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Investing in Youth: from childhood to adulthood¹

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Outline

Early investments are crucial for all aspects of human capital formation. Investing in youth is an occasion to reunite social and economic goals. Investing early in youth education and care is much more efficient than repairing later when grown ups turn out to be unskilled, unemployed, depressed or violent. Investing in youth is a centre-piece for modernising our societies to stimulate performance and cohesion.

A number of youth policy initiatives have been implemented across Europe, but the youth agenda can be further pushed forward in three dimensions. First, more investments are needed from public and private sources. Second, most fields of youth policy interact with each other and the situation of youth is deeply dependant on mainstream policy decisions. This calls for appropriate policy coordination. Third, there is ample opportunity for policy improvement through exchange of practical knowledge and experience.

This report distinguishes five fields which need increased political attention and investments. The starting conditions for successful human capital investment are created in the early stages. This requires investments in children's well-being and development, to avoid child poverty or other unfavourable socio-economic conditions. A second prerequisite for successful investment is good health, of particular importance in the light of new or growing challenges such as mental illness or obesity.

In the second stage, the core of the investment lies in education. The challenges here are pressing, since future economies require higher needs to be fulfilled by fewer people and greater importance is put on social skills.

Once education has been completed successfully, the job market should cater for young arrivals and they in turn should be ready for the job market. This implies labour markets that do not favour insiders over outsiders, and systems that guarantee smooth adjustment into a fully-fledged working life. It also requires young people to participate in wider society.

There is a need for coherence across policy fields and layers. Successful policies are often policies that are both inclusive and concrete. For example, it is more effective to open a one-stop-shop in schools for health or health-related issues, than to single out any one particular health issue. For primary education to be effective a common approach is needed on the whole range of issues including teacher quality, segregation, early dropouts and education to citizenship programmes. Labour market institutions must be tailored to avoid hindrance to rapid youth entry. Furthermore, these institutions should be underpinned by educational requirements. Anti poverty measures should be made coherent with actions to increase labour participation of women and child care facilities.

Youth projects that are successful are often projects that involve a variety of stakeholders. Youth initiatives that fail are often characterized by several organisations working on similar subjects but in isolation.

What is needed above all is a strong call to public authorities, the private sector and communities for a strategy of investment in youth. Young people themselves and their parents should be involved. Youth has often featured on the EU agenda in the last few years. A consensus exists on the need to take action to help young people with education, employment and civic participation. A new political momentum is needed to stress the timely importance of investing in youth and further enhance the coherence between Community and Member States' actions.

Investing in youth: from childhood to adulthood

1 Introduction

This paper calls for an investment-based vision of a modern Europe in which both seniors and youngsters contribute to growth and social cohesion. The Commission Communication to the Spring Council on the Lisbon Strategy in 2005 stated that ‘The future of Europe and the future of the Lisbon Strategy are closely linked to young people. The Union and the Member States must ensure that the reforms proposed help to give them a first chance in life and equip them with skills needed throughout their lives’.²

Investing in youth is, indeed, one of the key responses for Europeans to the challenges created by rapidly changing social, economic and demographic environments. These trends require young people to be more cognitively, socially, and politically skilled as well as to have confidence in their future.³ New economic and social realities imply that youngsters need to be employable and adaptable. It is more effective to invest in youth than to repair later, if badly equipped adults turn out to be unskilled, unemployed or depressed. As G. Esping-Andersen puts it, ‘There is one basic finding that overshadows all others, namely that remedial policies for adults are a poor and costly substitute for intervention in childhood. Solid investments in children and youth now will diminish welfare problems among future adults’.⁴ This paper will argue that Europe here has an important role to play.

Investing in youth is an opportunity to reunite social and economic goals. Some observers advocate the urgent need to develop a ‘warmer’ and ‘caring’ face to Europe in order to help European integration (and the Single Market) to develop and prosper.⁵ Giving special attention to youth could represent an efficient as well as a highly symbolic boost for Europe. It could revamp its social dimension and increase the sense of belonging of its citizens which is itself essential to achieve its economic and social objectives. Moreover it would result in much needed greater confidence of young people in their future.

There are at least four interrelated reasons for investing more in youth: (i) to improve the current situation of children and young adults; (ii) to speed up the modernisation of the social models in Europe; (iii) to confront demographic trends and intergenerational imbalance, and (iv) to prove our sense of responsibility for the future.

1. To **improve the current situation** of young adults. The current condition of young adults is a matter of considerable concern. Social unrest (in the U.K. and France) has shed light on their precarious situation, particularly of those belonging to minority groups. This difficulty is shared by most young people as markets’ needs for labour flexibility rest mainly on their shoulders. Such a situation for young people differs between Member States, but almost everywhere their unemployment rate is about twice that of adults.⁶ Higher demands are put on

² European commission *Working together for growth and jobs A new start for the Lisbon Strategy*. Communication. COM(2005) 24 final.

³ The report will not go into the discussion on what constitutes ‘youth’. We will consider the end of youth as the moment of attainment of financial autonomy and full participation in society.

⁴ Gösta Esping-Andersen: ‘A child-centred investment strategy’ in *Why We Need a New Welfare State*, Oxford University Press 2002.

⁵ Maurizio Ferrera: ‘Friends, not Foes: But what kind of Friendship? The European Union and National Welfare States’ in A. Giddens, P. Diamond and R. Liddle (eds.) *Global Europe, social Europe*, Cambridge Policy Press.

⁶ Youth employment ratio (unemployment as a share of total young population) 8.4% against 6.2% for the entire population, would give a less dark picture. See *Youth Employment in the EU*. DG Empl., October 2006.

the quality and levels of their education. In most Member States, it takes a long time before young people find stable jobs and most young adults find themselves in a difficult financial situation. Early school leavers face increasing difficulties in finding work, against a background of declining demand for unskilled workers and a general rise in the level of attainment. The aspiration for autonomy of the great majority of young people today is greater than the autonomy they can achieve. This situation undermines their general integration into society as adults and citizens and raises their resentment and fears of change.

2. To speed up the ***modernisation of our social model(s)*** we have to think in terms of social investments. Investing in children and youth is a way to recast social protection and modernise social policies which fail to take into account the risks associated to changing family patterns and the needs of the labour market. While the labour market and social inclusion of young adults is a major issue in many European countries, the focus of policies should not only concentrate on those who are about to enter the labour market (18 to 25 year-olds). The general functioning of the labour market is of paramount importance. Besides, successful policies should take a lifelong view on individuals and their human capital from the very youngest to the most senior. Research underlines the importance of massive mainstreamed early investment to avoid the development of problematic groups of children especially with regards to vulnerable parts of the population. This implies a shift in social investment strategies from cure to prevention.

3. To confront ***demographic trends and intergenerational imbalance***. In the near future fewer young people will have to provide for an increasing number of retiring seniors.⁷ Migration flows will not compensate for these changes. The younger generation will have to contribute to rising pension costs. This calls for a new intergenerational contract, new forms of solidarity between generations. Youth has to be given the best chances through education, social cohesion and a rebalancing of the financial burden between the active and the retired parts of the population. We need a sustainable policy (with long term effects) that underpins a knowledge society, manages future risks (inequity in longer life, social exclusion, etc.) and helps to enhance fertility.

4. To prove our ***sense of responsibility for the future***. Today's concern for sustainable development has not sufficiently been matched by an equivalent concern for human resources. Any 'investing in youth' strategy aims to enhance the chances of the current and future generations. In this regard, three inter-generational equity and efficiency issues have to be borne in mind: (i) *Breaking the poverty cycle*. Poverty is highly transmitted through generations. Interventions related to early childhood education, health and employment should break the poverty cycle; (ii) *Designing a new intergenerational contract*. Declining fertility and increasing life expectancy creates a larger pool of elders requiring care and also concentrates this burden on a diminished pool of potential care providers. There is a risk of uneven sharing of the burden between generations; (iii) *Investing now in the world of the future*. The well-being of future generations depends primarily on the societies we build today, on the quality and quantity of assets (including human capital) that future generations will inherit. In this sense, providing an appropriate legacy for a working-age population faced with an ageing society is increasingly needed: for instance in providing a smooth labour market, a healthy environment.

In the next sections, we list the issues of particular importance as regards young people and the interactions between them. Section 2 discusses the role of human capital as the centre for youth investment, while section 3 deals with youth from an investment perspective

⁷ See European Commission: *The demographic challenge: an opportunity for Europe*, Communication. October 2006.

announcing **five top priorities: child well-being, health, education, labour market integration and citizenship and politics**. Section 4 concludes by discussing the role the EU can play to enhance investments in youth.

2 Human capital as the centre of youth investment

To succeed in tomorrow's world, the European youth of today must above all develop their human capital and be supported in consequence. This involves a complex multi-faceted and multi-staged investment strategy. As far as human capital is concerned, investing in youth is complex since it requires by its very nature a combined effort of the youth themselves, their parents, schools, non-governmental organisations, and various layers of government. This means that apart from the complexities of the issue itself, there is always a serious coordination problem to be solved. In addition there is a timing issue. For all aspects of human capital formation, early investments are crucial. Not only is it more efficient to prevent 'problems' than to solve them afterwards, it is also the case that, in the words of Nobel Prize Laureate J. Heckman, 'early success breeds later success, just as early failure breeds later failure'.⁸ This applies to cognitive skills, social skills, health and culture, and is even transferable to next generations. This view does not rule out later investment that provides people with a second chance.

Certainly, a holistic approach is needed to handle the complexity of human capital. But first the starting conditions for a successful investment must be there. This requires in the first place to favour children's well-being and development and to avoid child poverty or unfavourable socio-economic surroundings. A second prerequisite for successful investment is good health, of particular importance in the light of new or growing challenges such as mental illness or obesity.

Once the prerequisites are there, the core of the investment lies in education. The challenges here are pressing since future economies require higher needs to be fulfilled by fewer people, social skills are growing in importance, while the most recent OECD 'Education at a Glance' report shows that Europe is lagging behind in a number of fields: a large share of young people do not complete secondary school; funding (the gap with other OECD countries is about 1.5 % of GDP)⁹, especially from the private sector, is insufficient; education systems do not compensate enough for socio-economic background disadvantages.

Once education has been completed successfully, the job market should be sufficiently ready for young arrivals and they themselves should be ready for the job market. This implies labour markets that do not favour insiders over outsiders, and systems that guarantee smooth adjustment into a fully-fledged working life. On a different level it also requires young people to participate in wider society. This is a challenge, given the growing lack of interest of young people in traditional politics.

There are linkages between the various stages of investment. Human capital formation is not just a simple set of disjoint investments over time. The situation of youth in the labour market depends on the smooth functioning of the labour market in general and, furthermore, the poverty and social exclusion of parents seriously limits the opportunities open to children and their access to opportunities in later life, thus compromising the future well-being of society as a whole. As for women's employment, for instance, we know it is a good lever for fighting

⁸ Heckman J.J. *Invest in the very young*. In: Tremblay RE, Barr RG, Peters RDeV, eds. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development* [online]. Montreal, Quebec: Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development; 2004:1-2.

⁹ European Commission (2006): *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training*.

poverty but the quality of their work has surely to be improved in relation also with the development of children (and family). Studies show that for the development of the child, parents (women and men) need to have quality work with flexible hours but also job security and a pressure-free work environment. Youth participation in society is important for the acceptance of youth policies. It is all the more important that young people rarely feel their voices are heard. Here too, learning begets learning, since the early dissemination to children of information regarding rights and duties, knowledge about the functioning of institutions and respect for the freedom and well-being of others pays off in future behaviour.

There is a need for coherence across policy fields and layers. Successful policies are often policies that are both inclusive and concrete. For example, it is more effective to open a one-stop-shop in schools for health or health-related issues, than to single out any one particular health issue. For primary education to be effective, a philosophy is needed on the whole chain of teacher quality, segregation. Singling out one particular policy problem may be ineffective. Labour market institutions must be tailored to avoid hindrance to rapid youth entry. Besides, these institutions should be underpinned by educational requirements. Poverty measures should be made coherent with actions to increase labour participation of women and child care facilities. Youth projects that are successful are often projects that involve a variety of stakeholders. Youth policies that fail are often characterized by several organisations working on similar subjects but in isolation.

3 Youth as an economic, social and political investment

Five interrelated and cross-cutting policy fields should have the highest priority on an agenda for investing in Youth: Child Well-being, Health, Education, Employment and Civic Participation of young people. These issues are strongly connected (see above). In many ways, European welfare states and other institutions are well equipped to tackle the challenges. But there is no room for complacency. Youth investment is an opportunity, and one that needs priority. The ‘malaise’ of youth squeezed between increasing demands for performance, knowledge and adaptability and the crumbling of old types of securities is universal.¹⁰

One should keep in mind that girls and boys are affected in a very different manner. While being on an equalising trend, the opportunities for girls and for boys are still very far apart in terms of access to (and positions in) the labour market, availability of resources, access to education in scientific disciplines, in terms of responsibility for the family and caring needs, and consequently for their civic participation. Physiological differences in teenage years add to the social construction of differences as to health hazards and risks (pregnancy, violence) and to constrain the freedom of girls after puberty.

3.1 Child well-being

One of the crucial findings in contemporary research is that it is ‘very early child investments that matter most’. So any policy aiming at preparing a healthy future should first and foremost make sure that individuals have a ‘strong start’ from birth.¹¹ To give all children the best chances to develop the variety of their skills, we need to give each child the widest opportunities to develop into a confident and responsible young girl or boy and a productive

¹⁰ For instance the *World Bank Report for 2007* deals with it from a development perspective.

¹¹ As highlighted by Ruth Lister commenting on the ‘new welfare paradigm’ of considering children as citizens, workers and parents of the future, we should also be reminded that ‘children deserve a secure, safe and happy childhood for its own sake’ in *Investing in children and childhood: a new welfare paradigm and its implications*.

adult. Investing in all children is also necessary because the future labour force will be shrinking and needs to confront the issue of increasingly large dependent groups.

Child poverty is rightly recognised already by many Member States as the most pressing of issues, as the poverty experienced by children has long-lasting impacts on their health, education, socialisation and future employment. Poor children experience a disproportionate share of deprivation, disadvantage, bad health and bad school outcomes. When they grow up, they are more likely to become unemployed, to get low paid jobs, to live in social housing and to be involved in anti-social behaviour. Moreover, in most countries they are likely to transfer their poverty of opportunities to their own children. This has an economic, a social and a political cost which has to be put against the costs of early interventions to reduce the risks of future negative outcomes and social exclusion.

Challenges

The last three decades have seen a pervasive increase of child poverty rates. The poverty indicators are everywhere higher for children than those of the entire population. There are about 94 million children and young people below 18 living in the EU. Around 20 million of them (19%) have known an above average risk of income poverty compared to adults.¹² Some situations bring particular risks: children living in single parent families and large families; children in non-working households or with parents working in insecure, temporary and low paid employment. Migrant children and ethnic minorities are often in a precarious situation.¹³ Remedial policies to these worrying and counterproductive trends involve a number of initiatives ranging from different types of income transfers (cash and/or tax benefits, children's 'endowment', etc.), to labour market measures aiming at improving the family income (by encouraging parental employment, and particularly quality employment and equal opportunities for mothers) to universal measures for the child itself, i.e. access to early childhood education and care.

Early education is the second major issue which requires investment if the best chances for their development are to be given to all children. Studies clearly show that children who participate in high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) develop higher-order reasoning and problem solving skills, are more cooperative and considerate of others, develop greater self-esteem and are better equipped to make an effective transition to compulsory schooling. The effects are more significant and long-lasting with children from disadvantaged socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds but benefits affect all children. The cognitive social and emotional development of children who have attended quality ECEC improves their likelihood of educational success and further for successful integration into the labour market. This appears as a clear conclusion of the regular reviews of the issue made by OECD since the 1996 education ministerial meeting on 'making lifelong learning a reality for all'.¹⁴ A broad system of nurseries and pre-schools endowed with qualified personnel and affordable for all parents would avoid the development of disadvantaged groups of children. This would also help to limit social and ethnic inheritance of poverty, for instance by having all children

¹² Aassve, Arnstein, Maria Iacovou and Letizia Mencarini (2005) 'Youth Poverty in Europe: What do We Know?' *ISER Working Papers* No. 2005-2.

¹³ About integration of migrants as well as migration, see Beutin R., M. Canoy, A. Horvath, A. Hubert, F. Lerais, P. Smith, M. Sochacki : 'Migration and public perception', Bureau of European Policy Advisers, European Commission, October 2006. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy_advisers/publications/index_en.htm

¹⁴ The latest conclusions of the investigations done by OECD on Early Childhood education and Care over the years are to be found in *Starting strong II* 2006.

learn and speak the national language before entering primary school, and avoid the singling out of underperforming children already at the age of five for costly catch up schemes.¹⁵

Priorities

Needless to insist on the fact that child poverty must be at the top of the agenda because of the long-lasting effects it embeds and the interactions this issue has with other challenges (health, education). Three complementary problems need to be addressed within an investment strategy in child well-being: (i) Measures directed towards the development of the child with a specific emphasis on the significance of early years for children's future development: Early childhood education and care ; (ii) Measures aiming at improving the well-being of parents with a special focus on the quality of maternal employment; (iii) The provision of money through various types of income transfers and asset endowment should be carefully assessed. Finally, experience proves that improving the well-being of children requires regular and visible monitoring.

Develop universal access to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): The issue is to translate promises into deeds by mobilising all existing instruments and policies to these ends. Access should be universal (free or at very low cost for children from low-income families) and of quality. The quality of the service should meet the developmental and educational goals of early childhood programmes. Regular high-level monitoring of the quantity and the quality of ECEC facilities could help to improve services by:- comparing and valuing quality (local) programmes with regard to the cognitive social and emotional development of children and the likelihood of educational success;-developing partnership funding and -enhancing staff training, pay and motivation.

Promote maternal education attainments and employment in quality jobs: Children tend to fare better on behaviour, cognitive and academic outcomes when welfare-to-work programmes result in both the employment of mothers and increased income. This entails also an adapted timing as regards parent's needs, new forms of organisation of public services in the caring sector and for low-skilled mothers (especially if they are migrants), the provision of specific training and employment assistance.

Income transfers: There is a need to improve our knowledge of the impact of various forms of transfers on family life and children. Member States could profit from the sharing of a very diverse range of experiences through an annual review of the type of income transfers which have worked best and why. In the UK for instance, the intervention of the women's budget group revealed that improved results for the child occurred when the direct recipient of the transfers was the carer rather than the head of household.

Asset endowment: There is an increasing amount of evidence that starting out on adulthood with an endowment of financial and other assets can make a significant difference to life chances. It is also likely that acquiring the saving habit and the associated skills of financial literacy early in life help with later capital accumulation and entrepreneurship. Several member states are showing interest in schemes that provide asset endowments for youth, while at the same time encouraging families to save for their children and giving the children themselves power over the accumulating assets. These include the Italian plan for '*dotie per*

¹⁵ A key finding from a recent study on policy measures concerning disadvantaged youth commissioned by DG Empl. (coordinated by A. Walther and A. Pohl from the Institute for Regional Innovation and Social Research of Tübingen with a network of experts) show that remedial policies which single out 'problematic' youth and develop special programs bear the risk of undermining the self esteem of children and young people and their confidence and readiness to overcome problems. Strategies focussing on keeping all young people in mainstream institutions are considered as more promising for achieving a stable integration into society.

ogni bambini' and the UK Child Trust Fund set up in 2005.¹⁶ Ideas such as these could be considered at an EU level

Monitoring processes and peer review focusing on children are crucial in each of these areas to take stock of what works best in given situations. The first and easiest step to take here is to put a much stronger emphasis on child poverty in the Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion, starting with having more indicators and adapting the observation systems to this purpose. For the first time, in 2006, child poverty has been one of the priorities of the Social Inclusion Reports. As a second step, one could consider developing a regular report with key indicators on the situation and well-being of children in the EU.

3.2 Health

A high level of health is essential for young people's well-being, growth and development. Healthier young people make healthier adults. Many problems causing ill health and premature retirement in adults have their origin in the approach to life and lifestyle shaped during youth. In their youth people begin smoking, consuming alcohol and drugs, engaging in sex and having more control over their diet and physical activity. Behaviours that persist affect their future health. The demographic trends causing a decline in the working age population mean that it is particularly important to maximise the human capital which we have. Measures to improve health in young people can contribute by establishing healthier patterns of behaviour resulting in lower levels of illness and an increase in the number of years of healthy working life available. And from a cost effectiveness point of view prevention is again better than cure. In addition, education for young children on maintaining a healthy lifestyle may help to change the family lifestyle.

Challenges

There are worrying trends regarding health in the fields of obesity, mental health and alcohol usage. One child in five is overweight or obese in Europe. The number is increasing by 400,000 every year.¹⁷ And there is a risk that the steep rise in obesity over the past two decades will mean higher costs in the future. Obesity costs around €59 billion a year for the EU Member States in direct healthcare costs, but the overall economic impact could be much higher. In the WHO European Region, the costs of mental health problems are estimated to be 3–4% of GDP.¹⁸ Mental health problems are responsible for nearly 20% of the health costs. Mental health problems in children and adolescents are diagnosed increasingly often. Suicide remains problematic. Amongst 10 to 18-year-olds suicide accounts for 10% of deaths in boys and 7% in girls. The cost of alcohol to EU society in 2003 was estimated to be equivalent to 1.3% of GDP.¹⁹ In most EU Member States there has been a significant increase in binge drinking and drunkenness amongst young people over the last ten years. In 2003 an estimated 13% of all EU 15-16-year-olds had been drunk more than 20 times in their life.

Youth health provides an excellent opportunity for dividends from positive investment policies. There is a lot of existing research and policy material and differences between Member States can be exploited to verify what works and what does not. To ensure that the benefits of improved health are felt by all young people in Europe requires a major and

¹⁶ For an in-depth analysis of the scheme and its rationale, see Julian Le Grand, 'A Demogrant' Chapter 9 in *Motivation, Agency and Public Policy* Oxford University Press.

¹⁷ Lissau, (2004), 'Overweight and obesity epidemic among children'. Answer from European countries *International Journal of Obesity* 28.

¹⁸ *State of mental health in the European Union 2004*.

¹⁹ 'The Use of Alcohol in Europe': in *Alcohol in Europe: a public health perspective*. Anderson P, Baumberg B. Institute of Alcohol Studies. 2006 http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/doc/alcoholineu_chap4_en.pdf

coordinated effort by government, public and private stakeholders. The contribution of young people and their families needs to be adequately supported by organisations and governments – particularly schools, health services, economic operators, as well as policy makers at local, national and European levels.

Priorities

A combination of actions is required: regulation, public awareness, improvements in the delivery of health and education services, and investments in imaginative initiatives. Such a coordinated approach can be achieved through fruitful partnership of stakeholders. Local governments and Member States hold most of the competence in these areas. They are encouraged to take action provided that such actions are supported and coordinated as appropriate by the EU.

Some of the most effective actions which they may wish to consider address health issues in young people through providing structured programmes engaging both young people and their parents to improve life skills and coping in a range of situations. Such programmes may also have additional benefits on learning as well as on life after leaving school. Several Member States are involved in developing such initiatives for secondary school children. Such efforts could be usefully supported and extended with EU involvement.

These initiatives should be supplemented and strengthened by other policy actions, such as enforcing regulations on the sale and promotion of alcohol to young people, reducing the level of alcohol tolerance for younger drivers, expansion of early treatment services for young people with mental problems and addressing the promotion of healthy foods to young people. For its part the European Commission will contribute through the development and publication in the next twelve months of strategies on alcohol, nutrition and physical activity and on mental health, which will identify further actions which can be taken.

3.3 Education

Education is a centre-piece for a social investment strategy. *Early-childhood education and care* and *primary education* play a key role in providing social and cognitive skills that help offset an adverse socio-economic background (see section 3.1). Later, the curriculum of compulsory school is also crucial considering the dramatic increase in demands for skills in a knowledge society. Skill demand entails that key competences are acquired (in social skills, languages, IT, science, culture...). Most of these skills are easier to acquire at an early age. *Secondary schools* need to confirm the acquisition of those key competences as well as to prepare an increasing number of pupils for the tertiary level. *Higher education* has to train an increasing number of students to answer the needs for innovation, growth and well-being in the European economy including in engineering, life sciences and medical professions.

Challenges

While each educational stage requires, for the benefit of all, appropriate resources and a capacity to adapt to a changing environment, educational institutions at all stages are increasingly facing a dilemma to conciliate equity and efficiency: to offer the best opportunities to all and develop excellence in a context of increasing diversity. The demands of the information society, inflation of qualifications on the labour market and increased emphasis on performance and competitiveness tends to dramatically amplify problems such as truancy, fatigue, learning difficulties and, as a consequence, school failure. So, in addition to a blatant need to enhance the teaching of languages at all levels in an enlarging EU, a specific case needs to be made in education for fostering higher education on the one hand and fighting ‘failures at school’ on the other hand.

Higher education is a crucial means of fostering innovation, productivity and growth in a knowledge society. Innovation capacity and updating of know-how have become prime assets in the modern European economy. Furthermore, in order to ensure prosperity and reduce the risks of social exclusion, action is required for keeping young people up to date with learning requirements. The employment performance of girls and boys who hold a higher education degree is usually much better. Moreover, given the evolving structure of the demand for labour, jobs which only require basic qualifications are quickly disappearing. It is all the more significant that the average level of attainment is increasing. The cost of failing at school is then not only high for the pupils directly concerned and their families but also for society. It is more costly, though not impossible, to compensate for this lack of education later in life.

The good news is that the number of young Europeans with higher education qualifications is much greater than in the previous generation: 28% of Europeans aged between 25 and 34 hold a higher education degree against 16% for the 55-64 age group.²⁰ However, access to higher education is still too limited or inadequate and some crucial needs for specific competences in the labour market are not filled. This is the case in mathematics, sciences, medical professions (doctors, nurses). Furthermore, 70 million workers of the Union are still low-skilled (around 30% of the workforce).²¹ There is a worrying level of early school leavers. In 2005, it was estimated that 6 million young people (18-24) in the EU had left education prematurely and some Member States badly need to step up their effort to reach the Lisbon target of less than 10% early school leavers.²² Besides, research also points to the failure of many educational systems to compensate for inequity, in particular for migrants' children. Nowhere do they reach the same level of performance as native children. All in all, the European education systems tend to reinforce rather than compensate for disadvantaged social economic and ethnic backgrounds.²³ Finding ways to overcome this situation is all the more pressing since Europe will need more migrants to partly compensate for the effect of a shrinking European population.

Reforms are underway for the EU to become more efficient and more competitive. The Bologna process has already started to develop a European dimension to the higher education systems and to promote the mobility of students. Some Member States have been successful in providing young people in difficult situations with a variety of educational systems and pathways (including with the recognition of skills acquired outside the school system) which has helped them into the tertiary level. However, in the words of Frans van Vught a real boost is needed to stop 'education losing the race with technology'.²⁴ Under existing trends, one can foresee that: 'the future increase of educational output of highly skilled workers will be smaller', 'skill-biased technological change and globalisation processes will remain dominant', while 'a positive relationship exists between the supply of skilled workers and the role of skill-based technological change'.

The most promising way to tackle inequity and, at the end of the day, to include more people in tertiary education and in the labour market, is to give children a 'strong start' with early education provided by properly trained personnel. The next stage to reduce school failure and dropping out is, as practised in some Member States, to support and train teachers with various pedagogic tools to deal with children and youth with learning difficulties. For the

²⁰ *Education at a Glance (2006)* OECD.

²¹ Eurostat (2006): EU Labour Force Survey 2005. *Statistics in focus* n°13-2006.

²² European Commission (2006): *Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training*.

²³ Stephen Machin (2006): 'Social disadvantage and Education experiences'. *OECD social, employment and migration paper* n°32.

²⁴ 'Youth, Education and the Labour Market', Cheps (Center for Higher education Policy Studies), University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands, 2006, www.utwente.nl/cheps.

'hard to reach' that are still left out, what is necessary is to mobilise a variety of actors in local partnerships to help youngsters lacking qualifications to reintegrate the mainstream. The European pilot project on 'second chance' schools has turned into a success story.²⁵ The European label has been an obvious added value to these local projects on three accounts: it has acted as a powerful marketing tool by enabling cities and local actors to muster the necessary goodwill, support and publicity; it has allowed disadvantaged young people who had often been confined to a life of deprivation to gains witnessed by the EU-supported experience, thus boosting their sense of self-esteem, a crucial element for the teachers who helped them succeed. Finally, in networking these initiatives, the European level has helped to mobilise pupils and teachers, provided for comparison and identification of good practice and offered a consistent feedback into the policy process. 'Second chance' schools have moreover positively influenced the participation of early school leavers in education later in life by providing them with a support network.

Priorities

The main priorities in the field of education are (i) to increase and improve the effectiveness of investments in education; (ii) to reduce the number of early school leavers and low achievers; (iii) to implement structural reforms in higher education and to increase participation in mathematics, science, technology and engineering studies.

Increase and improve effectiveness of investments in education: On education, EU countries spend on average just 5.8% of GDP (private and public),²⁶ below Canada and the US. This is almost entirely due to much lower investment levels from the private sector in Europe. It is important urgently to increase and diversify universities' incomes, through the increase of public funding for research and teaching, creating a favourable fiscal system to attract private donations and helping students with a generalised system of loans and grants to personally contribute to the tuition and enrolment fees. On primary and secondary education, the priority investments are to be directed to assisting those who have the most difficulty in keeping up and to language teaching, the most fundamental skill both for the integration of migrants and minorities and for the consolidation of a united Europe. Last but not least, as already massive investment effort should go into early childhood education and care so as to present children with opportunities from the earliest stage. Integration through extra-curricula school activities such as sports and culture should also be considered.

The reduction of early school leavers and of low achievers in the compulsory school period: Teachers and pupils must be supported and provided with more pedagogical tools and with special aid for languages and mentoring in predominantly migrant districts to prevent early dropping out during compulsory school. Alternative pathways could be opened to allow a second chance. The development of local partnerships through a network of 'second chance' schools at national and preferably European level is the next stage to actively work on.

Reforming higher education: Structural reforms in higher education are urgent and necessary in order: (i) to facilitate and stimulate the mobility of students, teachers, researchers and graduates; (ii) to create conditions to attract an increased number of students in higher education through the implementation of more flexible pathways to tertiary education and increased diversified enrolment so as to provide access for much larger numbers of students with various educational backgrounds; (iii) to overcome the fragmentation of European higher education and research; (iv) to ensure fair and effective access for graduates from all EU countries to the European labour market. This means to make qualifications transparent,

²⁵ European Commission (2001): *Second chance schools: the result of a European pilot project*.

²⁶ European Commission (2006): *Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training*.

easily understandable and recognisable in the European higher education area to allow students and employers to find the institution and programme that fit their needs and capabilities. The Bologna process is already a fundamental step towards this objective; to put European higher education in a position to attract the best talent from within and from abroad, and in this way to promote our cultures, our values, our science and technology and our social model in the world. The knowledge of languages and ICT skills is an essential way for avoiding fragmentation. Girls tend to do better than boys at school but they are often underrepresented in scientific domains. As the need is becoming more pressing a way of increasing their participation in mathematics, science, technology and engineering studies is essential.

3.4 *Employment*

We need to invest in youth in favouring more rapid and more secure entry in the labour market. A failure in this area is a huge waste of human resources and may have also a series of negative impacts on future jobs for young people, on family composition and parenthood. Prolonged transitions, due to youth unemployment, job instability and the difficulty of entering the housing market, have negative consequences for delaying the age of first childbirths, with possible impacts on demographic trends. Furthermore, a low performance can have strong side effects on the investment in education, in decreasing returns of education. New trends in labour markets imply as well that transition periods from school to work are less and less standard and become more complex. Young people need to be prepared and equipped for these transitions as for the later transitions in their lives. And the labour market needs to be adapted for their entry. One part of the answer is to adapt education systems to better respond to the needs of the economy and to reduce the number of early school leavers (see previous section); the other is more related to labour market functioning and employment policies.

In designing reforms, one should remember to take into account the different pathways and attitudes of girls and boys in accessing and staying in the labour market as gender but also ethnic origin continue to be sources of segregation and discrimination (in the labour market). Girls' access to the labour market is more often than boys' constrained by family traditions and responsibilities (especially if they already have children). Stereotyped attitudes add obstacles to their integration at the level of their skills and qualifications. In the same manner as their elders, young women are still over-represented in low-paid and temporary jobs for which they are overqualified; percentages are 2 to 3 times higher if they are from an immigrant background.²⁷ This waste of human capital is also seen as detrimental to the next generation.

Challenges

The employment rate for young people (15-24) is low and is not significantly improving, while the general level of attainments has dramatically increased and active labour policies have mainly focused on young people.²⁸ In most Member States, the relative participation in the labour market has been declining. It is partly due to an increase in the number of students. But it hides also worrying trends: even if the phenomenon is difficult to measure, the so-called NEETs (Not currently engaged in Employment, Education or Training) population is increasing. Worrying too is the high level of unemployment: nearly 5 million young people are unemployed among a total of 20 million unemployed in Europe. They are more at risk of unemployment when they are unskilled, but a degree is no longer a guarantee to getting a

²⁷ OECD-SOPEMI (2006): *Immigration outlook*.

²⁸ European commission (2006): *Employment in Europe*. October.

good job. Despite better performance in education for girls, the gender gap still remains significant: it is around 2 points for the EU on average and reaches 9 points in some Member States. Many countries have undertaken reforms of the labour market but with putting too much stress on contracts designed for youth. Those partial reforms have reinforced dualism of the labour market and have favoured insiders against outsiders. In fact, most young people are hired on a temporary basis, with fewer elements to secure their trajectories in terms of unemployment benefits, training, etc. And these jobs are too rarely stepping stones towards better jobs and do not help enough to build human capital. In some Member States, the youngsters work for too short a period to be entitled to any unemployment benefits.

The determinants of youth unemployment are complex, they encompass an individual's socio-background (with a specific accumulation of difficulties related to child poverty, mental health, ethnic minorities), as well as institutional systems.²⁹ However, the general situation of the labour market (and economic growth) is an overwhelming determinant of the level of youth unemployment. One must acknowledge that some countries have better results than others in youth employment. For instance, countries with a high level of apprenticeships show that in Europe good practices exist to facilitate the first foothold in the labour market in reinforcing links between employers and education. It helps to obtain a first work experience often requested by employers. Other countries have implemented a set of measures guaranteeing that none of the young people are left behind without any training or any job.³⁰ These kinds of measures facilitate the transition from school into a first job provided the quality of the system is carefully addressed. Some countries seem to have succeeded in stabilising the declining trends for unskilled employment thanks to subsidies low-wage jobs. Others perform well in combining secure trajectories and flexibility. In these countries employment issues have not been tackled by a single instrument and the general framework is for the labour market to have been modernised in general and not only a specific segment.

Priorities

To facilitate the integration of young people in the labour market, the general economic and social context is of paramount importance. The question of securing their trajectories along with having a general flexibility of employment is a cornerstone to facilitate entry into the labour market. However, young people should not shoulder alone the needs for flexibility. The reduction of youth unemployment entails a good return on investments in education. Thus, a good functioning of the labour market is a priority. Beyond general recommendations related to labour markets and education systems fitting with economic needs, it is worth spreading across Europe good examples to show that there is a way out of chronic youth unemployment. Three types of instruments have been proven fruitful: apprenticeship has helped to tighten the links between education and employment, immediate activation; and instruments for a more secure entry into the labour market.

Reinforce apprenticeship and life long learning. Many studies show the importance of the apprenticeship to help in particular disadvantaged youth to have a foothold in the labour market. This could be more developed (in terms of sectors especially) as it creates a link between employers and employees and can be added to the school curricula. Special attention must nevertheless be given to the actual transfer of knowledge and to the acknowledgment of 'qualification', whatever the pathway used to secure later transitions. The articulation with long-life learning is therefore essential. So far, the less skilled have been less trained.

²⁹ *Youth unemployment in the EU*. DG empl. Oct. 2006.

³⁰ These recommendations already feature in the European Employment Guidelines, are not widely implemented by the Member States.

Activation: the sooner the better. In terms of content and design, successful programmes, notably toward disadvantaged youngsters, share some characteristics (i) Job-search assistance programmes are the most cost-effective for youth, providing positive returns in the form of higher earnings and employment; (ii) Training programmes should be adapted to local or national labour market needs. In this respect, mobilising and involving the private sector to assess local or national demand for skills and commitment is crucial (See ‘Second chance’ school); (iii) Making participation in programmes compulsory for youth after a period of job searching of no more than six months is essential.

Design a more secure policy for Youth. The transition from youth to adulthood is complicated by youth unemployment. Young people’s unemployment makes them economically vulnerable if they are not financially supported by their families or by sufficient benefits. The political debate has often focussed upon the need to cut benefits and to introduce workfare. However, some counter-examples exist in this domain, notably as regards young people: Danish unemployed youth, with high levels and widespread coverage of benefits, enjoy a good situation. Young people need to be reassured of their (financial) independence and on the other hand to find a way to enter and stay in the labour market. So far, flexibility seems to have been given priority over security. For instance, where flexibility has been introduced for contracts for young people, this has reinforced the dualism of the labour market rather than facilitate its general functioning.

3.5 Citizenship and Culture

A strong civic competence and a sense of belonging are critical for the development of a democratic society and a guarantee for societal cohesion, political stability and economic progress. When acquired at an early age, they create the groundwork for the development of an active approach to politics in youth and adulthood and they are passed on to the next generation under the influence of family, school, the media, peers and religious institutions. As experienced by the World Bank worldwide, ‘young people’s disposition towards citizenship tends to be durable and participating early in life is a good predictor of ability and willingness to engage in the future’.

Challenges

In later youth, turning 18 has a symbolic value for being the time when the right to vote in elections is granted. It should not, however, overshadow the continuous active process of identity formation in which girls and boys are engaged from their teenaged years. This period when people begin to establish their identities as individuals, outside their families, is often a turning point. The sense of belonging and involvement in the community which will be experienced by individuals in later life is deeply influenced by the social and political responses of the community and/or public authorities to teenagers. Investing in enabling youngsters to recognise themselves as citizens is highly necessary. An active knowledge of their rights and duties, an ability to filter and assess the mass of information they receive from an always wider range of sources and providing them with real opportunities to exercise their citizenship are the main components of an enabling framework. These tasks were traditionally left to schools in stable and tight communities. In the age of television and internet and with increasingly changing political and social environments (with regards more particularly to the situation of migrants), the school system alone cannot fulfil these needs.

Shared citizen’s values of respect, tolerance and solidarity are more necessary as Europe is becoming increasingly diverse in ethnic terms. Practical training to exercise one’s citizenship in the EU cannot be limited to the boundaries of the school yard. Travelling, studying in other countries, making friends or professional relations from other cultures, speaking several languages, etc. is part of the key experiences needed by all to live in a united Europe. Young

people living in Europe, including from migrant and ethnic communities, girls as well as boys, have to be able to communicate in more than one language, to show understanding and knowledge of other cultures, in order to unlock the doors to different ways of thinking and also for finding a job. The acquisition of these basic skills and experiences needs to be supported and encouraged not only for young people themselves, who expect more than their elders from Europe and European integration,³¹ but, as many thinkers repeatedly tell us, for Europe itself, to build a European identity and to make sense of our world.³²

A sense of civic duty and feelings of belonging are fundamental for political cohesion and the consolidation of democracy. But today, ‘young people and the dispossessed are those who do not vote’.³³ This creates a biased system of representation. Only one out of two young people in the EU (against two thirds for all European citizens), have a strong sense of civic duty with regards to their involvement in politics.³⁴ When not given the opportunity for productive civic engagement, young people’s frustration has been known recently to turn into violent behaviour and lead to economic and social instability. The political integration of children from families of poor educational background and/or from immigrant families in Europe is becoming a matter of increasing concern. Their situation frequently follows a vicious circle of exclusion which needs to be reversed. As for building understanding and cohesion amongst young people of different Member States, existing linguistic skills are still insufficient. Only about half of Europeans speak at least one foreign language.³⁵

Several, predominantly local, initiatives aiming at the development of active citizenship³⁶ of girls and boys have been sponsored by local or national bodies, NGOs, and the European Commission. Both formal and informal learning environments have been used.³⁷ They aim at facilitating civic integration and are often developed in the most marginalised or socially excluded districts as a matter of priority. They foster youngsters’ participation through direct involvement in the policymaking process, in conjunction with local institutions. Young migrants seize this opportunity to take concrete steps to improve the life of their community. In Molenbeek (Belgium) for instance, a group of young people from the local youth club took the initiative to gather people of different ethnic groups to counter the negative image of their area famous for Molotov cocktails, fundamentalism and extremism; in Ghent, seven Turkish girls managed to produce a book telling about their dreams if not constrained by culture, age or sex. Initiatives which help youngsters to shape their social and political identity confirm the global trend for young people under 25 to be active in civil society movements dealing with practical issues (linked to the preservation of the environment, ethical consumption, disarmament, human rights, anti-racism, women’s rights) though they show increasing reluctance to participate in formal politics.

³¹ According to recent *Eurobarometer*, on average, 55% of Europeans aged 15 to 24 would like a more important role for the European Union in five years’ time against 49% for the older. ‘Youth takes the floor’ ‘Young Europeans’ concerns and expectations as to the development of the European Union’ - December 2005.

³² ‘By and large, there is no European identity but it could be built, not in contradiction but complementary to national, regional and local identities. It would take a process of social construction’ Manuel Castells, in *the information age: economy, society and culture* vol. III, p.333.

³³ The culture of contentment of J.K.Galbraith (1997) in ‘*The Good Society*’.

³⁴ Young Europeans in 2001, Special *Eurobarometer* EB 55.1.

³⁵ Europeans and language, Special *Eurobarometer* EB 64.3, February 2006.

³⁶ The CRELL project on ‘Active citizenship for democracy’ uses the following working definition: ‘participation in civil society, community and/or political life characterised by mutual respect and non violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy’.

³⁷ See for example: Active citizenship: National case study England on <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/citizenship/>

As far as European citizenship is concerned, research conducted under the EC 5th framework programme identified priority factors which contribute to European identity and a positive awareness of European citizenship: language skills, travel and mobility programmes as well as opportunities for learning about European history, culture and to 'live' Europe, whether in formal education or through friends and families.³⁸ These opportunities were found to be very unevenly distributed amongst the different sites investigated in the project.³⁹ European citizenship is an active process of identity formation: 'Citizenship is a journey, not a destination'.⁴⁰ It has to be provided with appropriate tools.

Priorities

Four actions could be given priority for initiatives to be conducted throughout the EU to encourage the civic participation of young Europeans: (i) Promoting education and training to active citizenship from an early age throughout the EU; (ii) Integrating young girls and boys (including young migrants) into formal politics and opening new avenues for their participation; (iii) Developing EU youth citizenship 'as a journey'; (iv) Encouraging cultural learning and multilingualism.

Promoting education and training to active citizenship from an early age is important to arouse interest in community life. It can be undertaken in primary schools with the involvement of parents and increased in secondary schools and youth centres. The European dimension can help schools to develop 'Citizenship education' (including 'what it means for my country and me to be part of the European Union') in the official curricula, exchange experiences and contribute to raise interest in foreign languages in primary and secondary schools in Member Countries. It should give thorough and timely information to children and young people about their rights and duties, a knowledge of the functioning of institutions,⁴¹ basic values and laws, respect for the freedom and well-being of 'others' and tips and tricks (including a good knowledge of IT skills) on how to participate in society as responsible citizens. Active citizenship is contained in the second education objective⁴² of the Lisbon strategy and the 'open method of coordination' has been used to move towards common European objectives. Efforts in this field should, however, be boosted in an enlarged Europe. As a first step, a political monitoring of existing citizenship education courses and initiatives throughout the EU and exchanges between projects would map out the situation, highlight the importance of the issue and engage a networking process.

Integrating young girls and boys (including young migrants) into formal politics and opening new avenues for their civic and political participation is a necessary move to consolidate democracy and stop the disenfranchisement of parts of the population. There is an obvious case that the feeling of belonging for most young people today is experienced in action, be it in formal or informal politics. There is an urgent need to develop on the one hand their representation into the formal channels of representative institutions (in political parties as well as amongst social partners) and to support them in opening non traditional channels of information and communication at different levels (local, regional, national and European) and on different issues (including elections, legislation on issues of direct concern to them like fighting discrimination, racism, xenophobia, sexism, etc.). The Commission could play in this domain the same active role that it has had throughout Europe in raising awareness of the

³⁸ For more see <http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/youth/>

³⁹ In Austria, Germany, Spain, UK, Czech and Slovak republics.

⁴⁰ Hastings quoted by David Kerr, head of business development National foundation for Educational Research.

⁴¹ As it is for instance being done *in vivo* with the mock European Parliament.

⁴² Facilitating the access to all education and training systems (ie providing learning opportunities towards the development of civil society and reduction of disparity of opportunities).

democratic deficit represented by the low participation of women in decision making positions.

Developing an EU youth citizenship 'as a journey' is already an ongoing process through the many initiatives taken to facilitate student exchanges, the promotion of languages, the mobility of youth, etc. but it is not identified and named as contributing to build an EU citizenry. While strengthening these actions, in particular when directed towards the newcomers (new Member States and migrants), an initiative to gather, every year, many thousand young people in a major 'EU youth agora' in the summer with music, cultural events, a job market, language learning methods, political parties, NGOs, etc., could have a positive effect on the actual concern for public and European affairs and participation of young people. The Commission could promote the participation of the most disadvantaged and the President of the Commission could take this opportunity to announce a highly symbolic initiative like the *youth pass*,⁴³ a language festival, cultural awards, etc. as contributions to the building of a European identity.

Encouraging cultural learning and multilingualism by facilitating the learning and use of several foreign languages, not only 'European' but also 'extra-European' and making the foreign language curriculum more appealing. This could be achieved by (i) supporting the diffusion of literature for adolescents (translation, promotion, actions in libraries, etc.). (ii) Creating a standard European price for teenage literature highlighting European values as well as for the translation of teenage literature. (iii) Supporting professional training in activities related to organisation and access to cultural events mainly addressed to young people.

4 A role for Europe

Youth has often featured on the EU agenda in the last few years. An EU consensus exists on the need to take action to help young people with education, employment and civic participation. Commendable efforts have been made⁴⁴ which have to be built upon but an across-the-board policy vision and investment strategy in youth is needed to fully develop the potential contribution of young people to growth, jobs, and the future of Europe. The present vulnerabilities of children, girls and boys, often result from insufficient and bad quality investment in their development and their future. A major reorientation of policies is thus needed if significant progress is to be made. Hence the need to create a new political momentum to stress the importance of the issue and further enhance the coherence between Community and Member States' actions. What is suggested here is not a new policy (or set of policies) for youth but a shift of policies and resources to account for the importance of building up a healthy, adaptable, confident and knowledgeable youth.

Initiatives have been taken, including the European Youth Pact adopted by the Council in 2005 and the connection it establishes with the Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the Structural Funds. Some 'concrete actions' and good examples have been developed as a result. Moreover, at national or regional level some Member States focus on the need to provide answers to the 'malaise' expressed by youth. All this provides a strong foundation to develop a new policy vision for youth and an investment strategy in line with the objectives of the Lisbon agenda.

⁴³ Proposal by the 'Centre européen de la culture' of Geneva. Pr. Dusan Sidjanski and B. Barut.

⁴⁴ Namely through Eu programmes in the field of Education and youth policy (Erasmus, Leonardo, Comenius, Youth programme, etc.) and the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on education but also under the strategy for growth and jobs, the OMC for social protection and social inclusion.

4.1 *Integrate more aspects*

In many areas, the prime competence and responsibility lies with Member States or local governments. An EU action nevertheless can help Member States, regional and local authorities by the use of its existing resources and competences and increased coordination and impulsion mechanisms. Flagging the issue at EU level is, in itself, a catalyst to promoting partnerships of Member States, other political and institutional levels and private stakeholders and raise the awareness of those most directly concerned, young boys and girls themselves and their parents, about what the EU can do for youth.

Over the years, the European Commission has developed an extensive expertise to mobilise a wide diversity of resources and tools towards the achievement of an objective, sometimes of a local nature (e.g. second chance schools). Moreover, the range of possible actions (regulation, public awareness, and improvements in the delivery of public and private services in health, education, employment, housing, sports) and investments in specific initiatives widens when agreed at EU level.

The coordination mechanisms (Open Method of Coordination on youth, on social inclusion and on education) and the Youth Pact already mobilise energy on some of these issues (participation and information, poverty, drop outs, labour market entry, etc.). Nevertheless, it is worth being more wide-ranging and systematic in order to favour cross-cutting issues and translate findings and actions into concrete measurable outcomes. Strong interactions exist between policy areas and the level of intervention which have to be fully exploited. For instance, coordination policy on inclusion and social protection has a major role to play. Youth investment here could be reinforced.

On the basis of its knowledge-based approach, the European Commission can also contribute through reinforcing the development and publication on a regular basis of 'Situation of youth in Europe' (child well-being, education of migrants, welfare state for European youth, health...) which identifies which further actions are needed. This should be backed by an improved data system with breakdowns for sex and age tracts. This should be high on the agenda, visible, and involve young people themselves.

4.2 *... for an efficient investment strategy*

What is needed above all is a strong call to public authorities, the private sector and communities but also young people themselves and their parents for 'more and better investment in youth'. The EU can certainly contribute to 'the better' through the mobilisation efforts mentioned above; it can also supplement 'the more' through community programmes and structural funds which can bring increased sources of investment to Member States. The Structural Funds Guidelines mention youth in numerous strategic places. Regarding Member States' take-up of this priority in their programming exercises, the upcoming review exercise could provide an opportunity to call for a reorientation of investments towards the 'investing in youth' priority.

Sometimes very low-cost initiatives such as 'the Europa Diary' (€1.60 per copy)⁴⁵ taken in collaboration with Member States can be leveraged to reach youngsters and their families. In general, initiatives that directly connect to young people and contribute to the creation of

⁴⁵ The specific aim of the Europa Diary is to encourage young people (15-18) in the European Union to become more aware as consumers, by getting them to work and reflect on consumer-linked themes (as health) in teams under adult guidance on a regular basis. Reading the Diary made them realise that their knowledge might be incomplete or even insufficient. The Europa Diary is designed to be used by teachers and is distributed at no cost to schools, together with a teacher's kit to provide an additional teaching resource. <http://www.generation-europe.org/page.asp>

common knowledge should be supplemented and strengthened. This is typically the case for initiatives in the fields of education, civic participation and health.

One should also keep in mind that as the success of many of the measures to be taken within the 'investing in youth' parameter relies on the involvement of children and/or young people, policies should consider the way young people think, behave and communicate. A strategic communication approach should take this into account.