

Summary & Learnings

From Housing Insecurity to EU Scepticism - the YES Forum Policy Event 2026 brought together 40 participants including youth workers, social practitioners, young people and policy makers from 12 EU countries to discuss housing insecurity, social inclusion, and youth participation. The wide range of sessions offered included direct dialogue with policymakers and experts, topical introductions, best practice presentations and time for participants to meet and exchange.

The event took a closer look at two pressing topics young people and the EU face: Firstly, housing insecurity, with high costs for rent and limited housing options available tremendously impacting young people's transition to adulthood. The topic is quickly gaining relevance in EU policymaking, with initiatives under the Commission's Affordable Housing Plan currently being debated, and housing one of 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Furthermore, the policy event explored how to bridge the gap between young people and the EU, with a best practice showcase from Ireland and the opportunity to try out the "Europe United" Board Game.

Meaningfully involving youth is important in YES Forum events. Most of the photos featured in this report were taken by two young people from the Ardèche region in France. For both, it was their first visit to Brussels and their first experience of being engaged in policy dialogue. Having them behind the camera brought a unique perspective, allowing us to see the event through their eyes.

4 Nov 17:30 – 20:30 | **Meet & Connect**

The policy event kicked off with interactive get-to-know-you activities for our participants – a diverse group of youth work professionals and young people from around the YES Forum network. icebreakers ensured that the youth work professionals got to connect beyond familiar faces, while the young participants got to meet, exchange and get started thinking about the topic of housing.

A key point of the evening was introducing the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) as an important framework guiding EU policies. While the professionals engaged in how YES Forum members are connected to the EPSR, the young people learnt about the EPSR and its connection to housing and mental health, as well as initiatives and actions that have been implemented so far.

A networking dinner gave the perfect opportunity to finish conversations started during the ice breaking activities, and to get some energy after an exhausting travel day!

To round off the evening, participants were encouraged to get creative on the topic of housing and put their thoughts into collages and posters. Overall, the activities provided a solid base both socially and topic-related to ensure a smooth and fruitful second day of the event!



Interactive activities on the European Pillar of Social Rights, creative with collages on housing

5 Nov 09:45 – 10:15 | **Linking EU Presidency and Youth Work – Experiences from Ireland**

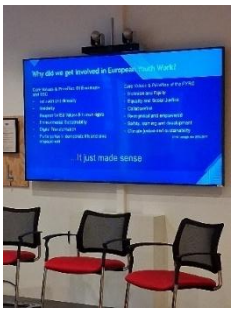
Bridging the gap between young people and the EU is not always easy. YES Forum member Finglas Youth Resource Centre (FYRC) in Dublin shared inspiring insights on how they bring the EU into their local youth work - and how the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU (July–December 2026) helped them to expand their work further. Opportunities included connecting with European stakeholders, from youth networks to organisations in the Presidency programme, getting young people meaningfully involved in local Presidency events and consultations, and brining the Presidency to the youth centre with activities exploring European identity, citizenship and participation.

At its 2026 European Youth Week event, for example, FYRC invited local young people and schools to meet programme participants and learn about the opportunities open to them.



Their tips were to:

- Start local and connect European themes to issues young people already care about.
- Build trusted relationships rather than one-off activities.
- Remove barriers around confidence, language, travel, money and knowledge.
- Keep the benefits going after an exchange or event ends.
- Recognise youth workers as the bridge between young people, European opportunities and decision makers.



Valuable advice for YES Forum members - especially for our Greek and Italian members, whose countries hold the Presidency in 2027 and 2028.

5 Nov 11:15 – 12:30 | **A place to call home – housing challenges and dreams of young people and the professionals supporting them**

The age at which they leave their parents' home also varies widely, from around 21 in Finland to over 31 in Croatia. National, regional and local differences (as well as rural and urban divides) mean that there is no one answer for addressing the housing challenges young people face. Yet every young person deserves a place to call home, and the EU has made steps to try and ensure that this goal is realised for young people regardless of where they live.

With high costs for rent and limited housing options available tremendously impacting young people's transition to adulthood, this policy dialogue session focussed on a highly relevant topic for many participants. Housing insecurity, with high costs for rent and limited housing options available tremendously impacting young people's transition to adulthood. The topic is quickly gaining relevance in EU policymaking, with initiatives under the Commission's Affordable Housing Plan currently being debated, housing one of 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and Dan Jørgensen became the first EU Commissioner in charge of the topic of housing in 2024. In this policy dialogue session, four policymakers and experts joined YES Forum member's professionals and young people they support to discuss how European policies can better support social inclusion and access to affordable housing for young people. To encourage direct discussion and exchange, participants split into two smaller groups for a focus-group style discussion bringing participants' own experiences, professional and lived, directly to the people shaping EU housing policy.

The **policy dialogue** took place with:

- Sergio Pérez Barranco, Policy Officer, FEANTSA
- Alex Quinn, Policy Officer for Social and Economic Inclusion, European Youth Forum
- Agnese Papadia, cabinet of Dan Jørgensen, Commissioner for Energy and Housing

– Regina Doherty, MEP (Fine Gael, EPP), Vice-Chair of the Parliament's Special Committee on the Housing Crisis (HOUS)











Impressions from the policy dialogue on housing with policy makers and experts

Some of the inputs that came from the session included:

- **Affordability:** Young people struggle to become independent and plan for their future including education and training. Homes exist but are too expensive to buy or rent.
- **Social housing can limit European opportunities:** A former care leaver explained that she would risk losing her social housing and security if she moved away for a short-term opportunity in Europe.
- **New housing models are needed:** Participants called for a mix of social housing, private rentals and cooperative housing.
- **Youth workers are affected too:** Professionals highlighted that they also face housing difficulties while supporting young people.

We would like to thank all our guest speakers for their openness and engagement during this session, and hope the insights gained will support them in their work on this important topic going forward. A big thank you also to all young people who shared their experiences!

5 Nov 14:00 – 15:30 | **What It Takes to Start a New Political Party – Policy Dialogue with MEP Lukas Sieper's Policy Team**

A group of nine YES Forum representatives, including three young people from Germany and Ireland, met two members of Lukas Sieper's policy team to talk about political engagement, representation and policymaking at the European level.

Lukas Sieper took a different path into politics. In 2020, he co-founded the Partei des Fortschritts (Party of Progress), rather than joining an established political party. Elected to the European Parliament at the age of 29, he is one of its youngest Members. The party vision is a future-oriented European Union that strengthens education, defends democratic values and promotes social justice.

During the meeting, we learned about challenges of shaping policy as a representative of a small political party. A key takeaway was the importance of building alliances and finding common ground with other political actors. To influencing debates and actively shaping policy it is important to belong to a parliamentary group. The Partei des Fortschritts shares the most common ground with the Renew Europe parliamentary group. We also heard how Lukas Sieper connects with citizens through social media and direct contact, both in person and online.

The discussion also explored what it takes to start a new political party. A good idea and the motivation to put it into action are only the first steps. Having friends and supporters, access to funding and other resources, and enough time to develop ideas are just as important.

Finally, we discussed one of his key achievements during his first term: his work on introducing proxy voting for MEP during maternity leave. The initiative aims to make it easier for women to remain politically active during pregnancy and early motherhood, while making the European Parliament more inclusive and adapting its working arrangements to modern needs.

We agreed to stay in touch to continue the conversation with Lukas Sieper in a second meeting via Teams.

6 Nov 11:00 – 12:00 | **Integrating the voices of disadvantaged youth into EU policy design**

16 participants including youth work professionals and young participants from Germany, Ireland and France had the exciting opportunity to meet Marta Markowska, EU Youth Coordinator and responsible for bringing young people's perspectives into the policymaking process. The intimate setting meant that participants could enter into dialogue directly, share experiences and ask questions. The session opened with Marta sharing when she first encountered the EU, before young people and professionals shared their own stories. Key turning points included school, the introduction of the euro and a first Erasmus+ exchange. Marta then encouraged participants to make their voices heard through opportunities such as the EU Youth Dialogue, the European Youth Event (EYE), EU consultations and volunteering.

The young people stressed that they need support to get involved, as institutional routes are often bureaucratic. These routes suit many young people, but they assume time, confidence and financial security that young people facing disadvantage often lack. For them, volunteering needs to lead to training or paid work. Participation in the policymaking process should be built into the everyday practice of the services they already use, rather than depending on formal consultations.

Overall, the session gave everyone a much-valued opportunity to enter directly into dialogue, talk about participation opportunities and barriers, and learn from one another!



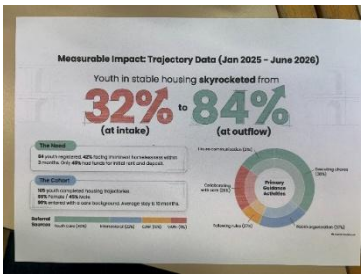
Young participants meeting with EU Youth Coordinator Marta Markowska

6 Nov 08:30 – 12:15 | **- Field visit to Het Brughuis in Leuven**



YES Forum member organisation practitioners experienced innovative youth work at Het Brughuis in Leuven supporting vulnerable young people into housing. Brunhilde Schiettecatte from Het Brughuis ("the brigde house"), welcomed professionals from the YES Forum network and presented her work. At Het Brughuis, an innovative concept bringing together the founders' knowledge of the housing market as well as social work practice, means that the organisation can profit from housing properties that are vacant to offer a variety of different forms of supported housing for young people. Housing via the organisation provides a first step into the housing market for young people who struggle on the open market and a safe and supported environment to practise competences needed for successfully maintaining your own living space. A specifically tailored support structures mean that each young person gets as much or as little support as needed. After the presentation, professionals shared perspectives from youth living projects and available support in their countries, resulting in a fruitful exchange and an inspiring visit for all.





Connecting with European youth at the Caritas Youth Forum

The YES Project's Final Conference, held together with the 2026 Caritas Youth Forum took place from 4-6 November 2026. YES Forum is a partner in this Erasmus+ project that supported young people to speak out about the issues most important to them: mental health and housing. After a keynote speech by Commissioner Glenn Micallef, Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, project partners presented their work within the project. YES Forum member Stichting SCN showcased their work on mental health with young men, and YES Forum members Cassandra and Rodrigo presented their work bringing together policymakers and young people on the topic of housing.

In the afternoon, eleven participants of the YES Forum Policy Event joined the event. Cassandra Helmli, YES Forum working student and project participant, was part of the housing panel together with MEP João Oliveira, fellow young advocate Nela Červenková and policy expert Alex Quinn from the European Youth Forum. Cassandra spoke about her experiences hosting a podium discussion on housing for young people she organised with fellow young advocates in Esslingen, Germany, bringing together YP and policymakers.

Visiting this event gave YES Forum participants the chance to encounter even more perspectives on housing difficulties of young people in countries beyond the YES Forum network, and hear how young people were involved in speaking out about housing in the YES project.

Moreover, in the evening, YES Forum members and young people came together with young people from the Young Caritas network in a relaxed atmosphere to overcome challenges facing the EU together – as part of the Europe United board game, developed within the Erasmus+ project "EU Player", coordinated by YES Forum.