



Policy Paper on the Future of EU Youth Policy Development

Adopted by the European Youth Forum / Forum Jeunesse de l'Union
européenne / Forum des Organisations européennes de la Jeunesse
Council of Members, 28-29 April 2006, Prato (Italy)

Introduction

In light of the mid-term evaluation of the EU Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the Youth field taking place in 2006, the Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum (YFJ) called for the development of a *European Youth Forum (YFJ) vision for post-2006 EU Youth Policy cooperation*¹.

Based on the experience of the European Youth Forum, and its Member Organisations² who are actively involved in following the implementation of the current European youth policy framework, four main trends have been identified as regards to the future of EU youth policy: a stronger Open Method of Coordination, spaces for structured dialogue, implementation of the horizontal aspects of youth policy and greater mainstreaming of youth policy in the EU.

This policy paper, based on the experiences of youth organisations across Europe, identifies the major challenges and obstacles of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field, analyses them and then proposes new methods of implementing and monitoring this specific process and also more generally, European youth policy development in the EU.

1. Background: EU Youth Policy cooperation 2000-2006

In the past decade, the European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations have been very active in demanding and contributing to the definition and the current shape of the framework for European Union youth policy. The YFJ was deeply involved in the entire development process of the White Paper "*A new impetus for the European Youth*", adopted by the European Commission in November 2001³. The YFJ then welcomed the Council Resolution adopted in June 2002⁴ notably establishing the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field and the Common Objectives in the four priority areas: Participation, Information, Voluntary Activities and a Better Understanding and Knowledge of young people.

A first review of the process is currently taking place. Following the Council resolution on the implementation of the first two sets of Common Objectives adopted in November 2003⁵ - Participation and Information - a review of the OMC in the youth field needs to be done in 2006: on the content, but more crucially on the method.

At each phase of the different processes, the European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations asked for more recognition of the role of youth organisations and a stronger

¹ European Youth Forum Work Plan 2005-2006, adopted by the General Assembly in Madrid, November 2004.

² As a part of the process leading to this vision, the European Youth Forum has produced a Shadow Report on the implementation of the first set of EU youth policy Common Objectives on participation and information, based on the national evaluations undertaken by National Youth Councils. The YFJ contracted an independent research study on the methodology of the OMC process (this study, conducted by the Finnish Youth Research Society, will be published in May 2006, but the preliminary results of the study have been used as a background for development of this policy paper).

³ European Commission White Paper "*A new impetus for European Youth*", COM(2001) 681 final

⁴ Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field (2002/C 168/02)

⁵ Council Resolution of 25 November 2003 on Common Objectives for participation by and information for young people (2003/C 295/04)

commitment from both the European Commission and the Member States in the implementation of the Common Objectives.

The European Youth Forum recognises the evolving and constructive nature of the relationship with the European Commission and the Council of the European Union of the Youth Ministers. Youth organisations, as major stakeholders, are convinced that any further elaboration of the EU youth policy agenda has to develop hand in hand with the increased participation of young people in the discursive and decision-making processes on the matters that concern and affect them. Mechanisms and methodologies for the engagement of young people have to be further elaborated and should be of a participative and democratic nature.

EU Youth policy cooperation so far - any impetus for European youth?

The conclusions of the European Youth Forum, elaborated through its work on the first phase of the implementation of the Common Objectives of the OMC in the youth field, both at the national and European levels, showed that **youth organisations clearly felt an 'impetus' between 2000 and 2002, but unfortunately the results of the consequent process did not meet their expectations.** In the framework of the White Paper and its follow-up, a number of consultations, at different levels, took place, and a number of national committees were set up; however, limited follow up is in sight. The YFJ is concerned that there is no youth policy action plan (at the different levels), of which the Common Objectives would be part. The lack of such an action plan makes it difficult to ensure real implementation.

So far, the European Youth Forum is disappointed with the success or direct impact that the Common Objectives and their implementation have had on youth policy at the national or local levels.

Regarding the **Objectives on Participation**, consultation is not enough, as it is not result or partnership-oriented. The YFJ saw a real lack of involvement by youth organisations in the establishment of viable measures to promote the greater participation of young people in the life of civil society in general, and at the regional and local level in particular. The **role of youth organisations in enhancing the participation of young people** should be seen and understood as central, from the local to the European level. Therefore, the YFJ is calling for a sustainable dialogue to be set up with the authorities, and a long-term commitment established, for the support of youth organisations at all levels - and more specifically, for National Youth Councils, as the coordinating bodies for youth organisations at the national level.

The European Youth Forum believes that the **Common Objectives on Information** have not been given appropriate consideration. The main concern of youth organisations relating to the Common Objective on Information remains: there is a need for national coordinated strategies to further develop and enhance youth information. On the other hand whereas youth organisations in many countries are actively participating in the work of youth information centres or even being the responsible actors behind them their role has not been recognised in the policy development process.

Information regarding citizenship, involvement, or volunteering, is not reaching youth through existing channels. The YFJ sees this as one of the results of not **involving youth organisations and young people in the processes establishing these channels.** The same criticism has been addressed towards the youth portals at the national level. The creation of the European Youth Portal, despite being aimed at providing youth-friendly information to young people in Europe, was set up with limited partnership with youth organisations. In

this sense it would be important to continue the engagement of youth organisations, especially those at the national level, in the development of European information tools. Even though at the European level the European Youth Portal has gradually improved, as the concerns of youth organisations in Europe have been addressed via the YFJ, the question of ownership of this tool remains a vital one.

There is a great need to move forward on information policy and give more of an opportunity to young people, through youth organisations, to participate actively in information delivery; as is the case in some Member States. This can be achieved by involving them in the different information centres put in place, but also by giving them the opportunity to communicate their own issues and concerns, and not only on the actions and policies run by governments.

Last but not least, training young people from youth organisations, in order to provide them with better capacities to become multipliers, relaying information actively, should be a major component in the youth information action plan.

The Common Objectives highlight the role of youth organisations in the promotion of youth participation and in providing quality information to young people. Preliminary results of the analysis⁶ undertaken by the YFJ however, shows the need to ensure the **financial sustainability of youth organisations** still remains. Political commitment to further youth policy is not enough, as it should be followed up with the adequate allocation of resources to implement those commitments. Youth organisations need to have financial sustainability to be able to promote youth engagement and involve more young people in their activities. Proper funding would also be necessary regarding the need to communicate the aims and activities of youth organisations, to young people and also to society as a whole, using the appropriate tools. For instance, the YFJ sees the financing of youth work and youth organisations from the profits of the national lottery monopolies as a sustainable and good practice.

2. Strengthening the Open Method of Coordination

The European Youth Forum has welcomed the European Commission's proposal⁷ to evaluate the balance between the flexibility and effectiveness of the Open Method of Coordination before launching the new cycles⁸. The entire Open Method of Coordination, including the priority areas, should consequently be re-evaluated in 2009. Based on the real-life experiences of youth organisations working with the implementation of the Common Objectives across the EU, the **European Youth Forum is convinced that it is time to put a strong emphasis on the effectiveness of youth policy cooperation and transform the political commitments into action**. This can be achieved through strengthening the methodology used, as well as creating genuine partnership between youth organisations and the public authorities responsible for the implementation. Increasing transparency of the process should be one of the key elements of strengthening the Open Method of Coordination. The Member States and the European Commission should make all relevant documents public and also easily accessible to young people and youth organisations.

⁶ See footnote 2

⁷ Communication of the European Commission to the Council *Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe - implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship*- COM(2005) 206 - 30 May 2005

⁸ YFJ Response to EC Communication ("Addressing the concerns...") "Leading the way and providing the means"

Methodology used for the Open Method of Coordination in the Youth field

The Open Method of Coordination applied in the Youth field can be defined as the lowest level of policy convergence capacity⁹ and is based on voluntarism when it comes to the implementation framework¹⁰. This has been clearly identified since its establishment. For the European Youth Forum, it is evident that the shortcomings and the slowness in achieving the goals reveals the weakness of the process itself, and points to the need to redefine the balance between its flexibility and effectiveness. The European Youth Forum is convinced that the **effectiveness of the process can be boosted through the development of measurable indicators and a benchmarking system for the implementation of the Common Objectives**, along with the **introduction of national action plans**. Additionally, at the European level, a Community action plan, to clearly define what actions are going to be taken in order to implement the Common Objectives, needs to be created.

When the OMC in the Youth Field was still under development, the European Youth Forum demanded indicators. This was seen by the Member States as an interference with their competences. The European Youth Forum sees the question of competence to be a rather ambivalent one: as the Open Method of Coordination represents the voluntary political cooperation of Member States and is used only in the fields where European Union competence does not exist or is limited, lack of competence should not be an issue. Thus, it is when considering the question of competence that the very nature of OMC-arrangements should be borne in mind.

The European Youth Forum suggests that to strengthen the process does not necessarily imply any transfer of competence, but that it is rather a way to enhance the implementation of what Member States and the Commission have already committed themselves to. Benchmarking is more a quantitative tool to help follow-up the national policies, and has been used in most of the OMC processes - also those dealing with policy areas with very unique national characteristics¹¹ - revealing its efficiency in following the evolvments of the process. The European Youth Forum underlines that benchmarking should not be seen as a possible disciplinary process only because it is a quantitative tool: **the development of measurable and quantitative indicators to complement existing qualitative ones** would not lead to increased harmonisation of national youth policies nor would it create hidden Union competence, but it **would contribute to the added value that the European cooperation in the field of youth can give to the development of national youth policies**.

Indicators and Benchmarking

Some first steps in developing indicators for youth policy have already been made. The EUYOUNG¹² project has been developing European comparative data on the political participation of young people, and five comparable factors have been identified: a representative system (voting, party work); political consumerism; political discourse; political protest; and illegal and violent forms. In the same context, some non-comparable

⁹ Developed by Martin Rhodes 2005 in "the scientific objectives of the NEWGOV project. A revised framework", NEWGOV consortium conference 30 May 2005, in Florence.

¹⁰ Gerda Falkner 2005, "Complying with Europe: EU harmonisation and soft law in the Member States", Cambridge University Press.

¹¹ E.g. OMC processes on Education, Employment, Research and Development, and Social inclusion

¹² EUYOUNG was funded under the European Commission Fifth Framework Programme (1998-2002) Improving the Human Potential - Key Action: "Improving the Socio-Economic Knowledge Base" - www.sora.at/EUYOUNG.

indicators have also been highlighted, such as political participation through internet discussion forums. This research should be used and developed in order to be applicable to EU Member States, and to then draw up a picture of European youth participation. Youth participation indicators at the local level, identifying the opportunities and possibilities offered to young people, should also be established. The European Commission, in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination in Education, had asked the Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning to develop indicators on active citizenship; but while these specific indicators do not only target youth, they could also be used as a reference in the youth field.

Indicators should be developed in different priority areas of the Open Method of Coordination and be used to monitor the implementation of the Common Objectives. At a later stage, such indicators should also be developed to cover other fields of youth policy. Youth employment could therefore be one of the possible fields of political cooperation, especially since there is well developed data and analysis on this matter. **The European Youth Forum calls on the European Commission to take the initiative to develop measurable indicators, based on existing research and knowledge, to follow the implementation of the Common Objectives in partnership with the Member States and youth organisations.**

Index-based approach to follow the implementation

The European Youth Forum proposes an index-based approach to be used in the OMC in the Youth field to follow the implementation of the Common Objectives. In the index-based approach, the progress of Member States during an implementation cycle is followed with reference to the initial situation of the respective countries at the beginning of the cycle. This tool would not be a ranking instrument between Member States, but rather, a tool to ensure that the right implementation measures are taken, and also that none of the Member States ever decreases its performances.

National Action Plans and Community Action Plan

In the context of the mid-term review of the Open Method of Coordination, **the European Youth Forum reiterates its proposal for the development of national action plans on the implementation of the European youth policy framework.** Such an action plan would be the translation of the political commitment of the Member States in the framework of the OMC in the youth field, the resolution adopted in June 2002 and the European Youth Pact adopted in March 2005.

To ensure the coherence of policy and the possibilities to fully implement the action plan, the European Union should develop a timeframe following the implementation cycle of the Common Objectives. This would provide an opportunity for Member States to cooperate and dialogue with National Youth Councils to develop and monitor those actions plans. National Action Plans for the implementation of the OMC Common Objectives should feed into those national youth policy plans that already exist in some Member States, or to the cross-sectoral youth policy programmes - the establishment of which the YFJ is calling for - in order to implement the *horizontal aspects* as agreed in the Council Resolution 2002.

Role of young people in EU Youth policy - from consultations to genuine partnership

As previously explained, one of the major obstacles for the effective implementation of the Common Objectives so far, has been the lack of genuine partnership between public authorities and youth organisations. The European Youth Forum notes that the consultations used so far have been useful, but they do not ensure that the views and

concerns expressed will be effectively taken into account: neither current consultations represent a coherent process in developing the youth policy agenda in the EU. The YFJ is concerned that up to now, too many measures have been implemented in a top-down manner - from public authorities.

The European Youth Forum strongly demands increased partnership with youth organisations throughout the different stages of the Open Method of Coordination - both at Member State and European levels. In the re-launched, consolidated and enhanced post-2006 Common Objectives on Participation and Information, the **involvement of youth organisations and the recognition of their legitimate role as major stakeholders** in the design, implementation and monitoring of the policies affecting youth, **has to become reality**. The European Youth Forum believes that such a genuine partnership and mutual understanding can be developed through a method of structured dialogue.

3. Structured dialogue

The European Youth Forum is convinced that the next step to be undertaken in order to develop better youth policies in Europe and address the concerns of young Europeans, is the creation of a system for structured dialogue between decision makers and youth organisations - as the democratic and legitimate representatives of young people. Structured dialogue would not only bring different actors closer together, but also lead to better elaborated policies, as experience and expertise from the different actors - youth organisations, public authorities and researchers - could be taken into account at all stages of the policy cooperation. At the European level, the European Youth Forum sees the development of structured dialogue as a way of bridging the gap between European institutions and young people; which is also crucial in view of the debate on the future of Europe and how the European Union could be closer to its citizens - primarily the young.¹³ Furthermore, the discussions in the framework of Plan D serve the purpose of formulating proposals for the future shape of the European Union. The decision-making of the EU has to be based on participatory and representative democratic processes, such as a structured dialogue between young people and decision-makers.

In this regard, the European Youth Forum welcomes the Council resolution of November 2005¹⁴ in which Member States committed to "*develop[ing] structured dialogue with young people and their organisations at national, regional and local level, on policy actions affecting them, with the involvement of researchers in the youth field*", as well as asking the European Commission "*to develop structured dialogue with young people at the European level, on policy actions affecting them*".

From the perspective of the European Youth Forum, structured dialogue can be seen as the implementation of two political priorities already agreed by Member States: Participation and Better Knowledge and Greater Understanding of youth. It not only contributes to the quality of policies by anchoring them into practical knowledge on the challenges of youth work and the living conditions of young people, but it also - and very importantly so - recognises the right of young people to contribute to the development of policies that affect them.

The European Youth Forum's vision on structured dialogue

¹³ As called for by the European Council, *inter alia*, in its Laeken Declaration in 2001 - see the Conclusions of the European Council 14-15 December 2001 and the Proposal for the Constitutional Treaty establishing the European Union, 2004/C 310/01.

¹⁴ Council Resolution on the implementation of the European Youth Pact and the promotion of active citizenship (2005/C 292/03); adopted 14–15 November 2005. This resolution is a follow-up to the Commission Communication on European policies concerning youth from 30 May 2005.

The European Youth Forum asks for a structured dialogue that is priority-focused and action-oriented. Through structured dialogue, decision-makers and young people together can define how the concerns of young people can be effectively addressed through different policy fields and policy measures. In order to achieve this, the structured dialogue has to serve two goals: the definition of a common political agenda encompassing the concerns of young people, and a partnership for developing and implementing the concrete policies needed to address those concerns. In this framework the structured dialogue should not be limited to priority areas, but be linked to the implementation of the second pillar of the Council resolution 2002 - the horizontal aspects.

The European Youth Forum believes that, at the local and regional levels, the *Revised European Charter on Participation of Young People to Local and Regional Life*¹⁵, could be used as the basis for the development of such a process. In countries in which such dialogue does not exist at the national level, it would be the primary role of National Youth Councils to propose a model of cooperation with their government.

At the European level, the European Youth Forum calls for structured dialogue taking place on two political levels: one regarding the political agenda of EU youth policy cooperation and the other, the monitoring and the implementation of the policies.

Setting the European youth policy agenda through structured dialogue

On a more strategic level, the structured dialogue would serve as a method to define the common political agenda of Member States, European institutions and youth organisations - encompassing the concerns of young people. The European Youth Forum envisages a two-step process for these regular meetings.

Structured dialogue should be based on the engagement of representatives of youth organisations meeting on a regular basis to discuss contemporary issues in the youth policy field¹⁶. *These meeting forums should be interlinked and should avoid repetition, becoming, rather, part of a structured agenda while advancing the interests of young people in Europe.* Representatives from the YFJ would be designated to present these views at the structured dialogue meetings, embodying a broad variety of organisational and regional experiences.

From the decision-makers' side, the European Commission (all relevant Directorates-General) and representatives of the European Parliament should participate in the meetings. The Council should be represented by the troika of Presidencies, thus ensuring coherence over the Presidencies.

Partnership for following-up the implementation of EU youth policies

A system for structured dialogue should also be developed to create stronger partnership between the European Commission, youth organisations and Member States to follow up the implementation of EU youth policies. The European Commission has already put in place this form of structured dialogue in certain fields, meaning that the main

¹⁵ Charter COE.L.9/94 CH 1994, adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe and endorsed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 128(2003).

¹⁶ In this regard, the Youth events of Council Presidencies - *if and only if* organised recognising the representative expert role and taking into account the independence of youth organisations to set up the agenda and the working methods for these events - could serve as these conferences.

stakeholders are consulted¹⁷ and then the results of the discussions with the European Commission are taken into account in the policy developments. This kind of system could be applied to the youth field as well.

The European Youth Forum calls on the European Commission to set up a system of advisory committees to follow each of the current priority areas of the Open Method of Coordination and the second pillar of Council resolution 2002 - the horizontal aspects. The advisory committee responsible for following the horizontal aspects could also follow the implementation of the European Youth Pact. The advisory committees should be comprised of the different stakeholders in the youth field: representatives of youth organisations with expertise in the relevant topic - nominated through the European Youth Forum; representatives of Member States; public bodies working in the youth field; and youth researchers.

The role of these advisory committees would be to support, assist and advise the European Commission in drafting proposals on the implementation of different policies in the youth field. Establishment of such a system would enable the Commission, as the coordinating body of the EU youth policy cooperation, to gather experience and feedback directly from the field, and then to adjust the policies in real time, while also favouring the exchange of knowledge between different stakeholders.

4. Youth policy - from Marginal to Mainstream

"A framework of European cooperation in the youth field" was drawn up in the Council resolution of 27 June 2002¹⁸, in which the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field was also established. This resolution foresaw a cross-sectoral approach to youth policy, stressing the importance of the so called *horizontal issues*, and stating that "*the other* [strand of the cooperation would be] *taking more into account the youth dimension in other policies*". Since then, another important policy development regarding youth issues has taken place, as the European Youth Pact was adopted by the Heads of State and Government in March 2005, introducing a strong youth element in the re-launched Lisbon process¹⁹.

The European Youth Forum believes that after a number of years, and with the different processes currently existing, it is now the time to address seriously and profoundly the horizontal nature that youth policy should be given. Whereas the Council resolution of 2002 already identified a range of policy areas that are of particular relevance to young people in the EU youth policy cooperation, it is still lacking a clear direction as well as a mechanism on how these horizontal aspects would be tackled. In this regard, the European Youth Pact can be seen as a good example of how youth issues can be mainstreamed within a general EU policy framework such as the Lisbon strategy.

On the occasion of the review of the first two sets of Common Objectives, the European Youth Forum recalls the commitment made by the Member States and the European Commission to enhance further their cooperation in the youth field, and also to the horizontal aspects of youth policy. This commitment should be followed by the

¹⁷ In the area of agriculture, the Commission can consult the advisory committees (stakeholders) on any matter relating to the CAP or rural development policy. The chairman of each committee can propose that the Commission consult the committee on a matter for which it is responsible. When the committee adopts an opinion unanimously, the Commission communicates the results of the committee's deliberations to the Council if the committee so proposes. The Commission is not bound by the opinion of these committees, but it sets great store by them, and informs committee members how it has taken account of their views.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Presidency conclusions of the European Council 24-25 March 2005.

establishment of concrete mechanisms and structures which would enable co-operation between different governmental departments and the cross-sectoral design and implementation of youth policy. The European Youth Forum understands the political and bureaucratic difficulties in the development of such mechanisms within national and European administrations, but this cannot be used as an excuse for not making these commitments matter.

The European Youth Forum calls upon all governments to develop cross-sectoral national youth policy programmes²⁰ that should be drafted in cooperation with different governmental departments and National Youth Councils, and be adopted by a governmental authority that is competent in making decisions that bind the different governmental sectors.²¹ In relation to the role of youth organisations in implementing such programmes, the European Youth Forum stresses that National Youth Councils should not only be consulted but empowered to follow implementation effectively. The role of structured dialogue (in this sense) becomes crucial.

As part of the process leading to the fully-fledged mainstreaming of youth in all relevant policy areas, the European Youth Forum reminds the Member States of two existing processes that could be contributory. The European Youth Forum once again renews its call for meaningful and ambitious National Reform Programmes in the context of the Lisbon strategy, which would take account of the commitment of Heads of State and Government within the European Youth Pact. On the local and regional levels, the full and effective implementation of the *Revised European Charter on Participation of Young People in Local and Regional life* would set a coherent framework for mainstreaming youth issues in the policies of Local and Regional authorities.

Mainstreaming youth policy in the European Union

The European Youth Forum reiterates its demand²² for the establishment of an inter-service group within the European Commission, in order to ensure the mainstreaming of youth policy. The European Youth Forum believes that such an initiative from the side of the European Commission would also encourage the Member States to develop interdisciplinary youth policy coordination mechanisms.

As a tool to take youth issues better into account in the different policy areas of the European Union, the European Youth Forum also calls for the introduction of a *Youth Impact Assessment* for legislative proposals. This implies the development of technical models which would take into account the legislative and administrative settings of proposals, thereby allowing the European Commission to monitor the impact of policies affecting youth.

5. Conclusions

Based on its experiences from the first cycle of the implementation of the Common Objectives, and the realities of youth organisations across Europe who were actively participating, the European Youth Forum is convinced that it has come time to shift gears in EU youth policy development. The commitments made have now to be realised.

²⁰ The United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth, adopted by the UN General Assembly, also calls for development of such national action plans for youth policy. A/RES/50/81, 30th March 1996.

²¹ The YFJ notes that in some countries such programmes already exist. In general their approach and effective cross-sectoral implementation could be further strengthened.

²² See, *inter alia*, the European Youth Forum reactions to the European Youth Pact (*signum*) European Commission's Communication (*signum*).

In order to increase the impact of EU youth policy and to better take into account the concerns of young people, the European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations call, on the occasion of the mid term evaluation of the Common Objectives on Participation and Information, for:

- *a stronger **Open Method of Coordination** in the youth field*
- *the establishment of a viable, continuous and elaborate **structured dialogue** in the field of youth policy of the European Union*
- *the introduction of an effective mechanism in order to **implement** the second pillar of the June 2002 Council resolution - **the horizontal aspects***
- ***the mainstreaming of youth policy in the European Union.***

This can be done :

- by developing measurable indicators and a benchmarking system for the implementation of the Open Method of Coordination and by introducing an index-based approach.
- by implementing the structured dialogue taking place at two political levels; one regarding the political agenda of the EU youth policy cooperation, and the other one the monitoring and the implementation of the policies.
- by introducing the Youth Impact Assessment and by establishing an interservice group within the European Commission.

The European Youth Forum further calls for EU youth policy cooperation that is more visionary, based on mutual trust and partnership between public authorities and youth organisations, and which encompasses the range of concerns of young people. Most importantly, it must make a difference in enhancing active youth citizenship and in creating better living conditions for young people. The European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations, for their part, are ready to take on this challenge and from the time of publication of the White Paper, remain willing to engage further in elaborating and implementing such policies.