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#EU4Youth

# Youth Education, Employment and Participation in the Eastern Partnership

EU4Youth Achievements Report 2023



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# MAIN INSIGHTS AND PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

## Foreword and report structure

Young people remain a top priority on the European agenda. The EU's commitment to youth is evident through initiatives like [Erasmus+](#), the [Youth Guarantee](#), and the [EU Youth Dialogue](#), while in 2023 several pilot projects were launched worldwide as a result of the Youth Action Plan. Beyond the EU, young people are considered important actors for change in their countries. In line with the [Youth Action Plan and the EU youth strategy](#), the EU4Youth regional programme continues to engage, empower, and connect young people in the Eastern partner countries, reducing youth unemployment and promoting active citizenship.

Marking the 6th year of the [EU4Youth programme](#), this report highlights the results achieved in 2023. The investment of over 50 million EUR since 2018 has considerably strengthened youth employment and entrepreneurship, encouraged active citizenship, and supported international commitments such as the Paris Climate Agreement and the [2030 Agenda](#).

The EU4Youth programme, the flagship initiative for EU support to young people in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine – focuses on Education and Employability, Employment and Entrepreneurship, and Engagement and Empowerment. In 2023, the programme has demonstrated its strong capacity to adapt to local realities and political developments, while continuing to address youth issues in a dynamic fashion.

Responding to the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine, the programme has also continued to repurpose funds, releasing 2 million EUR towards [youth employment and entrepreneurship projects in Ukraine](#). This funding aims to strengthen youth resilience and to encourage active participation in Ukraine's recovery.

The EU's investment in young people in the EaP countries promotes democracy, stability, and economic development. By [getting involved in decision-making](#), young people can push for democratic reforms and resist authoritarian influences, fostering a pro-European sentiment vital for regional stability.

Economically, [investing in youth enhances employability](#), encourages innovation and [supports social entrepreneurship](#), boosting local economies and creating new markets for EU goods and services. Socially, supporting youth promotes cohesion and inclusivity, also thereby reducing migration pressures.

With the EU4Youth programme, the EU will continue to support young people's innovative visions, engagement, and participation, striving to give them better opportunities for the future, and supporting them to become more resilient in the face of global and regional challenges.



Launched in 2017 and led by the [European Commission's Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations](#) (DG NEAR), the EU4Youth programme seeks to increase investment in young people's skills, entrepreneurship and employability, and to encourage active youth engagement in democratic life.

Just as the programme itself, this report is structured around three key pillars:



## Education and Employability

Strengthening the employability of young people in the region through the targeted development of skills. This pillar includes capacity building of both local and regional stakeholders to foster education and employment opportunities and to strengthen young people's competence development and employability.



## Entrepreneurship and Employment

Increasing the entrepreneurial, green and digital skills of young people by promoting (social) entrepreneurship among youth and youth employment stakeholders in the region. Understanding what young people need to secure employment and improving youth policy design through evidence-based policy recommendations, are key elements of this pillar.



## Engagement and Empowerment

Enhancing young people's participation in society by increasing youth awareness in terms of national policy developments. This pillar aims to contribute to improvements in youth policy design and help to strengthen young people's capacity in terms of civic participation.



Tailored to each of the Eastern Partnership countries, the programme has been systematically collecting and analysing its impact at the national level over the past six years. With the 2023 edition of the EU4Youth Achievements Report, there are now five comprehensive documents for policymakers, civil society leaders and educators designing and implementing youth empowerment initiatives and policy measures in the Eastern Partnership region.



## Adapting to the policy context

Across the Eastern Partnership region, 2023 continued to be marked by ongoing conflicts and political instability. These developments not only affected policies and programme activities, but have also greatly impacted the lives of young people in the Eastern Partnership countries.

In spite of this challenging context, the EU4Youth programme continued to play a vital role in creating opportunities and empowering young people in the region, underscoring its capacity to adjust and evolve with changing circumstances.

## The war and youth in Ukraine

While the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine forced projects to adapt to the new regional and local realities, leading to some activities being postponed or terminated, projects largely managed to redesign or reorient their actions. This guaranteed continued support to youth, including to those directly affected or displaced by the war.

Responding to the specific needs in Ukraine, the programme [moreover allocated €2 million in direct funding to youth initiatives](#). Together with the other grant projects, these direct grants are meant to help strengthen the resilience of youth in Ukraine, while empowering young people to take an active part in rebuilding their economy and society.

## Working towards EU accession

Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia also continued their [path towards EU membership in 2023](#). Following the decision to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova in June 2022, EU leaders agreed to open accession negotiations with both countries in December 2023, while conditionally granting Georgia candidate status.

In the upcoming years, the EU4Youth programme will continue to reinforce ties between young people across the EU and the candidate countries, while also providing crucial policy support to assist these countries in their EU accession process, particularly in relation to Chapter 26 on education and youth.

## Further political challenges

EU4Youth activities in Armenia and Azerbaijan were overshadowed by the escalation of conflict in the second half of 2023, as Azerbaijan's military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh led to the [displacement of a large number of Karabakh Armenians](#). While programme activities under Phase III proceeded in both countries, grant projects are facing a delayed start in Azerbaijan due to increasing technical and legal challenges.

The challenging political situation in Belarus continued in 2023, [prompting the EU to extend its restrictive measures linked to internal repression](#) and the regime's support for Russia's war against Ukraine. State suppression of civil society also limited EU4Youth activities in the country, further narrowing the possibilities to effectively support and engage with non-state, local and regional actors, including young people.



## Changes in the EU4Youth programme set-up

Activities in 2023 were largely characterised by transition, with newly-launched projects following up on existing structures and initiatives. Taking into account the recommendations and lessons learned from previous programme phases, these additions will allow the programme to reinforce its efforts through a more deliberate and strategic approach and a wider outreach.

The beginning of the year marked the completion of the [‘EU4Youth: Youth Engagement Roadmaps’](#) (YER) project and the closing of the phase II grant projects. These were followed by the start of the eight phase III grant projects emphasising entrepreneurship, green and digital skills.

The [Coordination and Support \(C&S\) project](#) also ended in August 2023 and was followed by the launch of a renewed [EU4Youth Coordination and Policy Support \(CPS\)](#) project at the end of 2023. It works on strategic cooperation between major stakeholders and programmes targeting youth in the region, better alignment of the programme with EU and national policy priorities, and an enhanced visibility of the programme.

Finally, the [‘EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment’](#) project began in the second half of 2023, with the objective of further strengthening the involvement of young people in policy dialogue and decision-making processes.

Amidst the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the programme repurposed funds within the framework of the [‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’](#) project. Through direct grants to non-profit organisations, the programme responded to the societal and economic repercussions of war, strengthening resilience amongst youth and encouraging their active participation in the country’s recovery.

## EU4Youth grants

### Small EU4Youth grants

In 2017 and 2018, the European Commission's DG EAC / EACEA gave grants to 102 small projects involving over 600 organisations from 37 countries, including the six Eastern partner countries. The projects focused on capacity building for youth organisations and youth workers.

In 2024, a new wave of small grants will be awarded under the 'EU4Youth Engagement and Empowerment' project to facilitate innovative pilot projects at the local level, focusing on climate change, the inclusion of disadvantaged youth, and country-specific topics.

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### Large EU4Youth grants

In two phases between 2018 and 2023, EU4Youth provided grants to ten large regional projects focused on increasing the employability, (social) entrepreneurship and participation of young people in society.

In 2023, eight new large grant projects were launched under the 'EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship' project, focused on supporting youth employment and entrepreneurship in the green and digital economies.

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### Direct EU4Youth grants to Ukraine

Due to repurposing efforts to mitigate the consequences of the Russian full-scale war in Ukraine, EU4Youth has since 2023 been providing direct support to initiatives in Ukraine. These aim to foster societal and economic resilience in the country. Actions include support to youth centres, assistance for persons with disability, rehabilitation for young veterans, as well as investments in post-conflict education and trauma programmes.

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## Technical assistance projects

### EU4Youth Coordination and Support - EY 2018-2023

Ensured the smooth coordination of the overall EU4Youth programme by supporting the monitoring, communication and visibility of the programme activities.

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### EU4Youth Coordination and Policy Support – EY 2023-2026

Continues to provide coordination and policy support for the programme in alignment with EU and national policy priorities by supporting strategic partnerships, programme monitoring and successful communication across the Eastern Partnership region. This service contract also coordinates the EU4Youth Alumni Network, provides sectoral expertise for better alignment with policies and initiatives, and supports key thematic activities addressing young people.

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### EU4Youth: Youth Engagement Roadmaps - GOPA 2019-2023

Completed in 2023, the project has promoted youth participation, youth employment partnerships and youth social entrepreneurship. It has advanced the development of evidence-based policy responses to the challenges faced by young people, and promoted their involvement in policy discussions, using roundtables and policy labs in the region to facilitate youth engagement in policy making.

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### EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship – CPMA 2021-2025

Co-financed by Lithuania, through a delegation agreement with this EU Member State’s agency, the project promotes the active participation of youth in both democratic life and labour markets. Building the structural capacities of key institutions, activities cover partnerships among public employment services and other stakeholders to address youth employment issues, promoting youth involvement and facilitating knowledge transfer and exchange with the EU experience on the Youth Guarantee.

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### EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment – GIZ 2023-2025

Implemented by GIZ, with co-financing from Germany, the project builds on the work of previous project phases to actively involve young people in policy dialogue and decision-making processes. It does so by strengthening the ability of youth organisations and public institutions to engage in participatory and structured policy dialogue at local, regional, and national level, while also improving the quality and outreach of youth work in the region.

## EU4Youth scholarships

### College of Europe (Natolin Campus – Poland) scholarships - CPMA 2021-2025

Increases the understanding of EaP youth about European politics and governance and fosters multi-cultural learning through [scholarships for the College of Europe in Natolin](#). It supports European Interdisciplinary postgraduate studies for an estimated 75 young people from the Eastern partner countries.





## Main achievements of 2023

In 2023, the EU4Youth programme continued its efforts to foster youth employability in the region. Aligned with the [European year of Skills in 2023](#), the programme focused on strengthening cooperation and partnerships with institutional stakeholders, while also reinforcing competence development activities to assist young people in an evolving labour market.

**140 different stakeholders** from government, administrations, CSOs, and the private sector participated in youth employment partnerships.

Eight grant projects launched under the [‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ grant scheme](#) started their activities by the end of 2023. They are set to improve career development and employment opportunities for youth in the coming years by strengthening young people’s entrepreneurial competences and their green and digital skills.

In addition, the programme underpinned its commitment to empower local changemakers, offering young people hands-on experiences through scholarships, mobility opportunities, and work-based learning.

**15 young students** from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Georgia graduated from the College of Europe programme in European Interdisciplinary Studies at the Natolin campus thanks to scholarships provided by the programme.

80 EU4Youth Alumni gained first-hand experience in youth work, implementing 45 initiatives centred on supporting vulnerable youth in their community.

To drive systematic changes for improved youth employment and entrepreneurship support at both national and local levels, the EU4Youth programme also focused on enabling national governments to develop better policy frameworks. It helped introduce youth guarantee-type measures, strengthening cooperation with Public Employment Services (PES), and fostering the creation of a positive business environment.

An interactive [Telegram game](#) and [several podcasts](#) were developed to inform stakeholders about fair working standards and best practices to strengthening youth employment.

The [Entrepreneurial Competence Framework for Youth](#) and the self-assessment tool [EntreGram4Youth](#) were launched to allow young people to test and validate their skillsets.

Several [policy recommendations](#) related to education and employability were developed, covering best practices in the fields of apprenticeships and entrepreneurship policies related to digital, green, and social businesses.

Youth engagement and empowerment, with particular attention paid to disadvantaged groups, remained a key priority and cross-cutting feature of most activities in 2023. In addition to young people's active involvement in the grant projects, as well as in the [EU4Youth Alumni Network](#), the '[EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment](#)' project, which began in 2023, has laid the foundations for substantial capacity development support in the EaP countries, promoting networking, exchange, and mutual learning between key actors within and beyond the region.

# Timeline of the key developments



## **Youth Idea Lab (EU4Youth Alumni Network)**

Within the framework of the EU4Youth Alumni Network, 55 young Alumni from the EaP region participated in the Idea Lab activity to build their skills, network, and learn from experienced mentors to develop their own local initiatives.

## **Final Youth Policy Lab events**

The Youth Policy Labs brought together people from across the EaP to discuss, collaborate, and engage on youth policy and youth priorities. Organised under the YER project, the final round of national events counted more than 200 participants.



## **YER project interregional stakeholder meeting**

The final YER project activity gathered key stakeholders from the EaP and the EU to present and discuss recommendations and follow-up actions in the areas of youth engagement.

## **EaP National Youth Councils Meeting**

EU4Youth collaboration opportunities in the EaP countries were discussed with National Youth Councils in a meeting coordinated by EU4Youth C&S.



## **Launch of the National Steering Groups on Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship in Moldova and Georgia**

The launch of the national steering groups in the countries gathered youth stakeholders from the public and private sector, as well as NGOs, to work together over the coming years.

## **Launch of the 'EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment' project implemented by the German development agency GIZ**

The new three-year regional project will contribute to increasing the influence of young people in determining policy outcomes in the region.



## **Youth Wiki Chapters on youth participation published**

Youth Wiki provides information on a number of youth policy issues across EaP countries. The EU4Youth C&S team published new chapters on youth participation, completing chapters on the topic for all 6 EaP countries.

## **Telegram chat-bot game on fair working conditions and decent work standards for youth and employers launched in Georgia and Moldova**

The interactive game initiated by the 'EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship' project is designed to raise awareness and understanding of fair employment practices among young people and employers.

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### **EU Youth Study Days in Ukraine**

The EU4Youth C&S team contributed to an online event aimed at providing young people from Ukraine with information about learning opportunities under a variety of EU support programmes.



**May**

### **Presentation of EU4Youth-funded study on the reintegration of young Ukrainian veterans**

Commissioned by CPMA as part of the EU co-funded 'EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship' project, the study was conducted from January to May 2023 by experts from the research institution, the NDC 'Institute of Family and Youth Policy named after Oleksandr Yaremenko', exploring challenges experienced by young veterans and ex-combatants in Ukraine.

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### **Publication of the EU4Youth 2022 Achievements Report**

The publication of the fourth annual report marked the 5th anniversary of the EU4Youth programme in 2023, highlighting the collective outcomes of the various programme activities.

### **Dialogue Labs held in Georgia**

Three rounds of cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder meetings were held in Georgia, aimed at structuring dialogue among key stakeholders and elaborating recommendations on youth employability in Georgia.



**June**

### **EaP Youth Seminar in Stockholm**

The Seminar coordinated by the EU4Youth C&S team was hosted by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 20-22 June in Stockholm, bringing together nearly 70 participants, including representatives from National Youth Councils, selected civil society organisations, government officials from EaP countries, and EU officials.

### **Launch of the National Steering Groups on Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship in Armenia and Azerbaijan**

The launch of the national steering groups in the countries gathered youth stakeholders from the public and private sector, as well as NGOs, to work together over the coming years.

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### **Launch of the 'EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship' grant projects**

From 4-6 July, eight projects selected by the EU4Youth programme under the Phase III grant scheme were launched in Tbilisi, Georgia. During the launch event, the grantees received necessary information on grant management and requirements, monitoring and communication.



**July**

### **EU4Youth Alumni Network Final Event**

The final event of the EU4Youth Alumni Network's 2022-2023 cycle took place in Tbilisi, Georgia from 5-8 July.



### **End of the C&S project**

The EU4Youth C&S project ended following the successful implementation of programme coordination and support over the past years.



### **Study visit to Lithuania and networking workshop with public employment services**

From 19-21 September 2023, the ‘Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ project invited representatives of public employment services of EaP countries to Lithuania to introduce them to the implementation of Youth Guarantee measures.

### **New cohort of EaP students start at the College of Europe in Natolin**

The third cohort of 15 EU4Youth scholars started the academic programme at the College of Europe in Natolin.



### **Launch of EntreComp4Youth Framework in Ukraine and EntreGram4Youth self-assessment tool**

In collaboration with the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, the ‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ project launched EntreGram4Youth – a self-assessment tool for young entrepreneurs.

This is part of a broader initiative known as the ‘Entrepreneurial Competence Framework for Youth’, aimed to help young entrepreneurs identify and bridge gaps in their personal development.

### **Dialogue Labs held in Moldova**

Cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder meetings were held in Moldova, aimed at structuring dialogue among key stakeholders and elaborating recommendations on youth employability in Moldova.

### **Completion of the Apprenticeship Think-Tanks in Georgia and Moldova**

Experts from the fields of youth and labour came together to assess work-based learning and apprenticeship schemes in the countries, comparing EaP and EU good practice and developing recommendations and suggestions for improvements.



### **Completion of the Roadmaps for the implementation of Youth Guarantee-type initiatives in Georgia and Moldova**

Experts from Georgia and Moldova elaborated a roadmap on how to pilot Youth Guarantee-type initiatives in the territories of Abasha, Chisinau, and Poti, focusing on mapping, tracking and outreach to NEETs, and preparing guidelines for establishing a co-management structure.

### **Presentation of Policy Recommendations as a result of the Dialogue Labs in Georgia**

The ‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ project presented the results of the Dialogue Labs held in Georgia, proposing concrete actions, strategies, policies and legislation amendments, which were reflected in the Youth Agency’s action plan.

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### Launch of the new ‘EU4Youth Coordination and Policy Support’ project

The newly launched two-and-a-half-year project is to continue supporting EU action on youth in the EaP region. Areas of work will range from enhancing strategic partnerships and extending EU support on youth policy matters, to monitoring the EU4Youth programme’s overall progress, and communicating the success of EU-funded youth initiatives throughout the region.

### Youth Wiki Chapters on Employment and Entrepreneurship are published for five EaP countries

Following the publication of chapters on youth participation, the ‘EU4Youth Coordination and Policy Support’ (CPS) also published new chapters focused on employment and entrepreneurship in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

### National Steering Group meetings in Moldova and Georgia on youth employment and entrepreneurship

During the national steering group meetings in Moldova and Georgia, the ‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ project presented the policy recommendations from the Dialogue Labs, and the Think-Tank on Apprenticeships report. A meeting between Steering Group members and EU4Youth Phase III grantees was also organised.

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December





## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY

Pairing learning and skills development with the active involvement and capacity building of national stakeholders, the [EU4Youth programme](#) seeks to create the necessary structures and conditions to assist young people's transition into the labour market. Over the last years, interventions under the Education and Employability pillar of the programme have shown the importance of targeted competence development. Similarly, more work-based learning opportunities and the recognition of skills acquired through non-formal or informal learning can positively impact young people's employability.

[The European year of Skills](#) in 2023 further highlighted the need to support young people in acquiring the right skills for quality jobs while also supporting public and private organisations in addressing skill shortages. In line with these objectives, the EU4Youth programme continued its efforts to enhance youth employability in the region.

With the focus on strengthening cooperation with institutional stakeholders, while reinforcing competence development activities, [new grant projects were funded](#) under the 'EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship'. In addition, the programme underpinned its commitment to train local youth educators and counsellors and offered young people hands-on experiences through scholarships, internships, and work-based learning.

## Increased work preparedness

Young people in the EaP region have the potential to drive positive change, innovation, and economic growth in their countries. Yet many students struggle with the transition from school to work. This is also highlighted by the results of the annual EU4Youth survey, which shows a decrease in young beneficiaries' confidence in finding a job over the years, passing from 88% of beneficiaries reporting an increased confidence, to 62% in the latest wave.

In order to improve young people's work preparedness, the EU4Youth programme is implementing a range of competence-development activities aimed at upskilling young people for the digital and green transformations, while at the same time fostering the development of soft skills to increase their resilience to new challenges and changes throughout their careers and their readiness to adapt to new standards and evolving requirements of the world of work.

## Competence-development activities

The newly-launched grant projects co-founded by the European Union and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, and implemented by the Central Project Management Agency (CPMA) under the 'EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship' pillar have the common objective of increasing employability among youth, with a specific focus on promoting green and digital upskilling, as well as entrepreneurial competences.

While efforts in 2023 predominantly focused on laying the groundwork for the project interventions, activities targeting the competence development of young people in the region will be manifold in the upcoming year, ranging from workshops, seminars and trainings, to informal learning activities that promote hand-on learning and foster the development of cross-cutting soft skills.



Focusing on disadvantaged youth in Moldova and Ukraine, the [Persp@ctive project](#) implemented by OESB Austria will target the development of digital and entrepreneurial competences through counselling, training courses and self-assessment tools for young people, in order to help facilitate their entry into the labour market.

To overcome the lack of cooperation and coordination between stakeholders in the field of education and youth employment, the project will moreover establish dedicated 'YourSkills' networks in each country. This will help bring together national employment agencies, education and training providers, NGOs, public institutions, as well as private sectors.

The networks will encourage lasting partnerships for the competence development of young people, ensuring that skills will match the demand of the labour market, while at the same time allowing students to validate their skills and obtain formal certifications.



To support the digital upskilling and career management skills of disadvantaged youth in Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova, another grant project implemented by [Caritas Czech Republic](#) is strengthening the capacity of career advisers and civil society organisations. Reaching out to those with fewer education and employment opportunities, the project will make use of both formal and non-formal learning initiatives for career counselling and the development of digital skills.

As a result, at least 720 disadvantaged young people, including young persons with disabilities and persons who are not in education, employment, or training (NEETs), will be able to enhance their digital skills through improved career counselling and digital skills capacity-building trainings.



## Competence frameworks and skills validation

With regard to skill development, the recognition and validation of acquired skills have been identified by the programme as important steps in promoting young people's employability. Given the evolving needs of the labour market and the opportunities that non-formal and informal learning can provide for transversal skill development, it is important that institutions foster mechanisms that allow for the official recognition and validation of skills acquired outside of formal learning.

Applying and adapting existing European frameworks for skills assessment within its grant projects and technical assistance components, the EU4Youth programme is actively promoting efforts to provide young people with adequate tools and mechanisms to test and validate their skillsets.

In order to enable youth better to assess their entrepreneurial competences, the 'EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship' project, [with the assistance of the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine](#), has developed the Entrepreneurial Competence Framework for Youth, as well as the accompanying self-assessment tool EntreGram4Youth.



The Entrepreneurial Competence Framework for Youth is based on the [European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework \(EntreComp\)](#) which was developed by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) to help people acquire the necessary competences and resources to start their own enterprises.

Applying this framework to youth in Ukraine, the newly developed version describes the components of entrepreneurial competence in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, while identifying appropriate tools for their assessment and development. Bridging the realms of education and employment, the framework is meant to serve as a benchmark for initiatives aiming to promote entrepreneurial learning, including curricula in formal education, or hands-on entrepreneurial experiences in informal settings.



Based on the Entrepreneurial Competence Framework for Youth, the self-assessment tool EntreGram4Youth was launched to help young entrepreneurs identify and bridge gaps in their skills and self-development. The tool is available in English and Ukrainian on the [Diia Education portal](#).

To further promote the framework and highlight the need to develop and recognise entrepreneurial competencies in the EaP countries, the '[EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship](#)' project is organising a regional online event on 'Fostering Youth Entrepreneurship'. The event will bring together government officials, educational entities, NGOs, and private sector stakeholders, encouraging them to familiarise themselves with the EntreComp4Youth methodology and self-assessment tool, and to explore ways to apply them in their own countries and projects. The event will also discuss how the framework and tool can aid the official validation of skills and promote the recognition of transversal skills developed outside formal education.

## Increased capacity to deliver education and career guidance

In order to ensure systematic support to youth, interventions carried out as part of the grant projects and technical assistance components of the EU4Youth programme have to be sustainable, meaning that local actors need to be able to implement and maintain newly-introduced structures and actions beyond the project's duration. This in turn requires the enhanced capacities of a range of local stakeholders, including formal, informal and non-formal education providers, youth organisations, including youth workers, and representatives of public institutions and employment services.

While competence-development activities provided within the EU4Youth framework seek to equip young people with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the labour market, the programme also acknowledges the need to strengthen and further develop professional orientation and career guidance as well as mentoring mechanisms.

The training of youth education providers is a crucial first stage in many of the grant projects, with projects organising capacity-building workshops and training programmes for teachers, counsellors and youth workers to foster their ability to provide quality support services.

Many of the projects are currently in the process of developing tailored programmes and guidance materials for youth education providers to help them deliver training and career guidance for youth. This will ensure that local teachers, trainers, youth workers and counsellors will be able to continue supporting youth even after the project has ended. At the same time, it helps to train new colleagues, therefore supporting the sustainability of actions.





The [SKYE Net project](#) is currently in the process of training teachers, counsellors and business support organisations by providing them with teaching methodologies and techniques to integrate social entrepreneurship competence development activities into their curriculum and support services. The training is based on a handbook specifically developed for the project that highlights best international practices with special adaptation to local contexts, using country-based examples and case studies.



Other projects, such as the [Building Back better through Social Entrepreneurship project](#) [the Persp@ctive project](#) have already completed the first rounds of capacity building trainings, enabling 50 youth education providers in Moldova and Ukraine to further support young people in acquiring relevant entrepreneurial, digital and career management skills.

Over the last years, the ‘EU4Youth: Youth Engagement Roadmaps’ project (YER), in close consultation and cooperation with the ‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ project, has provided a series of capacity-building activities for public administrations, and in particular Public Employment Services (PES), in order to allow them to provide more effective and efficient services to young people in line with the job market’s evolving needs. In addition, the EU4Youth programme has been organising a series of intra-regional events and study visits to allow institutional stakeholders from EaP countries to exchange best practices with their EU counterparts and to learn more about successful youth employment initiatives at EU level.

Following the completion of the YER project in early 2023, the [‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ project](#) has continued to maintain and further establish effective cooperation mechanisms with key actors and institutions active in the fields of education and employment. In the context of youth employability, the project is working closely together with the European Network of Public Employment Services to allow their EaP counterparts to benefit from the Network’s knowhow and experience.

In 2023, the ‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ produced policy recommendations related to education and employability, covering best practices in the fields of apprenticeships, working with persons who are not in education, employment, or training (NEETs); and entrepreneurship policies related to digital, green, and social businesses.



The ‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ project has [produced several podcast episodes](#) in 2023 in Azerbaijani, Armenian and English, [discussing the transition to work for young people](#) and exploring best practices from EU member states in the fields of career guidance and education, skills assessment, mentoring, counselling, and job placement.

## Increased mobility and learning experiences

In order to allow young people in the EaP region to expand their horizons, gain new insights, and network with peers from other countries, the [EU4Youth programme](#) is actively promoting a range of mobility and learning opportunities through both its grant projects and scholarship offering. These experiences not only help young people to acquire new competences in specific areas, but also strengthen their soft skills, allowing them to enhance their employability and foster their resilience.

Mobility and exchange programmes with EU countries moreover help to strengthen ties between young people across the EU and EaP region, promoting mutual understanding and cooperation mechanisms that will be essential in supporting countries such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in their EU accession process.

**72% of beneficiaries** that were able to do an internship as part of the support received through the EU4Youth programme, stated they had found a job following their participation in the programme.

*(Source: EU4Youth end-beneficiary survey 2024)*



In order to enable young students' insights into the functioning of an established social company, the SSC project implemented by [ChildFund Germany](#) will sponsor a one-week internship with an established social enterprise for 100 young people from Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine. Students will be able to complete their internship within their own region or abroad, receiving mentorship sessions and support from social entrepreneurs and local partners to spark their interest in the topic and inspire them to start thinking about their own ideas for a social enterprise.



Another grant project, implemented by GYEEK Club in Hungary, focuses on [cross-sectoral cooperation for youth entrepreneurship education in the South Caucasus](#), by developing and piloting a transnational internship programme that will offer disadvantaged youth from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia practical work experience in companies in Hungary and Slovakia.

These internships would allow the young people to improve their entrepreneurial and transversal competencies through a 6-week placement with private sector partners, gaining hands-on experiences in the work of a successful start-up business.

Between 2021 and 2023, the ['EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship' project](#) has also awarded 39 scholarships for the College of Europe to students coming from all six EaP countries to increase their understanding of European politics and governance and foster inter-cultural exchange and mutual learning - according to the EU4Youth Bi-annual data collection, 2021-2023.

## EU4Youth Scholarship recipients

2024/2025 **20**

2023/2024 **15**

2022/2023 **14**

2021/2022 **10**



The ten-month post-graduate programme in European Interdisciplinary Studies at the Campus in Natolin in Poland brings together young people from different backgrounds, encouraging them to think beyond boundaries and overcome existing preconceptions, in order to build bridges and become active changemakers in their countries.

Students following the programme focus on the internal and external dimensions of the EU, and on specific areas such as migration or the digital and green transition. In addition to the academic programme, [scholarship recipients can also further improve their career](#) prospects by attending professional development programmes, taking language courses, and participating in academic extracurricular activities and student-led initiatives.

Upon their graduation, they will have acquired both the knowledge and leadership competences that will allow them to become active citizens, engage in policymaking processes, and promote EU cooperation and integration efforts within their countries.

Highlighting [how the scholarship can help young people from the EaP region](#) to become future changemakers, Ianina Japalau from Moldova, a graduate of the 2022-2023 cohort, explained how she intends to put her newly acquired competences to use in her home country of Moldova:



“I wanted to push my limits and acquire more skills so that I could return to Moldova and add value to the European integration path of my young country – a country whose integration is now more important than ever, given the uncertainty in the international sphere.”

In 2023, fifteen young students from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Georgia graduated from the programme thanks to the scholarships provided by the EU4Youth programme. Applications for the new academic year 2024/25 closed in January 2024, with twenty EU4Youth scholarship recipients from the EaP region starting their studies in autumn.



## ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT

Many young people in the EaP countries continue to experience difficulties in the labour market, resulting in persistently high levels of youth unemployment across the region. Skills mismatch, coupled with a lack of effective career guidance and support from local employment services, often lead young people to seek opportunities elsewhere. This may undermine the potential for innovation and development within their communities.

Against this backdrop, all [eight projects launched](#) under the 'EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship' grant scheme have the objective to improve career development and employment opportunities. The task is to strengthen entrepreneurial competences among youth, especially in the areas of green and digital skills.

The projects will place a strong emphasis on both technical and financial assistance, guiding young people in the Eastern Partnership countries through the process of starting up an enterprise. This work also includes providing the necessary funds and support to open and sustain their business.

Mentorship enabled through the programme was listed by the survey respondents as crucial support.

Out of 221 EU4Youth programme beneficiaries trying to open their business over the last five years, 44% were able to do so. Targeted advice and mentorship enabled through the programme were listed by the survey respondents as crucial support that helped beneficiaries in this process.

The majority of the beneficiaries (86%) stated that the support received through the EU4Youth programme had helped them to increase their confidence in opening their own business. Out of those that were unable to use their skills to start a business, more than half (53%) stated a lack of funding as the main barrier<sup>35</sup>. Disadvantaged beneficiaries faced more difficulties in opening their business.

To drive systematic changes at national and local levels, the EU4Youth programme combines youth work with larger policy processes and institutional capacity building.

Financed by the European Union and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, and implemented by the Central Project Management Agency (CPMA), the [‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ project](#) focuses on providing technical assistance to governmental and non-governmental organisations involved in addressing youth employment and entrepreneurship.

In 2023, the project focused on enabling national governments to develop better policy frameworks, introducing youth guarantee-type measures, strengthening cooperation with Public Employment Services (PES), and fostering the creation of a positive business environment.

## Focus on social entrepreneurship

Highlighting the potential of young people to drive change and foster economic growth in their countries, the [EU4Youth programme](#) aims to raise awareness of social entrepreneurship by supporting youth to come up with innovative solutions to social problems. Equipping young people with the skills, resources and support needed to create and operate social enterprises, the programme thereby aims to generate a process in which young people not only learn to develop their own careers, but also create value for their communities.

Having started their work in late 2023, the eight EU4Youth projects will offer a wide range of career and business development opportunities across all Eastern Partnership countries over the next two years. They are building on existing resources, infrastructure, and experiences of previous EU4Youth projects in the region.

Creating synergies among actions across different countries, eight projects foresee activities in Georgia, six in Ukraine, five in Moldova, and four in Armenia. Due to the technical and legal circumstances and political challenges, there are fewer activities foreseen in Azerbaijan (two projects) and Belarus (one project).

Activities will include mentorship and training programmes on entrepreneurial competences, hackathons, social entrepreneurship incubators and accelerators, technical assistance for social enterprises, as well as freely available tools and resources for both students and mentors. Many projects moreover plan to integrate the development of entrepreneurial skills into the actual process of building a social enterprise, seamlessly merging education, work, and civic engagement.

Making use of both formal and informal educational resources and settings, competence development will be incorporated in school curricula and training programmes but will also extend to non-formal learning contexts such as youth organisations and extra-curricular activities.



## Blended entrepreneurship education



For example, fostering youth social entrepreneurship and practical career management skills in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia through the [innovative Social Student Companies \(SSC\) approach](#), the grant project led by Childfund Germany will provide support to 24 schools to allow students to put their social start-up ideas into practice.

The project merges students' social entrepreneurship education with the practical experience of developing and implementing their own SSC, helping them to creatively address local challenges with the assistance of a teacher, entrepreneur, or parent. Through this initiative, schools become local hubs for social entrepreneurial activity where young people learn to identify local resources, generate income, and become changemakers in their community.

Other projects such as the '[SKYE Net - Skills and Knowledge for Youth Empowerment Network](#)' implemented by World Vision in Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova, provide social entrepreneurship support in two stages: an initial entrepreneurship training programme focused on design thinking will help young people to transform their innovative ideas into social business models, after which an acceleration programme will allow a selection of aspiring young entrepreneurs to start-up and scale their businesses.



Through an idea pitching competition, 30 innovative, feasible and sustainable social business models will be selected to receive funding and additional coaching, as well as technical and legal support to implement their social enterprises.

Similarly, the 'Strengthening Cross-sectoral Cooperation for Youth Entrepreneurship Education in the South Caucasus' project will introduce its blended [youth entrepreneurship education programme \(EEP\)](#) in the form of a learning challenge, in which aspiring young entrepreneurs gradually proceed to the next stage, improving and developing their competencies and business ideas throughout the different stages, including bootcamps and national and regional Ideathons. The participants will be accompanied by mentors from the private sector, which will provide a coaching and support network for the young entrepreneurs.



## Increasing institutional capacity for career support service

Education, skills training and mentorship programmes are critical to help young people launch their career and develop the entrepreneurial mindset and specific skills needed for starting and growing a business.

However, employment and entrepreneurship can only flourish in an environment that provides continuous support and opportunities for young people. In addition to competence development activities targeted at youth, projects also focus on institutional capacity building for employment and entrepreneurship support.

 Recognising that many employment services and youth organisations in the EaP countries currently cannot provide appropriate career counselling and guidance to young people due to insufficient knowledge of the digital labour market and a lack of technical and financial resources, the project coordinated by Caritas Czech Republic will place a strong **focus on upskilling competences for professionals working with youth.**

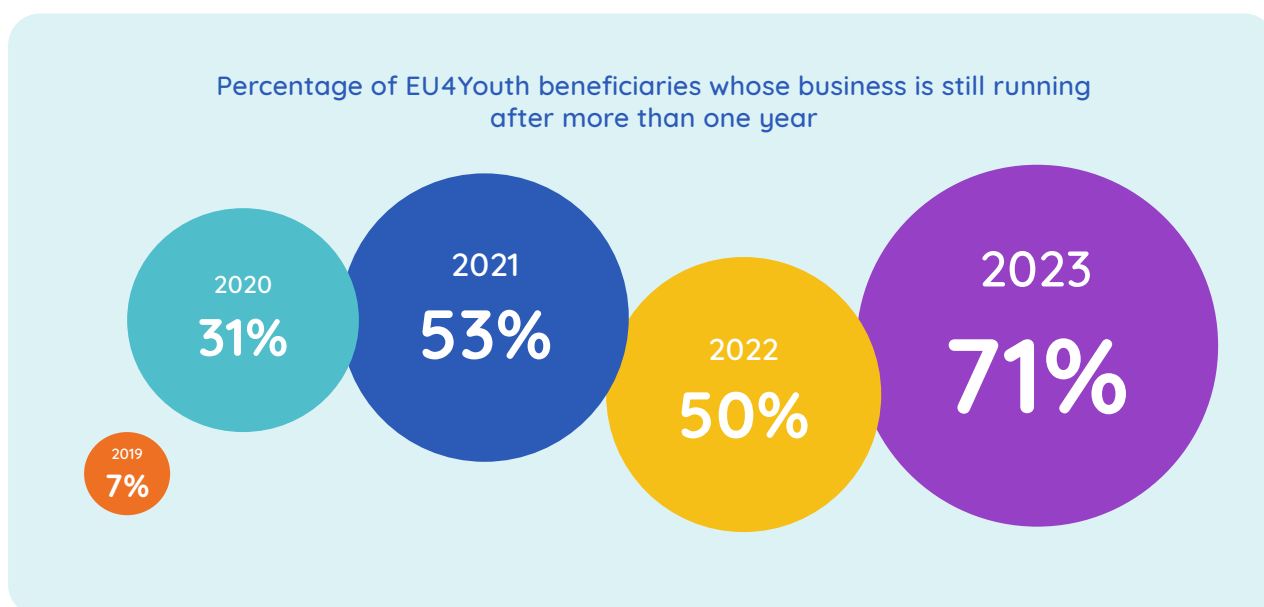
Career advisers in Georgia, Armenia and Moldova will be supported to enhance their knowledge in the digital professions and related market-driven skills and use of digital technology to deliver career development services more effectively. Moreover, CSO-based advisers will be supported with financial and technical resources to better mobilise disadvantaged youths and persons who are not in education, employment, or training (NEETs).

## Sustained support for sustainable change

To guarantee the sustainability of their actions, these EU4Youth projects will aim to build an ecosystem for entrepreneurship that will be able to sustain itself beyond the project framework. In doing so, many projects plan on seeking multi-stakeholder cooperation between businesses, educational institutions, governmental agencies, youth organisations and other local CSO to create long-term support structures for quality entrepreneurship education, financing, and technical assistance.

The need for support does not stop with the creation of a new business. Continuous financial and technical assistance as foreseen in many of the EU4Youth grant projects can help to accelerate and further improve young entrepreneurs' business operations.

The effects of continuous support to entrepreneurs are evident: according to the latest EU4Youth end-beneficiary survey, 71% of respondents stated that their new business is still running after one year. This shows an increase from previous years, highlighting the benefits of sustained support and a functioning eco-system for entrepreneurs.



## Multi-stakeholder partnerships for entrepreneurship



Forging partnerships for entrepreneurship support the [‘Greenhouse for Social Innovators project’](#) implemented by IBB Germany. It focuses on assisting young entrepreneurs to develop sustainable green and digital social business models by establishing lasting cooperation between young social startups and private business companies. The project also works with refugees and businesses that were forced to relocate from Belarus and Ukraine. The main instrument is to connect entrepreneurs with potential investors that may provide them with further funding and technical assistance or include them in their CSR-strategies or production chains.



The [‘SEEDS - Social Entrepreneurship and Enhanced Development-based Skills’](#) project implemented by the Danish Refugee Council also seeks to enhance entrepreneurial and career management opportunities for disadvantaged youth through the establishment of innovative incubators with the private sector in Georgia and Ukraine.



The [‘Strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation for youth entrepreneurship education in the South Caucasus’ project](#) will form wide private-public partnerships. The focus is on designing and implementing municipal action plans that set out clear steps to increase the local support infrastructure for young people’s entrepreneurial competencies and career development.



The project will invite all stakeholders committed to youth entrepreneurship and employment in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to participate in these partnerships, including municipal youth departments, youth groups, NGOs, councils, formal and non-formal education and qualification institutions, as well as representatives of local businesses.

Finally, the [‘Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship’](#) project implemented by JA Europe will moreover implement a revolving philanthropic sustainable financing model and fundraising mechanism in which the initially created companies will be provided with seed-funding using the model of “Pay it Forward”.



This work aims to create a community of giving: successful social entrepreneurs will have a non-binding option to give 1% non-dilutable shares from the newly-formed entities. This donation serves as a basis to catalyse further capital for the financing of a new group of youth, thus making the model circular and sustainable over time.

## Youth employment partnerships

Complementing activities directly involving youth with larger policy and capacity building support for youth employment, the EU4Youth programme continued enhancing cross-sectoral cooperation and strengthening stakeholders’ capacity for evidence-based policy design.

In 2023, the EU4Youth programme engaged nearly 140 different stakeholders from government, administrations, CSOs, and the private sector in youth employment partnerships to promote joint approaches to youth employment.

The [Youth Guarantee \(YG\) is a commitment](#) by all EU Member States to ensure that young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. The YG scheme aims to ensure young people’s smooth transition from school to work, support their labour market integration and make sure that no one is left behind.

With its overall successful implementation across the EU, the YG offers a compelling example of meaningful and mutually beneficial cooperation and partnerships among relevant stakeholders engaged in youth employment. This includes state entities like public employment agencies and municipalities, as well as private sector partners who provide traineeships, apprenticeships, or other work-based learning opportunities that facilitate young people’s entry into the labour market.

Promoting the YG framework as a viable policy solution to tackle youth unemployment in the EaP countries, the EU4Youth [programme is piloting Youth Guarantee type initiatives in Moldova and Georgia](#). Bringing together youth employment stakeholders from both countries, the ‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ project facilitated the elaboration of a roadmap to implement YG measures in the territories of Abasha (Georgia), Chisinau (Moldova), and Poti (Georgia), focusing on mapping, tracking and outreach to persons who are not in education, employment, or training (NEETs), and developing guidelines for establishing a co-management structure. The roadmaps were approved at the National Steering Committees in both countries at the end of 2023.



In September 2023, the [‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’ project invited representatives of public employment services](#) from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to Lithuania to introduce them to Youth Guarantee (YG) measures.

The study visit aimed to provide insights into the design, planning, execution, and subsequent assessment of YG measures, highlighting best practice and lessons learned across different EU Member States. Meetings with the Ministry of Social Security and Labour in Lithuania moreover touched upon legal issues of YG measures, focusing on the drafting and implementation of relevant laws and regulations, and the allocation of financial and human resources.

Since in EU member states public employment services (PES) play a major role in the implementation of youth employment measures, the participants also visited the Lithuanian PES to learn more about youth employment services such as vocational guidance, skills assessment, and career planning. Private sector representatives were also invited to discuss successful collaboration formats between PES and Lithuanian enterprises in employing young people or providing them with a traineeship or apprenticeship in the green and digital sectors.



## Knowledge sharing on policies, legislation, and fair work standards

In the area of employment and entrepreneurship, the EU4Youth programme focuses on disseminating best practices and lessons learned among policymakers, public institutions, and private sector stakeholders. At the same time, it ensures that young people are aware of existing legislation and policies and may exercise their right to fair employment and decent work standards.

### Youth Wikis

In 2023, the [‘EU4Youth Coordination and Policy Support’ \(CPS\)](#) team published new Youth Wiki country reports on [Armenia](#), [Azerbaijan](#), [Moldova](#), [Georgia](#) and [Ukraine](#) to support policymaking on youth employment in the region. These reports cover specific topics such as skills forecasting, career guidance and counselling, traineeships and apprenticeships, cross-border mobility employment, entrepreneurship, and vocational opportunities, as well as the development of entrepreneurial competences, and the promotion of entrepreneurship culture in the EaP region.

The [reports show that the five countries are actively working towards enhanced youth employment and entrepreneurship](#), focusing on initiatives such as start-up incubators and vocational education and training (VET) programmes.

However, the data also identifies the persistent mismatch between education systems and labour market demands as a common barrier in the region, impeding young people from entering quality employment. To address this challenge, the reports highlight the promotion of entrepreneurship and the leveraging of international best practices in youth employment policies as promising measures.

### Telegram game

The violation of labour rights and fair work standards by employers is a common issue observed in many EaP countries. This is particularly valid for young people who may be just starting their careers and are not fully aware of their legal rights or feel unable to assert them, leading to a need for greater awareness and advocacy in this area.



As parts of its efforts to better inform young people about their rights, and to promote good employment practices amongst stakeholders in the region, the [‘EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship’](#) project [launched the Telegram chat-bot game, @fairemployment](#) in 2023. The interactive game is designed to raise awareness and understanding of fair employment practices among young individuals and employers in Moldova and Georgia. It guides players through workplace scenarios as either an employer or an employee, evaluating their knowledge of fair labour standards in a four-stage simulation. The game also identifies potential violations of workers’ rights and highlights risk areas for employers. The game is available on the Telegram app in Romanian and Georgian.



## ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

Youth engagement and empowerment, with particular attention paid to disadvantaged groups, as a cross-cutting feature of most activities under the EU4Youth programme. In addition to young people's active involvement in the large grant projects and the EU4Youth Alumni Network, the work of the **'EU4Youth: Youth Engagement Roadmaps' (YER)** project has placed a specific focus on youth participation in policy making. Implemented by GOPA, the technical assistance **[project finalised its activities in February 2023](#)**, promoting and facilitating a series of multi-stakeholder discussions on a range of youth relevant policy areas in all six EaP countries.

Reinforcing many of the impactful actions introduced by the YER project, the **'EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment'** project started its work in April 2023.

Co-financed by the European Union (EU) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the project seeks to further embed the involvement of young people in policy dialogue and decision-making processes at both local and national levels.

Focusing on substantial capacity-building support to key stakeholders (including line ministries and national youth councils) in the EaP countries, the project will promote networking, exchange, and mutual learning between key actors within and beyond the EaP region.

The renewed '[EU4Youth Coordination and Policy Support](#)' project, which started its work in November 2023, will moreover continue its support of aligning EU policy actions on youth in the region, forging strategic partnerships and policy dialogue, creating more meaningful spaces and structures that empower youth.

The EU4Youth programme has been successfully supporting youth in becoming future leaders and changemakers in their communities. One third of beneficiaries from previous programme activities (such as the large grant scheme under EU4Youth Phase II) that no longer receive support stated that their participation in EU4Youth-funded projects had helped them in becoming more active citizens. Over the last years, this number has steadily increased, with 41% in 2023 stating that they had become active citizens. (Source: *EU4Youth End-beneficiary survey 2024*)

## Increased youth engagement in policymaking

### Youth Policy Labs

To empower young people to actively participate in policy debates by enabling them to identify and discuss key challenges in an inclusive and mutual learning process, 18 [Policy Labs and Policy Lab Consultations](#) were organised by the 'EU4Youth: Youth Engagement Roadmaps' (YER) project.

The Policy Labs were conducted in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine between 2021 and 2022 to engage youth more meaningfully in policymaking. Co-creating solutions using design thinking and a user-centred approach, the labs create a shared space with public administration and other stakeholders. Common policy challenges addressed included youth employment, entrepreneurship, digital skills development, internships, and volunteering. Country-specific challenges were also tackled.

The Policy Labs follow a three-pronged approach:

- **User orientation:** Direct involvement of youth in representing policy challenges, expressing needs and suggestions, and proposing solutions.
- **Design thinking:** Collection of social, emotional, and physical needs of users to design human-centred solutions, generation of new ideas in a participatory environment, and feedback collection.
- **System thinking:** Out-of-the-box analysis of policy challenges, focusing first on possible solutions and then on stakeholder contributions.

The Policy Labs resulted in the formulation of 15 sets of policy recommendations aimed at initiating policy change at the national levels. The recommendations, which address [specific challenges such as youth work and digitalisation, career orientation, and employment opportunities](#), subsequently guided policy discussion with state institutions to enhance ownership and commitment.

Recommendations included improved internship frameworks and entrepreneurship support programmes, as well as improved digital skills education, and capacity building for teachers and youth workers.

In total, more than 2,500 young people, youth workers and practitioners, policy makers and other key stakeholders profited from the project. A survey conducted among participants of the Policy Labs confirmed their positive impact, showing, among others, substantially increased knowledge of national policy developments and the overall policy cycle.

Participants also reported improved knowledge of methods to stimulate participation and to transform ideas into practical solutions. Overall, they deemed policy labs valuable for enabling cross-sector collaboration, out-of-the-box thinking, and amplifying youth voices in decision-making. However, some felt expert and official participation could be increased.

Finally, concerning the impact on policy making, most of the respondents indicated that they had a positive impression of the willingness of policy makers and officials to implement the recommendation produced by their Policy Lab, with some indicating that they already knew of some positive developments after the end of the Policy Lab cycle.





Focusing on reinforcing youth participation and engagement in the region, the '[EU4Youth Coordination and Policy Support](#)' (CPS) team is further developing the Policy Lab concept introduced in the YER project, with the objective of strengthening existing structures and actively promoting the use of the Policy Lab methodology across countries. Several strategic actions have been recommended to solidify and expand the Policy Lab approach:

- **Establish a permanent EaP Youth Policy Hub:** Establishing a regional Policy Hub will institutionalise the Policy Lab methodology by creating a competence centre which could further promote the approach among local stakeholders, follow up on the proposed recommendations, and facilitate continuous dialogue between youth and governments. Additionally, setting up national youth advisory councils will allow for regular engagement with government bodies and ensure ongoing follow-up on the Policy Lab outcomes.
- **Launch a digital Policy Lab platform:** A digital platform will foster knowledge exchange, track progress, and enhance regional cooperation on youth policy issues. In this respect it will also be vital to provide seed funding and capacity-building resources for youth-led projects tackling the challenges highlighted during the Policy Labs.
- **Sustained financial support:** Securing financial support from governments and development partners will be essential to maintain the viability of the Youth Policy Hub. This approach should also promote cross-border learning and collaboration focused on shared goals, like boosting youth employment and entrepreneurship.

## EaP Structured Youth Dialogue

The '[EU4Youth: Youth Engagement Roadmaps](#)' (YER) project showed that the integration of young people in decision-making and co-creation of policies still has a long way to go in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. Yet, the willingness amongst EaP youth and government institutions to drive progress on youth participation and empowerment highlights the importance of further strengthening the programme's work in this field.

The work of the Policy Labs and structured policy discussions have laid the foundations for the development of an EaP Structured Youth Dialogue, to ensure strategic and informed youth engagement in policymaking. This important line of work started by the YER project will be continued through a cooperation between the '[EU4Youth Coordination and Policy Support](#)' (CPS) and the '[EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment](#)' projects in close cooperation with major stakeholders at national and EU level, bringing policymakers and youth activists closer together.

In this respect, and in addition to capacity building activities, the 'EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment' project will launch a number of large and [small grant opportunities](#) in 2024. The aim is to enable National Youth Councils and other non-governmental youth bodies and organisations in the EaP region to implement activities conducive to establishing a sustainable, inclusive and impactful policy dialogue in the region.



## Institutional capacity building and youth policy support

The EU4Youth programme has successfully opened ways for young people to participate more actively in political and civic life in their countries, enabling them to have a greater voice and say in policy processes.

While continuing its efforts to develop young people's skills and knowledge of policy processes, and actively engaging them in actual policy debates, the EU4Youth programme is also working on establishing strategic collaboration with government bodies responsible for youth policies. This approach acknowledges the pivotal role that public institutions play in providing both incentives and opportunities for young people's active participation.

Kicking-off its work in 2023, the '[EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment](#)' project co-funded by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and implemented by GIZ, began to lay the groundwork for meaningful youth engagement with governmental institutions in the upcoming years.

The project initiated proactive outreach to key stakeholders in the EaP countries, building constructive partnerships with relevant ministries and agencies aimed at addressing the diverse needs of youth in the region.

Following the foundational work carried out throughout 2023, a series of impactful initiatives were launched in early 2024 to empower youth and promote their active participation. Guided by a needs-based approach, the collaborative actions with youth organisations and institutional stakeholders will focus on the unique context of each EaP country throughout the coming years.

## Technical assistance and grants



To increase the visibility of public institutions and facilitate their engagement with young people, the **'EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment' project** has provided technical support to the development of an accessible [online platform for the Youth Agency in Moldova](#).



The project has also fostered exchanges and sharing of best practices for public communication with EaP state institutions, providing, among others, expert support to help them increase their visibility, with a particular focus on social media platforms.



Since late 2023, the project has delivered guidance and organisational support for the elaboration of National Youth Action Plans in Georgia and the Youth Law in Armenia. It has also organised and facilitated strategic sessions for state institutions, equipping them with the tools to effectively engage with youth and integrate their perspectives into policymaking processes.

Building upon this work, the project will conduct several study visits to EU member states for EaP youth ministries and agencies, allowing them to exchange challenges, best practices, and lessons learned with their EU counterparts and to gain useful insights into EU youth policymaking.

This support is highly appreciated by the youth ministries and agencies of EaP countries. Asked about the impact of activities on youth in Ukraine, Deputy Minister for Youth and Sports of Ukraine Andrii Chesnokov stated:

“We value the EU4Youth programme as an important tool for the European integration of Ukraine in the youth sphere. Youth and civil society initiatives supported by the programme also contribute to more effective implementation of youth policy by the Ministry and provide the opportunity for the young generation to become a driver of positive changes”.

Zara Aslanyan, Head of Youth Policy of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Armenia highlights the importance of institutional capacity building and strategic partnerships:

“The activities of the EU4Youth component are in line with the Government’s priorities and are of vital importance for development of Armenia. We are very successfully cooperating now with EU4Youth with the aim of increasing youth involvement in policymaking in the country”.

Finally, by collaborating with public bodies in providing support for National Youth Fora, the project is actively strengthening the voice of youth and facilitating dialogue between young people and policymakers. The project has awarded grants to [National Youth Council in Moldova, the National Ukrainian Youth Association](#) (NUMO) and the [Youth Organizations Union of Armenia \(YOU\)](#) to support their work in enabling a structured and impactful youth dialogue across EaP countries.

## Policy support through the Youth Wiki reports

In addition to institutional capacity building in EaP countries, the EU4Youth programme is also contributing to the development of EaP youth policy at the European level. It does so by transferring knowledge and insights from the region to EU policy makers and Member States via the Youth Wiki reports.

The [Youth Wiki is an online platform](#) providing information on European and Erasmus+ countries' youth policies. Youth Wiki reports are designed to aid decision-makers by offering insights into reforms and initiatives, promoting the sharing of information, and facilitating peer learning activities.

Through the CoE-EU Youth Partnership, the ['EU4Youth Coordination and Support' project](#) developed and updated several reports of the general youth participation context in EaP countries throughout 2023. These reports provide an overview of the institutional and legislative framework on youth representation and participation in policy making, while also discussing topics such support to youth organisations, civic education in formal, non-formal and informal learning settings. The content also addresses the question of how to raise young people's political awareness in the EaP countries.

Following the publications on youth participations, the 'EU4Youth Coordination and Support' project published five new country reports on youth employment and [employability in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine](#) at the end of 2023. Over the next few months, the project is set to help in the development of additional EaP country reports on Youth Work and Education.



## The EU4Youth Alumni Network

Throughout 2023, the [EU4Youth Alumni Network](#) continued its work of providing opportunities for young people to become active changemakers in their communities. The Network was created to help young people who have previously participated in EU-funded initiatives (such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, and the [Young European Ambassadors](#)) to share their newly-acquired experiences and build leadership skills. In a peer-to-peer format, the Alumni implement interventions within their communities, supporting those with fewer opportunities. The Network is managed by the 'EU4Youth Coordination and Policy Support' (CPS) project, in close cooperation with [SALTO Eastern European and Caucasus](#).

Since the EU4Youth Alumni Network's launch in 2019, a total of 226 Alumni have joined the Network through the open competition. They have designed and implemented 145 initiatives, usually in teams of two or three, but often also as an individual project.

Together, [these initiatives have led to 1,600 local activities](#). The estimated impact covers well over 3,100 young people, expanding the reach of the Network with each new beneficiary. It has been particularly successful in empowering disadvantaged youth, encouraging their participation and engagement, and proactively targeting their needs at local level.

## Results of the third EU4Youth Alumni Network cycle



The 2022-2023 cycle allowed a cohort of 80 alumni to gain first-hand experience in youth work. Together, they implemented 45 initiatives centred on supporting vulnerable youth in their community and in EU mobility programmes.

Marking the completion of the third cycle in July 2023, the EU4Youth Alumni Network's [final evaluation event](#) in Tbilisi, Georgia, celebrated the culmination of the young participants' dedicated volunteer work for the programme. During the event, participants also reflected on the knowledge and leadership skills gained and discussed the sustainability and future of their projects.

Xenia and Victor, two EU4Youth Alumni from Moldova who spearheaded an initiative named 'Civic Education and Opportunities for Disadvantaged Youth' said about the larger impact of their project:

“We want to inspire teenagers to be active and responsible citizens, which is essential for building and maintaining democracy. By empowering young people with knowledge and skills, the project contributes to the development of a stronger and more prosperous society.”



Following the completion of the third cycle in July 2023, the fourth cycle was launched at the end of the year under the 'EU4Youth Coordination and Policy Support' (CPS) project, welcoming a new cohort of motivated and ambitious Alumni who will start implementing their projects throughout 2024.

## Upcoming: fourth Alumni Network cycle

In December 2023, EU4Youth launched the application call for the fourth Alumni Network cycle. Through this 10-month programme, the selected Alumni have been working with national mentors to create and realise their own local initiatives. More than 60 motivated young people from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine convened in April 2024 at the [IdeaLab Event in Tbilisi](#) to further refine their initiatives.

The Network also regularly provides information about new opportunities for learning and capacity development through other programmes, highlighting new grants and scholarships for young people in the region.

## Participation in external events

Providing spaces for active youth participation and bringing youth representatives and institutional stakeholders together is one of the main objectives of the Engagement and Empowerment pillar of the EU4Youth programme.

Throughout 2023, several stakeholder events, including the EaP Youth seminar and European Solidarity Workshop were organised to empower young people to take active leadership roles in their countries and to strengthen the work of youth organisations.

### EaP Youth Seminar

Taking place from 20 to 22 June 2023, the [Eastern Partnership \(EaP\) Youth Seminar in Stockholm](#), brought together representatives of national youth councils, selected civil society organisations, government officials from EaP countries and EU officials.

Co-organised and funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the seminar had the objective to [elaborate ways of supporting young people in building resilience](#).

In this context, panel discussions and workshops stressed the importance of involving young people in decision making processes, debating, among others, the role of youth in building resilience through active participation in the face of climate change ([Youth Goal #10: Sustainable Green Europe](#)) and promoting inclusive societies ([Youth Goal #3: Inclusive Societies](#)).

The Seminar also provided an opportunity to raise awareness about the concept of Youth Dialogue, discussing existing structures and their applicability in the EaP region.

While youth dialogue is an effective and ever-evolving format, ensuring that a youth perspective is appropriately considered in relevant policies and by relevant authorities, implementing it at the EaP regional level remains challenging due to differences between the countries and their perceptions of the concept of participation at policy and public levels. Therefore, a tailored approach to this issue is more essential than a one-size-fits-all approach to effectively ensure broader youth involvement in decision-making at national level.

The [joint conclusions and recommendations](#) of the Seminar directly informed the activity planning for follow-up EU4Youth actions, particularly the ‘EU4Youth: Youth Engagement and Empowerment’ project, which has a dedicated focus on improving institutional capacities and opportunities for youth dialogue in the Eastern partner countries.

## European Solidarity Workshop

Organised by the Polish Council of Youth Organisations (PROM) in collaboration with the European Youth Forum and the Municipality of Lublin in Poland, the [European Solidarity Workshop on 28 November 2023 addressed challenges](#) faced by young people in both EU enlargement and neighbouring countries. Its objective was to support youth in contributing to their countries’ journey towards regional cooperation and European integration.



## EU4YOUTH IN UKRAINE

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has drastically changed the lives of young people in the country since February 2022, creating new challenges and immediate needs, while exacerbating existing difficulties faced by youth.

In response to the challenging situation in the country, the European Commission, together with the Central Project Management Agency (CPMA), swiftly [repurposed funds](#) within the framework of the 'EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship' project, allowing for the release of €2,000,000 towards initiatives in Ukraine.

### Direct grant projects

Through direct grants to non-profit organisations, the [EU4Youth programme](#) will be able to address the societal and economic repercussions of war, strengthen resilience amongst youth and encourage their active participation in the country's recovery.

More specifically, funded actions will foster employment support services for internally displaced young people and businesses, the rehabilitation and reintegration of young veterans, the creation of support systems to address mental health, trauma and psychological distress in youth, and the involvement of young people in humanitarian and other civilian community support.

One of the first projects under the direct grant scheme was launched in July 2023 to [strengthen the capabilities of young graduates and university students in community-based care](#) services for people with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities. With the ongoing war disrupting the functioning of care, many youths with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities have lost access to essential services. As a result, these individuals, as well as their families, are facing increased isolation, vulnerability, and distress, impacting their mental health and overall well-being.



The '[Youth Employment in Times of Crisis](#)' project is implemented by the All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, together with the Djerela Charity Association. It enrolls some 300 young graduates and university students specialised in social work, pedagogy, and psychology in a tailored training programme to enhance their knowledge and skills related to the care of people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.

Among the selected students, [at least 75 individuals will be employed in their respective professions](#), following the completion of the training, while around 200 others will be offered volunteer opportunities with collaborating NGOs that provide personal assistance to persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. Through these community-based social services, the project will be able to offer respite provision for a minimum of 380 family members to allow them to take a short relief from their caregiving responsibilities. In collaboration with Ukrainian universities, the project will moreover modify the curriculum of prospective care professionals to better address the needs of people impacted by the war.

Since its start, the project has completed eight cycles of its training programme. So far, 8 graduates of the programme have signed employment agreements with local partner NGOs, while 49 volunteers are providing personal assistance to families.



Adding to this initiative, two more projects have started their work in early 2024, while three other direct grant projects are currently in the concept phase. These projects will help address the needs of young Ukrainians from diverse policy angles:

- entrepreneurial skill development for [young veterans and internally displaced persons](#)
- [reintegration of young veterans](#) in the Zaporizhzhia region of Ukraine
- strengthening of youth centres for [improved youth mobilisation and engagement](#)
- creation of post-conflict educational programmes and trauma-informed pedagogies
- development of initiatives aimed at facilitating the return
- successful integration of young Ukrainian professionals into the country's public sector

Together, these projects will play an integral part in responding to both immediate and long-term needs in the country, placing young people at the forefront of resilience and recovery efforts.

## Focus on veterans: 'Returning from the War' study

Many of the target actions will address the distinct needs of young veterans who will require particular support to reintegrate into society and the labour market, following their return from service.

In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences and challenges faced by veterans in Ukraine, the 'EU4Youth: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship' project commissioned the [study 'Returning from the War'](#), in cooperation with the National Research Centre's Olexandr Yaremchenko Institute of Family and Youth Policy in Ukraine.



Conducted from January to May 2023, the study finds that despite existing support structures, many veterans in Ukraine struggle to obtain medical aid or register social benefits. Job scarcity upon their return, combined with insufficient qualifications among support professionals and limited access to reintegration services further exacerbate these challenges, leaving many veterans grappling with unemployment and mental health struggles.

The study consequently proposes a comprehensive state policy in support of young veterans, ensuring job security and employment assistance, enhanced access to social support, and a simplified process for obtaining veteran status.

Additionally, it recommends better reintegration of discharged military personnel through a national mentorship programme, specialised training, psychological screenings, a veteran association registry, and online tools for job and educational updates.

Given the specific needs of youth in Ukraine, as well as the ongoing accession negotiations with the country, the EU4Youth programme will continue tailoring its interventions to address the challenges faced by youth and support their active involvement in the country's path towards EU membership.

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