EU strategy for youth – investing and empowering

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Council Resolution 2009/C 311/01 on the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) requires an EU Youth Report to be drawn up at the end of each three-year cycle, with a dual objective: (i) to evaluate the progress made towards the overall objectives of the EU Youth Strategy, and (ii) to serve as a basis for establishing a set of priorities for the coming work cycle.

This Communication presents a draft EU Youth Report to be agreed upon by the Council. It recalls that the Strategy is complementary to the Youth on the Move flagship initiative of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs, as well as the agenda for new skills and jobs.

The EU Youth Strategy addresses young people's needs and opportunities in eight fields of action:

- Education & training
- Employment & entrepreneurship
- Social inclusion
- Health & well-being
- Volunteering
- Participation
- Culture & creativity
- Youth & the world

Implementation of all fields of action is examined in detail in the report.

The report states that the implementation of the first three-year work cycle of the EU Youth Strategy, covering 2010-2012, demonstrated that it is both lasting and flexible as a framework for a whole range of actions – by the Commission, Member States and other relevant stakeholders. The strategy, with its cross-sectoral and all-inclusive perspective, has been greeted with interest and has inspired not only EU Member States, but also countries in the larger Europe and the world beyond.

The EU Youth Strategy has served as a vehicle to forge links between fields of action, including employment & entrepreneurship, education & training and social inclusion, to develop multi-faceted solutions in support of young people. This has proved relevant in looking for answers to address the current high levels of youth unemployment and to support the growing number of young people who are not in employment, education or training. Youth work has contributed to young people's development and has the potential to do more in all fields of action.

The report stresses that participation of young people in democratic life is central to youth policy.

The first cycle of the EU Youth Strategy (2010-2012): nearly all Member States report that the EU Youth Strategy has reinforced existing priorities at national level, with several Member States emphasising its direct impact. Lithuania, for example, mentions the strategy as a guiding document for developing its own National Youth Policy Programme; Austria mentions that the link between youth policy and labour market policies has been strengthened, and dialogue with youth has been further developed in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

The EU Youth Strategy advocates a cross-sectoral approach at all levels in implementing the youth policy framework. Most Member States report having a national youth strategy or a cross-sectoral plan targeting youth. All but two Member States have an inter-ministerial working group on youth or some other institutionalised mechanism. While some National Youth Reports set a good example, such groups often consist of different actors and stakeholders in the 'core' youth policy field, with little or no involvement from other government ministries, thereby limiting their cross-sectoral nature.

The next cycle (2013-2015): the priorities for the next cycle are to be adopted on the basis of the current EU Youth Report. The EU presidencies focused in the first cycle on 'employment and entrepreneurship' and 'participation'. The EU and National Youth Reports confirm the robustness and relevance of the EU Youth Strategy and its two overall objectives: (i) creating more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market, and (ii) promoting citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity. Both tie in well with Europe 2020, the Annual Growth Survey 2012, and Youth on the Move and the Youth Opportunities Initiative.

The priorities for the next work cycle should reflect the current overall priorities and activities under Europe 2020. Youth employment will remain high on the EU agenda. Member States should in particular target young people who are not in employment, education or training, and make full use of available EU funding. They should undertake more efforts to increase young people's access to work, apprenticeships and traineeship contracts and improve their employability. The **cross-cutting tools developed under the EU Youth Strategy** can serve to foster partnerships between different actors involved in delivering support to young people in transition, including employment services, education providers, youth work, social services, employers and young people themselves.

The Commission intends to propose by the end of 2012 a Council recommendation on **guidelines to establish youth guarantees**, which are schemes to be designed by Member States to ensure that all young people receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed (or leaving formal education).

The situation on the labour market and unemployment has related social effects. For the coming years, the **strategy should increasingly focus on the consequences of the current crisis and its effects on social inclusion** and the health & well-being of young people. To this purpose, it needs to step up its focus on participation in democratic and societal activities, as well as build on youth work in developing young people's life skills, their overall personal development and a sense of belonging to the society in which they live. In order to further its contribution to Europe 2020, the second three-year work cycle of the EU Youth Strategy (2013-2015) should continue to be placed on employment and entrepreneurship, increasing access to work, along with developing the innovative and creative capacities of young people. It should increasingly focus on social inclusion, health and well-being. The future EU programme targeting young people will contribute towards achieving these objectives of the EU Youth Strategy.

The Commission will **develop the initiative of the 'Youth on the Move Card'** in order to make it easier for young people to be mobile across Europe. It will also reach out to, and facilitate dialogue with, all young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities, through the new interactive tools of the **European Youth Portal**. Youth policy will also explore measures to foster the creative and innovative potential of young people when attempting to tackle challenges related to employment, employability and inclusion.

The Youth in Action programme and the future EU programme targeting youth will play a particular role in supporting these initiatives.