



# Position Paper On Youth in Action 2.0

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## **1. Introduction**

The European Union's Youth in Action (YiA) Programme is the largest programme in Europe that supports youth led activities with the aim to improve the situation of young people. From 2007 - 2013 it will provide around 1,000,000 young Europeans with valuable non-formal Education (NFE) experience and mobility possibilities, as well as to answer their needs.

The European Youth Forum welcomes the broad consultation launched by the European Commission in preparation for the future of the Youth in Action programme (hereafter referred to as YIA 2.0) as an opportunity to contribute in a participatory way to strengthening the programme. Youth organisations in Europe recognise the value of Youth in Action as it is a unique programme. It is the only programme of the European Union supporting non-formal education and addressing all young people and youth organisations, regardless of whether they are in formal education or not. It supports European youth work and European youth participation and recognises the crucial role of European youth organisations and the European Youth Forum. It is furthermore unique in that it is implemented directly by the young people it addresses. Young people within their youth organisations are both actors and beneficiaries.

Youth organisations are also aware of the shortcomings of the current programme and as the main stakeholders want to give a clear outline for a better and stronger programme. This position paper aims to give such a clear outline and is built on three extensive surveys among youth organisations on both the European and national level, as well as on the analysis of the existing practice.

A new programme for youth needs to be based on the competences of the EU and must be directed at responding to young people's needs. Only when it is firmly built on those two pillars can YIA 2.0 be an effective implementation tool of the EU's political agenda on youth as outlined in the Framework for European cooperation in the Youth field and Youth on the Move. Only with a stronger programme can these agendas be achieved and benefit the current and future generations of young people and, through this, strengthen the European Union as a democratic community of citizens.

## **2. Needs of young people in Europe**

Young people in Europe are a very diverse group but they have a common need; the need to become autonomous citizens<sup>1</sup>. Autonomy signifies young people having the necessary support, resources and opportunities to choose to live independently; to run their own lives; enjoying the possibility of full social and political participation in all sectors of everyday life; and being able to take independent decisions. For young people to become autonomous they need personal development, self-confidence, training for personal and vocational/job skills. This allows them to gain life assuring skills and experiences to enable them to grow in confidence and to develop as a person and an active citizen willing to take action for the community.

The European programmes should support this autonomy process and different programmes should tackle different fields. The European Youth Forum strongly supports the European Commission's message that 'Member States should ensure that European Social Fund swiftly supports young people' as outlined in the Youth on the Move Communication. The Youth in Action programme should complement the programmes

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<sup>1</sup> 0590-06 "Meeting young people's needs" A European Youth Forum approach to Youth Policy

focussing on socio-economic needs and should support young people in their personal development through non-formal education, volunteering and participation. Furthermore it should facilitate the full use of the competences acquired in other educational pathways and in the labour market through various instruments such as European Qualification Framework, Europass and Youthpass.

Youth organisations are the most effective actors to address the needs of young people, especially young people with fewer opportunities. The programme needs to be implemented by youth organisations capable of addressing those needs through providing long-term learning processes and a supportive structure that ensure that projects achieve sustainable results. This allows better follow up and valorisation of projects than one-off activities. . This capacity of youth organisations has to be supported and deepened through European support in order to offer more and better training and non-formal learning opportunities to young people, to give them space to participate and opportunities to volunteer, and to promote the importance and benefits of learning mobility.

### **3. An EU programme building on the treaties and implementing the EU political agenda on Youth**

The Member States and national parliaments have increased significantly the competence of the European Union on youth in the Lisbon Treaty: 'Union action shall be aimed at encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors, and encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe'. Youth in Action is the best-placed tool to make full use of this competence. The current programme already includes small pilot actions such as 'Youth Democracy projects' and 'Meetings of young people and those responsible for youth policy', to encourage democratic participation of young people. Such pilot actions were too limited in scope and all actions should support participation of young people.

The programme's aim is to be a way in which the European Commission takes up the responsibilities of the treaty. It should further be an instrument for the implementation of the complementary political agendas: the Framework on European cooperation in the youth field and Youth on the Move.

The Framework on European cooperation in the youth field rightly speaks of a need to empower and invest in youth and decided to create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market, and to promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people. The Youth in Action programme should be the implementation platform for all the youth-specific elements of the framework and should support the transversal aspects of the Framework. The Youth in Action programme, by supporting non-formal education, creates a substantial amount of unique opportunities that are crucial for young people. In the same way as the Framework connects different policy fields to youth policy, the YIA 2.0 programme should aim to connect to several other agendas such as gender equality strategy, neighbourhood policy, new skills for new jobs by forming a frame for implementation. In certain areas, this was very successful in the current programme. Such an example is the Balkan Youth Window<sup>2</sup> where the participation of Balkan youth and youth organisations was supported with funds from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. However, the new programme

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<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/08/140&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

should seek to increase links with other educational frameworks such as the Lifelong Learning Programme where little cooperation has been achieved so far.

The new Youth on the Move European Commission communication highlights the importance of EU and national action to tackle youth unemployment. Youth in Action can be an important contributor to this aim if its role is properly understood and clearly defined. In addition to that, young people gain a lot of competences valuable for the labour market through participation and volunteering. While these activities should be supported for their inherent value, they also have clear economic return as they, inter alia, also prevent Early School Leaving. Youth in Action needs to tackle youth unemployment by ensuring that young people are actively involved in decision making on employment and can acquire the necessary competences through NFE to act.

The European Youth Forum believes that YIA can bring a major contribution towards fulfilling these ambitious political agendas. This requires a stronger programme both in its shape as in its resources. Rhetoric on investing in youth that is not matched by action will severely undermine the trust of young people in the EU and its institutions.

#### **4. A truly participative programme**

Young people have the wish and the need to co-decide on issues and programmes targeting them. They need to be trusted as equal partners in matters that concern them such as formal education, non-formal education, mobility, employment, youth work and youth participation. While participation goes far beyond voting in political processes, it is a tell-tale sign that the participation rate in elections is alarmingly low which directly endangers democracy. It further aggravates the problems of young people as their problems are not, or too late, put on the political agenda. The current youth unemployment crisis is a clear example.

Youth in Action should be an inspiration and a guiding model on how participation can be an effective approach to increase the impact of funding programmes. This participative approach needs to be a pillar of Youth in Action on all levels, both European and national. It is time to introduce co-management with young people and their representative organisations as it is already working well in several national agencies as well as in the youth sector of the Council of Europe. This should be implemented on European and national level, even if that means adapting the current financial regulations.

#### **5. The shape of the programme**

The programme should be ambitious and aim to strengthen youth-led civil society in Europe. It should focus on ensuring tangible, sustainable, reliable and user-friendly support to young people and youth led NGOs, which provide the framework for both the active participation of young people and the delivery of EU priorities in the youth field. The European Youth Forum proposes three sets of actions:

1. 'Youth Moves' on mobility and volunteering (Youth for Europe and European Voluntary Service),
2. 'Youth Works' support to youth work
3. 'Youth Decides' supporting participative structures

The current actions have proven to be good models but have suffered from a tendency to be limited by rules that overly specify how the projects should be designed and implemented. This should be left to youth organisations and they should be given the needed flexibility to develop innovative approaches to deal with specific target groups.

The programme should further support longer term programmes that combine several actions.

The programme should also aim to be inclusive, one in which all young people, regardless of background, can participate and are supported in their participation. The implementation of the YiA programme should consider challenges related to the digital divide and fluency in foreign languages. Youth organisations commit themselves to this aim and together make the YIA the most inclusive EU programme.

Young people with fewer opportunities and small youth organisations do not have the capacity to build the knowledge necessary to benefit from the Youth in Action programme and from most of the EU programmes. YIA should become the entry point to all EU programmes for interested young people and youth organisations. Its implementation bodies should be a base of information and support youth organisations and young people wishing to apply to funds.

The programme should have a clearer division between European and national level as it is the principal instrument on European level but complements Member State action on national level. The European civil society should be strengthened by including a truly European level within the programme and a recognition of the status of European youth organisations who are the main channels through which young people interact structurally with the EU democratic process.. They should be recognised as pan-European and rules should not be based solely on the legal framework of the country where they have their administrative seat. The support for European youth organisations needs to become more sustainable to allow them to fully play their role. This is of special importance because INGYOs are the main organisers of multilateral youth activities. These activities are an opportunity without comparison for young people to experience that the European Union is more than an administrative body. The European Youth Forum will develop a further proposal on Action 4.2.

The programme should be truly European, aiming to include all young Europeans in its actions. Young Europeans should not be given less opportunities depending on whether or how far their country is in the process of EU accession. It is crucial for the EU to set an example to neighbouring European countries by treating their young people as equals and thereby providing a real-life experience of the EU's values.

The programme should also look farther afield, as the EU is a global player only if its citizens can easily take use of the opportunities of globalisation and know how to work on the challenges of globalisation. YIA2.0 should therefore, also support global youth work and support interregional cooperation as implementation of the political cooperation process with other continents. This requires also more possibilities for non-European young people and youth organisations to participate in the programme.

The concept of youth is evolving and the age one is considered 'youth' with young people growing out of childhood faster but becoming autonomous later in life. This should be reflected in the YIA 2.0 programme by raising the age level for all actions to 30 and lowering the age level for certain actions.

## **6. The implementation of the programme**

The YIA programme is a support programme and not an implementation programme and this should always be kept in mind. It should leave youth organisations much more space to develop the activities based on their own original ideas for the project. This way youth organisations would be able to reach their creative and innovative potential and at the same time be proactive towards the needs of young people.

The non-formal education approach underpinning the programme should be extended to the applying organisations. It needs to be an active learning process including pre-checking applications, providing feedback to the organisations on their reports, being flexible and allowing organisations to make mistakes, and thus learn. Assessments of applications should be completely available to applicants so that they can also learn from the feedback. Good practices of youth organisations must be allowed to be continued as the programme will serve a different audience each time.

YIA2.0 needs to have a more user-friendly framework, clearer, faster and easier procedures with simpler and less formal rules. Furthermore, the structure of the implementation of the programme has to guarantee, at all levels and steps of the process, an equal treatment and access to participation in the programme. The system of external experts in the selection is flawed and needs to be replaced by a more transparent system with a committee judging all applications

This to minimise resources spent on administrative issues and to allow more young people to benefit from the programme.

## **7. Conclusion**

The current Youth in Action programme and its predecessors supported youth organisations to make a bigger change for young Europeans than any other programme. The European Union and the Member States should rightly be proud of this and be ambitious. Even more is needed however: young people in Europe not only deserve a programme matching their needs, they demand to have all the support to build the European democracy and support the European Social Model.

## **8. Key Demands**

- Youth in Action 2.0 should remain an independent programme focused on non-formal education of young people.
- Youth in Action 2.0 is the core of the increased investment of the EU in young people and the EU should invest 1 Billion Euro or 10 euro per young European from 2014-2020.
- Youth in Action 2.0 shall encourage the participation of all young people in democratic life in Europe and ensure that the educational outcomes can be maximally used to reach the objectives of Youth on the Move.
- Youth in Action 2.0 should be built on 3 strands:

1. 'Youth Moves' on mobility and volunteering (Youth for Europe and European Voluntary Service),

2. 'Youth Works' support to youth work

3. 'Youth Decides' supporting participative structures

- Youth in Action 2.0 should ensure that youth organisations can focus their resources on young people. For this to happen, the process, reporting and structures of awarding YiA grants at local and European level needs to be reformed so that it is accessible and understandable for all young people.
- Youth in Action 2.0 should have a pan-European approach to allow also non-EU European young people to fully participate in the programme.
- Youth in Action 2.0 must be made more flexible so as to avoid the standardisation of projects and to enable young people to design truly innovative and alternative projects.
- Young people should be partners and co-managers at all levels of the Youth in Action programme in order to make sure that the latter reaches its aims to the fullest.