

## 9.3 Exchanges between young people and policy-makers on global issues

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### **Global issues exchanges with policy-makers at the domestic level**

#### **“Megaforum” of the Flemish Youth Council**

Youth representatives of the Flemish Youth Council think about social themes and represent the voice of young people in policies. By doing so, the youth representatives questioned young people (online and through focus discussions) and they then started to formulate policy recommendations on European, Federal and Flemish level.

A group of young people and youth workers are brought together to think about the world we live in. A “Megaforum” is one of the many ways in which the Flemish Youth Council participates in youth participation. It is a moment in which they bring together as many young people and youth workers as possible to discuss and debate with them about important policy themes that they as the Flemish Youth Council are working on (Education, Good in Sheet, Diversity, UN, Europe, local elections, Youth Work,...). This is seen as the ideal place for young people & youth workers with an opinion and a desire to see things differently.

The youth representatives discussed their recommendations in a number of roundtable discussions with experts and national policy makers on the event “Megaforum” of the Flemish Youth Council. The recommendations of young people are not binding.

#### **Flemish youth representative in FRDO**

The Flemish Youth Council monitors global policy developments and disseminates their opinion at the UN level. It also supports the youth representatives.

The Flemish Youth Council has youth representatives in the Federal Council for Sustainable Development ([FRDO](#)). FRDO advises the Belgian Federal Government on federal policy on sustainable development. The youth representatives represent the Flemish youth on this council. There are also representatives of NGO's, employers, employees, science and the government. Different working groups prepare opinions.

## **“What do you think?” project of UNICEF**

Since 1999, UNICEF has launched the project “[What do you think?](#)” in Belgium. UNICEF want to make the voices of children and young people heard with this project. UNICEF questions children and young people about their rights and whether or not children and young people experience problems with their rights. UNICEF gathers their ideas, their wishes and their suggestions. Subsequently, UNICEF will make these suggestions known to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

In addition, the project “What do you think?” want to encourage policy makers to go ahead with children’s rights. “What do you think?” is much more than just making reports: at least as important is the whole process that precedes and follows it.

This process aims to stimulate a real political and social debate at all (policy) levels on the participation of children, their experience and their situation. After all, we want to give all those who are involved in and responsible for translating the fine words of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into daily reality - policymakers at all levels of competence, the Committee's experts, lawyers, teachers, professionals from all kinds of sectors, parents, children and young people themselves - a clear picture of what is important according to the children and young people. So that they can take it into account and see how relevant it is to think about what children and young people think.

In 2016 and 2017, UNICEF Belgium continued with 'What Do You Think?' In the following two years they wanted to focus on children and young people on the run who have recently arrived in Belgium. They want to hear from themselves what their concerns are and what problems they are confronted with. And they want to look for solutions together with them, because these children are not passive victims. They are fully-fledged individuals who, at their level, want to and are able to shape society.

The publications and reports of these questionings can be found on the [website](#) of UNICEF (only in Dutch).

## **KRAS (Globelink)**

Since 1977, the Flemish-funded organisation Globelink runs the simulation project [KRAS](#). KRAS is a discussion and role play for young people from the third grade of secondary education. KRAS works across schools. All over Flanders, young people come together in their free time to discuss global issues with their peers on the cutting edge. Discussion and one's own opinion are central in this project. Every school year, a new annual theme with a global slant is used to introduce young people to the wonderful world of democracy and debate. The theme of this year is “Climate”. In this project empathy and discussion are central and essential. From the point of view of people who have something to say, young people get the best insight into the often difficult, global themes. That is why young people put themselves in the shoes of a political party, a young person from another country, the government of a country, the press, an interest group, etc. They are also able to make their own contribution to the debate on the future of the

European Union. They defend their voices with verve and experience the tensions that exist between the different parties. At the end of the school year, the Flemish Parliament invites the students to a big closing colloquium. On this colloquium, young people formulate their (non-binding) policy recommendations.

### **J100-top: initiative of youth organisations in Antwerp**

The J100 was founded by 11 Antwerp youth organisations in order to find answers to the city's divisions together with their young people. With this project, the young people take up their position in the city. They talk about what is important to them and how they want to live together in their city.

The J100 builds bridges between the young people from the various youth work activities, but also between the youth workers and youth work organisations. Together we strengthen our neighbourhoods and our city.

In 2016, the first [J100-top](#), an initiative of youth organisations in Antwerp, was organised. These youth organisations want to bring experts, (regional) politicians and young people together to discuss social themes.

During the first J100-top, the themes media, police, work and discrimination were discussed. Young people exchanged ideas with local policymakers.

### **Het Burgerkabinet Jeugd 'Give more colour to youth'**

In 2016 the minister of Youth organised his [Citizens Cabinet on diversity in the youth sector](#). It was prepared in a workshop with about 25 youth organisations. There was an online platform where more than 3000 youngsters posted ideas and questions, and finally there was a concluding meeting in the Flemish parliament with 134 participants from all over Flanders, with a nice diversity of ages, gender, habitation, backgrounds...that formulated a whole range of recommendations for the authorities of different levels.

## **Global issues exchanges with policy-makers at the international level**

### **Europinion-project of the Flemish Youth Council (Structured Dialogue)**

The Structured Dialogue is a European project and process for discussions between young people and policy makers about different themes, to make sure the opinions of young people are taken into account in defining the EU's youth policies.

In Flanders, the structured dialogue is managed by the Flemish Youth Council and it is called the Europinion-project ([Gestructureerde dialoog – Europinion](#)). A group of eight young people is brought together in Europinion. The European Council provides guiding questions about a specific theme, such as youth unemployment, rights and political participation of young people. The eight young people of Europinion are looking for answers on the guiding questions by

conducting research, consulting young people, policymakers and experts. Furthermore, there are a lot of actions: a kick-off weekend, a meeting with British Youth Ambassadors, a role play in the parliament, etc.

The results of the Flemish consultations and any additional input from international youth organisations are compiled into background documents. The eight Flemish young people will go to the EU Youth Conferences, where youth representatives and policy makers have the opportunity to work together and present a joint message to the EU. The EU Youth Conferences take place twice a year and are hosted by the country that holds the EU Presidency.

### **Flemish youth representative at the High-Level Political Forum of the UN**

The Flemish Youth Council sends a Youth Representative for Sustainable Development to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. This forum is the central United Nations platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2017, a youth representative participated in the High-Level Political Forum in New York to represent the Flemish youth in global issues. The youth representative is part of the official Belgian delegation to the Forum.

### **Flemish youth representative on youth forum UNESCO**

UNESCO is an organisation of the United Nations (UN). Its aim is "to contribute to the building of peace, the [eradication of poverty](#), [sustainable development](#) and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information".

The UNESCO Youth Forum was created in 1999 to provide young people with the opportunity to present their concerns and ideas to Member States and help shape the direction of UNESCO.

Every two years, UNESCO organises a youth forum, that precedes the general assembly of UNESCO. Young people come together at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris to discuss and debate thematic areas of concern.

The Flemish Government sends a youth representative to the youth forum.

In 2017, the 10th UNESCO Youth Forum was organised and a new way of working was thereby chosen. This new way of working involved that a group of approximately 60 young people who were already actively engaged in their communities was brought together. These young people were approached as equal partners and were asked to reflect on the question how UNESCO can improve the lives of young people around the world. The choice for such a closer collaboration with young people is related to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development – Leaving no one behind. UNESCO decided to transform the Youth Forum into a real dialogue with young people whereby young people were approached as equal partners in finding solutions for global challenges.