

YOUNG, LOUD, LEADING

Reflections from UNICA students at the
European Youth Event (EYE 2025)

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The UNICA delegation at the EYE 2025

INTRODUCTION

On the initiative of the **Youth Outreach Unit of the European Parliament**, UNICA attended this year's **European Youth Event (EYE2025)** with a delegation of 15 representatives – 13 students and 2 staff members.

The group joined more than 8,000 young people in Strasbourg for this unique opportunity for young people to making their voices heard at the very centre of European democracy.

Held every two years by the European Parliament, the EYE is a unique platform for youth aged 16 to 30 to engage directly with Members of the European Parliament, policymakers, experts, and civil society actors. The 2025 edition, held on 13–14 June, offered a rich programme of debates, workshops, artistic performances, and interactive sessions, both inside the Parliament and across the vibrant EYE Village, coordinated by the European Youth Forum. As part of this edition, **UNICA was also given the chance by Youth Outreach Unit to take part in two workshops exploring the role of universities in promoting youth engagement and democratic participation.** The sessions united students and youth networks from across Europe and beyond to re-imagine higher education as a space where learners are not passive recipients of services but active co-creators who shape those services, safeguard quality, and drive universities toward greater inclusivity, democracy, and genuine participation.

This document compiles the reflections of the students who attended the EYE 2025, describing the different activities they took part in and offering a glimpse into their vision of Europe. We hope these perspectives inspire universities to further engage with youth voices and actively support students in shaping the future of Europe, especially through processes and initiatives within their own academic communities.

UNICA is grateful to the European Outreach Office of the European Parliament for this opportunity, the participating students for their active engagement and enthusiasm, and Guido de Wilde for accepting the challenge to come along on this adventure!

Further resources:

- [About the European Youth Event](#)
- [Article “Young, Loud & Leading: the new sound of university governance”, by Federica Nestola, Project & Policy Officer at UNICA](#)
- [Overview of UNICA's participation at the EYE 2025](#)

ALESSIA RUTA, UNIVERSITÉ LIBRE DE BRUXELLES

#EYE2025: a starting point to recenter our Union... Starting from youth!

Once every two years, the European youth gathers in the premises of the European Parliament in Strasbourg for a memorable experience: the European Youth Event. In 2025, I finally had the chance to be among the participants – and that's all thanks to UNICA!

It was a great opportunity to engage in debates, workshops and conferences with peers from all over Europe, as well as with some EU decision-makers. If any takeaway clearly emerged from these two intense days, it is the immense energy that lies in the hearts and the minds of people from my generation, a generation with clear visions and strong opinions – yet with too little say! While it is true that events of this kind are important catalysts of ideas, knowledge and networking, they miss a relevant point: we the young people don't need anyone telling us that we are the future of the world and that we have to commit to making it better because we are the present and we are already deeply committed at the present time! As a consequence, what we actually need is to be listened to and trusted, rather than lectured.

Fortunately enough, at EYE2025 a few activities did in fact go in this direction. It was the case of the first session I took part in, a Youth Policy Debate with Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, Glenn Micallef. The Commissioner showed eagerness to learn from us what priorities we think that the EU should have in order for it to become more safe, competitive, sustainable, democratic, and people and social-centred. For my intervention, I felt the responsibility to draw attention to peripheral and rural areas: the university I was representing – Université Libre de Bruxelles – is from a capital city, but my roots aren't. As I was born and raised in an inland province of southern Italy, I have first-hand experience of what it feels like to grow up with fewer opportunities to learn and to engage with national and European institutions, which are often perceived as distant and inattentive to the specific needs of the peripheries. This is why I decided to use a space I was given to shed light on contexts like mine that are too often left out from the conversation or have a harder time accessing this kind of platforms to communicate directly with central institutions.

Another workshop that will also carry a special place in my heart is the one dedicated to poetry slam, an activity I have been committed to for years, alongside my political engagement and my studies in the political science field. Little did I know that –

contrary to the rules of geometry – these parallel lines of my life were destined to cross and that they would have done so in a venue as prestigious as the Strasbourg seat of the European Parliament. The aim of the workshop was to teach how to use poetry (in both written and oral form) as a tool to promote democracy. Not only did we delve into theory, we also moved on to putting everything into practice: on Friday we wrote our poems and on Saturday we performed them on stage at the Flower Bar of the Parliament! It was an incredibly touching moment.

After two intense days, I headed back to Brussels (and to the exams I still had to write) with a “moral luggage” filled with core memories, new knowledge and many inputs to keep reflecting on the European democracy that I want for our shared future, one where all individuals and communities are equally empowered and where democracy and human rights always prevail over any other interest. If decision-makers ever need to find where to start a reform from, us the youth is who they must turn to!

Reflections from EYE 2025: Learning, Dialogue and New Perspectives in Strasbourg

Attending the European Youth Event 2025 in the European Parliament in Strasbourg was a truly unique and enriching experience. Over two days, I had the chance to meet young people from across Europe, engage in meaningful discussions, and explore topics that unite, challenge, and shape us as a generation.

One of the workshops I joined, *“How to Tell a Story with Data,”* focused on how to communicate complex information in a clear and engaging way. We explored the idea that simplicity can be powerful, and that even large datasets can become stories that people truly understand. In *“How to Craft a Strong Argument,”* led by the international organization iDebate, we worked on building compelling arguments from scratch. Using the structure of *statement – explanation – example – impact*, we learned how to communicate ideas convincingly and logically, a skill I found immediately valuable. The Slovenian NGO Socialna Akademija led *“Let’s Talk About Hard Topics,”* a workshop that encouraged respectful dialogue on sensitive issues. After answering a series of personal questions, we were paired with someone whose views differed from ours. This exercise pushed us to listen, reflect, and exchange perspectives in a thoughtful and open-minded way.

Perhaps the most emotionally powerful session was *“How Is It to Be a Migrant,”* hosted by Associazione Jonathan from Italy. Through a simulation game, we experienced the uncertainties of migration by taking on the role of individuals journeying from Africa to Europe. It offered a profound insight into the harsh and often unpredictable reality that many people face.

Participating in EYE 2025 helped me strengthen my communication and critical thinking skills, deepen my awareness of key social challenges, and connect with passionate young people from different cultures. It was a dynamic mix of informal learning, intercultural dialogue, and civic engagement. I’m especially grateful to Comenius University in Bratislava and the international office for making this opportunity possible. Thanks to the support of **UNICA**, the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe, I was able to grow both personally and academically, while contributing my voice to the collective conversation on Europe’s future.

EYE 2025: a final overview

On Friday 13 and Saturday 14 June 2025, a sunny Strasbourg welcomed nearly 10,000 young people from all over Europe into its gorgeous streets and squares, raising - once again – the curtain on the biggest youth event in the EU. Two days packed with activities, organized across more than 450 panels, workshops, and debates, brought to light the vision that the new generation holds for the Union and its future, giving them the opportunity to be directly involved in shaping it.

As for me, a 23-year-old Italian student with a strong interest in EU law and policymaking, this experience represented, on one hand, the symbolic conclusion of a journey, as I'm about to finish my studies, and on the other hand, the spark of a new beginning. Participating in EYE gave me even stronger motivation to continue pursuing my dream job within the EU bubble.

Moreover, having the chance to represent my university (Sapienza University of Rome) as well as the UNICA and CIVIS Alliances, was a true honour and an incredible opportunity. Meeting people from all over the continent, each with their own stories, backgrounds, fields of study, and experiences, was deeply enriching. I truly believe that the unity of the Union - forgive the wordplay - stems from its roots: the roots of the next ruling generation, growing within the corridors of Europe's universities. Alliances like UNICA and CIVIS, in my opinion, are powerful instruments to advance EU integration and foster a stronger European identity every day. During EYE, I participated in various workshops, both in the Parliament and in the EYE Village, learning about local project development, journalism, and sustainability. But EYE is not only about panels: it's a full experience of fun, music, and joy. For instance, I also took part in interactive activities and evening concerts. In conclusion, the greatest takeaway I bring home from this intense, yet amazing experience is the inspiration I received from the people around me during those two days – inspiration to keep working and fighting for the future I want Europe to lead.

Reflecting on EYE2025: A Journey of Awareness, Empowerment, and Connection

Attending EYE2025 in Strasbourg was far more than just joining a youth event—it was a powerful reminder of what it means to be an active European citizen. Over the course of three unforgettable days, I found myself surrounded by thousands of young people from every corner of Europe, united by a shared desire to learn, connect, and shape the future. From the very beginning, EYE2025 welcomed us with vibrant energy. The opening concert wasn't just entertainment—it was a celebration of diversity. Listening to artists from various countries perform in different languages made me feel how art can bridge cultures and bring people together, even before we exchange words. Throughout the event, I participated in several sessions that pushed me to think critically about the world we are stepping into. In the "Skills of Tomorrow" session, I reflected deeply on what it truly means to be prepared for the future. The discussion on digital and green transitions, AI, and the need for adaptable skills made me realize how fast our world is changing—and how important it is to grow not only professionally, but also as thoughtful and responsible individuals. The heart of EYE2025, for me, was the experience of sharing space with my peers in the European Parliament building. Sitting in the Hemicycle, where decisions that shape millions of lives are made, I felt the weight and privilege of democratic participation. For a moment, we were not just students or volunteers—we were future decision-makers. In the EYE Village, I discovered projects from different organizations, listened to personal stories at the Living Library, and even joined a traditional European dance during Balfolk. Each activity made me feel more connected—not only to other cultures, but to a common European identity rooted in solidarity, respect, and inclusion. EYE2025 reminded me that youth is not a waiting room for adulthood—it is a powerful force for change. It gave me confidence in my voice, hope in our collective future, and a sense of belonging that crossed borders and languages. I returned home not only inspired, but with a deeper understanding of the role we, as young people, can and must play in shaping tomorrow.

EFE TURHAN, MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

I'm feeling incredibly inspired after a few days at the European Youth Event (hashtag#EYE2025) in Strasbourg! It was a fantastic opportunity to be at the heart of the European Parliament, connecting with young people to discuss and shape our shared future.

What surprised and inspired me most was the atmosphere. I went in expecting formal panels, but what I found was a vibrant, palpable energy from hundreds of young people united by a common purpose. This powerful sense of collective enthusiasm and shared responsibility was truly inspiring and showed that we are ready to lead the change.

I'm especially grateful for the insightful sessions I had the chance to attend:

- "Powering change: youth in the energy revolution" – A powerful discussion on the critical role youth must play in leading the green transition.
- "Out of the box: creating impactful projects" – This workshop provided a brilliant framework for turning abstract ideas into concrete, high-impact projects.
- "Beyond borders: your guide to European youth programs" – An eye-opening look into the vast opportunities available to us through programs like traineeships.

For any student wondering why they should attend EYE in the future, my answer is simple: it's where ideas meet action. It's a unique space that bridges the gap between high-level policy and grassroots passion. You get to see firsthand that the EU is not a distant institution, but a platform waiting for our voices and contributions.

This leads to my wish for the future of Europe: that the collaborative, hopeful, and proactive spirit of EYE becomes our continent's everyday reality. A Europe where every young person feels empowered, knowing their voice is not just heard, but is essential for shaping our collective path forward.

As a student at Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, I am proud to have been part of this conversation. A huge thank you to UNICA - Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe for their support. Looking forward to putting these new ideas into action!

Attending the European Youth Event 2025 in Strasbourg was an unforgettable and deeply inspiring experience.

The event kicked off on Thursday night with a high-energy concert by Ridsa at the Main Stage, which set the tone for the days to come. It was incredible to be surrounded by thousands of young people from across Europe, all united by a shared enthusiasm for music, connection, and change. On Friday, I began with the session "Dialogue with the enemy in the heart of Europe" at the EYE village which I got to explore but to be honest it was too hot to stay in the sun for long. Later, I joined the Next Generation EU podcast recording, where discussions around youth priorities and EU policy made me feel heard and empowered. I must say that this was one of my favorite activities.

One of the highlights of the day was participating in the Virtual role play game: Step into the shoes of an MEP, where I experienced firsthand the challenges and responsibilities faced by Members of the European Parliament. Saturday brought more engaging activities, beginning with a behind-the-scenes tour of the European Parliament, which offered a fascinating look at the spaces where decisions that shape our future are made. In the afternoon, I unfortunately missed the European Charlemagne Youth Prize networking session due to the long queues which made me really sad. Finally, the EYE2025 closing plenary in the Hemicycle was a powerful reminder of the importance of youth voices in democracy.

Hearing passionate speeches and witnessing the energy in the room gave me hope and motivation to stay involved in civic life. EYE2025 was more than just an event—it was a platform for growth, connection, and action. I left Strasbourg with new friends, new ideas, and a renewed sense of purpose as a young European.

ILLYANA GUIGNARD, SORBONNE NOUVELLE UNIVERSITY

The European Youth Event 2025 was a first for me and it convinced me to go back!

I had the incredible opportunity to represent my university, Sorbonne Nouvelle, as part of the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA).

I have to admit that, being French, I wasn't far from the European Parliament, and yet I didn't feel like I was just in France for those two days, but in Europe. I heard more different languages in the same place and discovered more cultures than in all the rest of my life!

I was able to take part in workshops on how to build a more integrated Europe and fascinating conferences with distinguished guests who helped me to understand the major issues involved in the enlargement of the European Union in the future with the conference 'Bigger, better? Expanding the European Union'.

It was an incredible human experience. I had the chance to meet, work and dance with young people, not only from Europe but also from the rest of the world, to think about Europe in our own image!

Doing an interrail showed me European solidarity, and this social Europe that I studied so much in class. The EYE25 showed me how to create this Europe together!

As, I hope, a future European civil servant after my studies, I am certain that this kind of experience will train me to be more than capable of being not only a European citizen but also a builder of this Europe!

MARÍA PILAR MORACHO GARCÍA, UNIVERSITY OF ALCALÁ

I am delighted to have attended the European Youth Event (EYE). In Strasbourg, I have not only met students from other universities and European alliances, but also groups of young people from very different cultures. I have also shared experiences with members of the European Parliament, as well with youth associations from all over Europe. Nevertheless, the EYE2025 has helped me to learn more about the Commission's translation and interpreting services and student participation in university decision-making bodies.

On the one hand, as a Master's student in Intercultural Communication, Public Service Interpreting and Translation at the University of Alcalá (UAH), I had always loved getting to know the facilities and the staff of the Directorate-General for Translation and for Interpretation. Thanks to the EYE2025, I have talked with translators about the EC traineeships, as well as participating in real-life simultaneous interpreting situations. Besides, the sessions organised by translations and interpreting services have emphasised the need for language professionals to achieve a multilingual Europe. In fact, one of the speakers raised awareness of the plain language movement to modernise discourse. He explained that translation services are already implementing plain recommendations to make EU texts more comprehensible to citizens.

On the other hand, the sessions on universities, in which UNICA participated, have confirmed me the need to create gathering places to develop a sense of community. As a student representative both at a local level in the UAH and at an international level in the European alliance EUGLOH, I believe it is indispensable to advocate for full and effective student participation in the governing bodies of higher education institutions. To meet this purpose, it is necessary to understand other student structures different from your home university in events like the EYE2025. In addition, knowing university networks, such as UNICA, allows us to connect with other students to share good practices and experiences to plan activities and events, improve services and infrastructures or defend students' rights.

In conclusion, the European Youth Event has showed me the work of EU translators and interpreters, but above all the importance of creating networks to meet other students with whom to enhance university life.

Participation, as well as the journey to the European Youth Event 2025, was an unforgettable and truly unique experience. Engaging in various interesting workshops, critical-reflective conversations on complex political topics, new friendships and opening up opportunities are just scratching the surface of this truly successful event, which was not only enjoyable for me, but also helped me think about the problems around me that I don't stop to think about during the normal stress of the day.

The workshops that I feel enriched me the most were the dramatic reading of Camus's work: Letters to a German Friend, and the seminar on hidden areas of poverty in society.

The dramatic reading of Camus's work, Letters to a German Friend, compelled me to reflect on several challenges in our society. These letters, or short essays, were written by Camus during the Second World War and deeply explore the societal issues during a time of significant political upheaval in Germany following the rise of the Nazis. What touched me most from this reading, was the part where Camus describes a priest who collaborated with the Nazi regime, reporting a Jew who was fleeing and feeling no remorse because, for him, "it was natural that his faith must serve his country." This sentence, along with the scene of a priest exchanging his loyalty to God for obedience to the state, really made me cringe as a theology student and future pastor. Today, when loyalty to a particular political establishment or party often takes precedence over personal conviction, faith, or critical thinking, this sentence urges us to reflect deeply on our values and priorities. In other words, is following the regime truly more important to us than our faith or beliefs?

During the seminar on hidden aspects of poverty, we gained insights into dimensions of poverty that may not be immediately apparent but remain present and restrictive for individuals who are often indirectly marginalised by these circumstances. For instance, children of financially disadvantaged parents may be unable to participate in school trips, thereby hindering their integration into the collective. Additionally, they might lack access to workbooks, books, and other essential educational materials, which could impede their academic achievement. This seminar has enhanced my

understanding of the concealed facets of poverty and its tangible impact on individuals' daily lives.

EYE 2025 helped me to see the challenges in today's society and gave me the space to reflect on their solutions. It also gave me the space to involve the young people around me in this reflection and, thus, together, shape the future that awaits us.

I would like to thank Comenius University in Bratislava and UNICA for allowing me to be part of this incredible event and for all the opportunities and exchanges it provided! The chance to join the EYE truly helped me engage with and encounter new perspectives and diverse sociocultural backgrounds, and will aid me in recognising and striving to improve the world and the environment I live in.

