

The first European Youth Report – A strategic vision to promote a better knowledge of European youth

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❶ The European political context: the framework of cooperation in the youth field

The European youth policy cooperation has been developed in a step-by-step approach which lead to a growing interest regarding the knowledge of the needs and expectations of young people in transversal areas such as employment, social inclusion and health.

For the moment no unic document exists covering all the different aspects of youth living conditions. The purpose of the youth report is to offer progressively a more global view on youth by putting together all available data.

The White paper: "a New Impetus for European Youth"

First, with the White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth", youth was recognised as a policy field and member-states then decided to adopt political priorities on specific youth issues such as participation and information, volunteering and better knowledge.

As for any "Open Method of Coordination" (OMC), member-states agreed upon common objectives for each priority; this was also valid for the priority on better knowledge and understanding of youth on which member-states will report at the end of this year on its 4 common objectives.

The 4 common objectives on better knowledge

- Identify – including at local and regional level – existing knowledge in priority areas of the youth field namely, participation, information and voluntary activities and implement measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it
- In a second stage identify – including at local and regional level – existing knowledge in further priority areas of interest to the youth field such as autonomy, non-formal learning, the fight against discrimination, education & training, employment, entrepreneurship, creativity, transition from education to employment, social inclusion and health, and implement measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it
- Ensure quality, comparability and relevance of knowledge in the youth field by using appropriate methods and tools
- Facilitate and promote exchange, dialogue and networks to ensure visibility of knowledge in the youth field and anticipate future needs.

Others topics of interest for youth, like employment or health, were at least partly covered by other European policies so that they were followed as the youth dimension of other policies.

The European Youth Pact

With the European Youth Pact adopted in 2005, the relevance of a youth policy integrating the employment and inclusion of young people was conceived and European and national policies also gained in impact and visibility.

Taking advantage of the favourable conditions generated by the Youth Pact and the report of the Bureau of European Policy Advisers [Investing in Youth: an empowerment strategy], the Directorate General Employment and Social Affairs (DG EMPL) and the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC) worked together on a new Communication targeting the Promotion of young people's full participation in education, employment and society.

These policy papers proposed the development of a more crosssectoral approach on youth, and to this end, requested the delivery of a triannual European Youth Report. This proposal resulted from a growing need to make youth policy more knowledge-based on the needs and expectations of young people, aiming at increasing its validity, efficiency and visibility.

A new political cycle

The political cycle which began in the year 2000 and which was marked in terms of content by the White Paper on Youth and with regard to methodological approach by the Open Method of Coordination is coming to an end.

A reflection process regarding the future political framework as well as the tools of youth policy (within the governing principle of subsidiarity) has been launched by the European Commission and will continue into 2009; In order to identify the challenges for youth and to come up with an appropriate strategy to tackle them, this process is enriched by a large scale consultation process committing all the stakeholders: whereas a structural dialogue with youth organisations has already started on these challenges, the results of bilateral meetings with member-states and their replies to a questionnaire on the present methods and tools of European youth policy are expected for the end of this year. Moreover, all those interested in this reflection can give their opinion through an on-line public consultation.

Another element of the reflection process will be the development of a synthesis summarising all hitherto existing member-states reports on the implementation of the OMC priorities and objectives, as well as of the European Youth Pact.

The results of this reflection process will then be published in an official Communication from the Commission in 2009.

It's in this context that a leaflet giving key figures on youth, the first EU youth report, synthesis reports on evaluation of the present framework of cooperation and of the common objectives for better knowledge on youth, will also be adopted.

Last but not least, 2009 will also be the year of evaluation of the whole Lisbon process: therefore it will be the right time for evaluating four years of implementation of the Youth Pact, with a focus on youth employment, social inclusion and well-being.

Conclusion

A lot of progress has been achieved since 2001, but the political situation has changed and many new issues have emerged which cannot be equally treated. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to set priorities for the European cooperation framework on youth policy, and the European Commission intends to make 2009 year of evaluation and preparation of the next decade. In this context and perspective, the European Youth Report makes sense and is a central tool in the definition and the follow-up of the situation and the needs of young people in Europe.

② Adapt Youth policy to the new challenges

World is changing

In the general context of the demographic change in Europe due to the decreasing birth rates and because of the particularly high level of unemployment among young people, "Youth" has become a political priority not only in the traditional fields like education, youth protection or sport, but also in all social fields : health, employment, social inclusion, culture and so on.

Contemporary globalisation, while creating new opportunities and enriching European diversity, also creates new challenges, for instance in terms of social cohesion or quality of life.

Young people are changing too

Young people are not a static, single group. Their values, needs and expectations evolve constantly. Youngsters want to be heard and to use their energy to make a difference, to participate and to get involved. They have new opportunities- for example to be trained and to go abroad- and also new means- such as mobiles and the internet.

Being young also means facing a unique set of challenges – in finding a job, in gaining autonomy, in securing a place in society. We have to face new unforeseen contradictions: less young people, more educated and trained, and at the same time, precarious conditions of living, and uncertain perspectives.

Inegal access to new opportunities deepens the gap

Some groups of young people, such as those with fewer opportunities, have more difficulties than others to find a place in society. Areas of public action aiming at a better professional and social integration for those young people who have less opportunities, has to be broad and multi-oriented, because many risks, causes, and forms of exclusion exist: poverty, difficult family context, physical and mental health problems, disabilities, life in disadvantaged urban or rural areas, ethnic background, poor performance at school, addiction, incarceration...

Conclusion

The European cooperation framework in the field of youth will be evaluated and reviewed in 2009. The Commission wishes to seize this unique opportunity to strengthen policies focused on young people with less opportunities, so that these children and youngsters get the chance they deserve to be integrated and to participate in society.

③ The European youth report

Method

Items selected in the report respond to a pragmatic approach, i.e. easily accessible and useful data existing in the diverse areas taken into consideration should be given the priority, with the purpose of drawing the state of play regarding the situation of young people in Europe.

A further extension of the knowledge provision should be envisaged for the next report. Comments on these data will also be enriched so that a virtuous circle can be developed: analysing data - or identifying where there is no sufficient data - will lead to a new process indicating what kind of other information and analysis could be useful, the results of which can be introduced in the next report.

This dynamic is also valid at the national level; exchanges of good practices – for example existing national reports on youth or in other fields - can be helpful to better know the working and living conditions of the young European generation.

Content

Europe (EU 27+EFTA countries+ candidate countries) counts 120 millions Young people (15-25 years old), of which 96,5 millions are living in the European Union and the decrease in the youth population seems to be a long term trend: young people aged between 25 and 29 years are more numerous than those aged between 20-24, themselves more numerous than the 15-19 group.

What are the current evolutions impacting on the needs and expectations of youth, and on the political answers we have to bring forward, that is the question.

To this end, the idea of the report is to inform and give data on the different pathways of young people in connection with the underlying social context, specifically concerning the transition from education to labour. Other important elements are the analysis of young people's active participation and their well being and family life. It was also decided that together with this general report 2009, there will be an additional part concentrating on young people with fewer opportunities.

④ Conclusions

It's a first report to be completed and enriched year after year, even if it is foreseen to publish one report each 3 years.

We have to ensure a better follow up by regrouping data, indicators, and analysis, on youth working and living conditions; this is required for implementing knowledge-based policies in line with the needs and expectations expressed by young people.

It's time for youth policy to be able to integrate all the youth diversity, condition for being efficient in the follow up of the changing lifestyle and life conditions of youth. Made available in one single document, the data could allow knowing how important are the changes, and in middle term, how and how much they impact youth lifestyle.

Our objective is to develop a European policy for all young people. Due to globalisation and greater competitiveness, young people have to experience mobility and flexibility, they have to improve their competencies, all elements which are developed in a European framework.

However, as a consequence of these evolutions, there is a growing gap between those who well perform and those who lose the road and stay behind.

Young people are an opportunity for Europe: Europe must be an opportunity for each of them. They share the same values than Europe, for example when talking about solidarity, and appreciate the new opportunities Europe is offering, for example, mobility. We can do better for all the youngsters concerned, by increasing the mobility of volunteers for example, and at same time make young people with fewer opportunities a priority; this is also a way to reconcile young people with Europe.

By elaborating this first European report on youth our ambition is to contribute to better integrated youth policies and to a European and knowledge-based strategy for youth.