some of the critiques of the earlier Job Guarantee:
- to extend the age group that can benefit from the guarantee to 30 years old
- to give more personalised guidance to young people matching their individual needs
- to ensure digital skills of young people and take account of the green and digital transitions of our societies.

Furthermore, the new budget of the EU from 2021 promises to provide more substantial funding for the implementation of the youth guarantee, if member states prioritise this when they apply for funding from European programs such as the European Social Fund Plus and the Recovery Fund.

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POINTS OF VIEW

Economies are complicated and difficult to analyse because many factors affect things like how many jobs are available and how well those jobs are paid. So, making an evaluation of the contribution of the EU Youth Guarantee to youth employment is difficult. Some people say that the reduced levels of youth unemployment that were achieved before the pandemic arrived were due to economic changes that the youth guarantee had nothing to do with. Other people argue that even if not all improvements in the situation of young people can be attributed to the youth guarantee, those young people who benefited from it will have improved their skills, education and chances of securing a secure job. Moreover, defenders of the youth guarantee argue that it is one of the most ambitious schemes for youth employment in the world, and one of the most innovative in the way it combines support for job seekers with training, advice and other forms of support.

More generally, the youth guarantee has been criticised for the following reasons:

-   youth unemployment is due to structural factors in the European economy, which depends on poorly paid and easily replaced young workers. Furthermore, the youth guarantee was first adopted in a context of austerity policies across Europe which saw massive cut-backs in state spending. The youth guarantee itself does nothing to address these larger characteristics of the European economy in general.

-   the youth guarantee scheme does not pay sufficient attention to the quality of the jobs young people are offered, in terms of pay, and in terms of rights and wellbeing at work, and it does nothing to empower young people to claim higher wages or more rights and health and safety protections at work.

-   the youth guarantee left too much scope to member states to decide how to try to achieve its objectives. It may be that with the new generation of the program, the EU will have a greater say in how they are run through the recovery program.

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Exercises (choose any to discuss in your group)

A) Despite lots of people not finding a job in Europe, there are shortages of people in many occupations. According to the European Union's survey of employers, these include software developers, engineers, and health-care professionals, but also carpenters, plumbers, bricklayers, cooks and heavy truck drivers. All of these jobs require specific kinds of skills which not enough people have. What can be done to ensure that young people want to learn these skills and do these jobs?

B) Imagine you are a young woman who left school four years ago. You worked briefly in a hairdressing salon, and then worked as a receptionist at a garage, but for the past year you haven't managed to find work.

Your boyfriend is in a similar situation: he has had a few jobs here and there, he is currently unemployed but looking all the time for work. You've decided you would like to have a child together: you've been planning it for years, and although you'd prefer to do it at a moment when both of you are earning money, you decide you don't want to wait forever – who knows when that will be? You are worried that with a baby, you (the woman) will be stuck at home and never have a job, whilst your boyfriend will probably manage to find something. What would help you to feel that you also have the right to work?

C) Imagine you are a young person living on the outskirts of a big city. You don't have the resources or the grades to go to university, but you would like to earn enough money to move out of your parent's house, and pay to go to a cooking school during the day. The only job opportunity you can find is to work as a delivery rider for a platform app – it is exhausting work, not very well paid and you haven't managed to take any holiday all year, but you manage to earn enough to rent a small apartment and go to cooking school. For such a person, do you think the government should do more (for example, paying for the person to be at cooking school?), or do you think this is a fair situation: you work hard, but you get to follow your passion for cooking? Do you think all young people who want to be cooks are in the same situation?

D) One radical idea to address unemployment has been to introduce a guaranteed income for everyone (this is called 'universal basic income'). Whether you work or not, you would receive enough money to ensure you do not live in poverty. This could mean that some people would choose to work less, and that could leave opportunities for other people to work. Because people would not be forced to accept a job, that could mean that work offers would need to be of a high quality, and sufficiently interesting and well paid for people to accept. What do you think of this idea?

E) Employers often complain that it is difficult to find young people with all the skills required for work. Do you think this suggests that schools are not adequately preparing people for work? Or do you think it should be the responsibility of employers to train staff? What could improve this situation?