

TOWARDS A EUROPE THAT LEAVES NO YOUTH BEHIND





ATD FOURTH WORLD

ATD Fourth World is an international organisation whose aim is to put an end to extreme poverty by ensuring access to fundamental rights for all. Founded in 1957 by Joseph Wresinski, ATD has no political or religious affiliations. Today, the organisation brings together individuals of all cultures and social origins across over 30 countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe.

ATD's approach is based on daily contact with people living in exclusion due to persistent poverty. It involves supporting them as they take action to lift themselves out of poverty while forging partnerships with other stakeholders. From this experience, ATD Fourth World has learned that the fight to eradicate poverty can only succeed if it is designed, implemented, monitored, and evaluated with the people concerned.



Between June 2021 and April 2023, ATD Fourth World organised a European mobilisation campaign to create a statement to use in public advocacy that answered the following question: "What does it mean to be a young person facing adversity in Europe today?"

For over two years, approximately one hundred young people with lived experiences of poverty and exclusion gathered regularly to reflect on the unfair situations they experience on a daily basis. These young people come from different countries in Europe (Poland, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Romania, Ireland, Great Britain, Spain, the Netherlands and France) where they are involved with ATD Fourth World projects.

Several institutional partners participated in this campaign. For the July 2022 gathering, ATD Fourth World joined forces with the French Ministry of National Education and Youth as part of the European Year of Youth. In addition, a board member from the European Youth Forum took part in the event. The campaign's second significant gathering, held in April 2023 took the form of a study session¹ in cooperation with the Youth Department of the Council of Europe.

This campaign is part of ATD's initiatives against poverty, but also marks a significant step in empowering youth participants as activists.

"This demands a lot of concentration, but it also does me good to be able to talk about my problems and to speak up for other young people who weren't able to be here. I hope that this will not be simply filed away in the archives but listened to."

In collaboration, these young people drew upon their own experiences to identify and understand the shared challenges they experience: harassment, discrimination, isolation, lack of decent work, and the impossibility of making their own choices or learning at school. They aimed to craft and communicate a common statement to the representatives of the various European, national and local organisations and institutions, demonstrating the unsatisfactory nature of the current situation and the denied access to these young people's rights.

"I'm here [at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg] to tell of how many people have suffered from harassment and discrimination. I'm here so that this doesn't happen again."

This document represents the perspectives of young people based on their insights and experiences and provides the foundation for ATD Fourth World's statement.

^{1.} An international education seminar geared for young people, lasting between four and eight days. It is hosted in one of the two Council of Europe's European Youth Centres situated in either Strasbourg or Budapest.

EUROPEAN YOUTH MEETING

Méry-sur-Oise (France)

JULY 2022

BINATIONAL MEETINGS - FROM JUNE 2021 TO JUNE 2022 **NOVEMBER 2021**

MARCH 2022

Preparatory meeting Méry-sur-Oise (France)

Preparatory meeting Wijhe (Netherlands)





FEBRUARY 2023

DIALOGUES IN 10 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

OCTOBER 2022

Preparatory meeting Méry-sur-Oise (France)

APRIL, 2023

FINAL STUDY SESSION

European Youth Center of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg (France)

OUR KEY MESSAGES

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3	We call for changing the dynamics in relationships with professionals to enable us to make our own choices p.10
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5	We must be able to effectively take part in social life and decision-making spaces

1. WE NEED THE WORLD TO UNDERSTAND OUR LIVED EXPERIENCES

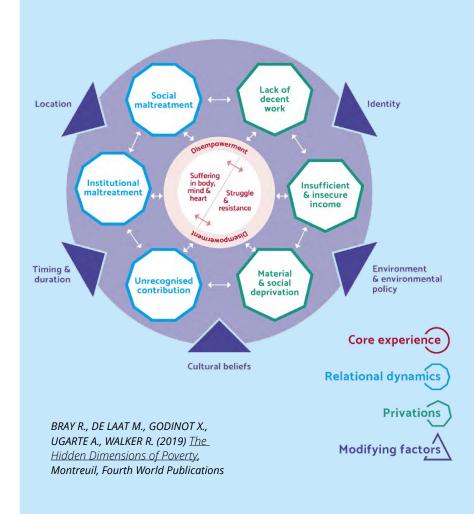
Young people made a key demand throughout this campaign: they wanted their experiences of poverty and exclusion to be known and understood, along with the aspirations and insights of their reality. It's crucial to consider their lived experiences when supporting them. Remaining unaware only reinforces exclusion and the discrimination they face, particularly in their social and professional interactions.

"When they tell us at work to leave our problems at the door, we can't we're human and there are days when we're okay and days when we're not. At work, you become a robot and put on a mask for the day. To talk about your worries, to say that you have slept on the street, would not stop you from working but would help explain to others why you're in a mood. Ask what's wrong, try to understand, and be attentive to others."

To effectively combat the consequences of poverty on the lives of young people, it is critical to comprehend their experiences. People should understand poverty is not solely defined by monetary concerns, which are often at the fore. As ATD Fourth World and the University of Oxford highlighted in a participatory international study in 2019, insufficient income is only one part of the experience of poverty.

THE HIDDEN DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY

The International Movement ATD Fourth World, in collaboration with the University of Oxford, conducted an international participatory research project entitled « The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty » in six countries: Bangladesh, Bolivia, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Tanzania. For three years, people living in poverty, professionals and academics worked together to refine the understanding of poverty and its multidimensional aspects, in order to contribute to the long-term elaboration of more pertinent policies that aim to eradicate poverty. Nine interdependent dimensions common to all the countries were defined.





This research demonstrates the intricate nature of poverty, highlighting that one cannot examine individual experiences of poverty and societal mechanisms independently. We must fight poverty with collective solutions and stop seeing it as the sole responsibility of those who are living in it.

"I have been unemployed and looking for work for two years now.... I didn't ask to live in a village with one bus in the morning and another in the evening and a train that returns at 10 pm. So I'm told that I'm lazy. Your parents don't want to help you, you don't have a car, public transport is the problem. You have to find a job to save up to buy a car."

European and international texts repeatedly (re)affirm their willingness to protect the rights of all and young people in particular. Unfortunately, ATD Fourth World still observes injustices in access to these rights. The testimonies of young people hold up a mirror to the dysfunctions of our systems. Their insights are therefore an **essential contribution** to the improvement of our societies for the benefit of all.



"Enable and ensure the inclusion of all young people in society."

^{2.} Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) European social charter of the Council of Europe (1961, revised in 1996), Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union (2000).

^{3.} European Youth goals, according to the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

2. WE WANT TO PUT AN END TO HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION AND THEIR EFFECTS ON OUR MENTAL HEALTH

Young people involved with ATD Fourth World, whatever their country of origin or their age, unanimously denounce the situations of harassment and social maltreatment that they suffer.

"Social maltreatment describes how people in poverty are negatively perceived and treated badly by other individuals and informal groups."⁴

Many young people with an experience of poverty and exclusion underline the fact that the prejudices, humiliation, and discrediting that they experience daily have a long-term impact on their mental and physical health, and exceed societal perceptions. When they try to talk about it, they are most often not believed or listened to, because people think they are exaggerating or that they are simply attention-seeking.

"It's the society that causes us to find ourselves completely alone. Society judges us constantly, and because of this judgment we're afraid to go out, and that's why we try to hide ourselves."

However, young people testify to the multiple and profound consequences of the discrimination and harassment that they experience daily. While some say that they have permanently **lost confidence in themselves**, others talk about their **anxiety** and **worry**. They also tell us about their **dark thoughts**, that force them to **isolate themselves or try everything they can to escape reality**. Because of this, they have difficulty envisioning their future where they have projects and dreams and create relationships with others. In the most serious cases, it can push them into self-harm and suicide.



^{4.} The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty, op. cit.

"Living in poverty means experiencing intense physical, mental and emotional suffering accompanied by a sense of powerlessness to do anything about it." ⁵

Among the various environments where young people living in poverty endure judgement and exclusion, school is often the place where suffering is the most pronounced. For many, regardless of their age, their time at school continues to be traumatic even years afterwards. It's therefore a place that warrants particular attention.

First, several European countries have failed to adapt their existing educational systems to meet the needs of young people facing the most severe challenges. Schools do not have adequate tools to guarantee equal learning conditions for all pupils. A great number of young people finish their school studies without a qualification and feel that they don't know how to do anything. However, families living in poverty place a lot of hope in school so that their children don't relive what they have lived.

Moreover, school is a place where children suffer from bullying and discrimination and all too often with a lack of protection on the institution's part. Several young people recounted that the institution downplayed their concerns and considered their situations to be "childish fights". Teachers and other players must take young people seriously when they find the courage to speak up. They must also be able to detect cases of bullying before the consequences become irreversible.



YOUTH GOAL #5: MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING 6

"Achieve better mental wellbeing and end stigmatisation of mental health issues, thus promoting social inclusion of all young people."



^{5.} The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty, op. cit.

^{6.} European Youth Goals, op. cit.

3. WE CALL FOR CHANGING THE DYNAMICS IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH PROFESSIONALS THAT WILL ENABLE US TO MAKE OUR OWN CHOICES

"In my entire personal or professional life, I have never been able to choose until this year. When I was young, I was placed in a home and then with a foster family. A [guardianship] was imposed on me five years ago. Working in [sheltered employment] was imposed on me, it was packaging work. It wasn't the kind of environment I wanted to work in. I wanted to work in the restaurant industry. Things were imposed on me whether or not I wanted to do them. I worked in a restaurant and actually [...] I was the clown; I was not respected. I was no longer motivated. I stopped. Today my guardian supports me in finding a proper job in a restaurant."

had to accept unsuitable accommodation to avoid ending up on the street, etc. This **disempowerment** is violence, limiting the ability of young people to regain their rights independently.

Disempowerment is lack of control and dependency on others resulting from severely constrained choices." 9

To regain control over their own lives, young people recognise that the **support of professionals** (psychologists, teachers, social workers, etc.) **is essential.** But they also share negative experiences

and point out attitudes and practices that dispossess them of their freedom:

"We can't trust professionals because it's not safe to. Why is this? Because professionals have power over us, and often they abuse this power and use it against us. They can tear our lives apart and we can do nothing to stop them."

"And when you fear all those who you are meant to go to for help, you stop asking."

Young people therefore call on institutions and professionals for cooperation, for access to all their rights, and for support that recognises their needs, aspirations,

and ideas, and that aims to ensure that each young person can make their own choices.



Too many young people say they are not able to make the essential choices for their own lives.

Their professional orientation has been decided with no one listening to their plans. They could not live with their family and were separated from their parents, brothers and sisters and/or children. They

^{7.} Judicial measure intended to protect adults in need of assistance, particularly with managing their money.

^{8.} Sheltered Employment is employment in an enterprise established specifically for the employment of persons with disabilities.

^{9.} The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty, op. cit.

For this, they request comprehensive and long-term support from a chosen person.

COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT: Young people are used to professionals only looking at one part of their life (for example, access to work) while ignoring the rest. However, professionals must consider the entirety of young people's lives for meaningful change to occur. Young people also want their family context to be considered, and for their relatives to be trusted. They refuse to be cut off from their family relationships against their will.

LONG-TERM: Young people encounter numerous professionals who change constantly. It's exhausting to start the relationship again each time, to have to recount your whole life anew, to take the risk each time things go wrong, or to be told the opposite of what was said to them before.

FROM A CHOSEN PERSON: So that comprehensive and long-term support is not a power relationship, young people must be able to choose a professional with whom to build a relationship of trust, or at the very least be able to request a change when they consider it necessary.

Young people demand the right to be accompanied by a person of their choice in their meetings with professionals. This allows them to gain more confidence, to express themselves, to take a step back after the meeting, and to limit the risk of abuse.

So that professionals can adopt these strategies, a modification of their training is necessary. Training should be based on the understanding of the experiences, needs, and insights of youth in persistent poverty. Training should allow for a change in their approach, which can create the conditions for trust and include:

- Supporting, not punishing
- Choosing open communication where young people can ask questions without fear of repercussions, and where professionals can recognise their mistakes and admit them when they do not know.

"Because not knowing is ok, abusing us is not."

Being aware that it is difficult for young people who have experienced hard things to trust others. Professionals should not judge but ask: what can I do so that they trust me more?

"We're not bad people because we want to keep something to ourselves. We haven't done something wrong just because we don't trust you." Being aware that promoting freedom of choice means not only respecting the person, but it can also resolve issues more effectively because it relies on the young person's energy.

"If we make our choice and then we make a mistake, we can get back up, but if it's another person's choice, it's hard to get back up."

"[Where I live], children and young people experience difficult situations such as drugs or dropping out of school. Fortunately, there are organisations that offer support; [one such] organisation teaches young people circus skills. I was the team leader, and this responsibility is important because you have a lot of choices to make. You're also responsible for the physical and mental health of the other team members. This responsibility allows you to support the others."

One way to assist others in changing attitudes is to rely on **merging of knowledge and practices** ©¹⁰ with young people in situations of poverty, to develop collaborative training programmes.

^{10.} Merging of knowledge and practices © shifts the traditional approach to anti-poverty work by including people with experience of poverty from the very beginning: in framing the questions, gathering ideas and data, and producing analyses and solutions with academics and grassroots workers and professionals as equals.

4. WE NEED DECENT JOBS THAT ALLOW US TO ACCESS ALL OUR RIGHTS

International institutions widely address access to decent work. In 2023, the United Nations organised the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty around the theme of "Decent work and social protection". Young people from ATD Fourth World, considering their unique experience, provide their analyses and proposals on access to decent jobs.

"Lack of decent work refers to the prevalent experience of being denied access to work which is fairly paid, safe, secure, regulated and dignified." ¹¹

A job that respects dignity is a job that you like and for which you feel useful. It is therefore necessary and critical to **give everyone the possibility of choosing their own path in life.** "A dignified job is a job that we do with passion, in which we flourish. It allows us to remove a weight."

Decent work ensures that we do not experience contempt or discrimination. A job where people respect our dignity as human beings, recognise our skills and allow us to express ourselves.

"I began work at 13. From the moment I started my first job, my boss said to me straight away 'you, I'll be keeping an eye on you', because I come from a violent neighbourhood."

11. The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty, op. cit.

Decent work is **work that gives access to all our rights and gives dignity to every person**: the right to accommodation, the right to social protection, but also the right to rest and leisure, and the right to take part in community life.

"A job unlocks everything: money, housing, the meaning of life."

"A decent salary makes it possible to buy yourself clothes, necessities and to travel so that you can discover new places, and not be stuck at home during the holidays."

Thus, to arrive at a situation where **work would become a means of liberation and fulfilment** for all, young people with experience of poverty highlight these necessary changes:

- Improve educational and vocational programmes by incorporating more internship and work experiences while ensuring that information is more accessible to all.
- Develop more public transportation in areas far from city centres and implement financial assistance for access to public transport and for obtaining driving licences to provide greater mobility for young people.
- Organise collaborative trainings (between the various stakeholders of companies and young people so that all parties can understand the working conditions, and the needs of each worker, with an emphasis on young people.

"We have different roles in the same company and the stress is different and we need to understand each other's stress. Sometimes we can't know which one is the most burdensome and so we need to know each other to understand each other better. Understanding one another better is essential for achieving equality."

- To allow colleagues to get to know each other better, introduce convivial time during working hours.
- In accordance with the fourteenth principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Council Recommendation relating to an adequate minimum income to guarantee active inclusion ¹³, ATD Fourth World calls for implementing a **minimum income in each European country for everyone from the age of majority**, to guarantee the economic independence of young adults.



YOUTH GOAL #7: : QUALITY EMPLOYMENT FOR ALL¹⁴

"Guarantee an accessible labour market with opportunities that lead to quality jobs for all young people."

^{14.} European youth goals, op. cit.



^{12.} European Commission, General secretariat, <u>European Pillar of Social Rights</u>, Publications Office, 2017.

^{13.} Recommendation <u>2023/C 41/01</u>

5. WE MUST BE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY TAKE PART IN SOCIAL LIFE AND DECISION-MAKING SPACES

SOCIAL INCLUSION

"Due to bullying, I left school at 19 because I could no longer bear to attend. I live in an area on the outskirts of town. There is one bus every hour to go into town. I am currently looking for work. There are very few places where I can work in the neighbourhood, and there is not much to do around here. I cannot meet people on my block. There was a community centre here before, but not anymore. I used to do acting there and play mini-football. The only way I could meet people after that was through gaming. I still feel isolated, though."

Poverty prevents young people from participating in social life, depriving society of their contributions. Young people call on societies to implement appropriate conditions for youth participation in social life.

Young people explain that they isolate themselves following the negative experiences they have had with others. To overcome isolation, one must fight harassment, discrimination, and social maltreatment.

Young people also want us to understand that for a person living in isolation, daring to meet others is an enormous effort. To help young people in such a situation overcome isolation, we must reduce barriers by:

- **Developing more public transportation**, in particular in disadvantaged, isolated areas.
- Developing cultural and social activities in all places, and ensure these activities are accessible to those with limited financial resources and those with disabilities.
- Creating spaces where young people with shared experiences can come together. Otherwise, those who are more isolated may fear judgement from others and experience hesitation to participate.



ONLINE GAMES AND ISOLATION

Many young people have explained how video games have made them feel **as if they** were locked in a cage: "Once you have left school, when you stay home and look for work and find nothing, after spending six months playing games on a console or the computer, you just start rotting and become lazy and aggressive. You feel attacked when someone visits, and you become suspicious."

Many of these young people have also described **how online games were the only place where they created positive relationships with others,** and how such games sometimes even helped them overcome isolation: "The Internet has helped me a lot. I isolated myself in the past [because] people bullied and harassed me. However, on the Internet, I met nice people, and we created a community, playing and spending evenings together. For the last 4 years, we have logged in and played together every evening."

These experiences show that trying to fight video game addiction without tackling issues like harassment, the lack of decent work and opportunities to participate in social life, as well as the lack of means of transport, is a futile effort.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In addition, at a time when youth participation in public policy development is increasingly considered essential, policymakers seldom hear and take into account the voices of young people who have experienced poverty. The opportunity for these young people to express their opinions on measures that directly affect them is not provided. According to ATD Fourth World, there are **two main reasons** for this:

- "The knowledge and skills of people living in poverty are rarely seen, acknowledged or valued. Individually and collectively people experiencing poverty are often wrongly presumed to be incompetent"
- In the few cases in which they are asked to describe their experience, the conditions for young people who have experienced poverty to fully participate are not fulfilled.



"Strengthen young people's democratic participation and autonomy as well as provide dedicated youth spaces in all areas of society."

^{15.} The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty, op. cit. 16. European Youth Goals, op. cit.

It is, however, impossible to create societies which are inclusive and fully democratic without the participation of the most excluded young people. The only way to end discrimination and exclusion is to build upon the experience and understanding of people who have lived in such situations.

To enable all young people to take part, adding a few chairs around the table is not enough. Discussion and decision spaces must change to fulfil the conditions for the most isolated young people to take part.

CONDITIONS FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SITUATIONS OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION

- Emphasise the involvement and the real, effective contribution of young people in the decision-making process and not "just an inclusion of young people in consultative bodies without any real possibility to participate in the actual decision-making" 17. Ensure the necessary conditions for such involvement in terms of time, budget, partnerships, among others.
- Avoid inviting a few isolated young people to join others in the usual engagement spaces. Gather young people sharing similar experiences first and create a space in which they can build collective knowledge together, as peers, before combining this knowledge with other contributions. Without such a process, the participation of young people who have experienced tough lives will be meaningless and will not give rise to any contributions or opportunities for change.
- Allow all participants to express themselves in their mother tongue.

- ▶ Ensure that the **language** used in the invitation, sessions and discussions is clear and **understandable to all participants.**
- Organise small group discussions (5 to 8 people), allowing less confident young people to contribute.
- Prepare young people who have experienced challenging circumstances beforehand, ensuring they have a support person present to assist them.
- Design of the format and pace of the process should consider the needs of less confident young people and people requiring more time.

Local, national and European institutions cannot work on implementing conditions for such involvement alone. **They must make a firm**, long-term commitment to cooperate with organisations working with young people living in poverty.

^{17.} Recommendation 128 (2003) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, cited also in Recommendation CM/Rec (2022)6.

13 PROPOSALS FOR A EUROPE WHICH LEAVES NO YOUTH BEHIND

TAKE INTO ACCOUNT ALL DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY, TO LOOK DIFFERENTLY AT YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY AND DESIGN PUBLIC POLICIES CAPABLE OF ERADICATING POVERTY.

PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

- 2 RETHINK PARTICIPATION AND DECISION SPACES, FOR ALL TO TAKE PART, INCLUDING THOSE MOST SOCIALLY EXCLUDED.
- DEVELOP CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES IN ALL PLACES, ENSURING THESE ACTIVITIES ARE ACCESSIBLE TO THOSE WITH LIMITED FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND/OR WITH DISABILITIES.
- 4 CREATE SPACES WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE SHARING SIMILAR EXPERIENCES CAN MEET.

TRAINING OF PROFESSIONALS

- TAKE SERIOUSLY THE ALARMS SOUNDED BY YOUNG PEOPLE REGARDING HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION ISSUES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES. TRAIN PROFESSIONALS TO PREVENT AND DEAL WITH THESE SITUATIONS, IN PARTICULAR PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN SCHOOLS.
- EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY. INCLUDING THEIR INSIGHTS AND UNDERSTANDING THEIR NEEDS, SOCIAL WORKERS CAN CREATE CONDITIONS FOR TRUST. THIS APPROACH INVOLVES USING THE MERGING OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES© WITH YOUNG PEOPLE TO ENRICH THESE TRAINING PROGRAMMES.

7

DEVELOP TRAINING PROGRAMS INVOLVING VARIOUS COMPANY STAKEHOLDERS, WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENT WORKING CONDITIONS AND NEEDS AT STAKE, IN PARTICULAR THOSE OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CHALLENGING TASKS AND DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES IN THEIR LIVES.

SUPPORT

- PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE, LONG-TERM SUPPORT TO YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH A DESIGNATED PERSON OF THEIR CHOICE.
- 9 GUARANTEE THE RIGHT TO BE ACCOMPANIED TO APPOINTMENTS BY A PERSON OF ONE'S CHOICE.
- 10 IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES AND GUIDANCE BY INCORPORATING MORE INTERNSHIP AND WORK EXPERIENCES WHILE ENSURING THAT INFORMATION IS MORE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL.

ACCESS TO RIGHTS

- 11 TO BENEFIT FROM A FAIR WAGE, ACCESS TO ALL FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS, AND THE RECOGNITION OF THEIR SKILLS.
- 12 DEVELOP TRANSPORT SERVICES IN AREAS ISOLATED FROM CITY CENTRES, AND PROVIDE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT ACCESS AND DRIVING LICENCES.
- 13 IMPLEMENT A MINIMUM INCOME ACROSS ALL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, AS OF THE AGE OF MAJORITY.





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