# Report on the 2025 meeting of the Testing Panels
27-28 March 2025, Brussels

Working together to reach out to young Europeans

Introduction

The third joint meeting of the Testing Panels was held in Brussels, Belgium from 27-28th March. 40 members of the Teachers' Testing Panel and 23 representatives from Europe Direct centres came together to test EU learning materials, build their network and exchange best practices. The panels provide an opportunity for the Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM), other Commission Directorate-Generals (DGs) and other EU institutions to test and receive professional feedback on their communication materials for young people.
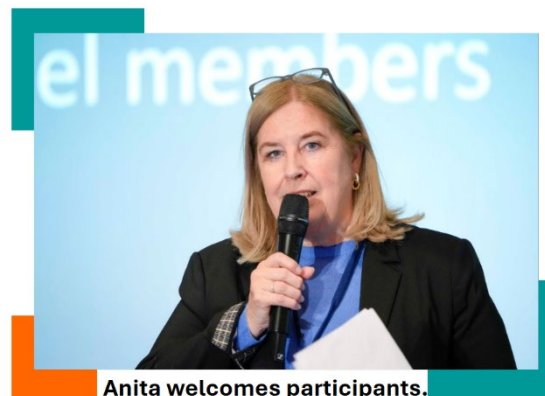
Anita welcomes participants.

Anita Pannebakker, Head of Unit for Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM) Unit B2, opened the event with a warm welcome to all participants. She emphasised the critical role young people have in shaping the Europe of the future, and how it is essential to engage with them directly, so they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to understand and navigate the world today. Teachers and Europe Direct representatives play a crucial role in achieving this.

Following the European elections in June last year, the new mandate of the Commission has a strong focus on reaching out to young people and involving them in discussions and decisions about Europe's future. To reflect this priority the unit has been renamed the Youth Unit, with a mission more focussed on work to engage with this important audience.

Plenary sessions

1. Getting young people to engage in society and democracy

Sophia questions how young people can engage in society and democracy.

The keynote speech by **Sophia Eriksson-Waterschoot**, Deputy Director-General, DG COMM, acknowledged the important work of the testing panels in helping the EU to produce youth-friendly products.

The new Commission recently passed an important milestone – the first 100 days of its new mandate. Sophia shared that the Commission had delivered on its commitments for this period, and good progress was being made on many other initiatives, such as European preparedness and defence, in response to the current volatile geopolitical situation. Europe's youth remain a constant and key priority for the Commission, and there will be an even stronger focus on the involvement of young people in EU policies over the next five years.

Recent data on young people published by the Commission provides some interesting insights, with the latest Eurobarometer survey revealing that more than 60% of Europe's youth are optimistic about the future of the EU. The survey also highlights some key concerns for young people, namely the economic situation, the cost of living, affordable housing, peace, global stability and climate change.

Pointing to the EU's long-standing tradition of youth engagement, with policies dating back 20 years, Sophia invited participants to read the latest Youth Report. She highlighted several initiatives for young people including the new '*youth check*'. Under the new mandate, all Commissioners were asked to hold Youth Policy Dialogues within the first 100 days of the new mandate. Now this process is complete, Sophia encouraged participants to promote the follow-up debate on the Citizens' Engagement Platform. In addition, President von der Leyen has also committed to setting up a Youth Advisory Board made up of young people from every Member State. Sophia also flagged the upcoming launch of the latest European Citizens' Panel – where a third of participants are young people – on the EU long-term budget.

Underlining the value of the members of the Testing Panels, Sophia highlighted their important role as key multipliers at the local and national level. Teachers and Europe Direct representatives are in a unique position to help identify specific trends and give feedback on what is working both within and beyond the classroom, and the Commission is keen to hear from them.

2. Empowering young people to recognise information manipulation

Zbigniew Gniatkowski, from DG COMM's Task Force for Strategic Communication and Countering Information Manipulation, set the scene for three parallel workshops on information manipulation. Zbigniew explained the differences between 'misinformation', 'disinformation', and 'foreign information manipulation and interference', and noted that 'information manipulation' is the preferred term at the Commission because it is broader than 'disinformation,' which is often only associated with censorship.

Zbigniew details the skills needed to recognize information manipulation.

76% of young people have been exposed to information manipulation, and such content is being created and shared at a much faster rate because of easier access to artificial intelligence. Zbigniew identified several tools and skills that would benefit both young audiences and the wider public, including digital tracing, source-tracking, and cross-referencing, as well as promoting safe online behaviour, respectful communication, and empathy.

The EU is responding to information manipulation through legislation such as the Code of Practice on Disinformation, [Digital Services Act (DSA)](#), the Digital Markets Act, the European Media Freedom Act, the AI Act, and the Defence of Democracy package. The European External Action Service (EEAS) has launched a Rapid Alert System to coordinate responses to foreign information manipulation and interference and is engaging in international cooperation to tackle information manipulation. Finally, various communication strategies are being implemented to tackle information manipulation, such as proactive factual communication, building societal resilience, cooperating with fact-checkers, and the development of the Preparedness Union Strategy and the European Democracy Shield. For teachers and educators specifically, there are resources such as [media literacy guides](#).

3. Closing the gap between the EU and young citizens

Annegret Ziller, Acting Director, Citizens Communication, DG COMM, introduced youth engagement as an increasingly important part of citizen engagement. She affirmed the importance of exploring out-of-the-box ways to improve communication with young people in today's challenging context.

The digital world has become the primary space where young people engage with politics, form opinions, and participate in democratic life. However, it's a double-edged sword: this same environment is ripe for information manipulation and can undermine trust in democratic institutions like the EU. The Commission's [2024 Youth Report](#) found that younger citizens are deeply interested in political and community participation; over 70% report that they vote in elections. However, participation of young people in the 2024 European elections decreased

compared to 2019. This indicates that there is a gap or disconnect between the EU and young people, and it is precisely this gap that we want to address.

Annegret introduced the following brainstorming session, noting that although we already have a lot of official channels and products, we need new ways of reaching young people. She emphasised the need to adapt to changing communication habits, remain relevant in the minds of young people, and draw on participants' experience on the ground.

Annegret sets the scene for the brainstorming session.

3.1   Closing the gap between the EU and young citizens

The brainstorming session explored how to better connect with young audiences by adapting communication to their changing behaviours and expectations. It aimed to gather concrete ideas and outreach strategies, drawing on the experience of educators and Europe Direct representatives.

Moderated by **John MacDonald**, Deputy Head of Unit, Internal Communication, DG COMM, participants engaged in two interactive exercises to generate ideas collaboratively. The first focused on ideas to bridge the gap between the EU and young citizens. Proposals included an EU learning app (inspired by Duolingo and Pokémon Go), mandatory EU-themed classes with expert visits, involving young people in decision-making on how the EU budget is spent, and greater involvement of young people in content creation. There was a strong call to integrate EU topics into school curricula, support teachers with training and offer more direct encounters with EU institutions and projects.

John moderates the brainstorming session.

The second discussion focused on outreach strategies. Suggestions included using festivals, sports events and games to reach youth beyond schools; establishing an EU-wide educational competition; regular visits from MEPs to schools; and introducing an EU-wide civil service year or even an annual EU-wide public holiday. Several participants stressed the need for long-term engagement strategies that foster curiosity and ownership and noted that young people should be seen as active participants, not passive audiences when learning about the EU.

4. Exchange of good practices among testing panel members

This session provided an opportunity for participant-led discussion. Teachers and Europe Direct representatives exchanged ideas on reaching young people, teaching them about the EU, and getting them involved in democracies and society at large.

Examples of activities shared by the group included:

- the development of a game called [EUropa Xpert](#) for primary school students to learn about the EU through role-play and consensus-building activities (Belgium);
- educating 16–24-year-olds about information manipulation through interactive games inspired by a film (Romania);
- playing a game with students where they have to use Eurostat data to choose winter break destinations (Poland);

Panelists exchange on their good practices.

- developing a publication explaining Erasmus+ and the European elections (Slovakia);
- launching an e-twinning project with a virtual escape room to enhance interactive learning;
- engaging young people in rural areas by getting them to join global competitions (Italy);
- asking 6th graders to test the responses of AI in a contained and safe environment (Greece); and
- facilitating meetings between EU-influencers and students on Europe day to foster discussions on European matters.

In their concluding remarks, participants emphasised the importance of sparking the enjoyment of young people for fostering good engagement. Topics they felt deserved particular attention included combating misinformation, fostering empathy online, acknowledging the role of teachers and parents and presenting relatable content to students.

Parallel sessions

1. Online environments – Helping young people to stay safe and thrive online

1.1   How to tackle cyberbullying inside and outside the classroom?

Moderators: **Paola Pepe**, **Donatella Nembrini** and **Magda Luminska**, Directorate General for Communication Networks, Content and Technology

Participants: Secondary school teachers and Europe Direct representatives

Objectives: To get advice from experts – especially teachers – to help shape a new EU action plan, test a draft survey and discuss practical, get real-life responses to cyberbullying.

Findings: In this session the panel looked at how the EU can do more to tackle cyberbullying, especially through the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Better Internet for Kids platform. Cyberbullying affects one in six schoolchildren and is rising. It often targets young people based on appearance, gender or background and has serious consequences for mental health, social inclusion and education. The EU's DSA and child protection strategy include key safeguards, but awareness and enforcement vary.

Four priorities for the upcoming EU action plan were shared:

- establishing a shared EU definition of cyberbullying,
- identifying good practices in Member States,
- strengthening cooperation with civil society, and
- encouraging a culture of advice-seeking and reporting.

Paola questions what the EU can do more to tackle cyberbullying.

Participants discussed how to tackle cyberbullying in and beyond the classroom through four real-life scenarios involving harassment in chat groups, gaming platforms and social media. Suggestions included: building awareness early; involving students in creating policies at school; offering teacher training and clear reporting procedures; making EU support and helplines more visible; and ensuring parents, schools, and platforms work together. The need for consequences for bullies and easier reporting mechanisms on platforms were also stressed.

1.2 Teaching students to fact-check online content

Moderators: **Romina Brondino**, Eurostat

Participants: Secondary school teachers and Europe Direct representatives

Objectives: To present and explain some of the tools created to help teachers and Europe Direct representatives make it easier for citizens an d young people to fact check content online using Eurostat data.

Findings: Eurostat provides statistics that are produced by the national statistical offices in the EU countries and calculates data for the EU as a whole and for the eurozone. To ensure its data is reliable, Eurostat follows the European Statistics Code of Practice, which sets out principles covering the production and dissemination of statistics. These include independence, objectivity, impartiality, methodology and transparency.

Participants were shown Eurostat's data visualisations webpage, which can provide inspiration for classroom activities. They were given a demonstration of how to use the Country facts,

Regions and Sustainable Development Goals tools for cross checking facts and comparing data between countries.

Eurostat is present on Facebook, Instagram, X and LinkedIn, and teachers and Europe Direct managers can reuse the content. A user support service (for projects, queries, etc) is available in all languages, while most of the tools which make statistics more accessible to young people and citizens can be found on Education corner. Every year, Eurostat and the Member States also organise a European Statistics Competition for secondary school students.

Romina invites panelists for a fact-checking exercise using Eurostat data.

Participants took part in a practical exercise to put the theory to the test. A key message from the session was to encourage young people and citizens to question the information they find online. For example, what is the source? Does the graphic link to the data? What references are provided?

1.3   Teaching lower-primary students about information manipulation

Moderators: **Klimentini Diakomananoli**, and **Ivana Sramkova**, Task Force for Strategic Communication and Countering Information Manipulation, DG COMM

Participants: Primary school teachers

Objectives: To see how the current EC toolkit for teachers on how to spot and fight disinformation (aimed at 15- to 18-year-olds), can be adapted to fit a younger audience (around 9 to 13 years of age). To find out what other complementary tools and videos should be developed for this younger audience.

Klimentini checks with teachers how the toolkit could be adapted for primary school pupils.

Findings: Parents and teachers are voicing their concerns that they lack the necessary tools to help children navigate the pitfalls of the online world, whilst very young children are spending a lot of time in front of screens.

Participants discussed in groups and agreed the following:

• products needed to be designed so that parents get involved;

• it is becoming harder to engage children with written texts, and therefore products should include more imagery or visual elements, preferably in cartoon form;

• content should not just be about information manipulation but should also point out how artificial intelligence is used to create fake content; and

- the products that the Commission develops must include some form of a game that the children can play.

Many concrete proposals were made, and these were collected for further review and consideration by the Task Force.

2. Engaging young people in sustainable action

2.1   Large carnivores and you(th)!

Moderators: **Nicole Wanders-Wengler**, **Mariana Furtado**, **Sophie Evers** and **Emilie Tamo Kamguia**, Directorate-General for Environment

Participants: Secondary school teachers and Europe Direct representatives

Objectives: To introduce participants to an educational role-play game developed by the EU Large Carnivore Platform to help students understand the recent comeback of species like wolves and golden jackals in parts of Europe, and the tensions this can cause – such as attacks on livestock or concerns about safety.

Nicole asks for feedback on an educational play-game on large-carnivores

Findings: Participants tested a short version of the game which was developed in response to polarised public debate and a lack of factual understanding around these issues. The game encourages players to take on real stakeholder roles, consider different viewpoints, and practice respectful dialogue and problem-solving. The session was well-received, and participants were directed to share further feedback by email.

2.2   Talking to children about climate change and engaging them in climate action

Moderators: **Elias Matthiessen** and **Martina Ceccarelli**, Directorate-General for Climate Action

Participants: Primary school teachers

Objectives: To share resources for engaging young people in climate action and to see how these could be adapted for a 9 to12-year-old audience.

Findings: Martina and Elias presented the European Climate Pact, a Commission initiative that supports individuals and organisations already taking climate action by giving them a platform, connecting them and helping them to encourage climate action. The Pact community boasts over 1000 Climate Pact Ambassadors and many Pact Partners. Numerous tools and resources are also available, some developed by members of the Pact community. Participants were introduced to four of the resources:

- A booklet on how to talk to young people about climate action
- An app that uses AI to recognise trees and enables young people to create their own tree collection.

- A guide on how to talk to children about the climate crisis
- A website, Our Planet, Our Future with multiple resources, available in several different languages.

Participants provided useful feedback on how the resources could be adapted for a 9-12-year-old audience. On the first resource there was a suggestion to focus on positive examples and success stories (where young people can do something). Regarding the tree App, teachers commented that primary school children did not have mobile phones in the classroom, but this could be overcome by the teacher using an iPad or the App could be used for a project or for homework. Some found the text on the

Elias and Martina check which Climate Action tools could be proposed to the 9+ year age.

climate crisis too difficult for this age group but suggested the images could be used as the basis for a discussion or to match with a specific problem (for children at the younger end of the age range). Panel members felt the website was well balanced presenting both good and bad news and liked the fact that it also featured solutions. Some panel members suggested making the resources accessible on Learning Corner and others also expressed interest in collaborating with the Climate Pact Ambassadors.

3. Diverse formats for diverse audiences

3.1   Podcasts

Moderators: **Luisa Zeidler**, former trainee, and **Jovana Stokovska**, Deputy Head of Youth Unit, DG COMM

Participants: Teachers and Europe Direct representatives

Objectives: To get feedback on a podcast created by Commission trainees.

Last year, the Youth Unit (DG COMM B2) decided to develop learning resources in diverse formats to reach more diverse audiences. Podcasts are an increasingly popular source of information for young people, and the unit explored the idea of developing a series of podcasts featuring the voices of youth. During her traineeship, Luisa Zeidler developed a pilot for a series called *EU-volution: Stories that shaped the EU*. In the first episode, she discusses three female trailblazers (Louise Weiss, Marga Klompé and Ursula Hirschmann) with a fellow trainee.

Luisa collects feedback on her EU-pioneers' podcast.

<u>Findings</u>: The pilot was well received and participants agreed that young voices would be relatable to students. Some teachers also noted that a podcast would be a useful teaching tool, with the potential to be used as a listening comprehension exercise with follow up exercises and activities and as an information source for projects. It could also be used as the basis for a follow-up discussion. Many agreed it was suitable for a teenage audience. Some felt there was a lot of information and suggested focusing on just one pioneer at a time and repeating important information at the end. Panel members gave some useful feedback on the tone and content of the pilot and suggested the benefits of making it available in languages other than English.

3.2   Specific EU campaigns and possible re-use in the classroom

3.2.1   Challenging gender stereotypes: a communication case study

<u>Moderators</u>: **Helena Soares** and **Daniel Makonnen**, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers

<u>Participants</u>: Teachers and Europe Direct representatives

<u>Objectives</u>: To explore the potential for using the EU campaign on challenging gender stereotypes in the classroom.

Elena and Daniel show how the campaign against gender stereotypes was used in the classroom.

Helena and Daniel presented the 2023 campaign which was targeted at young people (aged 18-29) and aimed to tackle gender stereotypes that affect both women and men. It reached over 17 million people and generated a lot of discussion between users and interest from social media influencers. The content of the campaign is available in all EU languages and material can be downloaded from the website. Posters can be ordered in any EU language.

<u>Findings</u>: An evaluation survey carried out at the end of the campaign indicated that it was very useful in raising awareness about gender stereotypes. While it was largely run on social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Spotify), the campaign has potential to be used in an educational context and some of its material has already featured in a photo competition organised by an Italian university and in an official French school manual. Participants were presented with an activity sheet taken from the French school manual to assess to what extent this could also work in their countries. This was well received, and many felt it would be useful, particularly for a language class. Feedback highlighted that the activities in the sheet provided room for creativity and freedom of expression and that the topic would also be good for younger pupils.

3.2.2   Circular economy #ForOurPlanet: get involved with your class!

Moderators: **Anne-Sophie Fabry** and **Karen Simon**, Youth Unit, Directorate-General for Communication

Participants: Teachers and Europe Direct representatives

Objectives: To present the upcoming circular economy campaign to be launched by the Directorate General for Environment on 22 April and to invite Teachers and Europe Direct representatives to spread the word and initiate actions.

Findings: On behalf of DG Environment colleagues who were unable to attend, Anne-Sophie and Karen presented a campaign on the circular economy, which will run from Earth Day (end of April) to Green Week (beginning of June). The aim of the campaign is to invite organisations to take action by launching circular economy projects (upcycling, sharing, reusing and repairing), and sharing them online.

3.3   Virtual role play game

Moderators: **Tamara Gojkovic** and **Chiara Bellone de Grecis**, European Parliament

Participants: Europe Direct representatives and secondary school teachers

Objectives: To inform participants of the European Parliament's Virtual Role Play Game, a resource to get young people more engaged in EU politics

Findings: During the session, around 20 participants took part in a simulation of a European Parliament vote. Each participant was assigned a country and a political group, and the session focused on legislation for greener food across Europe. Participants expressed this was a useful tool for making Parliament processes more transparent, and they saw the potential for helping their students get engaged in democracy at the level of the EU. The atmosphere was lively and collaborative, with everyone showing great motivation, asking

Tamara and Chiara invite panelists for a role-play game in the shoes of a Member of the EP.

questions and engaging actively with the facilitators. Participants expressed their interest in using the game with young people they work with.

Final conclusions

Anita Pannebakker concluded the event with a warm thank you to the speakers, organisers, teachers and Europe Direct representatives for all their efforts and contributions to such a constructive and engaging two days. The Youth Unit and colleagues from across DG COMM and other DGs, as well as other European institutions, have all benefited from the opportunity to collectively discuss experiences engaging young people on the ground and collaborate on the development of the next round of tools and resources for this audience. Concerns regarding the proliferation of AI, the spread of information manipulation and the need for more diverse and engaging resources to connect with young people were duly noted. Anita affirmed the Commission's renewed ambition to reach out to young people and place youth at the centre of this mandate. The feedback received at this event would be crucial to this work.

Main findings

Key takeaways of the meeting include the importance of **involving young people** in discussions about Europe's future and **bridging the gap** between the EU and its young citizens. Developing **innovative communication strategies**, such as interactive games and digital tools, to better connect with young audiences is essential. The event underscored the need to empower young people against **information manipulation**, prevent **cyberbullying**, and teach **fact-checking**. Engaging youth in **climate action** through positive examples and interactive tools like games and apps was stressed.

Participants highlighted the role of teachers and Europe Direct representatives in fostering youth engagement and provided valuable feedback on various EU initiatives aimed at empowering young people and enhancing their understanding of the EU.