Youth and student consultations to shape the post-2030 education agenda

Regional report

Europe and North America



General information

This regional consultation was organized on 31 July 2026, from 16.00 to 18.00 Paris time (CEST), as part of the global youth and student consultations to shape the education agenda beyond 2030.

A total of 123 young people from 39 countries participated in the consultation.

74% identified as women, 24% as men and 2% as non-binary.

63% lived in a main city, 28% in a small town and 9% in a countryside or rural area.

44% were students in higher education, 20% were students in upper secondary education and 16% were professionally active (either employed or self-employed). In addition, 9% identified as teachers or educators, while 7% were students in lower secondary education. A further 3% were not in education, employment, or training (NEET), and 1% were enrolled in vocational training programmes.

3% of participants reported living in an Indigenous or traditional community, and 2% in a refugee or displacement setting.

70% of participants were aged 19–30, 24% were aged 15–18 and 6% were aged 11–14.

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Summary of the discussions

Looking at 20 years from now, what is your vision of the ideal world and society you would like to be living in?

Participants envisioned **a world shaped by young people's own priorities**, designed so that youth and students can pursue what they are passionate about rather than follow a standardized path. Many participants called for education systems to contribute meaningfully to the achievement of current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while also shaping the global development framework beyond 2030. They emphasized that **sustainability, equity, peace and shared responsibility** should remain central to curriculum design and to the future international education agenda.

Participants called for a **peaceful, unified world** without regional inequalities and divisions that could hinder cooperation, and for a political landscape in which collaboration replaces confrontation. A recurring thread pushed beyond national framing altogether: some participants argued that nationalism and standardization should not define the purpose of education and called for a stronger emphasis on **Global Citizenship Education (GCED)** to enable learners to critically engage with diverse perspectives, recognize their shared humanity, and contribute to shaping a more just and sustainable common future.

Participants also called for the systematic **inclusion of neurodivergent learners and persons with disabilities**, rather than reliance on individual accommodations. They emphasized the importance of **free and accessible education** so that financial constraints do not limit participation. Participants also expressed a desire for **greater recognition of research** and of the field of education itself, arguing that careers in education should be financially stable, respected and dignified.

Several participants stressed that education should be reflective of learners' needs, offering diverse pathways rather than a single model to which all learners are expected to conform. One participant also urged that Indigenous communities and knowledge be acknowledged and supported within education systems, so that state schooling is not treated as the only valid form of learning.

Keeping your vision in mind, what should change in education and learning, so that your generation and future generations can live better than now?

Making education **more affordable** emerged as a clear priority. Participants argued that financial constraints should not prevent access to education, including the costs of tuition, books and transport, and that education should be **free from discrimination** based on background, gender, disability or income. Alongside this, participants called for **life skills** to be embedded in curricula, including financial literacy, public speaking, teamwork, critical thinking and digital literacy, arguing that current curricula place excessive emphasis on memorization and insufficient emphasis on practical skills.

Teachers were named as central to making these ambitions achievable. Participants stressed that teachers need workable conditions, manageable governance, genuine professional agency and respect for their profession, since excessive monitoring and administrative requirements can undermine their ability to respond effectively to learners' needs. Participants also called for **personalized learning** that is responsive to individual learners rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all approach. They emphasized that achieving this requires adequate investment in teachers, support systems and educational resources, rather than placing additional responsibilities on an already overburdened workforce.

On accountability, participants called for a broader and more comprehensive set of **education-related indicators** in the post-2030 framework. Building on lessons from the current SDG 4 indicator framework, they argued that future indicators should capture a wider range of educational priorities

and experiences, reflecting the view that measurement frameworks can play an important role in shaping policy attention and accountability. A related concern was **recognition**: participants noted that diplomas and qualifications are often not recognized internationally, requiring professionals and migrants to obtain new certification when moving to another country. They also called for **informal and non-formal learning**, including community projects, volunteering, internships, mentorship and online learning, to receive greater formal recognition and, where appropriate, certification rather than being treated as having lesser value.

On **technology**, views were divided rather than uniform. Some participants welcomed the introduction of comprehensive restrictions on AI use in educational institutions, while others argued that students should learn to use AI responsibly given its increasing relevance in education, work and society.

Participants agreed that **financial barriers require direct policy attention**, highlighting constraints on access to education financing in some contexts. They proposed that measures addressing **tuition costs and the broader affordability of education** should form a core part of the future global education agenda and be reflected in the development of the international framework that succeeds the current 2030 Agenda.

And what should be kept or strengthened from the current education and learning system because you believe is important and working well?

Participants firmly rejected the idea that education only happens in the classroom: **community projects, volunteering, internships, mentorship and online learning** were named as equally valuable forms of learning that should be preserved, strengthened and more fully recognized, rather than treated as secondary to formal schooling.

A teacher participant highlighted the need to continue strengthening **curricula that reflect the diversity of local student communities** while also developing holistic and employability-relevant skills. This echoed the wider call for **people from all parts of society to have meaningful opportunities to be heard in education decision-making**, ensuring that future education systems are shaped by the experiences and priorities of the communities they serve.

Participants also wanted to preserve and scale small-scale mechanisms for hearing directly from students, including short interviews and school-level surveys, so that decisions better reflect the experiences of those most affected by them. They also emphasized the importance of developing the capacity to **work across strong ideological differences toward shared goals**. While some participants referred to the SDGs as a current example of such shared goals, they stressed that the ability to build consensus and cooperate across differences should remain a core educational priority in shaping the global agenda that will succeed the 2030 Agenda.

What would you – as a young person – be committed to do on your own or together with your community to change education and learning for the better?

Participants identified a range of actions they could take individually and collectively to improve education in their own communities. One participant working in adult education research highlighted efforts to **formalize the recognition of informal and non-formal learning**, particularly to support migrants and people changing careers. Another described exploring legal pathways to **advance education equity** in their national context, including through constitutional provisions and the courts.

Other commitments reflected participants' emphasis on making education more responsive to learners themselves. These included **creating and participating in community projects, volunteering, internships and mentorship initiatives**, supporting peers through informal learning and knowledge-

sharing, and advocating for learning opportunities that recognize different skills, backgrounds and pathways. Participants also expressed a willingness to **strengthen student voice in education decision-making**, for example by organizing short interviews, school-level surveys and other accessible mechanisms through which learners can communicate their experiences and priorities directly to schools and decision-makers.

Participants also pointed to actions they could take to foster **more inclusive learning environments**, including advocating for neurodivergent learners, persons with disabilities and others whose needs are not adequately addressed by standardized approaches. Some emphasized the role young people themselves can play in building communities in which diverse perspectives are respected and in **working across disagreement toward shared educational goals**.

Taken together, these commitments suggest that young people see themselves not only as beneficiaries of education reform, but also as active contributors to it: through research, advocacy, peer and community initiatives, participation in decision-making and efforts to make learning more inclusive, relevant and accessible.

What support would you need, and from whom, so that your action is not only acknowledged, but can make a real difference?

A recurring message from participants was the need for **genuine partnership rather than one-off consultation**. They called on governments, education authorities, institutions and other decision-makers to move beyond seeking youth input towards **co-designing education policies and initiatives with young people, educators and communities at every level**. Participants emphasized that youth participation should be built into decision-making structures in meaningful and sustained ways, with young people able to contribute not only to identifying problems, but also to designing, implementing and reviewing solutions.

Participants also stressed the need for **resources and institutional support** that would allow youth-led ideas to move from proposals to practice. This included **dedicated funding for innovation**, access to appropriate expertise and opportunities to develop and scale initiatives within schools, universities and communities.

On **AI and digital transformation**, participants called for support from governments, education institutions and technology actors to ensure that change is **inclusive, equitable and accountable**. They emphasized the importance of equitable access to technology, protection of privacy and critical thinking, and meaningful human oversight, so that digital transformation supports rather than deepens existing inequalities.

Above all, participants called for **transparency and accountability from decision-makers**. They wanted clear information on how youth contributions influence decisions, why particular proposals are adopted, adapted or not taken forward, and what opportunities young people have to remain involved over time. Continued youth participation in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education reforms was seen as essential if young people's contributions are to have a lasting impact rather than being acknowledged only at the consultation stage.

Actionable proposals

Actionable proposal	Youth contribution
Put young people at the centre of curriculum and learning pathway design, enabling learners to pursue their interests, aspirations and different routes through education rather than following a single standardized pathway.	Participate in curriculum design and review processes, share perspectives on learning priorities and pathways, and take on meaningful co-design roles in education decision-making structures.
Make education affordable, accessible and free from discrimination based on background, gender, disability, income or other circumstances.	Advocate for equitable access to education, document and raise awareness of barriers experienced by different groups of learners, and contribute to initiatives promoting inclusion, accessibility and non-discrimination.
Embed practical and transferable skills-including financial literacy, critical thinking, communication, teamwork, public speaking and digital literacy-alongside academic learning.	Help identify the skills that matter most based on young people's lived experiences, provide feedback on the relevance of curricula, and contribute to peer-learning and other initiatives that help learners develop skills for life, further learning and work.
Give teachers workable conditions, manageable governance, professional agency and access to sustained professional development, alongside adequate resources to respond to diverse learners' needs.	Work alongside teachers to advocate for supportive teaching and learning conditions, participate in student-teacher governance and dialogue mechanisms, and provide constructive feedback on learners' experiences of teaching and learning.
Develop a broader set of education-related indicators for the post-2030 framework, building on lessons from the current SDG 4 indicator framework and expanding measurement to reflect a wider range of educational priorities and experiences.	Help identify which indicators best reflect young people's lived experiences and priorities, and participate in youth-led data collection, monitoring, evaluation and accountability initiatives.
Build effective recognition and certification pathways for informal and non-formal learning, as well as fairer recognition of qualifications and credentials earned across countries.	Document and share their own informal and non-formal learning experiences, contribute to the design of recognition mechanisms, and pilot-test proposed certification and recognition approaches to help ensure that they are practical, fair and accessible.
Make AI and digital transformation in education inclusive, equitable and accountable, while protecting privacy, critical thinking and meaningful human oversight.	Participate in AI-in-education discussions and working groups, identify potential risks, inequalities or harmful uses, share young people's experiences of digital technologies, and co-create safeguards and approaches that support responsible and inclusive use.

Move from one-off consultation of young people towards sustained co-design of education policy, implementation and evaluation, with transparent mechanisms showing how youth contributions influence decisions.	Take on meaningful roles in education governance and co-design processes, organize and participate in mechanisms for gathering student perspectives, and advocate for transparent feedback showing how youth proposals are considered, adapted or implemented.
Provide sustained and accessible funding for education innovation and ensure that affordability, including the direct and indirect costs of education, is a core priority of the post-2030 education agenda.	Develop and lead youth- and community-designed education initiatives, contribute ideas for innovative approaches to learning, and advocate for funding mechanisms that are accessible to young people and responsive to learners' needs.
Recognize, support and resource learning that takes place beyond formal classrooms, including community projects, volunteering, internships, mentorship, online learning and other forms of informal and non-formal learning.	Participate in and help organize community, volunteering, mentoring and peer-learning initiatives; document the skills and knowledge gained through them; and advocate for these experiences to be recognized in education, professional and employment pathways.