



Our Life. Our Voice. Young people and poverty Final conference Brussels, 4 May 2017

Report

On 4 May, “**Our Life. Our Voice . Young People and Poverty**” reached its climax with its Final Conference organised in Brussels.

As we celebrated their involvement in this two-year Erasmus+ project, the “Our Life. Our Voice” young participants coming from Finland, Germany, Italy, Romania and the United-Kingdom presented their work and results, highlighting the need to be more ambitious to tackle youth poverty across Europe.

More than a hundred participants from the youth and social field, the civil society as a whole, as well as local, national and European public authorities discussed these results with the young participants with very encouraging outcomes!

Please find below the **highlights of the discussions** led during the whole Final Conference. A **list of all participants** is also included at the end of this report.

All “Our Life. Our Voice” project results, which were presented during the conference, are available on ourlifeourvoice.eu/results.

For more information about the whole project, you can also visit ourlifeourvoice.eu, the YES Forum’s [Facebook](#) page including all pictures taken during the event, or directly contact info@yes-forum.eu.

Welcome Party – Celebrating young people's achievements (3 May)

The day before the official start of the conference, all guests were invited to a Welcome Party to celebrate the “Our Life. Our Voice” young participants' involvement as well as their achievements during the whole project.



The young participants didn't only get gifts and certificates : **MEP Julie Ward** (S&D, UK, left picture) also gave an informal speech in their honour!



#OurLifeOurVoice Final Conference (4 May)

Introducing the conference after YES Forum's director **Annett Wiedermann** (left picture), **Karola Becker**, Board Member of *Internationaler Bund* (middle picture), insisted on the importance of including young Europeans at all political levels in order to secure the future of the European Union itself.

Giulia, a young "Our Life. Our Voice" participant from Italy (right picture), voiced the same message: "We need to be included in our present to build our future!".



"Our Life, Our Voice" from the Young Participants' Viewpoint

Interviewed by our moderator Flavie Singirankabo, the young participants then presented their own experiences with and the activities they have carried out over the past two years in order to investigate into youth poverty and formulate their own policy recommendations on how to tackle it.



Keynote speeches

During her keynote speech, **Martine Reicherts**, Director-General for Education and Culture at the European Commission (left picture), praised the young participants for their engagement. Many European Union initiatives are already under way or being developed to fight against youth poverty, Erasmus+ and the upcoming Solidarity Corps especially. But she also reminded the audience that “Everyone is an actor for change”, urging European youth to be even more vocal to change the society as left by their elders.

Rachid Madrane, Minister for Youth Support in the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Belgium (right picture), pointed out the dreadful constat that, while the European Union is one of the richest region in the world, poverty levels are still alarmingly high nowadays. "Talking about poverty in Europe should not only be shocking, but even inconceivable", he added.



Panel discussion – “Ending poverty as a political choice - Which way forward?”

To conclude the morning session, the panel debate “Ending poverty as a political choice - Which way forward?” was introduced by two young “Our Life. Our Voice” participants. Based on the project’s results, **Jess** from the United-Kingdom and **Sergiu** from Romania (left picture) highlighted two underlying factors to be addressed in priority to tackle poverty: education and its unequal access on the one hand, and discrimination and the stigma of poverty on the other hand.

Amana Ferro, Senior Policy Officer at the **European Anti-Poverty Network** (middle picture), pointed out the need to hold governments accountable for extreme poverty: living in dignity is a fundamental human right, and the lack of political commitment to eradicate extreme poverty constitutes an infringement of this right. According to her, the financial crisis is not responsible for today’s levels of poverty in Europe: how public authorities dealt with it is the real explanation.

Building upon a comment from Amana stating that "Social investment should be more supported, not just "skills"! ", **Valbona Hystuna** from ARSIS (Association for the Social Support of Youth, Greece, right picture) also advocated for more ambitious public policies against poverty, addressing it at its very root: "Some young people are too desperate to want education. You can't study on an empty stomach".





The panelists also addressed a crucial question: how to better include young people experiencing poverty themselves in policy-making.

While **Georgi Karaghiozov** (left picture) from the **European Commission** (DG Employment, Social Investment Strategy unit), reminded the audience that "Figures [on poverty] can be helpful in designing policies, but what matters the most is the experience of people living in poverty themselves!", **Ellen Gorris** (middle picture) (European Commission, DG Justice, Rights of the child) highlighted the progress made at the European Union level: for instance, all programmes managed by the DG Justice of the EC now have to include children in their own design and implementation. For this reason, the civil society's involvement is crucial to build bridges between local communities and the EU institutions.

The other panellists suggested other ways to improve policy-making by making it more inclusive. Agreeing with Amana Ferro who insisted that "Participation should be organic and embedded in all processes: design, implementation and evaluation", **Damien Burguet** from ATD Fourth-World Europe (right picture) asked public authorities "take more time to listen to people experiencing poverty": many participatory processes already exist, but they are at this point not accessible to disadvantaged people because they don't give enough time to grass-root actors to act as intermediaries.



Youth's Truth - Interactive exhibition about the young people's work

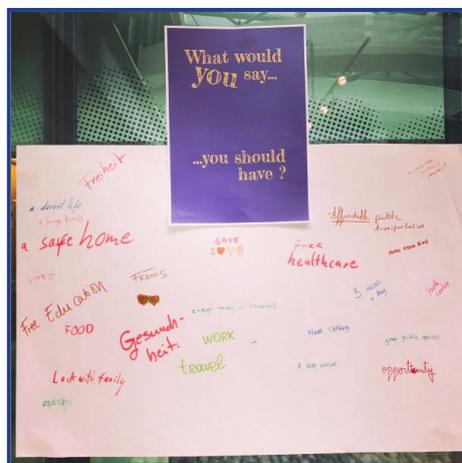
The afternoon began with interactive workshops by each national group – Finland, Germany, Italy, Romania and the United-Kingdom – to present the work they carried out during these last two years in the framework of the "Our Life. Our Voice" project, leading to the project's main results.



Recognition of Achievement and Closing remarks

Concluding the conference, **Manfred von Hebel** from the **German Erasmus+ National Agency** for Youth (left picture) congratulated the young participants for their motivation and dedication, while pointing out the key innovation of the “Our Life. Our Voice” project: working with, and not just for, young people to allow them to be the main actors of the project.

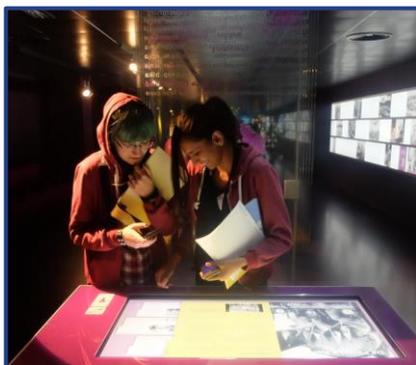
Edwin de Boevé, Director of **Dynamo International** (right picture), as a conclusion to the conference, insisted on one last aspect: nowadays tackling poverty can only be done at the international level, making international and especially European cooperation crucial, not only to support public policies, but even lead the way when public authorities fail to fight inequalities properly.



Bonus: “Our Life. Our Voice” young participants discover Brussels!

On the days before and after the “Our Life. Our Voice” Final Conference, the project's young participants also discovered Brussels and the European Quarter. They visited the European Quarter, discovered the Parliamentarium's many interactive activities on the EU and the European Parliament, and even paid a visit the European Youth Forum!

For the large majority of the young participants, it was their first time in Brussels, and the first time travelling by plane for some of them: another positive impact for the "Our Life. Our Voice" project, beyond its "Intellectual Outputs"!





Programme

3 May

19:00

Welcome Party - Dinner

Celebrating the success of young people's work & Networking
MEP Julie Ward, European Parliament (UK, S&D)

4 May

10:00

Opening and Welcoming

Annett Wiedermann, Director YES Forum
Karola Becker, Board Member of Internationaler Bund

10:30

"Our Life, Our Voice" from the Young Participants' Viewpoint

Young people from the project consortium

11:00

Keynote speeches

Ending poverty as a political choice - Which way forward?

Martine Reicherts, European Commission, Director-General for Education and Culture
Rachid Madrane, Ministre de l'Aide à la Jeunesse à la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles

11:45

Panel discussion

Ending poverty as a political choice - Which way forward?

Damien Burguet, ATD Fourth World, Djynamo Europe Coordination
Amana Ferro, European Anti-Poverty Network, Senior Policy Officer
Valbona Hystuna, ARSIS (Association for the Social Support of Youth, Greece), Youth Support Coordinator
Georgi Karaghiozov, European Commission, Policy Officer (DG Employment)
Ellen Gorris, European Commission, Coordination on the rights of the child (DG Justice)
2 young people from the project consortium

12:30

Open Debate and Q&A

13:00

Lunch

14:00

Youth's Truth

Interactive exhibition about the young people's work

15:45

Recognition of Achievement

Manfred von Hebel, Deputy Head of the German National Agency Erasmus+ Youth

16:00

Closing Remarks

Edwin de Boevé, Director of Dynamo International

Facilitator: Flavie Singirankabo





Project Details

Our Life. Our Voice. Young people and poverty (Grant Nr 2014-2-DE04-KA205-001641) is a two-year Strategic Partnership for Youth funded by the Erasmus+ programme, Key Action 2, and coordinated by the YES Forum.

From 2015 to 2017, groups of young people in 5 different EU countries – Finland, Germany, Italy, Romania and the United-Kingdom – worked together to explore young people’s experience of poverty and what it means for them to live in families struggling to make ends meet day to day.

The present document is a synthesis of the project’s Final Conference, during which all project’s results were presented. You can find all of them online on the project’s website (ourlifeourvoice.eu) or contact us directly.



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