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Sweet sixteen

What matters to the 16-year-olds of today? What are their biggest hopes and fears? What do they think about lowering the voting age to 16? We asked sixteen 16-year-olds to tell us – and learned that theirs is a generation acutely aware that political decisions will shape their future.



Anne Hielscher

Born in 2004 and living in Mollis (canton of Glarus), where she can now vote in elections and popular votes at the age of 16. Anne is a pupil at the cantonal school in Glarus. Her main subject is biochemistry.

“Quite a few of the young people I know are anxious about the future. It’s normal to think things over a lot at our age, but climate change and Covid-19 are difficult to process. We don’t know how the situation will pan out – or, for example, which jobs are still safe to go into. The pandemic has taken a year out of our lives. It’s a sobering experience. Mental health issues are on the rise. I am very concerned about climate change.

Politicians finally need to realise that something has to be done. They should stop talking and start acting. We don’t have much time left. I try and do as much as possible in everyday life to help our climate – like being a vegetarian and using public transport. I don’t like when people dress opinions up as facts to make a point. I am interested in science and have chosen biochemistry as my main subject.

One day, I can imagine doing research and then working as a teacher. I am currently doing an ornithology course in my free time. I like being in nature, going on excursions, and I jog regularly. However, I don’t have much time for hobbies outside school. I think it is good that young people can vote from the age of 16 in the canton of Glarus. Unfortunately, the pandemic has so far prevented me from doing so. The open-air assembly has been cancelled twice. I will certainly take part in the next one. I have the vote, so I want to use it.

Society will benefit as a whole from the fresh outlook and perspectives that young people can bring. Our priorities are different to those of older voters. They should also lower the voting age to 16 at national level. Young people who want to vote should be entitled to do so. After all, it is our future at stake. We are the ones who will have to live with what the electorate decides now. I watch the evening news, read newspapers

and chat with my parents to keep track of the latest developments. I am interested in politics but would feel uneasy belonging to a political party. I don’t agree entirely with any of the parties and would find it hard to defend a position that I don’t share.

INTERVIEW BY EVELINE RUTZ



Outside school, I mainly go to Scouts at the weekend.

Other than that, I often go skateboarding. The skatepark in Aarau is not perfect, but it will do. For me, a good skatepark has to have enough space, so that beginners can also skate alongside people who want to practise the more advanced tricks. And there also needs to be enough shade from the sun. Skateboarding flat out is physically quite exhausting.

You can only become a better skateboarder if you are willing to practise, practise and practise again. There is always the risk of getting injured – usually on the ankles and knees. But

“ I would like to become a member of parliament in the National Council. Bringing about real change is a prospect that excites me. For example, I want our economic system to be more liberal and climate-friendly. When in doubt, I always choose the most efficient option: I travel to school by bus, although the journey takes twice as long as riding there on my bike. But I can read the newspaper on the way.

You certainly need a bit of luck to be elected to parliament, but I am a keen, effective, quick-witted debater – which is not a bad thing to be. I have sat in the youth parliament of the city of Berne for over two years, where we have been calling for the voting age to be lowered to 16. The matter is currently with Berne’s cantonal parliament.

When I have finished school, I want to tour through Japan on foot with a friend. I am fascinated that a country so far away can, from what I read, be so similar to us in terms of its culture. Both the Swiss and the Japanese tend to be a bit reserved, but friendly once you get to know them. At the moment, I am learning Japanese with the help of online videos. And saving money for the trip. I don’t have a lot of money yet, because I don’t have a job. There simply isn’t enough time for everything.

INTERVIEW BY FLAVIA VON GUNTEN



Jason Steinmann

Born in 2005, living in Ittigen near Berne, and a pupil at Neufeld upper secondary school in Berne. Jason takes part in his school’s theatre productions because he enjoys acting out new parts.



Moritz Würtenberg

Born in 2005, living in Küttigen (canton of Aargau), and a pupil at lower secondary school in Aarau. This summer, Moritz will begin a three-year apprenticeship as a chemical laboratory technician.

none of us have protection on – it makes you much too hot. Helmets and knee guards aren’t really our style. You need to have an instinct for these things. Some days you feel good and pull off difficult tricks. On other days, it’s better not to overdo it.

They say that young people are not interested in politics or are not ready to vote at the age of 16. But I know that my friends and I often chat about political issues. Why wouldn’t we? Maybe not about party politics, but things that affect our future such as the fight against climate change. And I have already made important personal decisions related to my apprenticeship, for example. I take

responsibility for these decisions. So why do people still think that young people like me aren’t mature enough to have their own political opinions? It doesn’t make any sense. Of course, some history teachers are better than others. But I think we do learn quite a bit at school about politics in Switzerland. More than enough to be able to vote.

INTERVIEW BY JÜRGEN STEINER

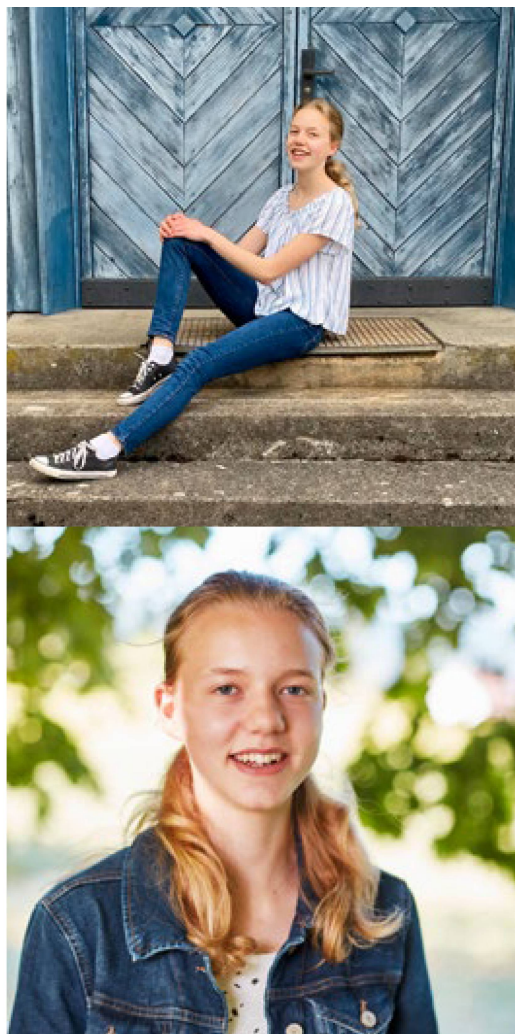


“We must give the environment better protection for the sake of future generations. Politicians need to get this message into their heads and invest more in combating climate change. My family are already doing their bit. We have no car, and a proportion of our electricity comes from the solar panels on our roof. The fact that we travel to Finland almost every summer is less environmentally friendly. We have friends whom we visit over there. My grandmother is Finnish. I learned the language from my father. By the way, Finnish has no female or male pronouns. I like that. Languages should be all-inclusive, regardless of gender. I try to use gender-neutral language whenever I speak or write in German. But doing that should be a given anyway. I have not yet made up my mind about what I want to do when I leave school. I am interested in the media. Maybe I will work as a presenter.

Switzerland's national and cantonal elections have been part of our history lessons at school. Our teacher has always stressed how important it is to vote and how privileged we are in Switzerland to be able to do so. This has made me more interested in politics. I always ask my parents about how they are going to vote. Social media is one of the ways in which I keep track of the latest issues. I think it would be good if younger people could vote. We could then use our voice to do more against climate change. Lowering the voting age to 16 would also make us feel integrated in society. After all, Switzerland's population is getting older. All portions of society should have a political voice. That includes people with physical or mental health issues.

I spend a lot of my free time outdoors. I regularly take our dog, Lupin, for walks. He is a toller who was born a year ago and still needs quite a bit of training. I often walk him with other girls who also have dogs. I like to read and I am interested in languages – I can imagine doing a semester abroad one day. Music plays an important role in my everyday life. I listen to various genres, play the violin, and sing in a choir. Another thing I would like to say is that schools need to do more to educate children about same-sex relationships.”

INTERVIEW BY EVELINE RUTZ



Johanna Ruoff

Born in 2005, living in Brugg (canton of Aargau), and a student at the cantonal school in Baden. Johanna enjoys reading, plays the violin, and goes on regular walks with family dog Lupin.



“Football is my main love. I have been playing for seven years, and I joined FC Zurich Ladies three years ago. I am now moving up from the under-17s to the under-19s. We train four times a week and play matches at the weekend. We often play our away matches in other cities, sometimes against French- or Italian-speaking teams. The level of football is high – our coach demands a lot, so I really have to give my all. That suits me fine, because that is how to improve. I am currently a defender and feel very comfortable playing at the back. We have a good team spirit. I also hang out with a few teammates in my free time. Naturally, there is competition for places in the team. You sometimes have to be selfish to play well. On the other hand, it’s a team game. You can only win together. I get annoyed when things don’t go our way. After a defeat, I prefer to go straight home and lie down.

We hardly have any contact with the boys in FC Zurich’s junior section. Their under-17s consists of three groups. The boys are under greater pressure to perform, and competition for places is fiercer. They have greater opportunity, because their budget is bigger than ours. For example, they have more training camps than we do. I think it would be great if they gave girls and boys the same level of coaching and funding.

For me, football is more than a hobby. I am thinking of going abroad one day – maybe to the USA, where



Kimmo Steiner

Born in 2004, living in Thun, and currently doing a boatbuilding apprenticeship in Spiez. Kimmo meets his friends at weekends to play basketball or eat out.

female footballers are better coached and paid. Whatever happens, I would like a career in sport. I enjoy being physically active. That includes being on the slopes in winter and at the outdoor swimming pool in summer. I also regularly spend time with children as a Guides leader. I enjoy that.

I am actively engaged in trying to make politicians take climate protection more seriously. I have already taken part in bike demonstrations as well as the Fridays For Future strikes. Sixteen-year-olds are capable of forming their own opinions. They are at a good age to determine what they want. I think it would be a good idea to lower the voting age to 16. I have been consuming a lot more media content to keep track during the pandemic. We also cover political issues at school. However, we need to be encouraged to think even more critically. It is important to question what the media say.

INTERVIEW BY EVELINE RUTZ

Yves Heim

Born in 2004 and living in Zurich, where she is a pupil at the Liceo Artistico – a Swiss-Italian upper secondary school devoted to the arts. Yves plays football in the junior section of FC Zurich Ladies. She is also in the Girl Guides.

“I couldn’t make up my mind whether to become a joiner or a multi-skilled mechanic, so I decided to do a boatbuilding apprenticeship instead. Boatbuilding combines skills from both these professions. I had never steered a boat before my apprenticeship, but I needed to pass a sailing course to complete it. I bought a boat last summer and promptly did the test.

I like the feeling of freedom that you get on Lake Thun. One day, I would like to sail around the world. I am attracted by the idea of getting to places that only a small number of people will ever see. In the long term, I would like to work as a boatbuilder during winter and as a sailing instructor during summer. It would be great if I could pass on my knowledge to others.

I am very happy with life. I have no urge to change anything. Politics is not really my thing, and being too young to vote at the moment is fine by me.

It is more important to me that my teammates hear my voice on the handball court. They have to, because I am captain of our team. The coach and I decide together what moves to practise during training. And I always have first pick when it comes to shirt numbers. The number-eight jersey is of no particular significance to me, but I like wearing it nonetheless.

INTERVIEW BY FLAVIA VON GUNTEN



Lionel Formaz

***2005, lives in Martigny (VS). He is in his first year at the Ecole de commerce (business school). He trains assiduously at Greco-Roman wrestling, as well as parkour and skateboarding.**



“ Yes, I’m interested in politics! If there is a big debate in the US or in France, I watch to see who is coming out ahead. I saw parts of the debate between Le Pen and Macron on TikTok and Instagram, for example. It was a tough one. There were some good digs. We look at this idea of debate in our political economics class. In Switzerland, politics is less lively, so the president of the Confederation doesn’t stand out. Regarding the right to vote, women fought to obtain it and in certain countries they still don’t have it. So it is an important right.

But as for the right to vote at 16, I’m not sure it’s the best idea, as not everyone is necessarily ready. One solution

“ I support the movement of allowing 16-year-olds to vote in Switzerland. I feel that in 2021 young people are more mature and educated than they were in the past, and since many young people today are excited about politics, they want to be involved in the decision making process. For me it would be important to look at details of both sides when forming an opinion, and to make an informed decision before voting. Whether it is 16- or 18-year-olds who vote, I think that everyone needs to consider supporting and opposing views and opinions, and not just vote for what your parents or friends like, so that you make an independent and informed vote.

It’s true that young people are in school and therefore don’t pay the taxes that support decisions that are made, however the decisions that are made do affect the lives of young Swiss citizens, and will for a long time to come. Some older people may think that young Swiss youth will only vote for short-term interests, however many young people today are interested in long-term issues

such as global warming, world hunger and world peace. Similar to how young people choose their educational path, being allowed to vote will help Swiss youth to play an active role in their political future as well.

Making a change and getting people involved can be difficult, however it is important for many different voices to be heard, and today’s population is younger, so this will allow for more voices to be heard. It also makes you more invested and engaged in your country concerning the decisions that are made if you know that your vote will count.

When I am older, I might return to Switzerland to live permanently, and if I am able to vote now, I can be part of what the country will be like when I am done with school, and the Switzerland that my children will know. I consider allowing 16-year-olds the right to vote an important part of having an educated and engaged voting base added to the current voices who are heard.

INTERVIEW BY STÉPHANE HERZOG



Juliette Siffer

***2005, lives in New York with her Swiss/American family. She attends high school and enjoys being politically involved, having philosophical discussions, and discovering new ideas.**



would perhaps be to first give the right to vote at a communal level. For referendums and national elections, I think we would need more in-depth information. At the level of local politics, I think the commune should listen more to the views of young people.

The opening of a skatepark in Martigny recently is a good thing. But it took 15 years to happen! During Covid-19, if it was raining, there was nowhere to go to meet up with your friends. We need to create spaces for young people.

My future? I'd like to have a house and a family in Martigny. I have another dream, more short-term: I'd like to

go to Japan with my friends to discover the culture as I'm a fan of Manga and Japanese cartoons. Regarding the big questions of the future, there is of course global warming. I make small efforts at my own level: I recycle my waste, I don't waste electricity. But for me, we are missing real joint action. In any case, we need to stop using nuclear energy, to avoid polluting the ground for life, and we need to find clean energies instead. Would I become involved in politics? I don't campaign for anything at the moment, but why not, one day!

INTERVIEW BY STÉPHANE HERZOG



Cléo Perret

*2005, is in her first year of high school in Geneva, in a class with a music option. She plays classical piano and dances.

“ Voting at 16? Yes, I'd do that. But you need to be able to look at the wider picture, and not all young people have a clear enough vision of the world for that. That said, there are a lot of votes held on subjects which concern young people more than the old. For the climate, having the right to vote at 16 would be useful. The same for pesticides. This theme was really prominent on social media. We would have had enough information to vote. The disadvantage would perhaps be that it pushes young people to grow up into the adult world too quickly.

Swiss politics? I don't understand a lot of it. It's a huge muddle for such a little country, with the three levels of political decisions. Out of the leaders, I know the name of Alain Berset, who has been very much to the fore in recent months. I've also heard a lot about the Maudet affair at home, but I didn't really understand the implications and I haven't read anything neutral about it. So I don't have an opinion on that topic. I don't look at the media a lot, apart from the articles that we read at school to learn how to debate. We did this on the topic of purchasing fighter planes, for example. I use Instagram a lot; I follow content creators.

My hopes for the world? First of all, I'd like the virus to stop! Then there is the question of global warming. The need to act is urgent, but it's not too late. I marched for that. The authorities need to organise the energy transition. My personal dreams are focused on classical music, which I've been learning to play since I was little. Learning an instrument is the preserve of a certain social class. I would like more disadvantaged people to be able to have this opportunity as well. Music will be a part of my life as an adult. I'll live in town and I'll have children. Those are the things I want most. As for my fears, I worry about the climate getting out of balance. That's frightening. Artificial intelligence also perhaps represents a danger to human employment. We live in a time where job security is no longer guaranteed.

INTERVIEW BY STÉPHANE HERZOG



“ I lead a full life. It is hard to make a short list of all the things I do. I dance hip-hop and jazz three evenings a week. I enjoy dancing with other people and forgetting my everyday worries. I also play the piano, draw people and animals in my sketchbook, and use my sewing machine to alter my clothes. My girlfriends and I often spend time along the River Aare, where we play cards or volleyball, skate, have picnics, listen to music, or just talk.



Olivia Aeschlimann

Born in 2005 and living in Berne, where she is a pupil at Kirchenfeld upper-secondary school. Olivia enjoys listening to the radio station SRF 3, because she likes its mixture of music and information.

Having so many interests is a good thing, in my view. But it can also be a hindrance, because I have no plans on what to do after I leave school. A law degree sounds interesting. Or maybe I could study medicine. Whatever I decide, I want to add my voice to the fight against inequality. For the moment, this means taking part in street demonstrations. I need to express my views in some way or other, given that I am not yet entitled to vote. I don't understand why I still have to wait two years. We have already studied politics at school, so I am well aware of how government works. At 18, I will just have a little more life experience.

INTERVIEW BY FLAVIA VON GUNTEN



Elena Niederhauser

Born in 2004, living in Tarasp in Lower Engadine (canton of Graubünden), and about to begin an apprenticeship as a chemist. Elena can well imagine going into politics.

“ When I am not at school or doing homework, I am usually out with my friends, or either reading or cooking. School is very important to me, and I am trying to get the best marks possible. I will be leaving school at the beginning of summer, after which I start an apprenticeship as a chemist. I want to get a good training and then ideally go and study – for which I will have to leave my home valley. After that, I will probably live in the city or even abroad. But I would like to return one day and live here again in the Lower Engadine.

My mother is involved in local politics. When my brother and I were younger, neither of us were interested. Now we notice how much we talk about politics at home, especially when there is a referendum around the corner. It has become quite exciting. The latest proposals – the initiative on pesticides and the initiative on clean drinking water – affected our family directly,

because my parents run a farm. We had to make a podcast about these proposals at school, when we looked at the politics in detail. I always try to form my own opinion. While I think it would be great to be allowed to vote at 16, I also think the issues would be too complex for me. There are many things I really have no clue about! When you are 16, there are more important things than exercising your democratic duty. However, I would happily change our climate policies. We could do so many things better. I can very well envisage getting involved in politics one day. I don't need to be Federal Councillor or anything like that.

INTERVIEW BY FADRINA HOFMANN



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What do 16-year-olds like Dewjana (GE), Lisa (TG), Malin (SO), Noelia (GL) and Valérie (SG) have to say? To read the portraits of all 16 young people interviewed, visit us online at www.revue.ch.