

Evaluation of the Political Outcomes and Policy Initiatives Following the Second Cycle of Structured Dialogue

1. INTRODUCTION

What is the structured dialogue?

The structured dialogue is a EU process that aims at ensuring the right of young people to participate and shape the policies that directly affect them. Together with policy-makers, young people across the European Union can jointly discuss, formulate and put forward proposals to feed in the development of youth policy at national and European level.

The structured dialogue is implemented in work cycles of 18 months, each focusing on one overall thematic priority. Each 18-month cycle is divided into three 6-month rounds of consultations and discussions with young people and youth organisations, which take place in all EU Member States. These consultations serve as a common basis for joint discussions at the EU Youth Conferences, organised successively by each Presidency every six months. At the EU Youth Conference, youth delegates and representatives of the Ministries responsible for Youth from all EU Member States discuss and agree on Joint Recommendations relevant to the given priority.

The Joint Recommendations are then sent for discussion to the Council of the European Union, which decides whether to include them in the political Conclusions adopted under each Presidency. In addition, at the end of the 18-month cycle, the Council adopts a Resolution based on the overview of Joint Recommendations.

Structured dialogue on youth participation

The second 18-month cycle of structured dialogue gave young people and policy-makers the opportunity to discuss youth participation in democratic life in Europe. As this topic had already been partly covered by previous work at EU level, the three Presidencies of Poland, Denmark and Cyprus decided to focus each on specific aspects to avoid redundancy in the process:

- Youth mobility and international cooperation
- Creativity and innovation of young people and youth participation in elections
- Social inclusion of young people, particularly of youth with a migrant background

Why an evaluation?

Now in the third 18-month cycle, structured dialogue has grown bigger and has become an integral part of youth policy-making. Over the past three years, young people together with policy-makers have put forward numerous proposals for youth policies. It is time to look into how these proposals were translated into concrete policies so as to evaluate to what extent the structured dialogue has been effective in achieving the overall objectives of *“a continuous joint reflection on priorities, implementation and follow-up of European cooperation in the youth field”*.¹

The EU Youth Report² adopted in 2012 evaluates the results of the first cycle of structured dialogue on youth employment (Jan 2010 – Jun 2011). The report highlights that the joint recommendations³ of young people and policy-makers have inspired or comforted several initiatives on youth employment at national and EU level, including the Youth Guarantee endorsed by the European Council in 2013. However, the EU Youth Report proves that more than half of EU

¹ Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), OJ C311.

² Joint EU Youth Report of the Council and the Commission, OJ C 394.

³ Joint Recommendations were adopted at the Hungarian Presidency's EU Youth Conference in March 2011 to conclude the 18 months of structured dialogue between young people and policy-makers on youth employment. Available at: http://europa.eu/youth/content/hungary-presidency-eu-youth-conference-and-conclusions_en

Member States have not yet taken any initiatives following the structured dialogue on youth employment, and calls upon the decision-makers to take recommendations from young people more fully into account.

While the results of the first 18-month structured dialogue have been evaluated as part of the EU Youth Report 2012, those of the second 18 months of structured dialogue on youth participation (Jul 2011 – Dec 2012) have not yet been evaluated. They will not be either in the upcoming EU Youth Report 2015, which will assess the implementation of the framework for European cooperation in the youth field for 2013-2015. Therefore, there is a significant need for evaluating the political outcomes and policy initiatives following the second 18-month dialogue and assessing the extent to which they have improved.

Challenges of the evaluation

It is important to note some challenges in evaluating the impact that structured dialogue has on young people's lives.

Length of decision-making

Young people and youth organisations expect immediate political follow-up of the joint proposals put forward in the structured dialogue. They expect quick implementation with changes brought in young people's lives. This impact needs to be demonstrated to prevent '*structured dialogue fatigue*' and keep their high motivation to participate. However, the EU decision-making process and the number of authorities involved in the implementation of EU policies, makes it difficult to obtain immediate improvement at grassroots level. Empirically, a EU policy takes at least 36 months from the moment it is proposed at EU level until it is implemented in the Member States. This creates a certain gap between the expectations of young people participating in the process for quick change and the realisation of such changes in their reality.

Difficulty to distinguish the results of the structured dialogue

The second big challenge is the difficulty to determine if policies result directly from the structured dialogue or from other circumstances such as civil society advocacy (including from the Forum and its members), political context, national initiatives, etc. Many times, new policies *coincide* with the joint proposals from EU Youth Conferences, but they actually are the *combined result* of the structured dialogue and other factors. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the proposals from the dialogue at national level are sometimes used directly by national policy-makers in their on-going initiatives, as was the case with the National Youth Strategy (2014-2020) in several countries.

Limits of the process

The challenge of the EU youth policy's boundaries

It is important to bear in mind that the impact of the structured dialogue process is also limited to the boundaries of the EU youth policy, which operates under the Open Method of Coordination. Youth policy is essentially of Member States' competence and the EU can only carry out actions to support, coordinate and supplement the actions of the Member States⁴. The EU has no legislative power in the youth field and may not interfere in the exercise of the competences reserved for Member States, and the decisions taken by the EU Council in the field of youth are non-binding. This implies that there is no option to force reluctant Member States to implement EU policies, especially in areas of Member States' exclusive competence, such as voting age. Nevertheless, Council documents constitute a clear political agreement, which can be reminded to each and every Member State's government.

Cross-cutting fields of competence

Ministers and Commissioner responsible for Youth are also bound by their own competences, which only cover the youth field. Since many proposals from the structured dialogue go beyond their competences – such as healthcare, fundamental rights and migration – their implementation

⁴ Article 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, OJ C 83.

depends on the cooperation that Ministers and Commissioner in charge of Youth are able to establish with their counterparts in these areas. Such cross-sectoral cooperation obviously requires additional efforts and time before producing results.

2. Structured Dialogue on Youth Participation: It's Time for (checking) Actions!

For each of the three aspects of youth participation discussed in the 18-month structured dialogue this evaluation compares the joint proposals put forward by young people and policy-makers at each EU Youth Conference to the Conclusions adopted in the Council, as well as the policies they initiated at European and national level.

This step-by-step evaluation will provide the Youth Forum and its Member Organisations with an overview of the impact the Structured Dialogue had on youth policies in Europe. It is important to note that this document does not constitute an exhaustive list of the measures adopted in follow-up of the structured dialogue given the difficulty of collecting all relevant information from all the Member States and due to the limited information available about measures implemented at national level, hence a partial evaluation.

2.1. Council Conclusions on Youth Participation and Mobility (Nov 2011)

Joint Recommendations versus Council Conclusions

Ministers from the 27 EU Member States, gathered in the Council of the EU,⁵ took some of the joint proposals fully on board in their Council Conclusions of November 2011⁵. The Youth Ministers invited the European Commission to continue fostering youth cooperation between the EU and Eastern Partnership countries and to enhance the Eastern dimension in the youth programme (full list of official documents adopted by EU institutions following the structured dialogue in Annex 1).

Nevertheless, they also clearly watered down some of the joint proposals before integrating them into the Council document. While young people and policy-makers demanded free-of-charge Schengen visas for youth workers and young volunteers, Ministers only agreed that easier access to visas for young people from outside the EU *can be made possible*. This proved the Member States' lack of strong political commitment towards concrete actions on Schengen visas.

Finally, other joint proposals of significant importance to young people were not referred at all in the Conclusions adopted by the Youth Ministers. The recommendations touching upon the future funding programmes were not included, allegedly to avoid prejudice to the negotiations on the Multi-Annual Financial Framework. Other proposals on the independence and sustainability of National Youth Councils in the EU, or those on the need for the EU's foreign policy to defend the independence of civil society and youth organisations from outside the EU, were not integrated either.

Implementation at EU level

The Commission created the 'Eastern Partnership Youth Window' within the Youth in Action Programme and allocated additional funds of 31.5 million euro for the period 2012-2013 in order to increase the number of projects for cooperation among young people and youth organisations from the European Union and Eastern Partnership countries. It clearly constitutes an answer to the recommendations made in Warsaw during the first phase of structured dialogue.

Several joint proposals about accessibility of information on mobility, about its promotion and youth participation, included in the Council Conclusions of November 2011, were translated into concrete actions. For example, the Commission launched a new European Youth Portal in May 2013 in response to the demand for making it useful and accessible by all young people. Moreover, the Commission published a study on *Youth Participation in Democratic Life in Europe* (February 2013) and is in the process of developing a 'Youth on the Move Card' by 2015. Nevertheless, the proposal to include young people from Eastern European and Caucasus (EEc) countries in the

⁵ Council Conclusions on the Eastern dimension of youth participation and mobility, of November 2011, OJ C372.

target group of these initiatives was largely ignored.

In 2012, the Commission dedicated an annual priority in the Youth in Action to projects aimed at stimulating unemployed young people's mobility and active participation, as a direct response to the political demand for promoting mobility and youth exchanges so that every young person can have an opportunity for mobility and participation in Europe (see full list of joint proposals -> political outcomes -> actions in Annex 1).

Nevertheless, several recommendations from the structured dialogue are still lacking implementation. For instance, no actions have been taken to improve cross-sectorial cooperation between youth organisations and decision-makers, or to facilitate access to visas for young people outside the EU, in particular neighbouring countries. The lack of implementation of the latter is so impactful that in the Erasmus+ programme Member States are reminded to establish fast-track admission procedures.

Implementation at national level

No information about policies adopted as a result of the implementation of the Council Conclusions or as a result of the recommendations of structured dialogue was found. More worrying is that one Member State even took decisions going against these: the Spanish government announced in 2013 that it would cut the funding for the independent, youth-led Spanish National Youth Council (CJE) and integrate it into a non-independent advisory body of the government. This clearly goes against the demand made by young people and policy-makers across the EU that every European country must have a representative, youth-led and independent National Youth Council with long-term sustainable support.

2.2. Council Conclusions on Youth Participation and Creativity and Innovation (May 2012)

Joint Recommendations *versus* Council Conclusions

The Ministers responsible for Youth, meeting in the Council of the EU, took some of the joint proposals into their Council Conclusions of May 2012⁶. They took on board to facilitate and improve the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning and invited the Commission to make a proposal on the subject. Notably, the Ministers also took on board to ensure appropriate and sustainable funding to support young people's creativity and personal and social development and they also endorsed the call to encourage initiatives to promote co-ownership with young people on youth-related issues (see list of political outcomes following the structured dialogue in Annex 2).

However, none of the main proposals on the overall priority of youth participation in democratic life in Europe were taken on board in the Council Conclusions. Reminding the principle of subsidiarity, Member States refused to consider setting up voting age commissions to debate on lowering the voting age to 16. They refused to consider making citizenship education compulsory and effective in schools, or to explore ways to ease access to vote for young people, although such initiatives could be extremely relevant to increase youth participation in the 2014 European Parliament elections. As reported by several National Working Groups, the lack of political follow-up to these core proposals led to disappointment among the young people who took part in the process.

Implementation at EU level

A Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning was adopted in December 2012⁷. It urges Member States to put in place arrangements by 2018 and to cooperate with youth organisations, among others, in the validation process as recommended at the Conference. Some Member States have already taken actions in this direction, for example the validation of non-formal education is currently discussed in the National Parliament in Portugal. Although this policy achievement is mainly due to the advocacy of the Youth Forum and its members, the structured dialogue reinforced the call and strong support for the validation of non-

⁶ Council Conclusions of 11 May 2012 on fostering the creative and innovative potential of young people, OJ C169.

⁷ Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, OJ C398.

formal and informal learning and thus contributed to the adoption of the Council Recommendation. While the Ministers took on board to encourage initiatives to promote co-ownership with young people on youth-related issues, little has been done in this direction. There is no visible progress towards co-ownership with young people; on the contrary, young people continue to be excluded from key decisions, such as the recent discussions at EU level on youth policy and Europe 2020 Strategy⁸, including inputs to European semester. As a result, young people feel that they are consulted only on '*light issues*' in the structured dialogue while the '*core decisions*' continue to be taken without them.

Implementation at national level

In line with recommendations from structured dialogue, some Member States have taken measures to ensure appropriate and sustainable funding for youth organisations. In Portugal, support for youth organisations was strengthened in 2013. In Malta, the National Agency clearly referred to the structured dialogue recommendations to set up a new fund for capacity-building of youth organisations.

Despite the absence of commitment at EU level, voting age commissions were created in at least one Member State. In Ireland, an Advisory Group was set up and advocated for a constitutional change to lower the voting age. In January 2013, the Advisory Group presented its arguments to the National Constitutional Convention, which, as a result, voted in favour of lowering the voting age to 16 and sent its recommendation to the Irish Government. In July 2013, the Government confirmed that the proposal to lower the voting age from 18 to 16 would be put to referendum in Ireland. While this achievement is mainly due to the advocacy of the National Youth Council of Ireland, the structured dialogue contributed to the advocacy and the overall result (see full list of joint proposals -> political outcomes -> actions in Annex 2).

As for the first phase, important provisions in the Council Conclusions, which follow-up on the joint recommendations, have not yet been implemented in the Member States. For example, no concrete policy measures or initiatives have been taken at national level to stimulate strategic partnerships between youth organisations, public authorities and private sector in youth-led projects, or to ensure co-ownership with young people on youth-related issues.

2.3. Council Conclusions on Youth Participation and Social Inclusion (Nov 2012)

Joint Recommendations versus Council Conclusions

The Ministers included some of the joint proposals from the Conference in the Conclusions they adopted in the Council of the EU in November 2012⁹. They recognised the role that youth organisations play in the social inclusion of all young people and agreed to engage all young people in the development, implementation and evaluation of all policies that affect them. The Youth Ministers also agreed to support young migrants in learning the official language(s) as well as to ensure equal access for all young people, including young migrants, to youth guarantee schemes, which support them in making the transition from education to work. Taking into account the proposal from young people and policy-makers, the Ministers agreed to strive to strengthen the support and funding of youth activities on social inclusion and intercultural dialogue of young people from EU and non-EU states, in the new EU programme (full list of political outcomes of the structured dialogue in Annex 3).

Other proposals of young people and policy-makers taken on board by the Ministers include, developing peer-learning activities in cooperation with youth organisations, supporting partnerships of media and youth NGOs in promoting an unbiased image of young migrants and creating better synergies on migration issues at national, regional and European level.

⁸ Council Conclusions of May 2013 on maximising the potential of youth policy in addressing the goals of Europe 2020 Strategy.

⁹ Council Conclusions of November 2012 on the participation and social inclusion of young people with emphasis on those with a migrant background, OJ C393.

However, as in the previous two phases, the strongest proposals put forward by young people and policy-makers – the most relevant proposals for young people’s social inclusion – were **not** taken into account in the Council Conclusions. Despite the demands from the EU Youth Conference in Cyprus, the Ministers did not consider the proposal for providing equal access to health services (beyond non-urgent healthcare) to all young people, including immigrants, nor did they discuss the proposal for introducing intercultural education in the national curricula or the one for setting up accessible micro-grant schemes for youth-led initiatives. The European Commission has not done more to follow-up either: it has not yet responded to the call for full implementation of the European platform against poverty and social exclusion, neither has it considered or shared with the other EU institutions the proposal for providing the right to vote and run for office at all levels to all long-term residents.

Implementation at EU level

As a positive development, the Youth Chapter in the new Erasmus+ Programme includes a specific priority on enhancing the international dimension of youth activities, notably through the promotion of mobility and cooperation between EU and non-EU youth organisations. The structured dialogue (both first and third phases) contributed to this result, although it is probably not the only factor that influenced it.

However, no actions have been taken to improve the cross-sectorial cooperation and create better synergies on migration issues at national *or* European level. Equally little has been done to involve young people with a migrant background in decision-making structures or to support partnerships of media and migrant youth organisations.

Implementation at national level

Youth Ministers took on board to support programmes and activities that facilitate access to employment and improve employability of all young people, including young migrants. As a direct result of the recommendations made nationally in the structured dialogue, Slovenia launched the ‘**First Challenge**’ initiative. This initiative provides subvention for social contributions to employers who hire young people below 30 in their first-ever job. More than 3,000 young people have been employed since the measure was put into action.

Moreover, the joint proposal on establishing youth information and counselling services for young people, included in the Conclusions of November 2012, was recently translated into concrete action in Malta. A Youth Information One-Stop Shop was opened in La Valletta in July 2013, where all young people can seek the information they need (e.g. training opportunities) and receive counselling assistance.

Cooperation of public authorities with youth workers and youth organisations in developing peer-learning activities is another recommendation that influenced Member States’ actions. While in Slovenia, the Government is in the process of establishing a ‘mentors scheme’ for young people, a workshop plan on migration and refugees / asylum seekers is being developed in the UK in order to be used in peer learning activities in schools and youth organisations.

2.4. Youth Participation in Democratic Life (Jul 2011 – Dec 2012)

The three aspects of youth participation in democratic life in Europe discussed during the 18 months of structured dialogue with young people and policy-makers were reviewed in a political document at the end of the cycle.

Joint Recommendations versus Council Conclusions

In addition to the three Council Conclusions already discussed, the 27 Youth Ministers sitting in the Council of the EU included some of the proposals on youth participation in democratic life made over the cycle into a Resolution adopted in November 2012¹⁰. The EU Ministers responsible for

¹⁰ Council Resolution of November 2012, on the overview of the structured dialogue with young people on youth participation in democratic life in Europe, OJ C 380.

Youth Affairs recognised youth organisations as channels for developing skills and competences of young people. They agreed to support youth participation in decision-making at all levels and to expand the Structured Dialogue to all young people, including specific target groups such as non-organised youth and young people with fewer opportunities. Several other proposals from the 18-month structured dialogue were also taken on board such as stronger support of all youth activities focused on the participation and intercultural dialogue of young people from EU and non-EU countries (also taken on board in the Council Conclusions of Nov 2012) as well as setting up youth facilities where all young people can meet, create and get involved in projects.

Implementation at EU level

The Ministers for Youth's political commitment to ensure stronger support of all youth activities focused on the participation and intercultural dialogue of young people from EU and non-EU countries, contributed to the specific aim of the new Erasmus+ Programme or 2014-2020 to support the mobility of young people to and from third countries, in particular neighbourhood countries.

In addition, in the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, adopted in December 2012, Member States recognise youth organisations among the key stakeholders with an important role to play in facilitating opportunities for non-formal and informal learning and validation processes. Although this provision is mainly the result of the advocacy of the European Youth Forum and its members, the structured dialogue contributed to this strong emphasis of the role of youth organisations in non-formal education.

Implementation at national level

The joint recommendation on setting up local youth facilities, guided by youth workers, where all young people can meet, was recently implemented in Malta, where a Youth Information One-Stop Shop was opened in July 2013, where all young people can receive support to create and get involved in projects.

Nevertheless, there is no information of any measures taken at national level to implement the other recommendations made over the 18 months of dialogue, as for example the recommendation to ensure stronger support of all youth activities focused on the participation and intercultural dialogue of young people from EU and non-EU countries,

Overall assessment

On average, approximately 30% of the joint recommendations adopted at EU Youth Conferences were **fully** taken on board in the political Conclusions or Resolution endorsed by the EU Member States' Youth Ministers in the Council of the European Union. In addition, about 20% of joint recommendations were **partially** addressed in respective Council documents. Nevertheless, only five joint recommendations from the 18-months structured dialogue were integrated in the Council Resolution adopted at the end of the cycle, which is a rather disappointing result compared to the number of proposals made.

Lack of political will to follow-up on the joint recommendations

Indeed, none of the key recommendations of young people and policy-makers addressing the essence of youth participation in democratic life in Europe were taken on board in the Resolution concluding the 18 months of structured dialogue. Neither the joint proposals for facilitating access to vote for young people or making citizenship education compulsory and effective in schools, nor the ones calling for the right of all long-term residents to vote and run for office at all levels were at all referred in the Youth Ministers' Resolution. Young people were expecting that these core proposals, left outside of previous Council Conclusions, would be included in the final Resolution. By ignoring them, the Council generated great disappointment, especially given the significant efforts that young people invested in the structured dialogue. As a result, the Council Resolution, expected to wrap-up the whole cycle, is largely considered as weak and insufficient, comprising *light* proposals and excluding the *strongest* ones, mainly due to the lack of political will or competence to act among Member States and the Commission.

Lack of coherence in the 18-month structured dialogue

The weak overall impact of the recommendations made on youth participation in democratic life can also be explained by the fragmented approach of the whole cycle. Each phase under each Presidency focused on *three different* aspects of the overarching priority of youth participation. This lack of focus did not allow for a clear list of proposals on youth participation, neither did it facilitate their inclusion in the Council Resolution. It proved easier and more efficient to focus on a single topic for the whole length of a cycle of structured dialogue, as was the case for youth employment, from January 2010 to June 2011. The set of proposals made during the 18 months was more coherent, better reflected in Council documents and continues to drive follow-up at EU level.

Repetition of topics

The number of new recommendations and subsequently of new policies has also been weakened by the constant repetition of the themes discussed in the workshops regardless of the topic. For example, all the three EU Youth Conferences organised during the second cycle of structured dialogue had, among others, workshops discussing access to information, recognition and validation of non-formal education, intercultural dialogue and support tools for youth organisations (see Annex 4). These topics were discussed repeatedly throughout the 18 months, and the outcomes of the discussions replicated from one conference to another: introducing citizenship education in school curricula and the validation of the non-formal education were proposed as joint recommendations both at the EU Youth Conference in Denmark and at the conference in Cyprus, six months later. Although this underlines a consistent demand from participants to both conferences, it also constituted a missed opportunity for putting forward other proposals better linked to the respective topics of elections (in Denmark) or social inclusion of young migrants (in Cyprus). This repetition can be partly explained by the repeated involvement of the same youth stakeholders in the consultations, and the fact that they do not necessarily have expertise on each of specific topics, such as social inclusion of young migrants.

To ensure that the Conference include a real reflection on its main topic, more preparation is required both for young people involved in the consultations and for the youth representatives taking part in EU Youth Conferences. More background information is needed, potentially coming from new stakeholders (experts, more specialised youth organisations, representatives of other policy areas), both on the topic itself and on the existing institutional processes. This information could be included in an Explanatory Note communicated to National Working Groups and INGYOs, or at least to the youth representatives taking part in the EU Youth Conferences.

Better focus on the follow-up to the structured dialogue results

Following up on the structured dialogue outcomes is essential to ensure its positive impact on youth policies and on young people's lives, but monitoring such follow-up requires much time, resources and efforts. It is particularly challenging to monitor the results of the structured dialogue *at the same time* as carrying out discussions on a new thematic priority, as it has always been so far. This duality entails the risk of Member States '*forgetting*' their commitments of the previous cycle while only focusing on consulting young people on the present topic, which leads to a vicious circle of limited follow-up and little impact on young people's lives. Therefore, a separate stage is needed to focus on the follow-up and implementation of the joint recommendations.

3. CONCLUSIONS: More Needs to be Done!

Overall, during its second cycle, the structured dialogue positively engaged young people across Europe and some of the proposals resulting from the dialogue were taken up at the highest level of decision-making in the youth field at EU level. Some are already put into practice at EU level and in a few Member States. However, the commitment of EU institutions and Member States remains somewhat disappointing, as many of the proposals resulting from the dialogue remain unanswered.

Recommendations to the European Commission

This evaluation proves that the Commission should play a more active role in the political follow-up at EU level. While Member States, gathered in the Council of the EU, have taken on board policy

proposals from the structured dialogue into four political documents, three Council Conclusions and a Council Resolution, the Commission has not taken any specific policy initiative, except from applying some of the few provisions addressed to the Commission in the Council documents, such as re-designing the European Youth Portal to make it more accessible to all young people. Despite youth policies falling within the competence of Member States, the Commission does play a key role in coordinating and facilitating the co-operation between Member States in the youth field as well as providing support through dedicated programmes and instruments. Therefore, the Commission can and should take on board proposed policy initiatives that facilitate coordination among Member States, such as creating a European database with research and information on lowering the voting age to 16. It similarly should provide support to the actions proposed for young people, such as the cooperation between migrant youth organisations and media or the setting up of micro-grant schemes for youth-led initiatives.

The Commission should also promote the policy proposals from structured dialogue across its departments, to the relevant Commissioners and services outside the youth field, and link them to on-going institutional and policy development. It should clearly adopt a cross-sectoral approach to the follow-up given to structured dialogue, and provide adequate and regular feedback to the European Steering Committee and the National Working Groups detailing its follow-up actions.

Recommendations to Member States

Need for more follow-up

Member States should do more to answer the joint recommendations put forward in the structured dialogue on youth participation in democratic life in Europe. Member States are expected to answer to the proposals for cost-free visas for youth workers and volunteers as well as they are expected to ensure the independence and sustainability of National Youth Councils in every European country. National governments should also take on board to make citizenship education compulsory and effective in schools and to establish voting age commissions to stimulate the debate about lowering the voting age to 16. So far these recommendations have not been followed, hence Member States should urgently start working on this. It would also be important that Member States better promote the measures they take in the implementation of structured dialogue recommendations.

Cross-sectorial cooperation in follow-up

Member States (within the Council of the EU) should also do more to follow-up at EU level on the joint recommendations that go beyond their competences in the youth field. They should address such issues as healthcare, fundamental rights and migration, by cooperating across policy fields with their relevant counterparts. The Presidency of the Council of the EU should lead by the example and share the proposals from the structured dialogue to the relevant Council formations, while each Youth Minister should do the same towards the relevant national ministries. In general, such outreach to other policy areas should be detailed in the feedback provided by the Presidency to the European Steering Committee and National Working Groups.

So far, no political follow-up has been carried out on the proposed actions that go beyond the youth field, which proves that cross-sectorial cooperation has not improved since the EU Youth Report¹¹ revealed this deficiency and recommended better cooperation across all policy areas affecting youth and creating new partnerships towards joint initiatives for young people.

Need for better implementation

As shown in this evaluation, new measures were put in place in some Member States following the structured dialogue proposals. Nevertheless, only few Member States have taken such concrete measures and most still have not answered adequately to the recommendations put forward in the structured dialogue. If in some cases implementation is lacking because the policy proposals are already in place, or because they are not relevant to the national context (e.g. cooperation with Eastern Europe and Caucasus), in general, the absence of implementation results is due to a lack of political will. All governments need to take the responsibility and step up their efforts in implementing the measures proposed. National Youth Councils, as the representative platform of youth

¹¹Joint EU Youth Report of the Council and the Commission, OJ C 394.

organisations and young people in their respective countries, can play an important role in securing the follow-up by reminding their governments of the engagement they took at European level, and by cooperating on concrete initiatives.

Need for regular and systematic monitoring

Overall, it is difficult to have a thorough overview of the actions implemented in the EU Member States without a regular and systematic monitoring. There is currently no structured process for monitoring the follow-up of the joint recommendations and their implementation at EU and national level. Only the EU Youth Report published every three years, comprises valuable information on some cycles, but fails to cover others due to its publication deadlines. Building on the EU Youth Report, a more efficient reporting system should be put in place, involving National Working Groups and the European Steering Committee to evaluate the progress of the structured dialogue from national to European level.

The cycle of structured dialogue dedicated to youth participation has had some impact on some policies formulated at EU level and in, some cases, led to concrete measures to improve young people's lives. However, more needs to be done since the follow-up at EU level remains weak and the implementation in Member States deficient. If young people are to be convinced that it is worth to constantly participate in the structured dialogue, Member States and the Commission should necessarily improve the political follow-up and implementation. It is only by providing clear information on the implementation of the recommendations that Member States and the Commission will prove that they listen to young people's proposals and that their proposals are translated into real measures on the ground.