



Position Paper on the European Youth Pact

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For a Youth Pact with Impact: challenges for the implementation of the European Youth Pact

At the Spring European Council of 22-23 March, the EU Heads of State and governments adopted a 'European Youth Pact' as one of the instruments contributing to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives. The European Youth Forum already welcomed this initiative in its position paper on the proposal from January 2005 (0062-05) and is glad to see the final adoption of such a 'European Youth Pact' by the European Council and its inclusion in the overall Lisbon Strategy. In this position paper, we will focus on the further elaboration and implementation of the European Youth Pact, taking into account the conclusions from the March 22-23 European Council meeting (Council document 7619/05) and the Commission's proposal for Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (COM (2005) 141 final).

In its Bureau response to the Youth Pact proposal from 18–19 February, entitled *For a Youth Pact with Impact* (0157-05), the European Youth Forum outlined what it saw as the main challenges to be addressed by the European Youth Pact. We regret that not all of these challenges are addressed in the action lines of the Pact or the Integrated Guidelines. However, this should not prevent member states or the European Commission from dealing with these issues in their reform programmes. Especially the following issues are of high concern to us.

From school to sustainable job, from their parents' house to a sustainable own flat, young people experience today several situations which them at social risk. This is why, for the European Youth Forum the most important element of the European Youth Pact is to establish a 'safety net' to secure their progressive autonomous lives.

In the area of **education and lifelong learning**, a significant problem across Europe is that too many young people leave formal education without a qualification. The link between the lack of formal qualifications and the greater risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion is a reality that needs to be tackled. Therefore, the European Youth Forum proposes that each member state should commit to reducing early school leaving by 50% in the period 2006-2010, to achieve a Europe wide reduction from 16% of drop-outs now to 8% in 2010 by a strong policy sustaining the access to education. Furthermore, the European Youth Forum would like to stress the role of non-formal education and involvement in the youth and NGO sectors, which provide a space and opportunity for young people to develop many invaluable social and personal skills. A key element of personal and social growth is also access to culture in a wider sense. Therefore, books, music and cultural activities should be more easily accessible to young people. Therefore, the European Youth Forum proposes that each member state should invest at least 2% of their annual education budget in non-formal education by 2010.

In the field of **employment, training and entrepreneurship**, the biggest challenge by far is the high rate of youth unemployment, which continues to

rise and is still twice as high as the average unemployment rate. Consequently, the European Youth Forum renews its call – expressed in our position paper on the European Employment Strategy (0516-03) – to set young people as a priority in the European Employment strategy. In particular, we urge the EU and its member states to commit themselves to reducing youth unemployment in the EU from 18% to 9% in the period 2006-2010. As long term unemployment has severe consequences for young people, the European Youth Forum also calls on all member states to reduce the average transition period between school or training and obtaining a paid job by 50% while at the same time promoting and recognising the value of non formal education and volunteering. Member States should also increase the number of training opportunities available to young people, make training opportunities more flexible and ensure that social security networks support young people in the transition from training to work. The number of young people choosing to set up their own business remains low, so increased support, training and incentives are needed to increase the amount of young entrepreneurs by at least 50% in the period 2006-2010. Finally, as young people, particularly young women, are more likely to suffer from poor working conditions, low wages and discrimination, governments should develop an action plan to improve the working conditions of young people, with particular attention to gender equality in the labour market. In addition, national governments should have concrete plans on how to better integrate immigrants in the labour market.

The reconciliation of working life and family life cannot be achieved only by child care and child friendly policies, but also by encouraging the equal sharing of family and work responsibilities between both parents.

In this Europe of diversity, we need to pay a special attention to groups of young people facing discrimination and social exclusion. In order to include young women, migrants and ethnic minorities, disabled young people and others discriminated against due for example to their religion or sexual orientation, special measures need to be taken. We believe that young people are a resource and not a problem; not to ensure **social inclusion** means wasting the potential of this resource. Young people in particular are dependent on the safety net of a well developed social security. Most young people would not have the financial resources to provide for their social, cultural and material needs without a social security system. Therefore social care networks need to ensure that young people, particular from poor and socially disadvantaged backgrounds are not discriminated against. Especially, due to a high rate of youth unemployment, low wages of young people, dependence of young people from their parents and an insufficient level of qualification, high numbers of young people suffering from poverty. Therefore the European Youth Forum demands the EU member states and the European institutions to reduce the number young people living in poverty by 50% in the period 2006-2010 and develop dedicated programmes targeted at the most vulnerable young people.

Another great challenge the EU is recently facing is demographic ageing. The social partners, the education system and public authorities will have to

reflect on how to combat the possible discrimination caused by the demographic ageing which could directly affect young people. Therefore, the European Youth Forum asks the EU member states and the European institutions to foster the dialogue between young people and elderly people, and to find new forms of solidarity.

As mentioned above, the European Youth Forum is disappointed that **participation and active citizenship** were finally not included in the European Youth Pact. The active participation of young people in the decisions and actions that affect them is essential if we are to build democratic and prosperous societies. Citizenship and participation should not remain theory; young people should also get the opportunity to practise it. Governments have to encourage and empower participative youth organisations, providing increased resources and involving them in consultations related to policies affecting young people.

Although the freedom of movement is formally implemented in the EU, many young people still face obstacles to **mobility**. Only a small percentage of young people have the chance to go abroad during their education and training period. Also the number of young people who can move to another EU country to work is still very low. Lack of language skills still proves to be one of the main obstacles. Therefore, efforts should be taken to ensure that all young people are encouraged to speak at least two non-native languages. More generally, the European Youth Forum calls upon the EU member states to take action to facilitate an increased number of young people to work and study outside their country of origin until 2010. The EU is further challenged by migration. In the coming years, thousands of migrants will be needed to help overcome the negative impact of demographic ageing in the EU. With regards to the integration of migrants, there is still a long way to go and especially young migrants are being harmed. Therefore, the European Youth Forum asks the EU member states and the European institutions to develop an effective integration policy for young migrants.

Finally, young people should have access to appropriate and affordable **housing** if they are to enjoy a decent quality of life. Many young people remain dependent on their parents concerning housing or are forced to live in unsuitable and expensive housing. The European Youth Forum calls upon all member states to address the housing problems of young people between 18 and 30. Action plans on housing and accommodation for young people should be developed, underpinned by the commitment from the Government to spend a specific percentage of GNP per annum.

Implementing the European Youth Pact

The European Youth Forum is glad to see the incorporation of the lines of action of the European Youth Pact in the proposal for Integrated Guidelines. Now it comes down to translating these guidelines into ambitious national and EU reform programmes for 2005–2008 that include concrete targets and establish instruments aimed at achieving measurable results for young people. The European Youth Forum calls on both the European Commission

and the member states not to lose sight of the European Youth Pact as one of the instruments of the Lisbon Strategy and to show sustained commitment to achieving its objectives.

Member states

The European Youth Forum believes that each member state should develop a national reform programme with clear, ambitious and tangible goals. These goals must be underpinned with provisions stating which stakeholder is responsible for each action, by when it must be achieved and outline the resources necessary to implement it. Unless member states do this, we are but repeating the mistakes which bedevilled the Lisbon Strategy for the last five years.

While welcoming the adoption of the European Youth Pact, the European Youth Forum is disappointed that it does not set concrete targets and that its scope is more limited than we had recommended. In particular, we are disappointed that participation and active citizenship were excluded from the final text. This is particularly so since the level of engagement in community life is closely associated with other issues such as employment and education. Equally we are dissatisfied with the exclusion of the central issue of housing. However, in our view this does not prevent member states from addressing these issues in their national reform plans and we would call on them to take these issues into account.

Member states should convene special meetings/seminars with stakeholders, including youth organisations, to explore and discuss proposals for inclusion in their national reform programmes.

To improve the quality of the implementation, ensure young people's needs are addressed and increase the sense of ownership of the Lisbon strategy, member states should establish structures or mechanisms (e.g. steering groups) in developing, monitoring and evaluating the national reform programmes, involving all stakeholders, such as relevant government ministries, youth organisations, national youth councils, other NGOs, employers, trade unions and others. Unless there is a shared national vision, a common understanding by all parties and a willingness by member states to recognise and vindicate the role of young people and their organisations in the process, it will be fatally flawed. Where such structures already exist, it is vital that youth organisations and national youth councils are included where this is not already the case.

These structures and mechanisms should not only oversee the drafting of the programmes and actions at national level, but they should remain in place to oversee their implementation and evaluation. It is vital that governments engage with young people, youth organisations and national youth councils not only at the outset in developing the national reform programme, but on a continual basis throughout the during the implementation phase.

All stakeholders should be involved in contributing to the national implementation report submitted by each member state to the European Commission each year. The national reports should take the impact and effect of both regional and local policy on youth into consideration. These reports should also be subject to independent validation prior to their submission to the Commission. Also, all reports submitted by member states must be made public.

EU level

Also at the European level, a sustained commitment by all the relevant Directorates-General and Council formations to involving young people and youth organisations in the Lisbon Strategy and achieving the objectives of the European Youth Pact is important. The European Youth Forum would welcome the establishment of a coordination structure involving the relevant Directorates-General, the European Parliament, the Council, the social partners and the European Youth Forum to oversee the follow-up of the European Youth Pact. This means that all relevant Directorates-General must consult the European Youth Forum on issues concerning youth.

As well, the European Youth Forum recommends organising an EU seminar once a year to discuss progress in the implementation of the European Youth Pact, involving all stakeholders, the European Commission and European Parliament, member state governments, the EESC, social partners, other NGOs and the European Youth Forum.

The European Youth Forum also calls on the Commission to consistently include the European Youth Pact in its future proposals and communications on the Lisbon Strategy. In particular, we would urge the Commission to include a chapter outlining measures and actions in the framework of the European Youth Pact in its "Lisbon Community Programme 2005–2008". Taking note that the Commission reserved the right to issue a communication in the near future containing explanatory information to help the member states draw up their respective programmes in the context of the Integrated Guidelines, the European Youth Forum would invite the Commission to draw attention to the European Youth Pact in any such Communication.

The Communication of the European Commission on youth policy, which is scheduled to be published in May, should also take the European Youth Pact on board, setting the participation of young people and youth organisations in policies and processes that affect them, notably the Lisbon Strategy, as a main objective of a horizontal youth policy. After all, their involvement in developing and implementing the European Youth Pact can contribute to realising the objectives of the Commission's White Paper *A new impetus for European Youth*, which included the ambition of taking more account of youth in other policies, especially education, lifelong learning and mobility, employment, social integration and autonomy for young people. These

policy areas are of high importance to young people and at the same time at the core of the Lisbon Strategy. Such an approach would equally contribute to other White Paper objectives such as promoting active citizenship and the increased involvement of young people in public life.

Conclusion

The European Youth Forum strongly urges the member states as well as the European Commission to consider the European Youth Pact as a real commitment to and partnership with the young people of Europe. Now that the Pact has been adopted, it is time to move from rhetoric to action. The follow-up of the European Youth Pact should actively involve young people and youth organisations in the Lisbon Strategy and outline concrete targets, establish instruments and achieve measurable results. Only this way the Lisbon Strategy can be meaningful for young people and successful in the long term.