



KEY PRINCIPLES FOR THE NEW FRAMEWORK FOR EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN THE YOUTH FIELD

ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ROTTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS, 13-15 NOVEMBER 2008

INTRODUCTION

The current framework for European cooperation in the youth field¹ was adopted in 2002, when EU Member States agreed upon a resolution establishing both the framework itself and the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field. Since then, the landscape has greatly evolved, as new initiatives have been taken and policies developed further. Hence, an initial evaluation of the current framework, to assess its outcomes and to acknowledge developments, is necessary in order to make the best proposal for the next cycle. Thus complementing the thorough analysis of the evaluation of the OMC and the framework provided in the respective shadow report, the European Youth Forum intends to suggest key principles to guide the definition of the new framework.

Since the publication of the European Commission White Paper “A New Impetus for European Youth” in 2001, the YFJ with its Member Organisations has been consistent in contributing, evaluating, and providing input into the subsequent related processes, in order to ensure that the voice of young people and youth organisations is heard and duly considered. In this context, a mid-term evaluation of the framework of European cooperation in the youth field and its main process, the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field (OMC) was undertaken by the YFJ. Through the different documents and reports produced - including a policy paper on the Future of EU Youth Policy Development (0116-06), two shadow reports on the implementation of the first, second and third priorities of the OMC, Information, Participation and Voluntary Activities (0401-06 and 0985-06) and the evaluation study of the OMC in 2006² - the YFJ has already expressed its vision, expectations and also disappointments regarding the current framework; and highlighted the improvements necessary to finally work genuinely on and with the transversal nature of youth policy.

In 2006, the YFJ adopted an approach to youth policy (0590-06), which intends to provide the general context within which youth issues should be tackled by the European Youth Forum and defines the essential principles and expectations of youth organisations in Europe regarding youth policy. It aims to promote the

¹ The Framework comprises three strands as defined in the Council resolution of 24 November 2005 (Official Journal C 292 of 24.11.2005):

- **Promoting active citizenship among young people:** The OMC in the field of youth allows Member States to cooperate with a view to sharing best practice on participation by young people, information for young people, voluntary activities and a greater knowledge of the field of youth, while respecting the areas of responsibility set out in the Treaties.

- **The European Pact for Youth** highlights youth issues in key areas of the Lisbon partnership for growth and jobs , particularly in relation to young people's access to the labour market, development of their creativity and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. It also highlights skills acquired through high-quality, relevant education, training and mobility experiences in the formal as well as the non-formal sector, and reconciliation of working life and family life.

- **Incorporating a youth dimension:** Incorporating a youth dimension in other European policies will concern in particular anti-discrimination, healthy lifestyles, including sport, and research on youth issues.

² Evaluation study of Open Method of Coordination in the youth field in 2006 - Evaluation study of the information access, actors roles and openness in the process implementation – 2006 (0687-06)

mainstreaming of youth issues in all policy areas that affect young peoples' lives, as a working culture for decision-makers, public administrations, the labour market and civil society.

The new institutional processes set up since 2002 - such as the European Youth Pact - and approaches such as those expressed in the European Commission Communication 'Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society' (COM (2007) 498 final) are fully in line with the YFJ's understanding of youth policy. The European Youth Pact, adopted by the European Council in March 2005, highlighted the need, and demonstrated the political will, to have a strong focus on youth within the Lisbon Strategy: and the Pact duly identified employment, access to the labour market, qualifications and training as major issues to be tackled. Almost two years after, following a request from the European Commission President José Barroso, the Bureau of European Policy Advisers released a comprehensive, strategic report "Investing in Youth: an empowerment strategy" in April 2007. The document states that *"the key for successful youth policies is to ensure that people can make the most of the opportunities they have"*. It also notes that *"youth is the future, and timely and effective investment in youth is the key to making that future prosperous, both economically and socially."* This led to a European Commission Communication in September 2007 stressing the need for transversal youth policy within the EU in order to respond to the needs and hopes of young people³.

The new framework should build on the experience for the last years but also encompass the cross sector nature of youth policy. This is why each process which is related to youth issues and which contributes to the establishment of a genuine youth policy should be given a place in the future framework. In order to ensure this, as well as to build on the developments of recent years, the YFJ is laying down principles that should lead and be the cornerstones for the future of EU Youth Policy.

1. The design of the new framework

- A more focused framework: less priorities, less objectives

If priorities are identified in the course of a process such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the youth field, adding new priorities to the framework challenges the possibility of achieving the previously determined priorities. Nonetheless, the Team Presidency of the European Union, as the political body responsible for all policy processes, should be able to set one or two priorities for the 18 months. The European Years should be considered as priorities only if relevant to the framework of youth policy.

³ This is acknowledged and reinforced by the Member States in their Conclusions of the Council of Ministers on 20 November 2007 (Council document 14426/07)

- Implementation of the cross-sector nature of youth policy by creating links with other relevant policy areas that affect young people. This implies, as suggested in the governance paragraph, that relevant connections need to be set up with relevant administrations. In terms of policy content, the YFJ refers particularly to education and lifelong learning, employment, social integration, culture, health, youth autonomy, mobility, fundamental rights and non-discrimination. The genuine implementation of youth priorities could also be ensured via specific “youth pacts” in relevant EU strategies e.g. the European Youth Pact and the Lisbon Strategy.
- Maintain the Open method of Coordination in the youth field (OMC) as a core process in order to provide Member States with a mechanism to meet and discuss youth issues. The OMC also provided youth organisations and other relevant actors in the youth field with the opportunity to contribute, give input, and discuss with decision makers, both at the European and national levels. Nonetheless this still needs to be genuinely implemented in all Member States.

The OMC should keep priorities, but focus on the following:

- Participation
- Information
- Voluntary activities
- Cross sector approach to policies affecting young people

The YFJ sees that the knowledge-based element in policy development should be founded upon an aim to feed into youth policy development and comparable quantitative and qualitative data in partnership with youth organisations.

As with the current framework, the common objectives aim at the implementation of the agreed priorities, and should remain clustered in order to address the various aspects of the priorities themselves. Nonetheless, the number of common objectives should be reduced to one by cluster. Indeed, the common objectives should tackle the common challenges faced by Member States, such as the low turn-out of young voters. Even so, it remains valuable for each Member State to share information at the European level on the specific challenges being faced at the national level.

2. The governance of the new framework

- A coherent Structured Dialogue. This means that the relevant institutions and actors are involved, leading to a common goal, with mutual respect for the partners (whether institutions or interest groups); that the process is participatory and meaningfully structured (in order to ensure coherence between the actors consulted and the consultation process)⁴. To ensure

⁴ The definition of understanding of the Structured Dialogue as defined by the European Economic and Social Committee in its opinion on the European Commission Communication on promoting young people's full

ownership of the dialogue process by all the actors involved, its agenda and priorities should be decided together.

- Clarification of the role of the European Institutions: Member States, as well as the other relevant actors, need to feel ownership of the new framework, and its added value. The role of the European Commission, though crucial, should be moderate, while the European parliament should be more present, in the framework itself, but also in view of the Treaty of Lisbon (particularly given the youth article),. At the European level, the YFJ therefore calls for:
 1. *A role for the European Parliament*: the European Parliament should be given the time to share its opinions and provide input in European processes related to youth policy. The purpose is not to affect the subsidiarity principle, but to give opportunities for relevant, necessary and diverse input and support to processes related to youth policy by a key European institution.
 2. *A group of Commissioners for Youth*: Commissioners dealing with policies that affect young people - especially education and lifelong learning, employment, social integration, culture, health, youth autonomy, mobility, fundamental rights and non-discrimination - should coordinate their work to ensure the exchange of expertise and coherent policy developments related to policies affecting youth people.
 3. *An efficient system within the Council of Ministers*: ensure an exchange of information, analysis and content between the actors working on issues affecting youth. The Youth Working Party (the working body of the Council of Ministers) can be the coordination point in order to gather relevant and meaningful knowledge and data on the situation of young people.⁵
 4. *Involvement of local and regional authorities*: the Committee of the Regions should be given a role in the definition as well as in the implementation of European processes related to youth policy, especially regarding youth participation.

- A monitoring and evaluating system for the framework: the Structured Dialogue, as specified earlier in this document, to be agreed upon by all relevant stakeholders, should be the governing body of the framework. Nonetheless mechanisms to ensure the involvement of all actors in the youth field, especially young people with their organisations, as well as to provide input and feedback on the on going implementation of the priorities of the framework, should be established. A stronger monitoring

participation in education, employment and society – 17 January 2008 – SOC/289 – CESE 76/2008 – par. 6.6 & 6.7

⁵ A system of fact sheets could be put in place. Such fact sheets could be produced on relevant policies affecting young people and communicated for information and input to the Youth Working Party. This would allow a coherent and cross sector understanding of policies affecting young people; and further the establishment of a genuine youth policy

system does not necessarily imply more reporting from the Member States (rather, more transparent and publicly available reporting) or the other actors, but points to a longer period for implementation, of at least five years, and a period for in-depth evaluation and definition of the following framework – lasting, for example, two years. Quantitative indicators should duly support the monitoring process.

The existing reporting mechanisms, such as the Lisbon National Report Programs, should be maintained (up to the new cycle of the Lisbon Strategy) as they are of the utmost relevance and provide information on an essential aspect of the policies affecting young people. Any other reporting mechanisms for future youth-related processes should be set up and feed into the understanding of the actual situation and needs of young people.

CONCLUSION

The YFJ urges the European institutions to reformulate the framework of European cooperation in the youth field, to allow a more focused and structured approach. This more structured framework should ensure a genuine cross-sector youth policy at the European level, allowing the different actors to have a proper understanding of the real situation and needs of young people. The YFJ hopes that the framework will also provide the necessary flexibility regarding the future processes to be established, and also regarding subsidiarity principles. It is necessary that the framework addresses the different levels of decision-making involved as well as their links. Aspiring to achieve the increased effectiveness and sustainability of the framework, the YFJ shares its recommendations and demands, but also expresses its willingness to remain a reliable partner for decision-makers. Only together, with all the relevant actors involved - namely the political stakeholders both at the European level but also in the Member States, and the young people of Europe - can a successful new term be guaranteed.