YouthProAktiv

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YouthProAktiv 2026 Youth Declaration on "Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Growth"

YouthProAktiv promotes proactivity and entrepreneurship in education and policy, while upholding the European Union's commitment to empowering all citizens equally in society and democratic life. As young Europeans, we believe that sustainable and inclusive economic growth is imperative. Growth must serve people and respect the planet, creating dignified opportunities for all.

In 2025, 11% of young Europeans aged 15 to 29 were neither in employment, education, nor training (Eurostat, 2025), with rates nearly four times higher in some Member States than others. Too many young Europeans remain excluded from the economic transitions shaping our future, lacking the skills, opportunities, and voice to contribute fully to Europe's green and digital transformation.

The EU has already committed to action through the Recovery and Resilience Facility (2021), the European Green Deal (2019), and a strategic focus on sustainable and inclusive wellbeing (Strategic Foresight Report, 2023). Yet frameworks on paper are insufficient. They must become daily realities for 340 million young people whose futures depend on access to quality education, dignified employment, and genuine economic participation.

This Declaration highlights **four pillars** for restoring sustainable and inclusive economic growth: entrepreneurship and green innovation, decent work and dignified employment, education as the foundation of opportunity, and social inclusion in economic participation. Each is essential to ensure young people are recognised as equal contributors and architects of Europe's sustainable prosperity.

I. Entrepreneurship and green innovation begin with access and investment. Young Europeans must have genuine opportunities to create sustainable enterprises. Yet barriers to youth entrepreneurship remain entrenched: capital access favours established actors, and young people face systemic obstacles to launching ventures in green and digital sectors. Green spending generates multipliers of 1.1 to 1.7 times for renewable energy investment—far exceeding fossil fuel returns of 0.4 to 0.7 times, evidence that green policies genuinely enhance short-term economic growth (Economic Modelling, 2025; Batini et al., 2022).

The EU has mobilised historic investment: the Recovery and Resilience Facility allocates 672.5 billion euros, with 37% directed toward climate action and 20% toward digital transformation (RRP Assessments, 2021-2022). This represents an unprecedented opportunity for youth-led innovation in clean technology and circular economy solutions. Yet too many young people lack capital, skills, and support to participate.

Regional disparities compound the problem, with Eastern and Southern Member States showing weaker conditions for youth enterprise creation, even as these regions face the greatest need for sustainable economic opportunity (Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing Index, 2025). Without targeted support for youth entrepreneurship in green sectors, innovation will remain concentrated among incumbent firms and older cohorts.

II. Decent work and dignified employment must be the standard. Young people must have access to fair wages, social protection, skill development, and respect in work. Europe faces a profound demographic and labour market crisis—by 2040, Europe will have 17 million fewer working-age people, a contraction that will reshape entire economic sectors (Strategic Foresight Report, European Commission, 2025). This demographic shock coincides with labour market transformation driven by geopolitical uncertainty, the green transition, and digital disruption (Draghi Report, 2024). Young people face a double burden: acquiring new skills while competing in a shrinking labour pool.

Over half of the emissions reductions needed to meet climate targets depend on technologies currently in prototype and demonstration phases (Economic Modelling, 2025). These emerging sectors will create opportunities in clean technology, renewable energy, and circular economy services (IEA, 2024). Yet without deliberate investment in skills development and quality job creation, young people will be left behind. Europe must upskill at unprecedented scale over the next five years—a capacity challenge that is both urgent and achievable (Strategic Foresight Report, 2025). Critical gaps in STEM education and vocational training directly limit young people's access to well-paid employment in green and digital sectors (European Parliament Study, 2024).

The transition must be “just”: costs and benefits fairly distributed across regions and social groups. Young people in carbon-intensive industries and vulnerable regions must not bear disproportionate burdens. Fair transition mechanisms and targeted investment are prerequisites for inclusive growth. Without them, the green transition will deepen inequality.

III. Education is the foundation of opportunity and resilience. Young people must have access to quality education developing technical skills and lifelong learning capabilities. Yet educational opportunity remains deeply unequal. Underachievement in reading, mathematics, and science is increasing, and volunteering among young people is declining —reducing their opportunities to develop social capital and civic engagement (Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing Index, 2025). These trends are worrying because education is foundational to resilience, social cohesion, and democratic participation.

Large-scale reskilling must happen at unprecedented scale —a priority stressed in the 2025 EU's Strategic Foresight Report. Yet education systems remain insufficiently adapted to labour market demands, digital literacy gaps persist despite the digital transition, and STEM participation remains uneven, with girls and disadvantaged youth significantly underrepresented in critical fields (morning European Commission Assessments, 2024-2025). Lifelong learning remains an ideal rather than lived reality across the EU.

Europe has acknowledged this through Erasmus+ and the Digital Europe Programme, yet investment levels and policy coherence fall short. Unless addressed urgently, these barriers will deprive young people of the education needed for meaningful economic participation and perpetuate cycles of vulnerability and exclusion.

IV. Social inclusion in economic participation remains incomplete. Young people must participate fully in economic decision-making regardless of gender, origin, disability, or socioeconomic background. Yet economic participation remains profoundly unequal. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds face barriers to enterprise and quality employment, youth from rural regions lack infrastructure, young people with disabilities face persistent discrimination in hiring, migrant youth encounter structural barriers to economic integration, and gender gaps in entrepreneurship and high-skilled employment persist (Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing Index, 2025; Eurostat, 2024; European Commission, 2024).

The Sustainable and Inclusive Wellbeing (SIWB) Framework recognises that economic prosperity must couple with social inclusion and environmental sustainability (JRC, 2025). Research shows a critical insight: wellbeing in Europe is decoupled from GDP. Household disposable income has fallen behind economic growth, and regional disparities in opportunity and quality of life remain stark (JRC & Benczur et al., 2024). Northern and Western Member States record better conditions for inclusive wellbeing, while Eastern and Southern Member States show weaker situations. Without deliberate investment in inclusive opportunity, the green transition will widen inequality (European Environment Agency, 2024).

Currently, youth representation in sectoral bodies, and economic policy-making remains minimal. Without a youth voice, policies reflect incumbent interests rather than young workers' needs. This exclusion perpetuates inequality and prevents the innovation youth participation would bring.

To restore sustainable and inclusive economic growth, immediate and coordinated action is needed at all levels of governance.

At the European level, we call on EU institutions to:

- Sustain funding for youth entrepreneurship specially in green and digital sectors through Erasmus+ for Entrepreneurs and venture capital support, prioritising disadvantaged young people.
- Ensure systematic inclusion of young people in European economic governance structures, including Parliament committees and the Just Transition Mechanism design.
- Develop the EU Skills Agenda with measurable targets for youth STEM participation and vocational training in green and digital sectors.
- Increase funding for apprenticeships and lifelong learning with quality standards and fair compensation.
- Establish youth-focused employment pathways in clean technology and circular economy sectors.
- Commission annual monitoring of youth economic participation and wellbeing across Member States.

At the national level, we call on Member States to:

- Develop National Action Plans for Youth Employment with specific skill development targets in green and digital sectors.

- Establish accessible youth entrepreneurship support programmes with capital access and mentorship for underrepresented groups.
- Guarantee fair wages, social protection, and worker rights across all employment sectors.
- Invest in vocational education and apprenticeships responding to labour market demands.
- Implement just transition policies supporting young workers in carbon-intensive regions.
- Foster inter-ministerial coordination across education, employment, and enterprise policy.
- Fund youth organisations and civil society partners amplifying youth voice in economic decision-making.

At the local and community level, we call on municipalities, employers, and civil society to:

- Invest in mentorship networks connecting young people with opportunity and skills development.
- Create accessible entrepreneurship pathways including incubation and microfinance.
- Implement living wage standards and ensure quality work conditions in local enterprises.
- Support awareness campaigns promoting inclusive economic participation and challenging discrimination.

Engage young people in local economic development.Closing this Declaration, we affirm that young people are essential contributors and leaders to economies in transition.Our participation is a right and a practical necessity for Europe's sustainable prosperity.

Decisions taken today will shape our access to dignified employment, enterprise opportunities, and social inclusion for decades to come. The frameworks for sustainable and inclusive economic growth are already in place. Continued commitment, strategic investment, and cooperation across sectors will be essential to turn these frameworks into tangible opportunities for people and communities.

We call on the European Parliament, the Commission, all Member States, and economic actors to join us. By investing in youth entrepreneurship, guaranteeing decent work, ensuring quality education, and centering young people's voice in economic decision-making, Europe can become an economy of opportunity where every young person can thrive and shape our shared future.