

SUMMER 2020

Solidarity, resilience and the way forward

EVENT REPORT



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Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union

Co-organised with



The covid-19 pandemic has thrown a spotlight on the shortcomings of many world leaders. In contrast, civil society and the general public have provided inspirational and effective responses to the crisis.

Finding ways to convert the energy behind those powerful citizens' initiatives into lasting contributions to solidarity and societal resilience was the goal of an online brainstorm in Friends of Europe's European Young Leaders (EYL) programme bringing together some of the brightest young minds from around Europe and beyond.

“ This is a moment for strong leaders to come together in transforming this energy people have felt across the continent

Ricardo Baptista Leite, Portuguese member of Parliament and 2015-16 European Young Leader

“This is a moment for strong leaders to come together in transforming this energy people have felt across the continent,” contended **Ricardo Baptista Leite**, Portuguese member of Parliament and 2015-16 EYL. “With strong leadership you can build on the momentum that was generated in time of crisis.”

The meeting highlighted initiatives that Young Leaders have launched or supported in response to the pandemic, including the Host A Hero platform providing safe accommodation for health workers; the Billion Molecules Against Covid-19 search for compounds to block the virus; or Euresilience, a Twitter-based platform for sharing stories of solidarity, community and resilience during Europe's lockdowns.

“We've come through a huge collective moment,” said Euresilience founder **Mary Fitzgerald**, researcher and consultant on Mediterranean Affairs and 2013 EYL. “Capturing that moment, and not losing what that moment meant and how unique it was in order to learn the lessons, is really important.”

As Europe emerges from the pandemic, participants brainstormed how to maintain and expand the spirit of such schemes in the fields of healthcare, education, culture and innovation.

There was consensus on the importance of ensuring projects that reach people on a grassroots level can be scaled up to make an impact Europe-wide. “Make Europe Scale Again,” was a slogan suggested by **André Loeseckrug-Pietri**, director of the Joint European Disruptive Initiative (JEDI) and 2013 EYL.

Young leaders urged the development of platforms and networks to improve communication among local projects facilitating exchanges of ideas, expertise and people.

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Malcolm Byrne, Irish senator and 2014 EYL

In education, the pandemic has forced teachers, students and parents to look beyond traditional classroom-based education and embrace distance learning, with mixed results. Greater connectivity could help the spread of best practice around the continent. “What is key for us is communication, that there are more platforms to be able to share some of the innovative ideas around the delivery of education across Europe,” said **Malcolm Byrne**, Irish senator and 2014 EYL. “Sharing good practice is something that we felt was particularly important.”

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Velibor Bošković, Managing Director of Science and Technology Park Montenegro and 2020 European Young Leader

In the business and technology sector too, speakers put forward the idea of a pan-European digital skill exchange where start-ups, NGOs and social enterprises could share best practice and find the skilled personnel they need to move ahead.

Velibor Bošković, Managing Director of Science and Technology Park Montenegro and 2020 EYL, pointed out that the crisis had forced many people, companies and institutions to quickly adapt to new solutions.

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Hanna Stähle, Senior Manager at DAFNE - Donors and Foundations Networks in Europe

“Things happened in one or two months that could not have happened in a couple of years before ... there’s a huge opportunity to seize this chance to make significant change,” Bošković said. “We could use this opportunity to create a joint pan-European project ... that could educate or train a lot of people to get a new job in the IT or tech sector.”

One idea for boosting pan-European connectivity was the formation of a European exchange scheme for professionals similar to the Erasmus+ programme for education, training and sports.

“We have to connect. What we have right now is really great scholarships and opportunities for academics, for students, but we do not truly have anything for professionals,” said **Hanna Stähle**, Senior Manager at DAFNE - Donors and Foundations Networks in Europe. “There are a lot of ideas out there but it’s not very interconnected, it’s not very European, it’s not being shared.”

The Erasmus programme was also referenced as the type of initiative Europe needs to be relevant in citizens’ daily lives, along with – in the cultural field - the Eurovision Song Contest, said **Krzysztof Candrowicz**, Director of the Foundation of Visual Education in Poland, and 2012 EYL.

“There is a European identity that we are still missing,” he said. “We need projects like Eurovision and Erasmus, those projects that really touch people, where they can contribute themselves and really feel part of culture at a European level.”

Young Leaders also pressed for a rethink in how culture is funded and for a European network to seek ways to make museums, festivals and other cultural institutions more environmentally sustainable and socially responsible.

“Creativity will save the world, so be creative don’t be afraid, just go for it and everything is going to be OK,” concluded **Agnesta Filatove**, Executive Director of the Vilnius International Film Festival and 2020 EYL.

Europe’s lack of coordination and “selfish” national responses in the early stages of the pandemic illustrate the need for a stronger pan-European role in public health and epidemiological preparedness. In response, Young Leaders proposed the creation of an “equivalent of NATO for public health” that could coordinate preparations and response, share resources, and build up stockpiles of essential medicine and equipment.

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Nina Rawal, founder of Emerging Health Ventures in Sweden and 2014 European Young Leader

“We (could be) using our voices in the Young European Leader community to advocate for stronger European coordination in the area of public health and pandemic preparedness as a natural first step,” said **Nina Rawal**, founder of Emerging Health Ventures in Sweden and 2014 European Young Leader.

Other ideas included setting aside one day a year as a Europe-wide holiday to promote a shared identity; persuading companies to allow employees to take a few days off every year for volunteer work; fighting inequality in digital learning by ensuring all families get access to online computers; adapting school curriculums to fight “screen-fatigue” for students in distance learning; and pushing for close monitoring and high-profile communication on how the new European recovery funds are spent so citizens can clearly see its effectiveness.

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