

BEING A POWERFUL YOUNG LEADER **IN THE** **21st CENTURY**

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Youth Station Association
Nihal Deniz & Enes Efendioğlu

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Executive Summary

Youth Station Association aims to improve youth's leadership skills by mobilizing young people and supporting international mobility for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Youth Station Association research and publications working group draws on objective and reliable statistical resources with particular attention to official and recent documentation. Drawing and building on the findings of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Centre for Educational Research, Innovation (CERI), and European Commission this document provides updated observations about the scale of leadership in the 21st century by youth and the competency levels in the Europe.

In this globally and digitally interconnected world, young people need 21st century skills such as productivity, creativity, and digital literacy to become effective and strong leaders. In addition to having 21st century skills, the environment of young people in Europe and the importance of the environment in acquiring skills should be emphasized. Firstly, the globalizing world causes difficulties; and these difficulties trigger the competitive environment. To survive and succeed in this challenging and competitive environment, the world needs solutions from today's leaders. Solutions for a sustainable Europe and world, include the leader's flexibility, initiative, social skills, and productivity. Secondly, the challenges do not end in 21st century Europe because the only constant is change itself. This gives young leaders the opportunity to find solutions for a sustainable environment. This opportunity is taken over by leaders who can think critically, produce creative solutions, and have strong communication skills. Thirdly, a Europe where artificial intelligence is a part of today and technology leaps forward day by day cannot be ignored. In the world order where all information true or false is accessible, a strong leader needs information literacy skills that can distinguish between accurate and reliable information, technology literacy that will understand the developing technology, and a media literacy that can understand the source of the news circulating in the media. And so, Europe becomes a place for young leaders where they can acquire 21st century skills.

Due to Europe's multicultural, productive, and entrepreneurial nature; young people have the capacity to develop their socio-cultural, communication and entrepreneurial skills. Although not generalizing, young people are in a structure that can adapt to different situations caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and show flexibility. But at the same time, the sustainability skills of European youth in terms of entrepreneurial activities and continuing the business they started are below their potential. For this reason, Youth Station Association makes various suggestions to improve the abilities of young people that they are good at and to improve themselves in the areas they feel the absence.

The suggestions offered by Youth Station Association can be done in practice instead of staying in theory. For instance, participating in student exchange programs offers the option of multiple 21st century skills such as social, communication, collaboration, entrepreneurship, and flexibility. Besides, by taking an active role in student clubs, participating in social responsibility projects, or participating in youth organizations; more than one skill such as leadership, productivity, problem solving, adaptability and intercultural abilities can be developed.

Being a Powerful Young Leader in the 21st Century

Changes in society and the economy necessitate that educational institutions provide young people with new skills and competencies, which enable them to take advantage from developing new forms of socialization and actively contribute to economic development in a system where knowledge is the essential asset. These skills and competencies are frequently referred to as 21st century skills and competencies, implying that they are more closely tied to the needs of new economic and social models than those of the previous century that were adapted to an industrial mode of production (OECD, 2009). According to OECD and CERI reports, 21st century skills divided into three categories: life and career, learning and innovation, and information literacy skills (2008). 21st century skills are summarized in the Figure 1.

Life and Career Skills	Learning and Innovation Skills	Information, Media and Technology Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexibility & Adaptability - Initiative & Self-direction - Social & Cross-cultural Skills - Productivity & Accountability - Leadership & Responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical Thinking & Problem Solving - Creativity & Innovation - Communication & Collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information literacy - Media literacy - ICT (Information, Communications & Technology) Literacy

Figure 1. Percentage of entrepreneurs reporting 'obtaining finance' as a major start-up difficulty in 15 EU countries, 2005 (OECD, 2014)

In the 21st century skills context, leadership indicated under the title of "Life and Career Skills". At the same time, in order for today's young leader to achieve the goal of sustainable development, the leader needs to incorporate other 21st century skills. Since a strong young leader is someone who motivates a team, group or community to achieve a goal in a competitive environment open to social and economic changes in the 21st century; it is in the leader's interest to have competence in different areas ranging from media literacy to critical thinking. Besides, Glenn Llopis, entrepreneur, author, speaker and senior advisor to Fortune 500 companies, mentioned that "a 21st century leader sees opportunities everywhere, every day, and makes the most of them. Many are opportunities others don't see."

Llopis's words can be adapted in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. Although there are many global challenges such as poverty, climate change, hunger, justice and so on; there are also opportunities for everyone to have a better and more sustainable future. However, a leader can see these opportunities and takes action to ensure social, economic and environmental sustainability. At the same time, in order to see these opportunities, it is necessary to have 21st century skills and competencies such as finding solutions to problems, thinking outside of the box, and being initiative. A leader who has a comprehensive knowledge of social environment, digital literacy, collaboration, technology and so on; can see and utilize the opportunities that others cannot see.

In this report, Youth Stations Association offers a concrete and realistic approach to the development of 21st century skills among young people in Europe, while focusing on the leadership through the existing social, economic, and technological structure.

1. Life and Career Skills in the 21st Century

Life and career are conducted in a dynamic context in the 21st century. This dynamic context based on global society and worldwide marketplace. Although globalization has an influence on the cross-cultural relationships and multifarious business ideas, a globalized society brings along social, political, economic and technological challenges. In addition to these challenges, since the globalize communities and workplaces are based on cross-cultural collaborative relations and social networks; the society and marketplace become intensely competitive. To both overcome these challenges and cope with a competitive environment as a young leader, it is necessary to have life and career skills (flexibility, adaptability, initiative, self-direction, productivity, accountability, responsibility, leadership, and social skills) and develop those skills.

According to The European Business Review, the ideas, ambitions and determinations of young people will shape Europe's future (2020). Therefore, considering the competitive and constantly changing world, solutions from young leaders are needed for a habitable city, country

and more importantly, a habitable world. While seeking solutions to problems such as the level of development, economy, social life, education level and technological differences of European countries; both the local and global dimensions of the problems should be considered. This is because local solutions have an effect on the global level. Thus, young leaders in the 21st century can achieve Sustainable Development Goals by acting with the awareness of local and global responsibilities.

So, having life and career skills are essential in order to become a young leader in the 21st century's developing society, changing economy and challenging business life. These skills are shown explicatively in the Figure2.



Figure 2. Life and Career Skills

1.1. Do young people in Europe have life and career skills?

Flexibility & Adaptability

The Covid-19 pandemic, seen in Europe and all over the world, caused a new process to be adapted and flexibility due to the change in the current situation. Economic and social impacts among young people in Europe disrupted every aspect of young people's lives in an unprecedented manner. According to OECD report, young people between 15 and 24 was most affected group by the increase in unemployment between February and March which represents the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis (2020). According to United Nations, more than 1.5 billion children and youth around the world have been affected by the closure of schools which has substantially altered how youth and children live and learn during the pandemic (2020). Despite all negative effects of Covid-19 and changing conditions in Europe:

- The outbreak of the pandemic has been accompanied by a rise in volunteerism, particularly among young people (OECD, 2020).

- The covid-19 crisis has demonstrated that youth workers, youth organizations, and unorganized youth can work together to enhance people's well-being (OECD, 2020).

Considering all the negative and positive aspects together, resilience of youth proves that young people may open and adaptable to changes despite adverse effects in unexpected situation like Covid-19.

Initiative & Self-direction

An idea of initiative and self-direction can be gained by looking at the rate of European youth working independently, starting a business, and living independently. According to data from OECD and Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE),

- Although in 2018 only 6.5% of working youth (20-29 years old) in the European Union were self-employed, young people have a high interest in self-employment (OECD, 2019).

- Young people are more likely to get involved in starting a business (OECD, 2019).

- New young entrepreneurs are optimistic about their potential of job creation (OECD, 2019).

- 51.8% of young people aged 18 to 34 lived independently from the parents. (INE, 2020). Additively, some young Europeans in Europe such as Italy and Greece, choose to live with family. This variation may be due to the family structure of southern countries or their level of economic independence.

These results show that on a large scale but without generalizing, young people in Europe tend to be initiative, but their acturience is less relative to interest about initiative and self-direction.

Social & Cross-cultural skills

Although, it is not known to what extent the social and intercultural skills of European youth, it can be predicted that young Europeans are also in culturally advantageous group due to European countries' multicultural structure. According to data from European Commission,

- In 2021, more than 20.000 European young people/leaders from different countries participated in European Youth Projects to develop creative forms of cultural expression (European Commission, 2021).

- In 2019, Erasmus+ Program which aims to gain experience abroad, supported almost 940.000 experiences, financed more than 111.500 organizations, and funded close to 25.500 projects (European Commission, 2019).

Social and cultural interaction arouse curiosity about cross-cultural interaction among young European. At the same time, it is observed that the experience between different countries with the Erasmus+ program also helps in melting the ice. Although, it is not known to what extent the social and intercultural skills of European youth, it can be predicted that youth is open to cross-cultural skill development since Europe itself is multicultural.

Productivity & Accountability

Since the level of productivity and accountability of young people in Europe could not be directly evaluated, their productivity in entrepreneurial products and whether they could continue their business by taking responsibility were examined. Although this information does not provide a definitive and general information, it is important to have an idea about the productivity and

accountability levels of young people in Europe. According to OECD reports,

- “Approximately half of new youth entrepreneurs reported that they introduced new products and serviced to their customers over the 2014-2018 period (2019)”.
- “Youth face several key barriers (knowledge and skill for entrepreneurship, fear of failure, accessing financial resources) to business creation and self-employment (2019)”.
- “Youth are more likely to discontinue their business (OECD, 2019)”.

Figure3 represents the percentage of answers to a question: “What was the most important reason for quitting the business?” Although there are various responses to this question, there is a sign that youth in European Union countries can give up responsibilities.

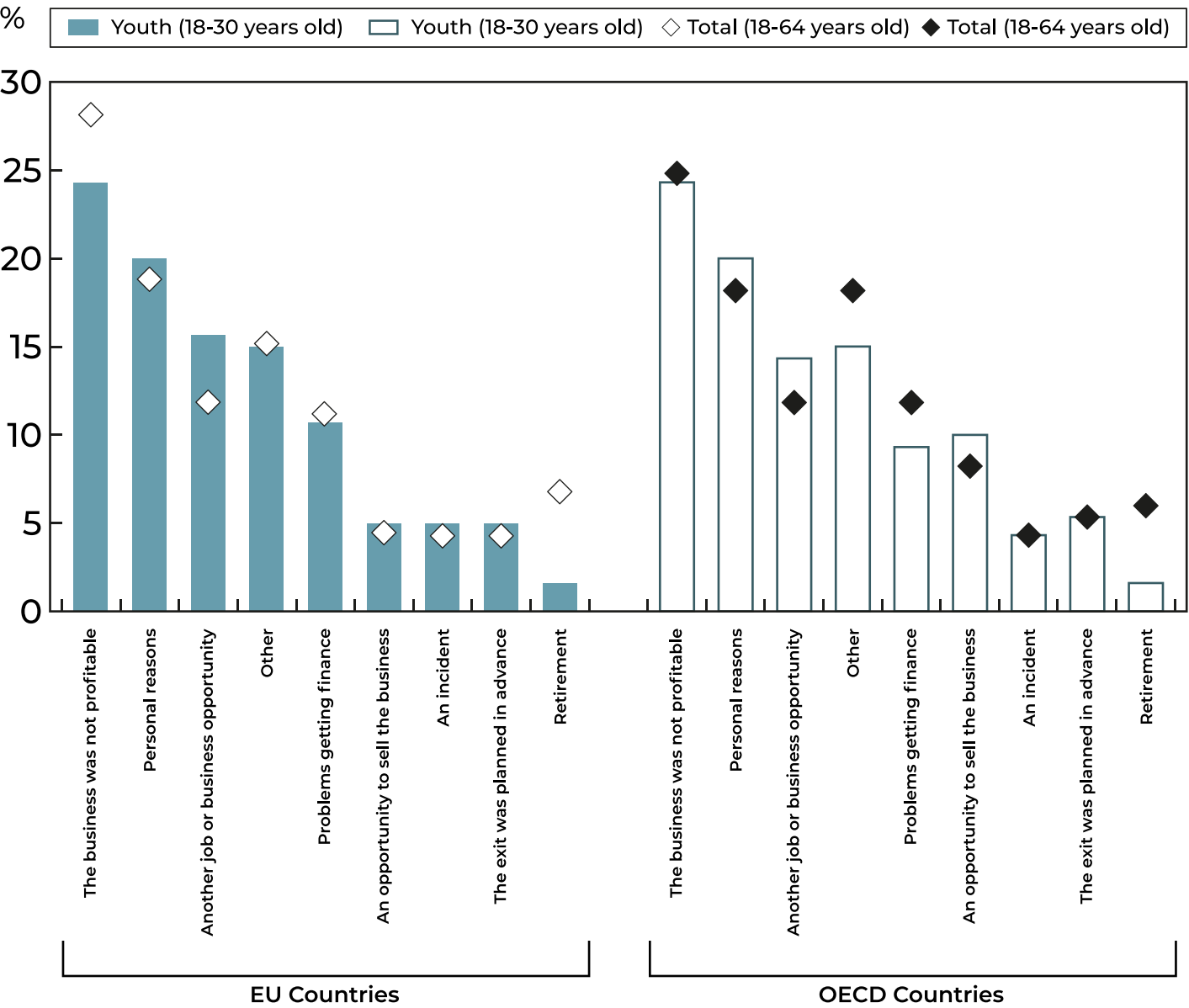


Figure 3. Percentage of entrepreneurs that exited in a business exit in the past 12 months (OECD, 2018)

Leadership & Responsibility

There are multifarious Youth Leadership Associations/Programs/Organizations (such as Youth Station Association, European Youth Organization, Young European Leadership and so on) to empower leadership among young Europeans. Also, young people participate these institutions to develop their leadership skills and to be beneficial to their societies. Besides, European young who work in such youth organizations, increase their sense of responsibility by actualizing projects in line with Sustainable Development Goals. Some young leader examples from the European Business Review,

•Vikash Das who is one of the Global Shapers at the World Economic Forum and a mentor for young founders to connect to the angel investors (2020).

•Jamie Bolding who is the sole founder of social media marketing platform Jungle Creations that help connect users with biggest companies like Apple, Virgin and Baileys (2020).

•Oleksiy Honcharuk who is the Ukraine's youngest ever prime minister. Also, he managed for several years a European Union funded Non-Governmental Organization that works to improve the business environment in Ukraine (2020).

In addition to the young European leaders exemplified above, it should not be ignored that there are also European youth who do not attend in leadership associations, programs or organizations and do not take part in these kind of responsibility activities.

2. Learning and Innovation Skills in the 21st Century

On the one hand, with the predicted increase in different areas of the world such as poverty, food crises, water scarcity, migration, inequality and so on; the world continues to experience the negative consequences of globalization. On the other hand, challenging and developing world encourages learning, creativity, and innovation. Since the change is constant and learning never stops, there is a need for changeable, evolving, and innovative perspectives to understand new concepts, extend our viewpoints and do innovations in the 21st century. However, it is not possible to do innovations without having an idea and knowledge about the process or the work to done. Besides, applying knowledge to new situations is another determination for doing innovation. Therefore, "know what is, what it means, and how to do it"; provide an advantage for the innovator.

While the bringing of the 21st century is new to everyone, it represents a path of innovation for those who can see the advantage in this bringing.

Young leaders equipped with learning and innovation skills (critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation, communication, and collaboration) can see the advantages in the changing world for a livable, workable, and sustainable world. To give an illustration, one of the young leaders for the goal of sustainable development is Gert van Vugt from Holland. According to the European Business Review, Van Vugt established Sustainer Homes to reduce carbon emissions in the construction industry which accounts for one-third of the world's carbon dioxide emissions. Van Vugt and his company directly serve the goal of sustainable cities and communities from the sustainable development goals by using the latest green technologies to create sustainable homes that cut 90% of the greenhouse gases from the construction process (2020). This community-oriented initiative is the example of 21st century young leader's point of view due to problem-solver creative perspective.

Thus, learning and innovation skills are necessary to become a young leader in the 21st century and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. These skills are listed in the Figure4.

- **Critical thinking & Problem-Solving** think logically / rationally / clearly and to find reasonable solutions
- **Creativity & Innovation** think outside of the box and implement new ideas
- **Communication & Collaboration** work together to achieve a common goal while conveying ideas clearly

Figure 4. Learning and Innovation Skills

2.1. Do young people in Europe have learning and innovation skills?

Critical thinking & Problem-Solving

Since critical thinking and problem-solving skills cannot be measured directly, unemployment data which is a big problem of young people in Europe, and entrepreneurship that is one of the solutions for unemployment, were examined to give point of view.

•According to the European Union labor force survey, there were 2.8 million unemployed people aged 15-24 in the EU-27 in 2019, while 18.2 million people in that age range were working. These results show in 15.1% youth unemployment rate (2020).

•Entrepreneurship is uncommon among young people, with a self-employment rate of less than 5% among youth and 14% among the general population in Europe (Eurostat, 2019).

As seen in the 2019's year sample data, entrepreneurial activity focused on solving the unemployment problem was very low among young people in Europe.

Creativity & Innovation

Some of the young people have creative ideas and skills in producing solutions to today's problems. Although a certain rate cannot be given, European youth in the 21st century is on the agenda about innovations. Besides, organizations to support European young entrepreneurs contribute to the development of young people's entrepreneurial skills. For instance,

- Kriti Sharma who is the president of Bots and AI at Sage which is one of the largest tech companies in United Kingdom, and co-inventor of a range of chatbots for business finances (The European Business Review, 2020).

Communication & Collaboration

Communication and collaboration cannot be measured directly as they are non-technical skills. However, some evaluations can be made according to whether there is a tendency among European youth or their participation in the activities. For example,

- group work originating from the education system in schools,
- participation in student exchange programs,
- associations supporting cooperation

While these factors aim to increase communication and cooperation skills among young people, an increasing trend can be observed in the skills.

3. Digital Literacy in the 21st Century

People, cities, countries and continents continue to be connected in ways that greatly increase our individual and collective potential due to the knowledge and advancing technology in the 21st century. But at the same time, the world becomes more volatile and ambiguous place due to globalization and digitalization. For this reason, constructing and recognizing knowledge is a very sensitive and important issue. Moreover, constructing and validating knowledge in the 21st century is about literacy (OECD, 2021). Literacy refers to understand the information and also to have a competence in a specified area. Digital literacy includes information, media and technology literacies. These literacies also involve understanding data, methods, machines, figures, and statistics that make the 21st century as an Information Age possible.



Considering the goal of a sustainable world with the ever-developing and changing technology, it is inevitable to expect solution-oriented ideas from young leaders. One of the examples that brings together the concepts of sustainability and technology is Josephine Goubé. She is a young French leader who aims to an entrepreneurial innovation and humanitarianism together. Goubé is the CEO of Techfugees, an impact-driven global organization that aims to build a sustainable ecosystem of “tech for refugee” solutions, support the inclusion of refugees and displaced people into the tech industry (The European Business Review, 2020). Building bridges between technology and refugee ecosystem in an entrepreneurial way emphasizes a young leader's perspective that proves 21st century skills. As in the example of Goubé, leadership characteristic comes to the fore with the blending of digital literacy as well as socio-cultural skill, problem-solving skill, productivity, initiative and so on.

Therefore, it is necessary to have information, media, and technology skills to be a young leader in the 21st century and to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals. These skills are framed demonstratively in the Figure5.

- **Information Literacy** understand data, facts, figures, and statistics
- **Media Literacy** understand the methods and outlets in which information is published
- **ICT (Information, Communications & Technology) Literacy** understand the machines that make the Information Age possible

Figure 5. Information, Media, and Technology Skills



3.1. Do young people in Europe have digital skills?

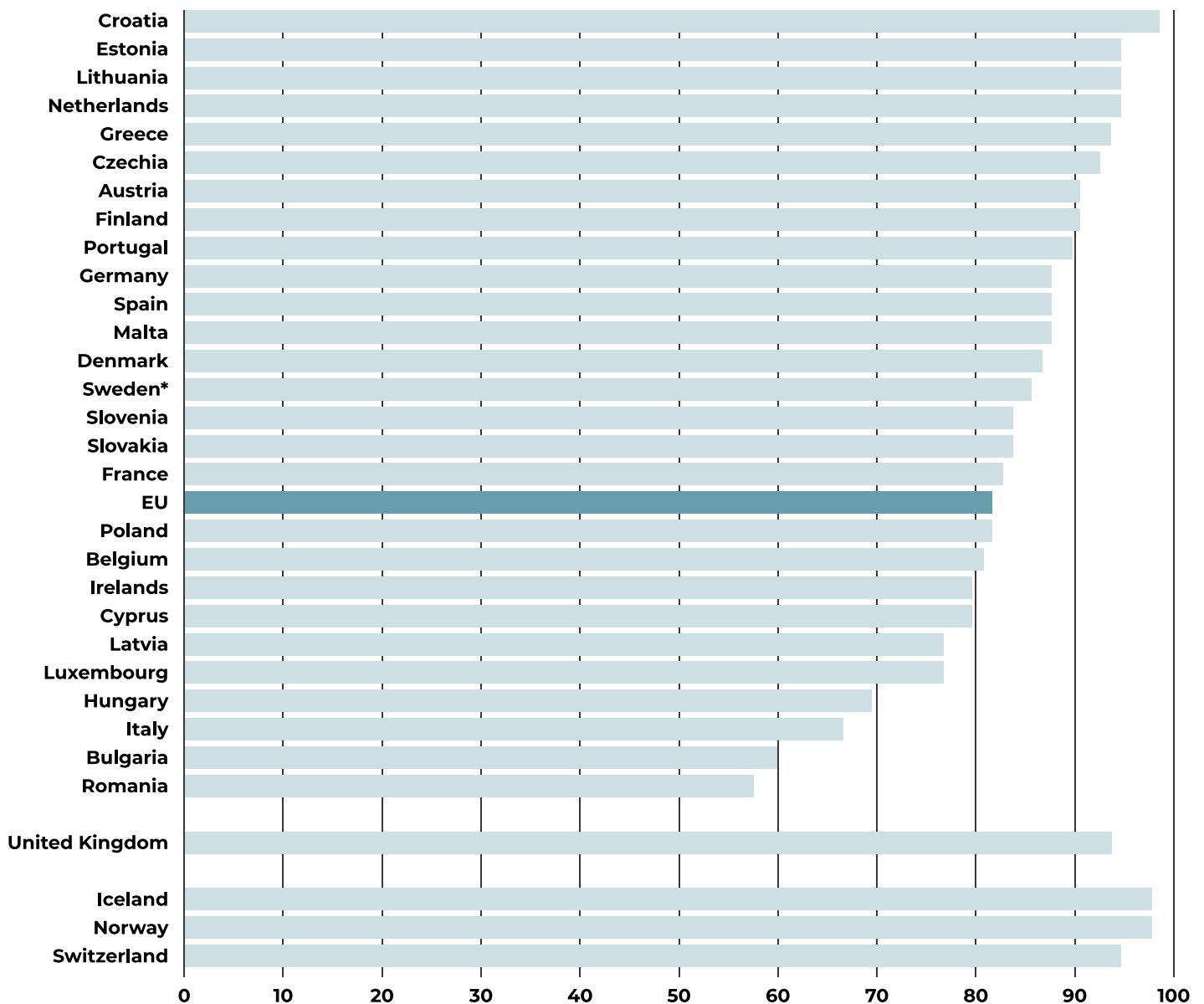
According to Eurostat report, 80% of young people aged between 16 to 24 in the European Union had basic or above basic digital skills. The basic or above basic digital skills are predicated on selected activities performed by young people on the internet in the four specific domains that are information, software, problem-solving, and communication (2020).

As can be seen in the Figure6, in 2019 year; four in five young people in the European Union (EU) had basic or above basic digital skills. Still, there are significant differences in the rate of basic or above basic digital literacy skills between EU countries.

Moreover, digital skills by itself are not enough to reach and understand the digital literacy because whereas digital skills focus on knowing and using; digital literacy focuses on understanding all components. However, there is no study yet that measures the digital literacy levels of young people in Europe.

4. How 21st century skills can be developed to be a powerful young leader?

This part of report focuses on how to develop 21st century skills to become a strong young leader with the solutions listed below. These solutions encourage both professional and personal growth.



*Data with low reliability

Figure 6. Share of young people with basic or above basic digital skills, 2019

•Taking Part in Youth Organizations

Youth organizations that aim to support socially responsible young leaders who are sensitive to the world and society they live in, are a huge advantage for young leaders. Firstly, young leaders' ideals can realize in youth organizations. As young people recognize different perspectives from their own, their perspectives gain flexibility. By taking part in youth organizations, their productivity also increases. At the same time, as they will be solution-oriented in the face of possible problems that may arise in the working groups, their problem-solving abilities also increase. Thanks to the collaboration they develop by participating in joint projects with other group members, their communication skills also increase.

•Participating in Social Responsibility Projects

Social responsibility projects are effective projects that enable societies to be in solidarity and reveal invisible problems. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills need to come into play to uncover problems. Besides, young people's production of projects on issues that will raise awareness improves their creativity and productivity skills. The most important point to know here is the content of the social responsibility project to be supported, to whom it is addressed, and its importance for the audiences. Young people can develop their flexibility skills by considering the sensitivities at these points and the lives outside of their own. At the same time, knowing different societies improves social skills as well as cross-cultural skills.

•Working in Public Institutions

Young people can take a role in the decision-making processes of public institutions and in public consultations. Therefore, working in public institutions provides an opportunity for young people to see the functioning of the current order. Due to the tasks young people will do, their responsibility skills develop. They can also improve their communication skills by meeting with people from different departments. Besides, problem-solving skills develop if they encounter problems in the areas they observe. They can even contribute to the institutions with the analytical perspectives they bring to the problems. Thus, a win-win relationship occurs between young people and public institution.

•Doing Internships and Volunteering

Through volunteering and internships, young people can take a concrete step towards identifying their core interests. Hands-on experiential learning opportunities help young people understand the realities of the real world.

At the same time, as they will meet people from different backgrounds where they work, their social and cross-cultural skills develop. Especially in project-based internships and volunteering, leadership skills are developed by directing the project. In volunteering and internships where teamwork is at the forefront, communication and collaboration skills are highly developed. Besides, internship experience in a different field by leaving the person's own comfort zone, on the other hand, improves his/her flexibility and adaptability to the environment.

•Taking an Active Role in Student Clubs

Taking an active role in clubs develops communication, collaboration, and leadership skills. In this way, organization, time management and ability to cope with difficulties develop. Especially in student clubs, the fact that club members are only students is a great advantage for young people. When the student club is established or the decision to continue the student club, the feature of initiative comes into play. In this way, the ability to self-direction arises. Competencies such as creativity, productivity, innovation, and problem solving come to the fore in determining the activities to be done in the student club together. Due to the collaboration and communication of the students, the tasks in the student clubs that progress constitute responsibility, so it also improves the responsibility skill. Especially club presidents have an opportunity to develop their leadership skills.

•Joining Erasmus/Exchange Programs

A young person develops a perspective on the education of different culture by taking more than the education in he/she received in his/her own school. Thus, he/she gets out of its comfort zone and gains flexibility. At the same time, young people gain the opportunity to develop its social and cross-cultural skills by adapting to different cultures. It increases the communication and collaboration potential by meeting people from different cultures and making projects in the lessons. Besides, joining Erasmus/Exchange programs also shows that the person has an initiative to go abroad alone and adapt to a completely different culture. It should not be forgotten that today's youth who have a proper awareness of other cultures will be tomorrow's leader, but more importantly it is to be in a leading position today.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, Youth Station Association aware of lifelong learning. Thus, it offers young people an environment where they can learn, develop, and maintain all 21st century skills in their life. To resumable skills in life, young leaders can

- take part in youth organizations
- participate in social responsibility projects
- work in government institutions
- do internships
- play an active role in student clubs
- participate in student exchange programs

These recommendations which reflect the ideas of the Youth Station Association are important steps to be taken for the spread of youth leadership in Europe. It is important that the recommendations are followed not only by young leaders, but also by relevant institutions and organizations. Thus, the efforts and suggestions made at the institutional level will fit into a more logical framework.

In addition to recommendations, Youth Station Association has ascribed meaning to this report by assimilating the following sentence:

“It will be the hottest century on record, and the last century during which there is a chance to do something about it” (Forbes, 2019).”

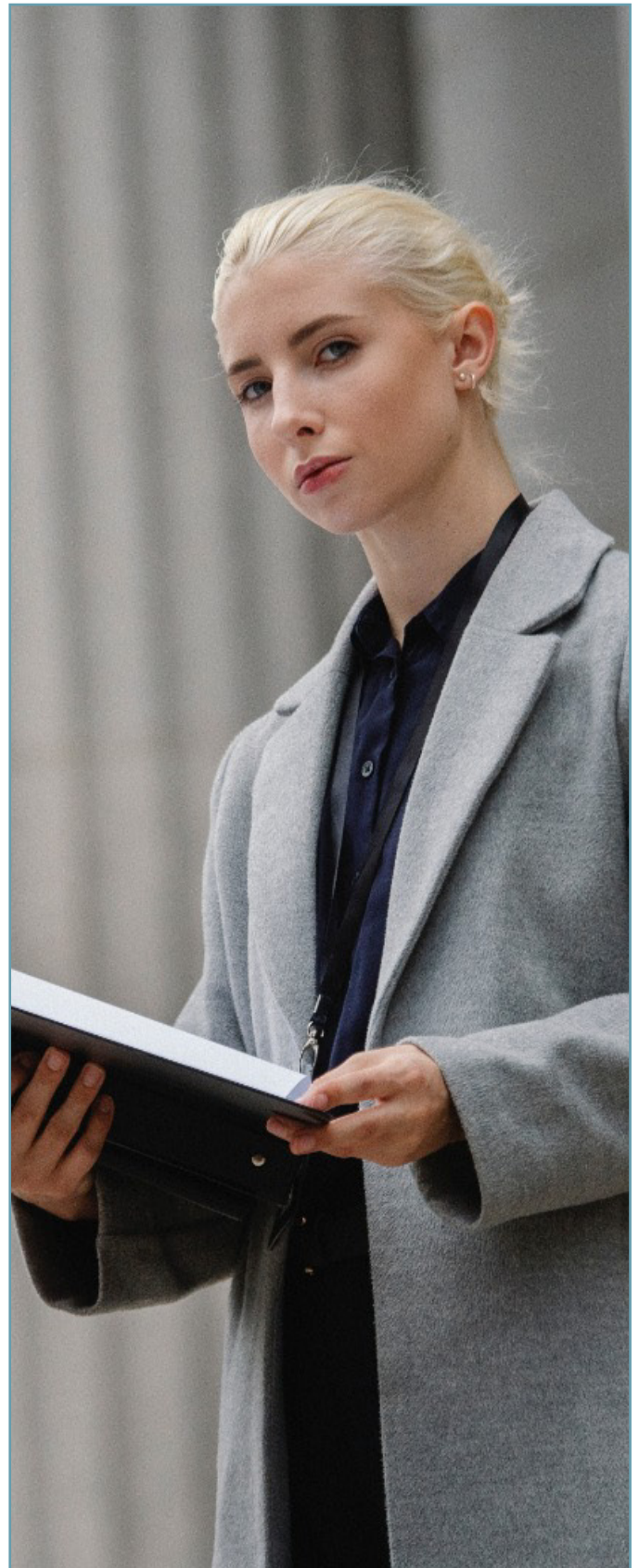
The partnership of strong young leaders is needed not only on climate change but also to achieve all sustainable development goals. However, this fact should not be forgotten that a leader cannot do anything on his or her own. This is even more important now than it was previously.

A strong leader has an open mind, be open to collaboration, be able to harmonize opposing ideas, and has the charisma to lead teams with diverse motives to achieve in sustainable development goals. Besides, to be a strong leader, it is not enough just to be motivated and purpose driven. To use this power properly, he or she must also incorporate the specified 21st century skills that include life, learning and technology.

•At the institutional level, steps can be taken to increase 21st century skills. For example, platforms for Sustainable Development Goals can be established. In these platforms, trainers who will lead young people can be trained. At the same time, peer teaching can be done by creating an environment where young leaders can learn from each other. Thus, they can share their knowledge, ideas, and new developments with each other. Also, young leaders can focus on the subjects they can be successful in, distribute tasks according to their competencies and take quicker action.

•At the national level, countries can create their own policies on sustainable development and youth. The important point is to determine the priority Sustainable Development Goal of the country. It develops according to need. With the contributions of powerful young leaders, faster action can be taken through promotion on social media.

Although this report touched upon 21st century skills in Europe and how young leaders can develop these skills to become strong, the current knowhow, technology, and financial resources are essential to achieve and succeed the Sustainable Development Goals in every aspect. For this reason, the programs, technological developments, and financial resources that can pave the way for young leaders may be the subject of further researches.



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