

*The Council Resolution of 20 May 2014, on the overview of the structured dialogue process including the social inclusion of young people, endorsed a simplified architecture for the conduct of the structured dialogue. It called for the development, in the first phase of each cycle, of a common understanding and bottom-up approach to the overall thematic priority set by the Council, which should serve as a guiding framework for the dialogue to be conducted in the subsequent phases. Youth representatives and representatives of national youth authorities, meeting in Rome at the EU Youth Conference on 13-15 October 2014, thus endorsed a guiding framework for the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle of Structured Dialogue on the thematic priority of “youth empowerment for political participation”:*

## **GUIDING FRAMEWORK**

### Youth Empowerment for Political Participation

Genuine youth political participation exists when young people form an integral part of political decision-making processes at all levels as equal stakeholders. As few participatory structures are available at the local level, that is closest to young people, this does not facilitate their involvement in bottom-up approaches.

There are formal barriers to youth political participation at all levels, such as the lack of transparency, age-related limitations and eligibility criteria to stand for election. Other barriers derive from a lack of citizenship education, low levels of confidence in the democratic process, and a lack of young people’s priorities being reflected in mainstream politics. In addition, politicians and political institutions often lack the capability and willingness to engage with young people in political processes.

In the absence of legal frameworks, youth engagement often occurs through consultations, where young people are rarely an equal partner in the process and often do not see the impact of their inputs reflected in the outcomes of the political process. This is reflected in a growing lack of trust and interest in politics, including traditional means of participation, as illustrated by the low turn-out of young people in the electoral process and the lack of young candidates for political office.

When formulating policies affecting the lives of young people, many political actors, including institutions, decision and policy makers, do not consider young people nor youth organisations as relevant contributors, thus denying their ability to have an impact. Traditional means of political participation often lack transparency and the accountability of decision makers to young

people. Such means also lack the flexibility and modern tools and techniques to meet the needs of young people.

The opportunity to experience political participation and be decision makers in their own environment from an early age is crucial for young people to become active citizens. Comprehensive formal education towards political participation does not exist in all Member States and barriers to full accessibility and participation of all young people in non-formal education persist. Citizenship education often does not combine formal and non-formal education and thus the methodology is not always adapted to the needs of young people.

A perceived lack of motivation of educators and students/pupils along with a lack of participatory culture within educational establishments results in less political participation. Insufficient involvement and cooperation of a wide range of stakeholders is a further challenge.

Informing and engaging with all young people is important to ensure and strengthen democratic processes, and to bridge the gap between young people and decision-makers. Young people are not a homogenous group, which leads to challenges for youth organisations, educators, media, political bodies and other stakeholders to inform and engage individual young people in a meaningful way, and avoid accusations of “tokenism”. Involving and representing young people with fewer opportunities in political processes remains a problem, including for youth organisations.

Financial and other resources are often insufficient to enable the effective empowerment in political participation of young people from all parts of society.

## **ANNEX: BACKGROUND AND PROCESS IV CYCLE OF STRUCTURED DIALOGUE ON YOUTH EMPOWERMENT FOR POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

The article 11 of the Treaty of the European Union introduces a new principle of participative democracy, according to which the role of the civil society and NGOs are explicitly recognized. Since 2009, the European Structured Dialogue established by the EU Council of Ministers aims to consult with young people and to promote their participation in the development of European policies.

The Trio Presidency – Italy, Latvia and Luxembourg – together with the European Commission and the European Youth Forum proposed Youth Empowerment for Political participation as the overall thematic priority for the 18 months from July 2014 to end of December 2015. This topic was the result of a consultation with National Working Groups and INGYOs held in the second semester of 2013 and was endorsed by the Council Resolution of 20<sup>th</sup> May 2014, thus launching the Fourth Cycle of Structured Dialogue.

The overall theme of the Fourth Cycle of the Structured Dialogue is also to be seen in the context of article 165 of the Treaty stating that the European Union's action should encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe, thus underlining the importance of political participation of young people in the European Union.

Following the review and evaluation process of the Structured Dialogue and the Council Resolution of 20<sup>th</sup> May 2014, the European Steering Committee agreed on an Implementation Plan based on the renewed architecture.

During the first part of the EU Youth conference in Rome, participants provided input for a Guiding Framework, which aims to give a common understanding of the topic addressed during the 18 months and to define the context of the consultation including the formulation of the guiding questions.

The second phase aims to identify recommendations in the field of political participation that derive from the results of the main consultation, which will run from October 2014 until March 2015.

The proposals formulated during the consultations will be discussed at the EU Youth Conference in Latvia, which will conclude with recommendations from young people and policy-makers on how to empower young people to participate in democratic life in Europe. The

recommendations will be put for discussion at the high-level Policy Debate with the 28 EU Youth Ministers.

In the third phase, the main focus will be on the formulation of concrete actions in order to refine and finalise the recommendations on youth empowerment for political participation. Representatives of young people and their organisations as well as experts and public authorities will analyse the feedback from the Ministerial Policy Debate across the EU Member States and at the EU Youth Conference in Luxembourg. The final joint recommendations adopted in Luxembourg will be submitted to the Council of the EU that will consider their integration in a Council Resolution closing the cycle.