



1. Submission Form

Public Consultation on the Development of the Priorities and Policy Programme for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026

Mandatory questions	
Name	Michael Mc Loughlin
Organisation (if any)	Youth Work Ireland
Date of submission	December 12 2025
Do you agree to all of the terms set out in this consultation process, including those set out under section 5 and 6?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Optional questions	
<i>The following questions are asked only to help us understand the range of perspectives received as part of this consultation process.</i>	
Respondent type (i.e. individual, NGO, business, academic, local authority, etc.)	NGO www.youthworkireland.ie
What is your sector/area of work?	Youth and related policy areas
What is your connection to the issues you are providing feedback on? For example, are you an expert practitioner, person affected by a policy issue, member of the public with a general interest in the topics, etc.?	<p>We are a leading provider of youth services in Ireland in conjunction with the Department of Education and Youth and other Departments. We are members of EU level platforms such as ERYICA and ECYC A number of young people from our organization participate in EU level activities such as President Von der Lyen's Youth Advisory Board.</p> <p>Youth Work Ireland helps bring the EU's goals for young people to life through its Youth Work for All campaign which champions the right of all young people to safe and supported spaces. Across our youth services, we give young people places to connect, learn, express themselves and get reliable information in a world full of misinformation. We work to include, and support marginalised young people by helping them feel part of their community and to amplify their voices in society.</p>

Optional questions

The following questions are asked only to help us understand the range of perspectives received as part of this consultation process.

Describe your geographical focus in the context of your submission? For example, rural, urban, national or EU wide.

We are a national organization with 20 local member youth services in a federation. We have a strong presence in all towns and rural areas through a network of funded youth projects and approximately 300 local youth clubs the latter often being in very rural areas

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Through these consultations the Government is seeking to gather observations, suggestions, and reflections on how Ireland can best fulfil its Presidency role; ensure the Presidency policy programme is informed by diverse perspectives from across Irish society; and identify EU-wide issues, themes, and policy areas that should be given particular attention during Ireland's Presidency.

It is proposed that Ireland's overall policy approach for the 2026 Presidency will be expressed at a high level in the form of a single overarching phrase or slogan setting out a people-centred and future-oriented vision for the EU, accompanied by three priority themes.

Respondents are asked to consider the following guiding questions and to limit their responses to each question to a maximum of 500 words. Please note that you do not have to respond to all questions.

Respondents are welcome to submit additional information alongside Submission Form. However, in such cases, respondents must provide a summary of the additional information under the 'Any other comments' question. This response should also be limited to a maximum of 500 words.

Question 1 – What should Ireland choose as the high-level thematic priorities for its Presidency of the Council in 2026?

Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.

We believe Ireland should draw extensively on the first priority of the **European Council's Strategic Agenda 2024-2029** "a free and democratic Europe" for its overall priority/slogan. With so much going on in Europe and the world we need to ground Europe in high level principles such as human rights, the rule of law and EU values, most particularly;

"We will protect and promote our founding values – respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities – which remain the cornerstone of our Union"

This field is most relevant to our work where we focus on the rights of young people and their need to access quality local youth work and supports in their community. It also covers other strategic issues on competitiveness, climate, security and more. Few of the EU's objectives can be realized if these overarching rights based values are let slide.

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Effectively a slogan/theme like **“Furthering our Values and Rights”** sums this up well.

There is more room for diversity in three potential policy themes. We believe one of these must be rooted in the need to ensure the continuance of social Europe consistent with the European Pillar of Social Rights. There is considerable pressure at the EU and national level to reduce these protections and they figure less and less in EU processes.

Yet for young people these are key to their development, whether it be in accessing local voluntary services, the housing crisis, mental health, and other areas. Tangible progress associated with the European project in these areas does more than all the treaties or declarations in the EU. Similarly the European Green Deal is constantly subject to dilution as witnessed at COP 30.

A theme revolving around social, environmental and human progress then would serve the Irish Presidency well where relevant files and policy areas could be monitored and progressed by the Council to serve such a heading.

Question 2 – Which particular policy areas and legislative proposals should be a focus of work for the Irish Presidency of the Council in 2026? What should the Irish Presidency aim to achieve in these areas?

Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.

Below are key areas relevant to young people for Ireland's Presidency largely in the EYCS and EPSCO configurations which would be relevant under a social and environmental theme. Consistent with the **EU Youth strategy, “Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027”** youth is seen as a cross-cutting issue as witnessed by the overall youth dialogue and the individual Commissioners Youth Policy Dialogues. This is similar to youth policy at a national level.

The following are the key policy and legislative areas in the above configurations and related fields;

EU Youth Strategy

This strategy will cease at the end of 2026. The strategy has pioneered the cross sectoral approach to youth. We believe there should be a **rights based approach to youth work** providing for access to youth work as a social right in policy and legislation. However, more emphasis may be needed on national delivery and levelling up local provision by member states. National programmes should **facilitate and encourage mobility** and other activities supported by the ERASMUS+. There should be a culture of parity of esteem between the formal and informal education systems.

Another key issue is **strengthening and supporting quality Youth Information** particularly in a time of disinformation and fake news. This is also a cross cutting field. Our work with the European platform ERYICA, which we plan to showcase during the Presidency, has much to offer here.

We are working locally and at the European level with partners and the Council of Europe (Strasbourg) on prioritising **quality youth spaces** for young people. Such practical initiatives should certainly feature in the EU Youth Strategy.

ERASMUS and the MFF

There will be a role for the trio and Presidency in supporting a strong budget allocation for ERASMUS+ particularly for the youth (as distinct from 3rd level) aspects. This is the part of the programme that

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achieves most in terms of inclusion and needs “earmarking” as called for by the European Economic and Social Committee.

The **Intergenerational Solidarity Strategy** is due in 2026, it should not represent any dilution to support for youth or major youth issues such as youth work, education, housing, and mental health. Commissioner Micallef’s Mission letter from President Von der Lyen stated “We must ensure that decisions taken today do no harm to future generations”

Other Cross Cutting Issues

There are huge issues relating to mental health, online safety and the protection and delivery of the Digital Services Act. **The Cyber Bulling Strategy** is due early in 2026. The European Parliament and Maria Walsh MEP have done valuable work on an **EU strategy for Mental Health**.

The development of **EU policy relating to housing** will remain a focus in late 2026 and affordability, particularly in the rental market, is critical for young people

In employment and social affairs youth interests must be a focus on initiatives such as;

- EU Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Quality Jobs Act
- Fair Labour Mobility package
- Education Package
- Employment Guidelines 2026 & 2027
- Traineeship Directive
- Equal treatment Directive

Question 3 – How can the work of the Council during the term of the Irish Presidency make the most substantial positive impact for people, businesses and communities across the EU?

Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.

It is inevitably challenging to bring somewhat arcane legislative and other procedures to the public at any time. There is however enhanced media and communications opportunities to enable at least increased impact.

The events programme has the ability to link with local communities and civil society organisations to illustrate the actual work and how it impacts on everyday life. Certain files or policy areas may be more amenable to this. Local radio and local connections and visits can also help a lot.

While the Commission and Parliament have advanced dedicated youth participation programmes these are less common with the Council meetings, particular outside of Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. The Presidency could be an opportunity to showcase quality youth participation in the policy making process in Ireland aligned to particular meetings and events.

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Similarly local events could also connect with local youth services in this fashion or through visits or fact finding activities. All these activities could also showcase the diversity of Ireland and connect all groups to the EU integration process.

While respecting sensitivities the Presidency should be open to engagement with groups from Northern Ireland in some of its meetings and activities in venues in the south. This would maintain a connection with the EU and Northern Ireland and also possibly be appropriate to the re-entry or alignment of the UK with the ERASMUS+ Programme

By promoting mobility and non-formal learning, the Presidency can help expand opportunities for skills development, cross-cultural exchange and innovation. These benefits extend beyond individual young people to employers, regional development and the wider EU economy. A Presidency that centres young people's rights and strengthens the youth work sector will make a deep and lasting contribution to social and economic wellbeing across the Union.

Question 4 – How can we best communicate the values and benefits of EU membership to its citizens and create a sense of ownership, amongst citizens, over Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU?

Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.

In many respects this is linked with the previous question. There will be media and PR opportunities clearly. Some of these should perhaps take more the form of debate and discussion about the EU and its priorities rather than mere "flags and balloons" events. With young people, youth services and schools there may be many possibilities here and these should be linked to actual Council meetings or activities.

While not an EU event the EPC meeting in Ireland should also feature in such activity.

Key sectoral partnerships related to the Council configurations could also help with local debate and discussion events related to some of the more engaging policy issues and files. There are clearly a number of sectors and even interest groups with different views on numerous topics. The work previously carried out by citizens assemblies may also be instructive here

Once more local events and activities are very much in the Irish culture and these can also find national expression for major set piece events. Local "adoption" of events or issues akin to the Special Olympics is an approach that seems to work well. We are confident that local youth services and young people would be more than happy to contribute or be involved in such activities

A dedicated Youth approach to the Presidency would be a new departure and a huge benefit, it could include;

- Youth-friendly, factual communication delivered through reliable youth information services and youth workers as the trusted intermediaries who can translate complex EU policy into accessible, relevant content. This is essential to counter disinformation and strengthen democratic engagement.

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- Creating participatory mechanisms for young people to directly shape Presidency-related discussions, such as youth dialogues, micro-grants for youth-led civic projects, and youth participation in thematic events.
- Highlight stories from across Ireland and the EU where EU membership has tangibly improved young people's lives, from access to mobility, education, employment supports, digital rights, environmental protections and anti-discrimination frameworks.
- Use high-quality youth spaces such as arts centres, youth clubs, libraries, community hubs etc.. as local sites for Presidency engagement. These spaces are democratic infrastructures where inclusive and meaningful dialogue with young people can happen.
- Collaborate with youth organisations to design communication that is culturally and linguistically inclusive, accessible to all and tailored for diverse communities.

Question 5 – Any other comments

Respondents are welcome to submit additional information alongside Submission Form. However, in such cases, respondents must provide a summary of the additional information under the 'Any other comments' question. This summary should also be limited to a maximum of 500 words.

We would refer to some key EU platforms and activities connected with our work

European Civic Forum <https://civic-forum.eu/> pan-European network of nearly 100 associations and NGOs across 29 European countries.

The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) Youth & Student Organisation <https://www.iglyo.org/> LGBTQI issues at the European and international level.

European Youth Information and Counselling Agency <https://www.eryca.org/> Youth Information, disinformation, mental health, digitalisation

European Confederation of Youth Clubs <https://www.ecyc.org/> a network of 20 youth clubs and youth work organisations across 18 Council of Europe countries dedicated to open youth work and non-formal education.

European Youth Forum www.youthforum.org Overall umbrella body for National Youth Councils and International Youth NGOs

European Economic and Social Committee <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en> The treaty based voice of organised civil society in Europe.

European Youth Card Association <https://eyca.org/> Association of 40 member organisations that issue the European Youth Card to more than 7 million young people in over 30 countries across Europe.