



Rue de l'industrie, 10
1000 Brussels
Belgium
Tel: + 32 2 230 64 90
Fax: + 32 2 230 21 23
www.youthforum.org
youthforum@youthforum.org

Position of the Forum EU Work Plan for Youth 2015-2018

Introduction

The European Youth Forum (YFJ) welcomes the initiative to adjust the timing of the EU Work Plan for Youth to the 3 years cycles of the EU Youth Strategy that already bring forward thematic priorities for the 3 years to come. The EU Work Plan for Youth should therefore be a **complementary tool** to support, not only the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy, but above all, to *“highlight relevant areas for coordination and collaboration with education and training and employment policies, with a view to ensuring youth policy input into the European Semester”*¹.

To live up to its expectations, the next EU Work Plan for youth needs to be an ambitious plan that puts forward **cross-sectorial** proposals and initiatives for stronger links between the **EU Youth Strategy, the Education and Training 2020 Strategy, and the Europe 2020 Strategy**, especially regarding the social targets related to employment, poverty reduction and education.

The YFJ insists that the adoption of a **EU Work Plan for Youth 2015-2018 should not only maximise the role of youth policy to reach the Europe 2020** goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, **but should also stress** that the **objectives of the youth field** are to be taken into account in the European Semester's recommendations.

To ensure a successful EU Work Plan for Youth, it is important to carry out an **early consultation with relevant stakeholders** in the field of youth, employment, education and training, notably within the Council of the EU and the European Commission. YFJ regrets not having been informed or included in the preparation of the EU Work Plan for Youth 2014-2015 and would be keen to contribute with the expertise and experience of youth organisations to the upcoming Work Plan.

An comprehensive **assessment** of the current EU Work Plan for Youth will be necessary in order to develop the next Work Plan. YFJ considers that the EU Work Plan for Youth 2014-2015 **hasn't yet brought substantial improvements in the coordination amongst the different policies, and in bringing youth policies at the centre of the Europe 2020 strategy**. We regret that there are still not enough synergies and links between the Youth Strategy and employment policies developed by the European Commission and the Member States.

Last but not least, initiatives such as **Youth on the Move**, which was a package of policy initiatives on **education and employment** for young people in Europe, launched in 2010 as part of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and a first attempt to propose a common policy initiative amongst sectors, **did not bring all the expected results**. Actions initially foreseen, such as improving the quality of jobs offered and ensuring better working conditions, have not been addressed. Moreover, when designing the Youth Guarantee, one of the main achievements of the Youth on the Move initiative, most Member states did not efficiently engage with young people and youth organisations, missing a great opportunity of cross-sectorial cooperation.

¹ 2014/C 183/02



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Operational implementation

Given the **cross-sectorial nature of the objectives of the EU Work Plan for Youth**, YFJ believes that it should be disseminated to other Council's formation and carried out in cooperation between the different actors across institutions (European Commission, Council of the EU and European Parliament). Moreover, YFJ would highly encourage the organisation of regular cross-sectorial meetings and would support more cooperation between Council's formation, ensuring for instance, that the Youth Working Party is involved at an early stage in any relevant discussions held at the Employment or Education Committee, ensuring its input is provided in a timely manner and dully taken into account. This is particularly crucial for the success of processes such as the validation of Non-Formal and Informal learning, the work on the Country Specific Recommendations or the implementation and monitoring of the Youth Guarantee.

The EU Work Plan for Youth needs to pave the way for the establishment of realistic bridges between sectors.

The **Structured Dialogue on Youth needs to be valued and improved as a tool to involve young people in the development of policy proposals**, and the results of the discussions, formulated under Council Conclusions by the Council on Education, Youth and Sport, should be systematically disseminated to the relevant actors, especially the Employment and Education Committees, and discussed there. The Structured Dialogue on Youth indeed covers a wide range of thematic priorities that have the potential to contribute positively to the overall targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy and to address the effect of the crisis on young people, and involving the increasing number of actors within this process can only be beneficial.

Yet, further **efforts need to be put in order to enhance young people's participation in democratic processes, as mentioned in the Art 165.2 of the TFEU**, with the establishment of further tools and participation mechanisms.

Expert Groups, which were set up in the previous Work Plan were useful tool to build reflection and proposals on identified issues, however, YFJ could see beneficial the implementation of "**groups of interests**", which would gather only Member States which are willing to contribute and move forward in a specific policy area, and would benefit from an exchange of good practices and a stronger cooperation with other countries Interest groups could be a more flexible way to gather Member States willing to put efforts on an issue.

To achieve a better **implementation** of the Work Plan for Youth, YFJ calls for:

- **Early consultation with relevant stakeholders**, in particular youth organisations on the Work Plan, so that they can contribute to the process with their grassroots experience and expertise.
- Implementing **cross-sectorial cooperation between the Council's formation** and amongst institutions
- Continuously **improving the Structured Dialogue** by taking into account the recommendations drafted in May 2015, at the **European Youth Week** event on Structured Dialogue
- The formation of "**groups of interests**" which would gather on a voluntary basis, Member States representatives willing to move forward on a specific issue.



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Overall, YFJ would encourage the Member States to focus on:

1) Mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy: YFJ regrets that the initiative from the Latvian presidency regarding the input and Council Recommendation on the contribution of youth policy to the Europe 2020 had to be put on hold, due to delays in the preparation of the Europe 2020 review. Given the relevance of this topic for the EU Work Plan for Youth, and following the Council Conclusions on “maximising the potential of youth policy in addressing the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy²”, **we would encourage the Member States to pursue that initiative in 2016, and bring the youth perspective in the Europe 2020 review.** It will be important to reflect on the impact of the austerity measures and discriminatory practices on young people³, such as lowering minimum wages, decreasing employment protection, cuts of expenditures in Education or health services, on reaching the objectives of the Europe 2020 and EU youth strategy.

The EU Youth Strategy should take into account and become relevant not only to European policies directly related to youth (such as specific youth employment measures), but also to policies that indirectly have a great impact on the autonomy and inclusion of young people in the long run— namely the EU Investment Plan which has the potential to create quality jobs for young people thus easing the transition from education to work for youth, providing young people with sustainable solutions and facilitating their autonomy and inclusion. It will be crucial **to monitor the Investment Plan for Europe** and to bring the youth policy perspective to this process, ensuring that priority is given to investment that create sustainable quality jobs as well as support the potential and development of young people, such as projects in education, and research and innovation. The Youth sectors' responsibility is to ensure the **rights based approach to youth policy**, notably in the sectors of employment, Education and Training.

2) Moreover, the EU Work Plan for Youth should anticipate the **review of the Erasmus + programme which will take place in 2016.** The Erasmus + is one of the major tool to support the work of youth organisations across Europe, and to help the European Commission reaching the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. In view of the mid term revision of the Erasmus+, **YFJ strongly supports the creation of a separate Programming Committee for the Youth sector** within the general Erasmus+ Programming Committee, which would allow the targeted development of the sector even further. On the occasion of the mid term revision of the Erasmus+, an assessment of the results of the increased decentralisation of the programme towards the national level should be made, especially considering the impact of EU wide networks benefiting from the programme.

3) In the light of the **2nd European Youth Work Convention Declaration** – issued under the Belgian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe - and of the Council Conclusions under the Latvian Presidency inviting the European Commission to initiate Council Recommendations on Youth Work, as well as following the “declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and discrimination through Education”, YFJ calls for a real **recognition of the value and the impact of youth work, youth organisations, volunteering and of non-formal education** in contributing to addressing the challenges ahead. **Non-formal education needs to be politically recognised at national and European level.** On that topic, **the youth sector needs to work hand in hand with the education and employment sector** to guarantee the 2018

² 2013/C 224/02

³ Youth in the Crisis, what went wrong ?, European Youth Forum 2014



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deadline set by the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning⁴.

YFJ is convinced the youth sector can and should bring a quality contribution to the institutional discussions following the recent terroristic attacks in and outside Europe. The dramatic events in Paris, Copenhagen should be a wake up call and a case for efficient long-term measures that **tackle the root-cause of the issues behind** (inclusion, participation etc.), rather than looking for short-term reactions to symptoms. In this light, **YFJ calls for the inclusion of European citizenship education into national curricula**, capitalising on **youth work and non-formal education**, which are complementary to formal education.

Moreover, it is urgent to acknowledge the **positive impact that youth work and youth organisations** have while supporting young people's personal development as well as intercultural and political awareness and to further support their efforts and their work (through funding, political recognition etc).

Moreover, efforts on **youth participation**, through the implementation of article 165 of the TFEU and on **social inclusion**, through the review of the Europe 2020, the Investment Plan and other macroeconomic policies, should be fostered.

In a nutshell, YFJ calls for the Work Plan to focus on:

- The contribution of the Youth sector to Europe 2020 by feeding in the **Europe 2020 mid-term review** and by monitoring the **Investment Plan for Europe**
- The assessment of the **mid-term review of the Erasmus +** programme, a key tool for Youth organisations across Europe to carry out their work with young people
- The recognition of **the impact that youth work, volunteering and youth organisations** have on young people's positive development and inclusion in society.
- The need to **value Non-Formal Education** at all level, and its **complementarity with Formal Education Institutions**, notably in providing young people with critical and political mind-set.

⁴ (2012/C 398/01)