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## 1. MOTIVATION

Our candidacy has its origin in 2018, when two separate events occurred that inspired us and made us decide to go for it. During a feedback session on the progress of our action plan “Ghent, Youth- and Child-friendly City” with our local Youth Council, the members stated that, in their perception, the focus of the city’s youth policy was too often on (little) children and insufficiently on young people. In that same year, a young inhabitant suggested Ghent would apply for the title of EYC. Seeing an opportunity to address both requests at the same time, we consider EYC as a lever for a strong policy tailored to the needs of young people and also as an opportunity to organise an amazing year for and by young people in 2024. In the meantime, the city has increased the budget for youth and youth (welfare) work by € 1.1 million on an annual basis, to meet the needs of their young inhabitants.

2024 has a symbolic value for Ghent. It will be 10 years after we first received our ‘Child Friendly City’ label. Furthermore, 2024 is an election year, with local (October), regional and EU (May) elections. This provides us with many possibilities to work with young people on active citizenship, politics and participation on all levels of youth policy. In 2018, we already did a try-out on voting rights from the age of 16 onwards during the local elections. In 2024, all young people aged 16 and over will have the opportunity to vote at the European level. We see this as a major opportunity to implement the lessons learned in 2018 and try to reach a more representative group of Ghentian young people, by involving more diverse youth work partners and experts on participation. The focus is not on the political aspect, but on giving young people the chance to be heard. Voicing their opinion, being heard, being seen is crucial for young people’s self-esteem, which can contribute to their mental well-being. We would like to use the elections as a lever to work on active participation of young people in all our youth organisations. In 2018, our local Youth Council organised a major event for all young people who had to vote for the first time, called “Our Century”. In 2024 we would like to repeat this and organise an even more ambitious project on elections and active citizenship. In addition, Belgium is president of the EU in the first half of the year, which creates opportunities to join forces and work together on EU youth topics.

In 2024 we want to enhance our policy towards young people and make it stronger, better and more inclusive. We want to create a framework to empower young people to experiment, co-create, engage themselves and become involved in their neighbourhood, their district and their city.

We are convinced that the title can leave a long-lasting mark on our city: the programme is designed to implement structural changes and initiate projects with a sustainable effect. Moreover, a fully operational ‘for-and-by’ temporary youth space will be the highlight of the year and serve as a stepping stone towards future projects like the “house of youth”.

We want to reactivate and reinforce the European dimension of our youth policy, an area with still quite some room for improvement. The EYC programme in 2024 will give our youth (organisations) plenty of opportunities to exchange ideas, travel, learn and share with other European youth (organisations) and invite others to experience our youth-friendly city.

2024 will also create momentum to share Ghent’s best practices with colleagues from abroad, learn from other cities, especially those that were EYC before, and improve our lobby efforts to influence European policy when it comes to children and young people. But most importantly, we are committed to doing all the above together with our youth, allowing them to truly participate and co-create.

In her State of the Union on September 15, 2021, EU President von der Leyen announced that 2022 will be the European Year of Youth. We in Ghent are very excited about this news. It hopefully indicates that the very important themes such as participation, inclusion, diversity, sustainability that make up Ghent’s DNA will also be optimally integrated into EU youth policy in the coming year and tailored to European youth. This European year in 2022 (and 2013) gives Ghent, especially when we get the title of EYC2024, maximum opportunities to connect, be visible and participate on an international level.

## What we want to achieve

Today, young people 'are the city' of Ghent in the sense that they are an important force in shaping the future of our city. To reinforce that position, we have formulated 3 key goals for our candidacy: Engage, Care and Empower.

**WE ENGAGE** *Ghent aims to engage young people in active citizenship and volunteer work.*

Ghent is a city where young people play an active role in society. There is a great deal of awareness amongst young people about climate change and the will to act on it. For months in a row in 2019, students participated in climate marches, asking for immediate political action to reach the EU climate goals. We also focus on volunteer work, since Ghent is a leading example of a very strong and unique youth work field, based on 1000s of young volunteers and more than 150 youth organisations, committed to creating a safe environment for children and young people to experience and grow.

With EYC2024 we aim to engage more people from diverse backgrounds and life situations, e.g. young people who experience poverty and substandard living conditions, from different ethnic backgrounds. Ghent wants to be a city where every young person can be an active co-creator.

**WE EMPOWER** *Ghent aims to create space and opportunities for young people, allow room to experiment and make young people co-creators of city life.*

There is a permanent need for high-quality public space. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this even more apparent. Although the amount of parks and green spaces rises every year in Ghent, there is an ongoing need for more green spaces, designated play areas and spots for young people to hang out in the public space. This need for 'chill spaces' is something that keeps coming back in all participation dialogues with young people.

Young people also want to be able to move freely in the city, get from A to B in a safe and smooth way. In earlier participation projects, it was clear that mobility and transport are a hot topic amongst our young people. They have concerns about safety when it comes to cycling in the city (especially at a few hotspots) and about public transport in the city. The city has already invested considerably in a bike- and pedestrian-friendly environment over the last couple of years, implementing a new mobility plan which restricts traffic in the city centre. For the next couple of years, the city will focus on involving young people in solutions for mobility issues that concern them.

**WE CARE** *Ghent wants to be a safe haven where young people's mental and physical wellbeing is taken care of.*

Mental health is a major topic: the importance of mental health(care) has become even more prominent during the last few months. The Ghent student of the Year in 2020 did research on the mental wellbeing of students (pre-coronavirus) and raised awareness about the high amount of mental problems amongst students. In the survey we conducted in October 2020, it was clear that COVID-19 had a major impact on the wellbeing of our local youth. Young people are in need of accessible, free support and information on this issue.

Equal Rights and diversity is another important topic. Although young people consider Ghent a tolerant city, homophobia and racism are still very topical themes. Young people feel unsafe in certain neighbourhoods, are banned from certain night clubs because of their appearance or company and sometimes deliberately hide their orientation out of fear of being ridiculed or mobbing. For years, the City of Ghent has been investing in a strong anti-discrimination and anti-racism policy, as one of the pioneers within the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR). We ultimately would like to give every young person the opportunity to reach their full potential, without issues such as poverty, mental problems or discrimination holding them back.

Poverty is the main challenge for the creation of a safe environment for all young people to grow up in. In 2017, 22.8% of Ghent's children were born in families living in poverty. Therefore, Ghent is strongly committed to tackling poverty – especially child poverty – and to including all children

and young peoples without any distinction and regardless of any characteristic or opinion in our local society . Furthermore, we want to rise to the challenge of enhancing accessibility for all: the barriers to get access to adequate education, childcare, health care and welfare are too high for many. Families with children and young people experience under-protection and do not make use of all their rights (minimum wage, social benefits, subsidies, ...). The city's resources for the fight against poverty have never been so high.

### Selection of key goals

We chose the key goals, **Engage, Empower** and **Care**, based on the challenges we derived from input we collected through various participatory channels in the last few years. The input came from different sources:

- 1) Participation projects with young people within the framework of “Expedition 2025” (ANNEX XX), the big participation project organised in 2018 in preparation of the next legislature. We held a big student survey, a testcase on voting for 16- and 17-year-olds and developed a participation game for schools: Mayor @ Your Town (ANNEX XII A+B). With the game “Mayor @ your Town” the City of Ghent wanted to start a dialogue with young people about the challenges for Ghent in 2025. Almost 500 young people were surveyed about various themes such as mobility and traffic safety, public space, meeting places, student jobs and work, leisure time, well-being at school and living together. The game was developed together with a core group of 15 young people. As young people helped to develop the game, the survey was fully tailored to their needs and their living environment. 27 classes from 12 schools participated, with a balanced representation of ASO (general secondary education), TSO (technical secondary education), BSO (vocational secondary education) and part-time education. A teenage group from Ghent's biggest youth welfare organisation also participated.
- 2) Signals from youth welfare organisations and social field workers (see ANNEX VI), derived from the official ‘signals document’. Ghent practitioners brought together structural problems that require cross-sector solutions in a publication, in order to work on them together with policy actors. Youth welfare organisations are active contributors. In the signals document of 2021, the impact of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of young people is mentioned repeatedly.
- 3) Input received from network organisations (e.g. on poverty), recent studies (e.g. on mental health among students), etc.
- 4) Double-check of the chosen priorities through an Instagram survey (ANNEX XIII) during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The fact that two of our three key goals are similar to the 3-word-based Youth strategy is no coincidence, as we used the European Youth Goals, defined under the EU Youth Strategy, as a touchstone. We saw that almost all the youth goals could be found in our three key goals (with the exception of rural youth). The fact that we focus on ‘care’ shows that our young people in Ghent are concerned about each other's welfare and want to look after each other and themselves. The current pandemic and its consequences for children and young people made this focus on social inclusion a very conscious choice.

In addition, we also measured the key goals against the SDGs. At the end of 2020, the City of Ghent drafted and sent in its first Voluntary Local Review Report, based on the “NY City declaration voluntary local report (VLR)” (see ANNEX IX). This makes Ghent part of the growing international community that monitors the SDGs in their city with the aim of improving on all 17 goals. The first local sustainability report from 2020 is a baseline measurement that links Ghent's multi-annual policy plan with the SDGs. The priorities that arose from this report match perfectly with our 3 key goals (engage, care, empower). A few examples of priorities from the multi-year plan, linked to the SDGs, which can be found in our 3 key goals, are:

**WE** *Ghent aims to engage young people in active citizenship*  
**ENGAGE** *and volunteer work*



- *SDG4 (Quality Education)*: strengthen the actors in growing up, learning and education; Focus more on the opportunities and challenges presented by the presence of students and higher education institutions
- *SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions)*: Strengthen local, city-wide, participatory practice for all inhabitants of Ghent; Strengthen volunteers and focus on cooperation with a diverse group of associations and civil society

**WE EMPOWER** *Ghent aims to create space and possibilities for young people, give room to experiment and make young people co-creators of city life.*

- *SDG11 (Sustainable cities and communities)*: Increase pedestrian safety; Build the most bicycle-friendly city for all; Increase the share of accessible collective transport; Increase selective accessibility of traffic; Regenerate the public domain and make it greener
- *SDG15 (Life on land)*: Regenerate the public realm and make it greener; Extend and (re)design parks, woodland and nature for and with the people of Ghent

**WE CARE** *Ghent wants to be a safe haven where young people's mental and physical well-being is taken care of.*

- *SDG1 (No Poverty)*: All families with underage children and all young people in poverty receive appropriate aid
- *SDG3 (Good Health and Well Being)*: Reduction of social inequality in health, with increased attention to mental well-being

### Participation during preparation

Due to COVID-19, many of our 'traditional' methods could not be used to reach out to young peoples and communicate and interact on our plans and ambitions to young Ghentians. So we took the opportunity to experiment with social media campaigns and surveys. With our candidacy for EYC 2024 in mind, we verified our priorities through an Instagram Survey in October 2020 that reached almost 50,000 young people and generated more than 10,000 interactions. We also conducted an online survey to get a more profound input on our candidacy from 236 people who responded. This survey was targeted towards all young people who live, study or work in Ghent (aged 13-26). Innovative participation methodologies like these demonstrate the city's attempts to involve young people well beyond classic participation. We added the results of this survey in ANNEX XIII.

It soon became clear that we would still need to resort to alternative forms of participation to involve partners and young people in the EYC story. We organised online information and participation sessions for youngsters & civil society (see ANNEX XVII), where they were informed and provided with feedback and project ideas. We also hosted two of these sessions particularly aimed at youth organisations. For the young people, we opted for an online "kick-off" event. In a plenary session, the mayor and alderman for Youth talked about why we want to become EYC, the former coordinator of EYC Antwerp explained what legacy 2011 has left in his city and the Youth Council talked about what the title can mean for young people and what role they themselves can play. Afterwards, young people got the chance to sign up to take an active role in the further preparation based on an EYC topic they chose. Our ambition was to bring together a group of young people at the online kick-off, with whom we could further develop and shape the youth panel. Given the select group of young people who participated and wanted to stay involved afterwards, we were forced to think up another route. We put our heads together with our youth representatives who came out of the project and some representatives of youth welfare work, to work on a way to convince more young people to participate. The idea is to start from a theme, linked to their interests and environment. Then they can enter into dialogue with policy makers and work on a concrete project (if relevant). We do not see the panel as a place where policy makers can test their ideas, but as a place where young people can put their proposals, concerns, annoyances and dreams on the table and take these to our policy makers. The panel will have an advisory function towards the project team.

## Dedication

The preparations for the EYC2024 application started in 2019, a benchmark of other cities took place and a commitment by the city administration was asked, after which a budget was set for EYC. At the end of 2019, a project coordinator was appointed to prepare the application in January 2021. The project structure was drawn up, while the local Youth Council supported and actively participated in the preparations for EYC. Since autumn 2020, the project has had a programme director. The city earmarked part of its regular budget for the European Youth Capital Year and made a commitment to release more funds if the title was achieved.

The first additional team members will already be recruited in 2021, as we have published a vacancy for the project director in September, so that preparations can begin in good time and the relevant partners and young people can be kept on board. The project leader will remain in office until mid-2025, so that a thorough evaluation can take place. Continuity is considered, at least one permanent staff member will be seconded from the city to the project team.

## 2. INFORMATION ON THE APPLICANT CITY

### Brief History

Ghent (560,000 inhabitants in the heart of Europe) is a thousand-year-old city, but young at heart. With almost 80,000 students, 43,500 young people (11-25y) and 35,000 children (0-10y), with as many as 70 youth movements and approximately 10,000 youth movement members Ghent is a dynamic city with a vibrant cultural scene and a wide range of youth organisations. In our official city mission statement, a great deal of attention is paid to and commitments are made to children and young people as they are considered to be fully-fledged citizens, and Ghent's future.

During the last 5 years, the city has geared its youth policy. All policymakers, all departments and all services have worked together on a broad youth policy, implemented throughout the entire city. But notwithstanding these efforts and accomplishments, we still see many challenges.

Recent participation (research) projects show important remaining challenges<sup>1</sup> for many young people in Ghent, such as:

- **Equal Rights & Diversity:** the right to be yourself and to express yourself the way you want to. Young people point out that, although Ghent is known as a very tolerant city, there are still issues with homophobia & racism.
- **Sustainability:** the fight for a better future, climate awareness and sustainable ways of living. In 2019, climate marches were held week after week in Belgium. Young people get the feeling that they are on their own in the climate battle, that they have to pay for the mistakes of the previous generations. They ask for a firm climate policy and immediate actions.
- **Public Space:** the right to claim your space in the city, room to experiment, to meet, be creative,...Young people ask for more places to hang out, where they can meet their friends and chill.
- **Mobility:** being able to move around safely in the city. There are several places in Ghent which young people point out to be dangerous, due to busy traffic, lack of safe biking lanes etc., but there is also the feeling of unsafety passing through certain neighbourhoods.
- **Co-creation:** being an actor in the city, co-create, participate, having the opportunity to experiment. Young people want to design their own neighbourhood, local square, youth hub, etc. Although there are successful participation projects running, there is room for improvement when it comes to co-creating with youth.
- **Active Citizenship and participation:** being involved, being an active member of society by doing volunteer work or by policy involvement. Young people want to be heard, be able to decide or give input on matters that influence their life.
- **Poverty:** the right to grow up without being deprived of opportunities and experiences by financial issues. Young people who grow up in poverty do not get the same opportunities in life as those who don't.
- **Mental Health:** the right to proper aid and support when experiencing mental health issues. This topic is now higher on the agenda than ever, due to the Covid pandemic. Young people are struggling and the threshold to guidance and assistance is often still too high.

Ghent has a young population, with a large influx of people in their early twenties (mostly students who stay after their studies). Teens and young adults (16-25y) are a vulnerable group. Ten% of 18- and 19-year-olds receive a minimum income, for the group of 20- to 24-year-olds that still is 7%. Young people with a foreign nationality are much more likely to leave secondary education without a diploma: this is the case for 38% of students with a non-EU nationality. More than 40% of the unqualified school leavers in Ghent are still looking for a job a year after leaving school. Research shows that young people are the highest risk group when it comes to suicide attempts. These numbers indicate that we have to keep an ongoing focus on the most vulnerable children, teens and young people in our society. At the same time, we are seeing a demographic increase in this

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<sup>1</sup> Challenges are based on recent studies and input received from network and youth (welfare) and social workers.



group, a trend that started in 2018 and will continue strongly in the coming years.

## Youth Track Record

### Youth policy

Since 1993, the city of Ghent has had a long history in writing youth policy notes:

- Every 6 years, the deputy mayor of Youth draws up policy notes with input from the administration, youth organisations, children, young people & parents.
- In 1997 the city's youth service elaborated a broader approach to youth policy and initiated a policy on public space for youth.
- In 2013, a programme director for a "youth- and child-friendly city" was appointed.
- In 2014, the annual action plan was integrated into the city policy plan.
- In 2015, an **action plan on child and youth friendliness** (containing 181 new or highly renewed actions) was approved. Our definition of a child- and youth-friendly city: "A city, committed to fulfilling children's rights, is a city where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public policies, programmes and decisions"<sup>2</sup>.
- Actions for children and young people are now screened for and embedded in all policy plans.

All the initiatives that have been taken over the past 30 years with a view to a stronger, broader youth policy have delivered a number of very clear results:

- The quality of public space has strongly increased: there are more playgrounds, there is more & better community sports infrastructure, there is more green space with attention to children and youth.
- There is a stronger poverty policy with a focus on child poverty.
- The amount of leisure activities for young people has increased.
- Attention to vulnerable target groups continues to increase.
- **Child-friendliness has become part of the DNA** of the city administration.
- More attention is directed to children and young people participating in policy either directly or through advocacy. The Youth Service often acts as a facilitator in this regard.

In recognition of its efforts, Ghent received the label of 'Child-friendly City' in 2014 and again in 2020. This label is granted by a steering committee of several youth policy related organisations in Flanders. To receive the label in 2020, a report containing the priorities regarding youth policy in Ghent for the period of 2018-2024 was drawn up (see ANNEX XIV). These priorities mainly match the priorities in our EYC application.

## Youth Participation

Youth participation in Ghent started as early as 1993, when the Youth Council was founded. The city provides a part-time counsellor to support the Youth Council.

Ghent has a tradition of involving (the voice of) young people in drafting its policy plans. **The Youth Council**, as an official advisory body, provides standard advice on all policy documents related to youth. The signals related to youth are included in the upcoming policy plans. In preparation of the current term of office, a major participation project "**Expedition 2025**" (See ANNEX XX) was organised by the city: it organised focus groups with parents of young children, developed a participation game for schools (age 14-18), held a big survey among students and did a test case on voting from the age of 16, and 16- and 17-year-olds were asked to give their opinion on different themes. All output was submitted to the elected Deputy Majors and used as the basis for a new action plan, together with the new actions from the policy notes. This output formed the basis for the elaboration of the key goals for EYC2024.

In Ghent, young people are seen as active '**actors**': children and young people shape their living environment, they become supervisors in **neighbourhoods** they grew up in, they are trained as sports coaches, and in cases of public nuisance, young people are seen as a partner and are

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<sup>2</sup> Based on UNICEF's definition of a child-friendly city <https://childfriendlycities.org/>

involved in creating solutions. They become ambassadors of their neighbourhood to interact with police, the judiciary and policy makers. Children and teenagers are consulted in the **design of public space** ranging from specific neighbourhood related projects (playgrounds, green spaces,...) to district and city-wide projects (city parks, sport infrastructure,...). **Mobility plans** on district level are drawn up based on the input of the local residents (including young people). Through the **Community District Budget** project (with a budget of € 6.25 million for the 25 districts), anyone can hand in an idea to improve their neighbourhood, and young people can submit ideas (with the help of their parents or organisations and supported by the city's youth service). Schools are encouraged to approach their **student councils** as true participation platforms. Student councils work together with the Youth Council on certain policy notes. Our youth movements and organisations themselves are the perfect example of participatory organisations. They are created by and for young people at the core. They follow the train-the-trainer principle, where current leaders train the eldest members to become the next generation of leaders. Local movements are not coordinated by a professional, but are run by young people themselves: from weekly activities to camp organisation, fund raising, finances, ...

More than 20 years ago, the city was the first in Belgium to create a designated department on citizen participation and since 2019, we have had a **Deputy Mayor of Participation**. Although significant progress has been made since then, we are fully aware that we still do not reach all children and young people in Ghent. One of our strategies to address this challenge is to work in safe environments and organisations, close to these young people, where they feel at ease. For instance, Young Ghent in Action, a youth organisation for young people living in poverty, is supported financially to work on participation with their young people.

The COVID-19 crisis made it even clearer that an in-the-field approach is crucial to ensure that young people stayed engaged and connected to our EYC story and to youth organisations in general. While schools used to be the most common place to interact with young people for the municipal youth service, this was not possible during the last 18 months. Youth work could not take place either for a long time. Youth organisations in Ghent put a lot of effort into reaching out towards this group. Home visits were planned, one-to-one walks with youth worker were organised, laptops were collected and distributed, etc. The youth field did everything possible to support young people, mentally as well as logistically, and to make sure they stayed connected to the youth organisation. Engaging in youth participation was not on the priority list of youth organisations, the main focus was the well-being of young people. Until the summer of 2021, participation moments could only be organised online. However, a very high level of online fatigue was observed among young people, who often spent entire days behind their screens for school. This made it particularly difficult for us and our youth organisations to engage as much in youth participation in the past year and a half as we had originally planned.

### Youth Support Services

Ghent has a wide range of youth support services, ranging from city services that support young people and youth organisations to very specific help for, for example, teenage mothers or children of parents with addictions. We try to capture the multitude of initiatives, in which we try to interpret the types of support. All mentioned organisations are financially supported by the city.

Youth Welfare organisations: youth work with a focus on marginalized and disadvantaged groups. In addition to meeting opportunities, their activities (games, sports, music, carpentry and welding, etc.) stimulate personal and social skills and encourage social participation of young people.

**Organisations for childcare and family support:** Childcare and family support centres (CKGs) provide temporary support for families with children aged 0 to 12 to get through a difficult period.

**"Self-organisations":** Self-organisations are immigrant associations formed to maintain contacts with the country of origin and are often located in the youth, socio-cultural domain or in the political domain.

**Sports organisations** with a specific youth & community engagement, who use sport as a methodology to work on the well-being and empowerment of children and young people.

**Specialized Youth Care:** Facilities within Special Youth Care provide youth assistance to children and young people aged 0 to 18 and their families. They are concerned with those children, youth and families who find themselves in a difficult or distressing situation.

**Youth Aid Services:** organisations providing aid in many different areas of wellbeing. Many of these aid actors are brought together in a network called Samen1Plan Gent, who work together to offer children, young people and families in Ghent timely and meaningful help when there is a need for it. A few of these actors are:

- Lejo: encourages youth to become stronger in society and encourages social institutions, governments and policy makers to become stronger in giving opportunities to young people in a socially vulnerable position
- Tejo: offers low-threshold, short-term, immediate, anonymous and free therapeutic counselling to young people between the ages of 10 and 20.
- JAC (Youth Advisory Centre): helps young people between the ages of 12 and 25 with all their questions and problems (drugs, rights, money problems, bullying,...)
- Overkop (Overboard): In an OverKop house, young people up to the age of 25 can just walk in and out and do all kinds of fun activities. It is a safe place where they can also find someone to share their problems with and call on professional therapeutic help, without being labelled.
- CLB (Centre for Student Counselling): Counsels children and adolescents in educational training as well as their parents with regard to questions about physical or mental problems, learning disabilities, educational career,....
- Wel Jong, Niet Hetero: organisation for the LGTBQ+ community, with a focus on young people.
- Amaro Kher & De Fontein are self-organisations supporting people from their own network (specifically Roma and homeless people)

**Professional youth movement support consultants:** They are the contact person for youth movements in case of questions or problems and are the intermediary between the city government and the different youth movements.

**City services: youth, sports, culture, social services, ...** all provide certain support for young people.

### Youth Council

The Youth Council is the officially appointed institution consisting of young people aged 16 to 30 that gives advice on new policy concerning young people. The Youth Council advises policymakers on almost every policy note (often in collaboration with the local student councils) and collects input by conducting online surveys on different topics. It also organises activities on (city) policy for young people in Ghent. Every young person between 16 and 30 years of age who lives, studies and/or works in Ghent is free to become a member of the executive committee. In practice, being a member of the executive committee means that the member commits, through spontaneous registration, to regularly attend the meetings of the executive committee and/or to participate in the activities organised by the Youth Council.

Volunteers from (recognised) youth or other associations representing the interests of the target group as well as youth work professionals can also be executive committee members. It is mandatory to have a Youth Council in Flanders: “ *The Municipal Executive shows that it requests advice from the youth council on all matters relating to youth policy, including when drawing up the multi-annual plan. The youth council can give advice on its own initiative on all matters concerning children and young people. When making decisions, the municipal executive must justify why it does not follow the advice of the youth council, or only partially. (decree on local youth policy, article 5 §3)*”



In 2018 – on the occasion of the local elections – the Youth Council organised ‘*Our Century*’ (ANNEX XI), a big event with workshops and debates for 1000 18-year-olds who voted for the first time.

### Youth Involvement in general

Apart from the Youth Council, there is also a strong involvement of young people through different bodies, spread over different themes that have an impact on youth,

**Network For Young People in Poverty** “Young Ghent in Action”: a youth organisation for young people living in poverty. Young people share their experiences of poverty and exclusion and convey them to policymakers together.

**Children’s Climate Council:** The Children's Climate Council gives children the opportunity to engage in direct dialogue with a policymaker in the City Council chamber.

**Cavaria:** representative of the LGBTQ+ community, based in Ghent, with a representation of young people on their board

**StuGent (Students of Ghent):** Ghent Student Council (Dutch: Gentse Studentenraad) is the central student council of Ghent University and aims to represent the interests of the students.

The Ghent Student Council consists of a General Assembly and a Board. Every student can participate as part of the General Assembly. The General Assembly elects a Board every year that can carry out and elaborate the policy of the Ghent Student Council. The Board consists of approximately six voluntary students, a chairman, a vice chairman, a coordinator, a Director responsible for educational affairs, one for social affairs, one for external affairs, one for digital affairs and one for the participation of the student representatives. Beside the Board, the General Assembly could also appoint voluntary students as Policy Officers responsible for a single topic, e.g., mental well-being, sustainability, gender and diversity etc. The Board and Policy Officers are supported by a dozen of working students.

The Ghent Student Council organises working groups on, among others, social or educational affairs on a weekly basis during the semester. Once every three weeks, they organise a General Meeting that is chaired by the Board and attended by the General Assembly, student representatives and students.

Besides educational and social affairs, Ghent Student Council also provides financial assistance for projects intended for and executed by students. Examples include Studium, an online platform on which students can share summaries and notes of courses, Cultour, which provides affordable tickets for cultural events in Ghent, Student Kick-Off, a free festival for students in the first week of the academic year etc.

During the pandemic a second body was created: a 'core team' that had weekly meetings between students, the deputy mayor and the universities. This allowed for an even stronger collaboration to face the crisis together.

**Forum for Youth Welfare Organisations:** the forum facilitates a structural consultation between the City, Youth Welfare and other actors with the aim of joining forces even more and working towards a child-friendly city for all children and young people and is financially supported by the city to empower disadvantaged youth in local governance.

**Local Youth Organisations Support Platforms:** On the one hand, there is a consultation platform in which the professional supporters of the youth movements meet on a regular basis and, on the other hand, there are consultation structures for each type of youth movement at a district level.

**Local Art Support Platform:** They have a working group on children and young people. They are policy advisor both for urban cultural policy and for adjacent domains such as mobility, spatial planning, education, poverty, civic integration, etc. With this working group, they are specifically preparing a cultural programme for European Youth Capital.

**District Youth Working Groups:** these are working groups at the district level where representatives of professional youth work organisations and volunteer initiatives connect. One passes on signals to policymakers and organises actions at a district level. These working groups are supported by consultants from the city's youth service.

**Student councils (secondary schools):** once a year a meeting is organised, together with the Flemish Student Association, to collect signals from these councils, which are taken to the responsible deputy mayor.

Apart from the youth structures mentioned earlier, there is an ongoing effort to have young representatives in different official structures, on different levels. For example, young people are represented in the Nightlife Council and representatives of the Youth Council are members of the municipal planning commission GECORO<sup>3</sup> and of the core group on child- and youth-friendly Ghent.

## Main partners

### Local

Ghent has a large number of organisations that work on behalf of young people in various sectors and themes. Some of these organisations already have a structural partnership with the city, based on covenants or other forms of cooperation and support. In preparation of the EYC concept note, we reached out to all organisations in our network with the question to participate in and support our candidacy. Over the past year, many of them actively participated in one or more working groups organised by the City. In ANNEX VII we added a list of all partners engaged so far. We remain committed to involving new partners in our EYC journey.

### Flemish Partner Group

We set up Flemish Partner Group (see Chapter 8) with key partners from the regional youth field. They provided us with input and feedback on the application and information from their field of expertise. The partner group consists of:

- **Flanders Youth Council:** the official advisory board for the Flemish government on everything related to children, youth and youth work.
- **Ambrassade:** an expertise centre for everything related to youth work, youth information and youth policy; a support and network organisation for the entire youth work in Flanders and Brussels; the coordinator for youth information in Flanders; the linking organisation between youth work, other policy domains which have an impact on children and young people (education, welfare, work, education, ...) and policymakers.
- **Flanders Department of Youth:** is responsible for implementing the youth and children's rights policy of the Flemish government. They support youth associations through operating and project subsidies. They coordinate the drafting of the Flemish youth policy plan and closely monitor the international youth and children's rights policy.
- **JINT:** is the National Agency for Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps and coordinates the Bel'J programme in Flanders.
- **KeKi:** the Children's Rights Knowledge Centre aims to gather, make available, disseminate and promote knowledge about children's rights.

### Other Regional Partners

- **Network of child-friendly cities:** The Flemish Network of Child- and Youth-friendly Cities and Municipalities brings together youth officials, involved organisations and interested actors to share questions, experiences and knowledge with each other. They aim to strengthen child and youth-friendliness in Flanders, at a local and supra-local level.
- **Europe Direct:** information point in Europe with a big educational offer.
- **Event Flanders:** a specialised team that raises Flemish events to a higher level and tries to attract international events to take place in Flanders.

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<sup>3</sup> GECORO: The municipal committee on spatial planning advises the local government on major spatial developments in the municipality.

- **Bataljong**: a member organisation of cities and municipalities. They try to inspire youth leaders, youth officials and aldermen of youth and encourage them to interact. Bataljong also promotes the advantages of a child- and youth-friendly policy at the Flemish, federal and European levels, and promotes the interests of cities and municipalities in doing so.

### European Partnerships and Networks

Ghent is a board member of the European Network for Child Friendly Cities and was active partner in the **Cities for Children** 2007-2010 network. It also has close ties with the Dutch Child Friendly Cities network. There is a bilateral collaboration with cities such as Stuttgart and Amsterdam. We participate in events of Europe Goes Local and provide input on best practices.

In 2016 we co-organised the **“Child in the City” Conference**, and the first European Youth Work Convention took place in Ghent in 2010.

Ghent is currently active in three European projects on youth and youth policy. It is lead partner in the European **Erasmus+ project Includpas**, a social innovation project aimed at working with a digital application to create social inclusion through sport and physical activity for adolescents aged 14 to 18. It is a partner in 2 Interreg 2 Seas projects: **SPEED-You-UP**, that helps excluded young people find employment by improving their entrepreneurial skills and **PACE**, that is aimed at facilitating access to childcare and supporting job-seeking and vulnerable parents in their journey to work.

Ghent also participated in a European project on ‘Capacity building in the area of rights of the child’ and is a member of the **EUROCITIES working group on children and young people** (with a focus on poverty and healthcare) and of **Eunivercities**, focusing on the relation between cities and universities.

Ghent has a strong tradition of international collaboration, networking and European policy advocacy. In 2016-2018 we were the proud president of EUROCITIES, we are active in many other networks like **ICLEI** and **Global Parliament of Mayors**. In the recently approved policy note on international collaboration we underline the importance of Europe and its institutions, and becoming EYC in 2024 is one of the clear priorities.



### 3. EUROPEAN YOUTH CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Co-creation is the main principle of the programme. Together with youth organisations and individual young people, the City of Ghent will elaborate a comprehensive programme that will thrive on the input and the ideas of Ghent's young people.

In October 2020, we put out an Instagram survey to double check the priorities we distilled from the previous participation process and we asked young people for project ideas for EYC. Between December 2020 and May 2021, various input sessions were organised with representatives from youth organisations and key players in civil society on online platforms because of the restrictions related to the ongoing pandemic. Through pro-active communication with youth organisations, we were able to involve young people from different backgrounds in these sessions.

Because we also wanted to involve as many individual young people as possible, we organised an animated kick-off online-moment in May 2021 to inform, activate and collect input from young people. The collected information is processed into a first concretisation of the programme below. The programme will be gradually elaborated and as we are aiming to further increase involvement of young people in the process.

#### Preliminary programme

We categorised the programme into 19 different objectives linked to our priorities Engage, Empower & Care. These objectives focus on the challenges identified by young people in the preceding participation processes. The selected programme objectives are:

1. Strengthen youth participation in the city & local governance.
2. Create a better quality public domain for young people.
3. Integrate a designated youth programme into the city's own events
4. Improve mental health and happiness of young people in the city
5. Host and organise international conferences, meetings and exchanges under the flag of EYC 2024
6. Use sports to elevate young people & marginalised groups in city life
7. Create more space for youth
8. Increase young people's mobility & accessibility to public transport
9. Ghent EYC 2024 as a milestone towards Ghent European Capital of Culture in 2030
10. Generate the conditions for an EYC 2024 programme co-created by young people and based on their talents
11. Empower Disadvantaged Youth
12. Strengthen volunteer & active citizenship based initiatives
13. Young people as active communicators in 2024 and beyond
14. Activate & empower girls and LGBTQIA+ youth
15. Raise awareness and create the conditions for a sustainable future for young people.
16. Co-create EYC-year specific events
17. Stimulate exchange & knowledge on European level
18. Put Ghent and Europe in the picture
19. Get to know the EU.

In the overview of the programme in ANNEX XXIII we identified for each of these objectives actions for 2024 and already designated an expected or desired legacy. Where possible, we also draw up part of the trajectory leading up to these actions. Activities or legacies considered as innovative and bringing added value to the EYC title are highlighted in bold.

## 4. IMPACT AND LONG-TERM LEGACY

### General legacy

After a particularly difficult period for young people during the last two years, where the pandemic and the undeniable impacts of climate change sometimes painted a particularly dark picture of the future, the European Youth Capital Year will bring a restorative story of hope, positivity and change.

As a result, Ghent wants to build a brighter future for young people and emerging adults. Our city wants to offer these young people the means and the support they need to achieve this. The most beautiful legacy we could ever create with EYC is one in which our young people have a positive outlook on life, with hope for the future, a future they can shape and determine themselves. This vision for our city is fully in line with the wish expressed by European President von der Leyen during her State of Union speech on September 15: “Our Union will be stronger if it is more like our next generation: reflective, determined and caring. Grounded in values and bold in action.”

The dynamics generated in the EYC year will ensure that post-2024 Ghent will stand for:

1. **A “participatory city”, with a “Youth Panel” where young people actively participate in a wide range of urban policies as well as in the management of civil society organisations.**
2. **A “co-creative city” where both city services and civil society manage to work together in a positive way beyond the usual obstacles, with the common goal of involving and activating young people in the city.**
3. **A “vibrant city” where young people are active creators and experimenters in the public space.**
4. **A “safe city” where minorities feel at home and where the mental well-being of young people is ensured.**
5. **A “providing city” with a “House of Youth”, a free haven for young people to experiment, create and meet up based on the experiments during the EYC year.**
6. **A “future-proof, green & healthy city” where young people want to live and build a future.**
7. **A “committed city” where poverty & discrimination among young people is systematically fought.**
8. **A “European city” where young people and organisations are structurally supported in setting up European exchanges and experiences.**
9. **A “viable city” with sustainable and safe mobility for young people at a district and city level.**

### A co-created and dynamic legacy

In chapter 7 we introduced the preliminary programme through presenting our key objectives and actions for 2024. In this chapter we already elaborated some desirable and expected outcomes on a more concrete level leading to a profound EYC legacy for the city of Ghent.

As co-creation with young people is valued as an essential component of the realization of our programme and young people will ultimately create and elaborate the EYC programme, we would like to let young people decide on what particular outcomes they expect from Ghent EYC 2024, which in fact could be considered as a profound legacy in itself. What the young people who are involved in our participatory project to prepare for EYC expect today, may be very different from what young people expect in 2024. That is why we want to leave room for this in our process, without undermining our broad legacy.

### A legacy towards ECOC

As the city is also competing for the 2030 European Capital of Culture title, the city considers the

EYC title as an opportunity to connect young people to the city's cultural and arts institutions. Young people of 2024 are 2030's artists, creators, designers, architects, musicians and actors. During our EYC year, we want to reach out to precisely these young people, activate them and link them with our city's cultural partners so that they can be structurally involved by 2030.

### A European legacy

We aim to function as a source of inspiration and as an example for European cities who want to strengthen their broader youth policies and see young people as full actors in city life. We want to gear up our (bilateral and multilateral) contacts with other European cities and continue the support for youth organisations and youth colleagues to organize and participate in international exchanges. In doing so we can disseminate our experiences and findings of the EYC year throughout Europe.

### A monitored legacy

As we mentioned earlier, the evaluation report of EYC will be handed over to the new elected city council in early 2025. In doing so, actions and policy that form a legacy of EYC2024 will be integrated into the multi-annual plan of the city, that has its own monitoring tool.

We will also disseminate this report to Belgian umbrella organizations such as Ambrassade / Flanders Youth Council. In preparation of policy programmes for the new legislature, they advise other city councils on how to make their city/municipality more child/youth friendly.

To monitor the outcome, results and legacy of the EYC year, the city will set up an evaluation structure involving key players in the youth field (youth organisations and individual young people).

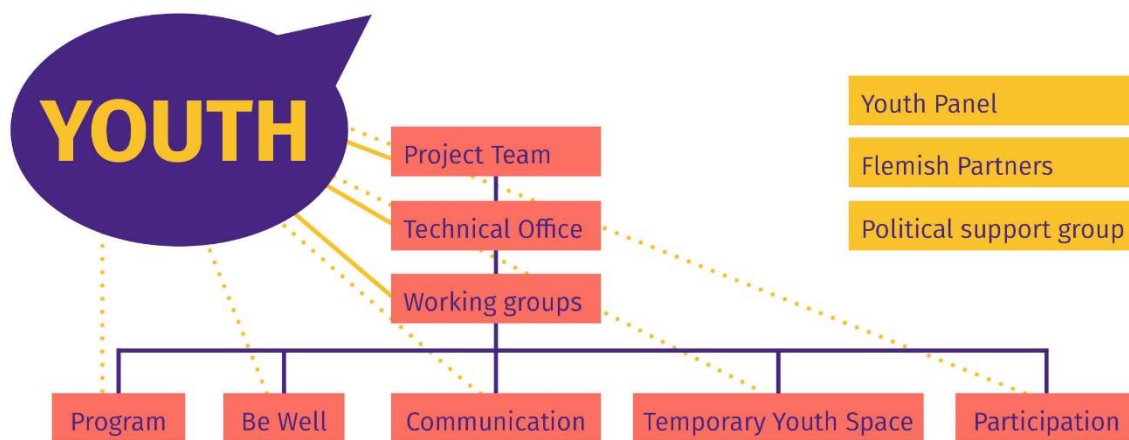
### A structural legacy

We are convinced that many of the initiatives will continue way beyond 2024, as these initiatives are not necessary linked to financial resources but rather rely on the collective strength of the partners involved and the young people themselves.



## 5. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The project structure for the preparation of the concept notes, as described in the first concept note, will form the basis for the project structure setup if we should become European Youth Capital. The project team is and will remain the engine of the European Youth Capital journey.

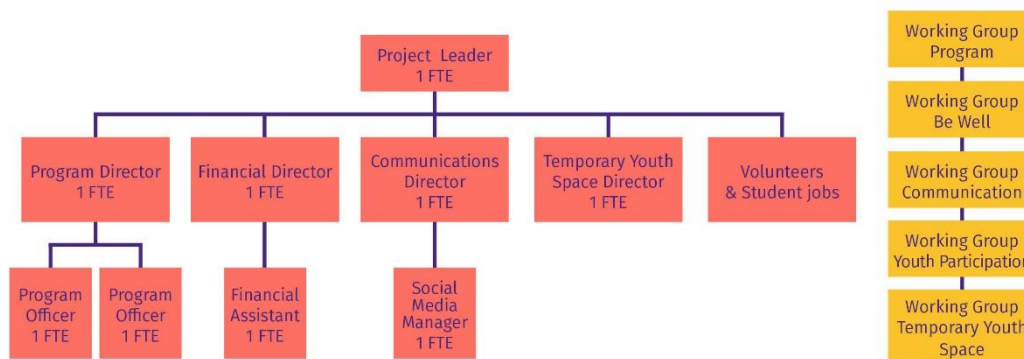


### Project team

The project team is the engine of the European Youth Capital project. This independent project team monitors the progress in achieving the key goals, sets the content outlines, keeps an overview and decides on structural and crucial issues. The project team originally started out as a select group of civil servants from different key departments and the Youth Council to initiate the candidacy. It has since been expanded to include individual young people and representatives of youth organisations, taking full account of the fact that minority groups are also represented by these youngsters or organisations. The project team consists of 1/3 civil servants 1/3 individual youngsters (the youngster who are leading the different thematic working groups) and 1/3 youth organisations. This means that young people and youth organisations are actually at the helm of this project team as they hold the majority of the decisive votes. The project team will be presided by the EYC project leader, assisted by the Programme Director and will be able to take decisions independently with no interference of the city's administration or the city's policy makers. The decision making power of EYC 2024 lies solely with the Project Team.

### Technical office

We will establish a designated technical office from the end of 2021 onwards. The Project Leader will hopefully start before the end of 2021. The Project Leader will be assisted by the financial director and a programme director from 2022 onwards. The rest of the Technical office functions will be gradually activated. An overview of the composition of the team responsibilities can be found in ANNEX XV. We will also strengthen the team with a secondment from the city's youth service so that there is a good liaison with the city's services. We would also like to recruit as many people as possible who are under the age of 30 and are already connected to the EYC candidacy project. The Technical office is in charge of the day-to-day operations and implementation of the EYC year. The Technical Office will be established under the wings of the city's Youth Service, but will be mandated to operate independently and will be managed and controlled by the Project Team only.



## Volunteers & Student Jobs

To support the technical office, we want to start extensive EYC volunteer work, which will be monitored by the technical office. These young volunteers will prepare, support and guide EYC activities. We will also connect with the European Solidarity Corps. Furthermore, we want to outsource certain matters to young people via student worker contracts, in order to outsource important tasks directly to young people.

## Working groups

Thematic groups are now active around the following topics: programme, well-being, communication, youth panel & temporary youth space. These groups are led by and consist primarily of youngsters and youth organisations. The technical office facilitates and monitors the involvement of disadvantaged youngsters and minorities in these working groups. The working groups are sometimes joined and supported by city officials depending on the topics. These working groups will continue throughout the entire EYC process. Extra working groups will dynamically be organised around defined themes, such as the opening event of the EYC year. An important side note is that the decision making power lies with the young people and youth organisations in these working groups themselves and not with the supporting members of the Technical Office. The youngsters who lead these group are also part of the project team.

## ADVISORY BODIES

### Political support group

The political support group is made up of the Deputy Mayors of 8 policy areas that have a close link to the European Youth Capital Programme. The political support group was crucial to get our candidacy off the ground, to ensure support from the city services, to secure budget and staff resources. As Ghent European Youth Capital is further developed, the role of the political support group will become much more advisory.

### Youth Panel

The Youth Panel is currently being established. It is an easily accessible participation platform where young people can elaborate on the development of the European Youth Capital. The idea is to start from a theme, linked to their interests and environment, about which they can enter into dialogue with policy makers and work on a concrete project (if relevant). We do not see the panel as a place where policy makers can test their ideas, but as a place where young people can put their proposals, concerns, annoyances and dreams on the table and take these to our policy makers. The panel will have an advisory function towards the EYC project team but we aim to continue this platform beyond 2024. We will ensure that there will be smooth interaction between the project team, the working groups and the youth panel.

### Flemish partner meeting

Via this platform, Flemish/national youth organisations and the Flemish government (Flanders being one of the three regions in Belgium) were briefed on a regular basis on the candidacy

process. They supplied us with feedback and suggestions about opportunities on a regional, national and European level. We will continue to consult them on a regular basis.

### Cooperation with existing youth structures

On a local level, we have a close cooperation with the following structures

- The Youth Council
- Network For Young People in Poverty “Young Ghent in Action”
- StuGent
- Forum for Youth Welfare Organisations
- Ghent Art Support Platform
- District Youth Working Groups

Concerning the representation of disadvantaged groups especially “Forum Of Youth Welfare Organisations” is very important. These organisations reach less privileged and marginalized young people. All these organisations have been informed about the European Youth Capital project and have been asked to participate in its preparation. They have a representative in the Project Team.

Our national network is represented in the platform of Flemish partners (as mentioned above) and there are frequent interactions with JINT and the Flanders Youth Council on particular themes.

On a European Level, the Flanders Youth Council is a member of the EYF, but there is also a link with WAGGGS and WOSM (the local representative of GSB is a member of the project team and is active on the European scene), which can be a perfect opening to organise our international jamboree (see programme). WelJongNietHetero (We are Young, but not Straight), the youth LGBTQIA+ organisation based in Ghent, is member of IGLYO. We hope to work on the LGBTQIA+ event in cooperation with the national organisations and IGLYO.

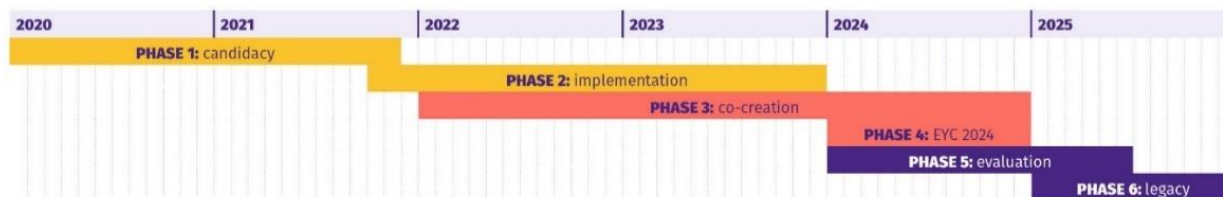
The Flemish youth organization Chiro is a co-founder of FIMCAP, which is a member of the EYF.

In the preparation of our application, we already reached out to several EYCs. We planned a working visit to Amiens last year, that was cancelled due to Covid. If we are awarded with the title, we will arrange a working visit to Klaipeda with a delegation of our Project Team. By applying for an Erasmus+ accreditation in 2022, we hope to make exchanges between Ghent and Tirana and Lublin possible for several of our youth organisations. Furthermore we hope to do working visits with our project team to learn from our predecessors. During the EYC year, we will be happy to invite upcoming EYCs to let them experience and exchange information. We will make sure that our expertise stays present in the organisation, so that upcoming EYCs can still reach out to us for information, even after the project team has been dissolved.

The contact person for the European Youth Forum are the current project coordinators Tina Van Acker (tina.vanacker@stad.gent) and Philippe Michiels (philippe.michiels@stad.gent).



## 6. PROJECT TIMELINE 2020 - 2025



### Phase 1: Candidacy (01/2020-11/2021)

- Benchmark other EYC cities + read the available documents on EYC
- Further develop project team and include representatives, individual youngsters and representatives of youth organisations (July 2021)
- The candidacy is prepared by the city's Youth Service in close collaboration with other city departments, youth organisations and young people
- Young people are consulted (online) on the main priorities and the content of the European Youth Capital application (Oct 2020).
- Communicate & start up partnerships with youth organisations & other local organisations, young people to create the preliminary programme (Dec 2020 - Aug 2021)
- Launch a trajectory to recruit young ambassadors to support the candidacy and the working groups (June 2021)
- Preparatory work with regard to evaluation and long-term planning
- Start up a candidacy communication campaign

### Phase 2: implementation (10/2021-12/2023)

- Secure & tag budgets on a city level.
- Secure budgets on a regional & county level
- Develop & implement a strategy to acquire funds from private partners.
- Gradually recruit and hire EYC technical office recruit Project Leader (2021) & detachment of Programme Director (2021)
- Start-up of the preparation and the infrastructural work for Temporary EYC Space as the hub of EYC 2024
- Regular meetings with the youth panel + involved partners + themed working groups with youngsters
- Further benchmarking with previous European Youth Capitals (visits, meetings)

### Phase 3: co-creation (01/2022-12/2024)

- Co-creation of the general programme with partners and individual young people
- Elaborate and develop a communication strategy together with young people + recruit a communication team (communications director, community manager)
- Find partnerships to manage & further develop the Temporary EYC Space with young people.
- Develop and launch an open call for youth organisations and individual youngsters, where they can submit projects for 2024 programme funding (2023)
- Apply for Erasmus+ accreditation and give our youth organisations the opportunity to focus on European exchange. We will apply for Erasmus+ accreditation early 2022 within the framework of EYC. We intend to keep the threshold for European exchanges as low as possible for our youth and youth organisations, both before and during the EYC year, with a specific focus on (and support to) the disadvantaged groups.

- Work closely together with JINT and regularly organise information sessions for our local youth working groups on the possibilities offered by European projects
- Recruit programme officers

#### Phase 4: EYC 2024 (1/2024-12/2024)

- Communicate & roll out the full programme
- Organise a big Local opening event
- Host the General Assembly
- Organise EYC Closing Event

#### Phase 5: evaluation (01/2024-06/2025)

- Mid-term evaluation & adjustment of the programme during the EYC Year.
- Start collaboration with University and Colleges
- General Assessment by the EYC project team
- General survey among Young Ghentians on the EYC year

#### Phase 6: legacy (01/2025 - ...)

- Evaluation will be handed over to our new City Council (elections will be held in October 2024)
- Implement good EYC practices on different levels of city governance

In order to ensure that partner organisations can participate in the EYC programme and implement their projects as planned, they identified the need for two things: financial and staff support from the city. We are already providing project funds for the financial part, with the intention of expanding it once we have obtained the title (with the support of the city council, the Minister of Youth, Event Flanders and private funds). In terms of staff, we will recruit 1 programme director & 2 programme officers to support partners in carrying out their projects.

## 7. APPLICANTS DETAILS & CONTACT PERSONS

### – MUNICIPAL LEGAL REPRESENTATIVES

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### – EYC PROJECT TEAM

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### – SUPPORTING YOUTH STRUCTURE

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ANNEX VII contains an extensive list of the Ghent EYC partners.

## 8. ANNEXES

ANNEX III: Summarized presentation candidacy Ghent EYC 2024

ANNEX IV: City map EYC 2024

ANNEX VI: Abstract signals youth 2018-2021

ANNEX VII: Partners Ghent EYC 2024

ANNEX VIII A: Working facilities overview

ANNEX VIII B: Working Facilities presentation

ANNEX IX: Ghent SDG Voluntary Local Review 2020

ANNEX X: Preliminary Programme

ANNEX XI: Our Century Youth Council Wrap-Up

ANNEX XII A Mayor At Your Town wrap up

ANNEX XII B Mayor At Your Town Dutch Publication

ANNEX XIII: Instagram survey EYC priorities November 2020

ANNEX XIV: Youth Policy Priorities

ANNEX XV: Technical Office

ANNEX XVI: Programme expenditure

ANNEX XVII: Financial Commitments national / regional level

ANNEX XVII: Images of the EYC online KICK-OFF + Ambassador meetings

ANNEX XVIII: Videos EYC Candidacy

ANNEX XIX: Processed Feedback Jury 2<sup>nd</sup> round

ANNEX XX A: Expedition 2025 wrap-up

ANNEX XX B: Expedition 2025 (Dutch publication)





**WE GHEENT  
ARE EUROPEAN  
THE YOUTH CAPITAL  
CITY 2024**