

Horizon Europe working with and for our Children and Youth!

With the Strategic Plan for the Horizon Europe Programme, the European Union clearly highlights the importance of Research and Innovation (R&I) in finding new solutions to the challenges we are facing. Horizon Europe aims to induce R&I impact long after the programme has finished. Therefore, this position paper argues that children and youth need to be full-fledged partners in both the co-design process of Horizon Europe and its future implementation in order for impact to be achieved. Horizon Europe should work with and for our Children and Youth!

Key messages:

- For solutions to be found to the challenges we face in Europe we need new insights and creativity. Let us therefore recognise young people's agency, resilience and their positive contributions as agents of change¹. Without their involvement, Horizon Europe will not achieve the impact it seeks. While children and youth are crucial in all challenges, it is disconcerting to see little or no mention of them in the document: '*Orientations towards the first Strategic Plan implementing the research and innovation framework programme Horizon Europe*'.
- In order for young people to fulfil their potential as change agents we need to also invest in them. By having a better understanding of their development and the challenges they face, we can drastically improve their and our future. If we invest in child/youth-centred R&I now, 2030 could be the start of an era of positive payback: healthy children and adolescents who are well-educated and skilled and have every chance to thrive and become constructive, engaged EU citizens contributing to society.
- A Horizon Europe that works with and for Children and Youth could significantly contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals since Child related indicators can be found in at least 14 out of the 17 SDG's².
- A Horizon Europe that works with and for Children and Youth would complement and strengthen other EU child and youth initiatives such as Erasmus+, European Youth Strategy, Education and Training 2020 and the Structural funds.

¹ https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf, p5

² <https://data.unicef.org/children-sustainable-development-goals/>

Crucial role of Children and Youth in four key challenges:

Climate change – Youth mobilisation

The impact of the ‘Youth for Climate’ movement has been huge. It is an important example of how children and youth are able to initiate real change. Top-down steering by governments and intergovernmental organizations alone cannot address global problems. To galvanize change and realize the SDG’s transformative potential, we need to mobilize a broad range of agents, including stakeholders, businesses, cities, and civil society.³ Decisively, we need to mobilize youth across the world that has the ability to catalyse change not only for themselves but for their communities and the rest of the world, now and in the future.

Health and Wellbeing – It pays to invest in children and youth

We believe under cluster 1 health, special attention should be given to the health and wellbeing of our children and youth. During childhood and adolescence, the foundations for the rest of our lives are created. Growing evidence from experts in disciplines as diverse as neuroscience, epidemiology, genetics and epigenetics, healthcare, economics and social sciences shows that investing in children (especially in early childhood) makes for positive results later in life. Research and innovation actions with a focus on children and youth have the potential to deliver new knowledge and approaches to improve our future physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution – not without children and youth involved

Young people are connected like never before. They are at the forefront of our societies, jobs, education and democracies going digital: a ‘fourth industrial revolution’. As these changes are being navigated, more must be done to make sure that young generations especially, will be protected and empowered to access rights, opportunities and tools needed to reach their potential as global citizens.⁴ Uptake in key enabling and digital technologies can only be achieved by involving our children and youth, making special efforts to involve girls in STEAM careers and traditional feminised professional paths open to boys.

Demographic change and human mobility are posing unprecedented challenges for social inclusion – children and adolescents are actors, victims and key drivers of change

Multilevel interdisciplinary and intersectoral responses giving way to ‘Nested ecosystems’⁵ need to be developed to generate the right collaborative, protective and inclusive frameworks. Our children, especially those in vulnerable situations (ex. disabled, unaccompanied minors), deserve safe environments as well as community and social conditions to grow and become active citizens.

³ Hajer, M., Nilsson, M., Raworth, K., Bakker, P., Berkhout, F., de Boer, Y., ... & Kok, M. (2015). Beyond cockpit-ism: Four insights to enhance the transformative potential of the sustainable development goals. *Sustainability*, 7(2), 1651-1660.

⁴ <https://www.youthforum.org/pineapple-report>

⁵ Caro-González, A. (Coord.) et al. (2018) “Universities, Policy Makers and Stakeholders fostering Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) nested systems for Societal Impact”, Position Paper. Bilbao. Retrieved from www.deusto.es/social-impact/workshop2018



About this paper

This paper has been co-created with some members of the Eurochild Children Council⁶ and is endorsed by the following European Networks: [GaragErasmus](#), [EDIW-Education for an Interdependent World](#).

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More information

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⁶ <https://www.eurochild.org/projects/eurochild-childrens-council/>