



Generation
Climate
Europe

Whose economy?

Creating space and conditions to advance Europe's transformation around new economic thinking

Report on New Economy by Generation Climate Europe

Executive summary

- **Problem statement:**
Across Europe, young people remain largely excluded from the spaces where economic priorities are shaped, including civil society platforms and the emerging 'New Economy' and 'Beyond Growth' movement, despite being key stakeholders in the sustainability transition, economic transformation, and intergenerational justice.
- **Key findings:**
Chronic underfunding, fragmented collaboration, limited economic and financial literacy, and tokenistic participation prevent meaningful youth engagement and weaken the movement's long-term impact.
- **Core recommendations:**
Embed intergenerational representation in New Economy platforms, strengthen youth capacity through education and mentorship, secure long-term funding for youth-led initiatives, and foster cross-movement coalitions to make Europe's economic transformation more inclusive and just.

[Executive Summary](#)

[1. Introduction: Why youth engagement in New Economy topics \(still\) matters](#)

[2. Key barriers to advancing new economy initiatives](#)

[2.1 Structural funding challenges](#)

[2.2 Youth-specific barriers](#)

[The economic literacy gap](#)

[Fragmented and tokenistic participation](#)

[Missing diversity](#)

[2.3 Systemic capacity constraints](#)

[2.4 Representation and equity issues](#)

[3. Emerging opportunities](#)

[3.1 Policy windows for intergenerational justice](#)

[3.2 Coalition-building potential](#)

[3.3 Emerging platform infrastructure](#)

[4. General recommendations](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[The moment for transformation](#)

[The cost of inaction](#)

1. Introduction: why youth engagement in New Economy topics (still) matters

Europe is confronting the limits of an economic paradigm in which growth has long been treated as a primary objective, despite its structural inability to deliver social justice, ecological sustainability, or even long-term economic stability. Political uncertainty, slowing productivity, demographic change, and environmental pressures continue to expose these shortcomings, while energy insecurity and geopolitical tensions shape Europe's economic agenda. Yet economic decision-making remains dominated by competitiveness, security, and growth, leaving limited space for integrating Beyond Growth perspectives into the EU policymaking debate. Despite being among those most affected by today's economic choices, young Europeans have little influence over how economic priorities are defined, both within mainstream policy processes and within emerging New Economy and Beyond Growth spaces - representing a democratic gap and a missed opportunity for more just and future-oriented transformation.

Building on its previous research, policy engagement, and advocacy on youth participation, economic governance, and alternative economic models, Generation Climate Europe (GCE) has developed a clear understanding of the New Economy as an

intergenerationally just, post-growth approach centred on well-being, fairness, and ecological balance. This report thus follows and complements GCE's ongoing work by situating youth perspectives within the broader debates on economic transformation and intergenerational justice (GCE, 2022; GCE, 2023).

Against this backdrop, GCE conducted a series of interviews with civil society organisations (CSO) and youth organisations across Europe, based in Germany, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, and the UK. The aim was to better understand how these actors perceive the current state of the New Economy and Beyond Growth movement, the political and organisational conditions shaping it, and the opportunities and challenges they face in engaging with young people. As a snapshot of the situation in the first half of 2025, this research captures a movement in transition and sheds light on the role youth-CSO collaboration could play in strengthening its impact.

The findings paint a concerning picture: chronic underfunding, accessibility barriers, and tokenistic inclusion are preventing Europe's youth from contributing to the economic transformation that will define their futures. Addressing these barriers could lead to significant opportunities for targeted investment and systemic reform, unlocking the potential of young people to build a fairer, more sustainable, and just economic system through their engagement, innovative thinking, and creative solutions.

2. Key barriers to advancing new economy initiatives

2.1 Structural funding challenges

European CSOs working on New Economy issues face a funding landscape that actively discourages transformative economic thinking. Most of these organisations lack state-based or institutional support, with New Economy framing often seen as politically risky by traditional funders. This issue is further amplified by the current political climate within the EU shifting to the right, focusing on topics such as competitiveness and deregulation.

The result is a dependency on short-term, project-based funding that prevents sustained engagement and strategic development. Organisations report having to dilute their transformative messages. Two CSOs from Denmark and Germany indicated that they strategically reframe their New Economy strategy as "competitiveness", "safety", or "health" to appeal to broader audiences.

This funding structure creates a paradox: Europe needs bold economic thinking to address its challenges, but there is a systemic lack of funding for such thinking. Organisations capable of providing such transformation must depend on local or regional funding, as EU funding lacks a comprehensive mechanism to address the

issue. As a result, the New Economy remains confined mainly to the academic field, as one German CSO highlighted in our interviews.

This gap becomes particularly evident in central and eastern Europe, where lower economic levels and specific historical experiences shape the reception of transformative economic ideas. In several contexts, public discourse remains cautious toward concepts associated with systemic change, partly due to the lingering ambivalence surrounding past economic transitions. As a result, New Economy initiatives in the region often operate with limited visibility and institutional backing. According to a Czech advocacy network, many of these initiatives are therefore driven primarily by individual or grassroots commitment rather than by structured support systems.

2.2 Youth-specific barriers

The economic and financial literacy gap

Young Europeans consistently report a lack of accessible entry points to critically engage with economics. Current educational curricula fail to provide frameworks for understanding alternative economic models, while technical language excludes many from participating in policy discussions. Two CSOs from Denmark and Germany emphasised that economic literacy is scarce and that education, beginning in schools, predominantly promotes a neoliberal economic perspective that discourages critical thinking.

Missing sense of agency

While youth will inherit the long-term consequences of today's ecological, economic, and social choices, they lack meaningful influence over these decisions. A Belgian activist network highlighted that young people often feel excluded from decision-making processes, reflecting a broader sense of political marginalisation. This undermines general democratic governance and ultimately impacts our capacity to reach the climate targets. Developing new thinking around the New Economy requires the systematic inclusion of youth voices in governance structures, ensuring that those most affected by the outcomes have real agency in shaping them.

Missing social cohesion

In our interviews, a Belgian activist network highlighted increasing social isolation among younger generations, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a decline in conviviality and solidarity. These values are essential to a functioning democracy and underscore the need to strengthen social cohesion within the broader context of systemic change.

2.3 Systemic capacity constraints

Despite overlapping goals, networks remain siloed by ideology, geography, and methodology, preventing the coordination necessary for policy impact. A German CSO emphasised these gaps within the inner-European network, underlining the need for stronger collaboration and connection.

A Danish CSO observes that while the New Economy is gaining momentum in academia and activism, it suffers from 'academic capture'. Discussions remain abstract and disconnected from media and politics.

2.4 Representation and equity issues

As observed by different CSOs, the European New Economy discourse remains dominated by white, male perspectives from developed countries. This limits both the diversity of solutions and the legitimacy of the movement among young people from different backgrounds.

Additionally, tensions exist between advocating for degrowth and sufficiency in wealthy European countries while supporting development rights in the Global South. Young Europeans are eager to address these contradictions but are rarely given space to explore them, as one German CSO pointed out.

2.5 Perceived powerlessness

Many people feel overwhelmed by the scale of systemic issues. This sense of powerlessness can hinder support and engagement in New Economy initiatives. In the interviews conducted, the Belgian activist network emphasised that people often perceive the issues addressed by the New Economy as being too vast, with progress remaining largely invisible.

3. Emerging opportunities

3.1 Policy windows for intergenerational justice

Europe is experiencing momentum around intergenerational justice. This shift is reflected not only in national and regional initiatives such as the Welsh Wellbeing Economy, but also at EU level through role of the Future Generations Commissioner and the development of the European Commission's Intergenerational Fairness Strategy, which explicitly recognises the need to consider long-term impacts and the rights of future generations in policymaking. The United Nations' increasing attention to intergenerational justice further reinforces the case for more systematic and meaningful youth engagement across governance processes.

The upcoming review of the European Semester and the implementation of the EU's Social Pillar (EC, 2017)¹ present opportunities to embed youth voice in economic governance. The European Semester, as the EU's annual economic coordination cycle, provides a direct pathway to influence how the funds of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the EU budget for the upcoming 7 years, are allocated to member states, ensuring that youth priorities are systematically integrated into national spending decisions. The EU's Social Pillar, which includes specific commitments to youth employment and social inclusion, could be strengthened to mandate youth consultation in economic policymaking.

3.2 Coalition–building potential

The most successful New Economy initiatives tend to grow out of horizontal alliances across feminist, environmental, faith-based and postcolonial actors. In Belgium, interviewees pointed to the Belgian Environmental Bureau's postgrowth work and to coalitions like Code Rouge, which brings together anti-poverty and anti-fossil fuel groups, as signs that environmental campaigns are increasingly being reframed through their social and economic impacts.

A faith-based NGO, in particular, employs value-driven messaging of the New Economy that transcends traditional political categories to bridge divides with as many stakeholders as possible. This resulted in a better ability to build bridges with more conservative political actors.

3.3 Emerging platform infrastructure

Platforms like the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, MERGE network, and Beyond Growth Conference provide convening power for New Economy discussions. These platforms increasingly recognise the need for meaningful youth engagement but lack structured approaches for implementation.

4. General recommendations

Building a New Economy that is both intergenerationally just and socially inclusive requires comprehensive structural support and funding, capacity-building, and cross-generational cooperation. The following recommendations outline broad areas of action that can help strengthen the movement's foundations and ensure that youth engagement becomes a catalyst for transformation across Europe.

- a. **Make youth participation structural, not symbolic:** youth engagement should be built into the governance of New Economy and Beyond Growth initiatives

¹ [European Commission. *European Pillar of Social Rights: Building a fairer and more inclusive European Union.*](#)

through intergenerational representation across alliances, networks, and platforms.

- b. **Invest in capacity and literacy for systemic change:** strengthening the economic and political literacy and capacities of young people on alternative economic models will empower them to take an active role in shaping future policies and debates.
- c. **Secure long-term and flexible funding:** sustainable funding mechanisms are needed to enable youth-led and intergenerational projects to grow beyond short-term cycles and develop lasting impact.
- d. **Build intersectional and value-based coalitions:** closer collaboration between youth and feminist, environmental, faith-based, labour, and postcolonial movements has the potential to amplify shared justice goals and connect the New Economy to broader social realities.
- e. **Strengthen European platforms for youth collaboration:** creating youth tracks and working groups within major European New Economy platforms could institutionalise participation and foster ongoing exchange between generations and organisations.

Conclusion

The moment for transformation

Across Europe, the New Economy and Beyond Growth movement stands at a critical juncture. The convergence of ecological, social, and economic crises makes clear that incremental reforms will not suffice; instead, they require a rethinking of (economic) progress. CSOs and youth organisations continue to drive this agenda forward, often under challenging political and financial conditions, keeping transformative economic thinking alive. However, the movement's long-term success depends on its ability to renew itself. This renewal will only be possible through the meaningful inclusion of youth.

Young people bring precisely the qualities this transformation demands: long-term vision, systems awareness, and a lived understanding of intergenerational justice. Their engagement is not an add-on, but a strategic necessity for building strong alliances, fostering innovation, and ensuring the legitimacy of a movement that aims to redefine Europe's economic future. Strengthening youth participation through capacity-building, funding mechanisms, and intergenerational collaboration can help the New Economy movement evolve into a truly inclusive force for systemic change.

The cost of inaction

Failing to meaningfully integrate youth into the New Economy and Beyond Growth movement carries substantial risks:

- **Loss of democratic legitimacy:** economic models and policies shaping future generations are being designed without their input.
- **Reduced strategic capacity:** the movement risks stagnation if it does not renew itself through youth leadership and fresh perspectives.
- **Weakened social cohesion:** excluding young people deepens intergenerational divides and alienation from transformative politics.
- **Missed innovation potential:** Europe will forgo the creativity, adaptability, and energy of a generation ready to rethink how economies can serve both the people and the planet.