EU strategy for youth – investing and empowering

2009/2159(INI) - 27/04/2009 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to propose a European Union strategy for youth based on the renewed open method of coordination.

BACKGROUND: Europeans are living longer, having children later and there are fewer young people. The 15-29 age group is projected to represent 15.3 % of Europe's population in 2050, whereas it is currently 19.3%. In this context, this generation will need to be the subject of particular focus in the years to come. This is why the Commission is putting forward a **comprehensive, cross-sectoral strategy** covering all aspects relating to young people and meeting their current and future needs.

CONTENT: youth cooperation is a well structured and developed EU policy field, particularly since 2001 when the White Paper on Youth was adopted. It was in the context of that White Paper that the open method of coordination (OMC) was first launched, a new stronger version of which is now proposed, to deal with the new needs facing young people.

A new strategy is proposed with three overarching and interconnected goals that closely link to those of the Renewed Social Agenda is proposed:

- creating more Opportunities for Youth in education and employment;
- improving Access and full participation of all young people in society;
- fostering mutual Solidarity between society and young people.

Under each goal, the communication proposes 'fields of action' along with priorities for the first three years 2010-2012. These priorities may be summarised as follows:

1) Creating more opportunities for youth

- **Field of Action 1 – education:** currently, a quarter of 15-year olds are low achievers in reading literacy and 6 million young people leave school without any qualifications. Renewed efforts are called for from the Member States and the Commission, in their respective spheres of competence, to enhance young people's level of education. In this regard, it is proposed, among other things, to: i) develop non-formal learning opportunities to address early school leaving; ii) fully use the range of tools established at EU level for the validation of skills and the recognition of qualifications; iii) promote learning mobility of all young people; iv) encourage cooperation between education and youth policy-makers; v) make available good quality guidance and counselling services for young people.
- **Field of Action 2 – employment:** young people's transition periods from education to employment have become significantly longer and complex. Unemployment among young people is on average at least twice as high as for the overall workforce; the current economic crisis puts further pressure on the labour market opportunities for the young. The actions envisaged by the Member States and the Commission are as follows: i) **ensure that youth unemployment remains a priority**; ii) promote cross-border professional and vocational opportunities for young people; iii) develop youth work as a resource to support youth employability; iv) encourage cooperation between employment and youth policy-makers; v)ensure that the European Social Fund is effectively used; vi) develop

short-term measures in their recovery plans to stimulate youth employment; vii) develop career guidance and counselling services; viii)lower barriers to the free movement of labour across the EU; ix) promote quality internships within education and training and/or employment schemes.

- **Field of Action 3 – creativity and entrepreneurship:** the Commission considers that young people should be encouraged to think and act innovatively. The objective in this field is to encourage young people to express and develop their talents and creativity and thus their entrepreneurial spirit. The communication recommends that the Member States and Commission: i) develop start-up funds and encourage the recognition of junior enterprise; ii) make new technologies readily available to empower young talent and attract interest in arts and science; iii) promote contribution of youth work to the creativity and entrepreneurship of young people; iv) widen access to creative tools, particularly those involving new technologies.

2) Improving access and full participation of young people in society

- **Field of Action 4 – health and sport:** the health of many young people is at risk because of stress, poor diet, lack of physical exercise, unprotected sex, tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse. Healthy living and physical education need to be encouraged. The main actions proposed are as follows: i) encourage cooperation and the involvement of young people in health policy; ii) mobilise all stakeholders at local level to detect and help young people at risk; iii)develop tailor-made information on health for young people; iv) encourage peer-to-peer health education at school and in youth organisations.
- **Field of Action 5 – participation:** another objective of the Commission's proposed strategy is to ensure the full participation of youth in civic life and democracy by supporting youth organisations. In this regard, it is proposed that the Member States and the Commission: i) develop quality standards on youth participation, information and consultation; ii) **support politically and financially youth organisations**; iii) promote e-democracy to reach out to more non-organised youth; iv) develop opportunities for debate between European/national institutions and young people.

3) Fostering mutual solidarity between society and young people

- **Field of Action 6 – social inclusion:** in 2006, one fifth of young people between 16 and 24 were at risk of poverty. Preventing poverty and social exclusion and breaking their inter-generational transmission by mobilising all actors involved (parents, teachers, social workers, etc.) are considered important. In this field, it is envisaged to: i) address issues related to teenagers and young adults, in particular those with least opportunities; ii) optimise the use of EU Funds to support the social integration of young people; iii) realise the full potential of youth work as a means of inclusion; iv) develop intercultural awareness and competences; v) encourage youth involvement in inclusion policy and cooperation between policy makers; vi)recognise challenges overcome by disadvantaged youth, including through special awards; vii) address homelessness, housing and financial exclusion; viii)promote access to quality services (transport, health, etc.), ix) promote specific support for young families.
- **Field of Action 7 – volunteering:** youth volunteering contributes strongly to intergenerational solidarity. It should therefore be encouraged by developing more voluntary opportunities for young people. It should therefore be encouraged by both Community and national actions: i) enhance skills recognition through Europass and Youthpass; ii) recognise contributions of youth organisations and non-structured forms of volunteering; iii) reflect on ways to better protect the rights of volunteers (e. g. European Year of Volunteering in 2011); iv) develop national approaches on cross-border mobility of young volunteers.
- **Field of Action 8 – youth and the world**: this area relates, for the most part, to mobilising youth in global policy-making at all levels (local, national and international) using existing youth networks and tools (e.g. structured dialogue) to address climate change and the UN Millennium Development Goals. The envisaged actions are to: i) encourage green patterns of consumption and production

among young people; ii) promote entrepreneurship and volunteering opportunities with regions outside Europe; iii) support the development of youth work on other continents; iv) raise awareness among young people on fundamental rights and development issues worldwide.

In addition to the description of a wide range of actions to mobilise young people, the communication looks at structures that exist in relation to directly reaching young people and, in particular, the fundamental aspect of **youth work** (and how it is enabled). This can take the form of youth organisations, municipalities, youth centres, churches, etc.). It can help deal with unemployment, school failure, and social exclusion, as well as provide leisure time. It can also increase skills and support the transition from youth to adulthood. However, youth work needs to be professionalised further. A series of actions to **professionalise youth work** are therefore proposed: i) equip youth workers with professional skills; ii) promote youth work via the Structural Funds; iii) develop mobility of youth workers; iv) develop innovative services, pedagogies and practice of youth work.

Envisaged approach to cooperation: to ensure that the actions detailed above can be implemented, the communication recommends that the Member States consider implementing at national level **cross-sectoral policy-making** in relation to young people. The Commission also stresses the importance of **dialogue** with youth. A working group with Member States and the European Youth Forum will be set up in 2010 to review the structured dialogue and a structured dialogue cycle with young people is proposed for every year.

The Commission also stresses the role of peer learning to ensure that better youth policies are drawn up and on the importance of evidence-based policy-making.

Lastly, the strategy will need to draw support from programmes in the youth sector (e.g. Youth in Action) and other similar programmes (such as Culture, Lifelong Learning, PROGRESS, MEDIA, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, Competitiveness & Innovation Programme) as well as the Structural Funds.