

## By Caoimhe Clements

On 6th and 7th November 2024, young passionate individuals from across the EU and UK came together at the London School of Economics (LSE) for the Youth Dialogue series of events organised by the EU Delegation to the UK and the British Council. On 6 November, there were three parallel workshops as well as the closing event of the *EU/UK Youth Stronger Together* project and on 7 November there was a one-day youth policy dialogue consisting of parallel working groups and plenary sessions dedicated to youth engagement and cooperation for EU/UK youth relations.

This two-day conference was dedicated to empowering youth, strengthening cross-border connections, exploring shared cultural opportunities and addressing common challenges. With a focus on collaboration and action, it aimed to inspire meaningful solutions to break down barriers and build lasting relationships for the future.

Key themes of discussion included shared challenges such as the housing crisis, which affects both the EU and UK, as well as the pressing issues of sexual violence against women and young girls. Participants explored how the EU could enhance safeguarding and acknowledge that no country in the world is free from Femicide. Additionally, the ongoing mental health crisis was a significant focus, emphasising the need for more action and better solutions.

Arriving in London early on Wednesday 6th November from Belfast City, Northern Ireland. I was honoured to join as one of the journalists covering the events over the next two days. Day one began in the early afternoon at LSE's Marshall Building, where discussions ran from 1–5 pm. The focus was on strengthening existing connections and forging new ones between people from the EU and the UK.

These discussions link seamlessly to the theme of *'Togetherness'* which emphasises the shared values, interests and challenges that unite us, regardless of where we come from. The collective passionate energy in the room helped to drive the ideas of young people to hold the potential to drive meaningful, positive change.

Day one concluded with an engaging series of solo talks followed by a networking session. The evening was particularly enjoyable, as it offered the opportunity to connect with people from diverse backgrounds and countries. The conversations were inspiring and encouraging, leaving me feeling truly energised and motivated for day two.

Rachel Smith (23), a participant from the Isle of Man, shared her unique perspective on attending the event: "I was invited to attend this event to represent UNESCO sites in the UK. I am a volunteer youth representative for Biosphere Isle of Man and have recently brought together the first UNESCO designation based Youth Network in the UK (Isle of Man falls under the UK UNESCO Commission!)."

Reflecting on her experience, Rachel admitted, "This was my first time experiencing an official youth advocacy event and so initially I was quite overwhelmed! It was inspiring to see so many individuals who were actively involved in youth representation and advocacy work."

Rachel also highlighted the meaningful connections she made, saying, “I made many new connections. The one I am looking forward to exploring the most is that with the British Youth Council. I believe that this connection/collaboration will help the work that we are doing on the Isle of Man. It will help develop our network and make the work that we do further reaching.”

Rachel, a graduate of Nottingham Trent University, currently holds a voluntary role of British Isles Biosphere Reserves Youth Representative.

Discussing her goals for attending the event, Rachel explained, “I attended this event as I wanted to make connections and gain inspiration for my work as youth representative for Biosphere Reserves in the British Isles.”

Day two began early on Thursday morning at 9am, lasting until the evening, featuring a series of compelling panel discussions. One panel that I particularly enjoyed which featured Cecilia, the President of YEM UK (Young European Movement UK). This organisation champions increased youth participation in political affairs and advocates for a closer relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Cecilia, an exceptional speaker, who is passionate about addressing issues including feminism, climate change and AI. She is also a journalist in her own right. Her speech was both moving and impactful, shedding light on critical challenges and emphasising the changes needed to create a better future.

The LSE European Society shared their pride in hosting the two-day event, emphasising its importance in bringing together young people from the EU and UK.

“The LSE European Society was honoured to host the 2024 EU-UK Youth Dialogue, reaffirming our dedication to fostering meaningful conversations on European affairs. As part of one of Europe’s foremost universities, we are uniquely positioned to convene diverse voices to tackle pressing international challenges.”

“This event offered an exceptional platform for young leaders from the UK and EU to engage in constructive dialogue, share perspectives and shape the future of EU-UK relations. Supporting initiatives like this reflects our mission to inspire and empower the next generation of global changemakers.”

I consider this two-day event to be a success as it led to the launch of the Youth Recommendations Report on 7th November 2024, the final day of the conference. The report is the outcome of a series of focus groups and online consultation organised by the British Council and was developed with input from 120 youth organisations across the EU and the UK.

The next step is to establish a network of EU/UK youth organisations, aimed at empowering young people and building long-term collaboration and connections.