



## European Youth Forum Policy on Young People and Social Exclusion

Adopted as amended by the Executive Committee,  
Geneva, Switzerland,  
26-28 November 1999

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### Background

The socially excluded are those whose quality of life has been reduced and their full participation in society limited by a combination of factors. Socially excluded people experience 'the denial (or non-realisation) of the civil, political and social rights of citizenship'. Social exclusion is multidimensional: people can be socially excluded because they have a low income; because of poor health, housing, education, training and skills; because of a lack of civil rights; or because of their gender, ethnic origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, nationality or place of residence, etc. Furthermore, social exclusion is often experienced dynamically. While many people may be socially excluded for all of their lives, others may fall into or climb out of social exclusion.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, notably in the transition stage between education and employment. Access to social protection can be very limited during this period of their lives, and unemployment is frequently high among this age group. For example, it is estimated that approximately 10% (Source: Eurostat) of young people between the ages of 16-18 in the European Union are not in education, training or employment and that they do not receive social security benefits. In this way, they do not participate in society and become effectively invisible. In central and Eastern Europe, the problem is more acute due to the transition from state communism to democracy and free market economics. There is also a problem of hidden unemployment in different countries; this helps for officials to reduce attention for the problem of unemployment. In many of these countries youth unemployment is high and social protection can be very limited.

Young people can experience social exclusion in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. A low income due to poorly paid employment, illegal exploitation (black economy), unemployment or a lack of social protection is the principal cause of social exclusion. Certain groups of young people are particularly at risk of having a low income or of receiving no income at all. These groups include those that suffer discrimination in the labour market and in society as a whole, on the basis of their religion, gender, ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability or age. Other factors which contribute to social exclusion are poor education, lack of training, poor quality housing, illegal status, homelessness, and poor health and health provision.

Young refugees and young people without legal stay, in several European countries, youngsters who are engaged in an asylum request procedure do not have proper access to education and health facilities. Meanwhile, young people who do not possess a legal permission of residence, the so-called "illegals", are not entitled to have any access to education and health facilities. As both groups lack access to such basic needs, they are considered as socially excluded.

Education and training play a crucial role in developing and ensuring democracy in our society, as well as the participation and personal development of each individual. They represent major assets for the development, progress and economic growth of Europe. They are essential elements in the promotion of cohesion and social inclusion. The best place to promote inclusion and cohesion is within compulsory education, especially during the early years when young people need to develop effective personal and social skills, self-confidence and esteem. As points of transition are critical moments that have a strong impact on the choices and decisions made by young persons it is important to focus on the transition throughout school as well as on the transitions between education and training and work when fighting exclusion.

Another important tool is the early identification of young people in need of additional support in order to prevent them becoming school drop-outs, low achievers and ultimately socially excluded.

The Third Sector, in connection with systems of civil service, and in particular youth organisations make a crucial contribution to the training and employment of socially excluded young people. Not only do they provide training and employment that is easier to access for socially excluded young people as it is targeted at their interests and abilities. They also often bridge the gap for many young people between formal education and employment as they offer them a place to develop their visions of an active participation in society and help them gain social skills and working experience. Youth NGOs are making a valuable contribution in preventing social exclusion in their everyday work. Youth NGOs as well as other parts of the Third Sector are not a storage for an unwanted young labour force but a trampoline to young people's full enjoyment of civil, political and social rights. The Youth forum and all its Member Organisations commit themselves to combat social exclusion and unemployment of young people.

Throughout Europe social exclusion can mean the effective denial of an individual's human rights. Not all European countries have signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter and the Revised European Social Charter. The adoption and full implementation of the aforementioned would promote the right to participate fully in society for all those living in Europe.

Dealing with social exclusion is essentially the responsibility of each individual country and its citizens and bodies inside the countries. In the European Union, the Treaty of Amsterdam gave the Community the right to 'support and complement the Member States' in certain areas related to the 'promotion of employment, improved living and working conditions, ... proper social protection'. However, actions to combat social exclusion remain the competence of the individual Member State. While many countries are beginning to take a more comprehensive approach to the problem, the multi-dimensional nature of social exclusion means that different government departments or ministries deal with different aspects of the problem. Therefore, any demands to confront the issue of social exclusion should recognise

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that they should be directed primarily at the national level and should focus on the need for a unified approach to combat the factors that contribute to social exclusion.

## European Youth Forum recommendations

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The European Youth Forum calls on all European governments to:

1. Sign up to, respect and implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter and they should ratify the Revised European Social Charter.
2. Ensure that every young person in Europe is covered by the social protection system. Social protection schemes are a key means of reducing poverty by providing a safety net for the unemployed, homeless and ill. Many young people in Europe are not eligible for such benefits.
3. Reduce levels of discrimination to counteract the social exclusion on the basis of social origin and ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, age, gender, or physical or mental disability.
4. Increase measures to improve social cohesion and integration, justice and fundamental rights.
5. Guarantee the full participation of civil society, in particular of young citizens, in all economic and social key decisions. Governments also should pay attention to the transparency of their decisions as well as of the impact and implementation of socio-economic measures. They should assess systematically the impact of the implemented socio-economic measures on the social exclusion of young people. In particular, they should do this evaluation with the participation of the young beneficiaries.
6. Ensure that in Central and Eastern European Countries there is a legal basis for that young people do not suffer a reduction in their rights to social security benefits and employment as a consequence of the adoption of free market economics.
7. Keep the issue of social exclusion on the political agenda by creating strategies to identify the different sources of exclusion, analyse them and develop prevention and inclusive policy for those who face or may face exclusion. Dealing with social exclusion successfully goes further than rising the employment rates.

The European Youth Forum calls on the European Union institutions and Member States to:

8. Intensify their efforts to ensure that Guideline 1 of the European Employment Strategy Guidelines as proposed by the European Commission for the year 2000 is adopted and fully implemented and, where possible, the new start takes place before the deadline of six months. Guideline 1 states that 'every unemployed young person is offered a new start before reaching six months of unemployment, in the form of training, retraining, work practice, a job or other employability measure with a view to effective integration into the labour market'. This guideline 1 should guarantee the new start "with a view to effective

and sustainable integration into the labour market" and allow a good quality of life.

9. Give special priority to ensuring that young people who are not in education, training or employment can benefit from these measures. They should also be aware of the consequences to social exclusion of making the receipt of social security benefits dependent on participation in such schemes.
10. Respect Guideline IX of the European Employment Strategy Guidelines which states that Member States will 'give special attention to the needs of the disabled, ethnic minorities and other groups and individuals who may be disadvantaged, and develop appropriate forms of preventive and active policies to promote their integration into the labour market.'
11. Take into consideration during the negotiations with accession candidate countries all the human rights and especially the social and economic rights of individuals, using the Revised European Social Charter as a guideline.

The European Youth Forum further demands:

*Employment*

12. Young people in employment should receive an income which allows them to have a decent quality of life. Young people should not be paid less for doing the same work as older workers. They should not live below the poverty line on the basis of their age.
13. Young people who are unable to work due to their disability or health reasons should receive an income which allows them to have a decent quality of life. Every young person has the right to a freely chosen employment in agreement with the conditions of the International Labour Organisation.

*Education*

14. Education and training must give each individual the opportunity to discover and develop his or her abilities and potential. The public education system must provide all young people with a comprehensive education and with an appropriate preparation for life as an active citizen of society, working life and private life.
15. Young people should receive an education which not only equips them for successful entry into the labour market but also enables them to have the ability and capacity to make positive, informed life choices. This should be achieved by enabling young people to access pre-vocational training, retraining, life skills programmes, supported work experience, mentoring, professional guidance and other appropriate support services. They should have a thorough grounding in information technology. Member States of the European Union should implement Guidelines VII and VIII referring to the quality of public education. In particular, Guideline VIII should be adopted and set into practice,

demanding that Member States equip 'schools with computer equipment and facilitating student access to the Internet by the end of 2002'.

16. Access to life long learning and the recognition of the value of non-formal education are also vital in ensuring that young people can adapt to the changing labour market and participate fully in society. Education and training schemes should take into consideration individual interests and aspirations, allowing young people to have vocational choice.

#### *Health*

17. European countries must ensure that their health services are accessible to all, independently of their marital and professional status.

#### *Access to justice*

18. European countries should take measures with the objective of every young person knowing their rights and having easy equal access to the justice of their country. This means that they should be provided with legal advice when their rights are not respected.

## Annex

### The Multidimensionality of Social Exclusion

- Income

Poverty is one of the main causes of social exclusion. A low income can prevent an individual from participating fully in society and limit the quality of his or her life. In families, a low parental or family income has an effect on the whole household. In single parent families the problem is more likely to be acute, with a high proportion of single parent families living below the poverty line. Moreover, children born into poverty are likely to be socially excluded for a large part of their lives due to the knock-on effect of poverty and limited opportunities during childhood.

- Employment

Unemployment levels are very high in many of the countries of the European Union, and the average for the Union as a whole remains consistently high, especially in terms of long-term unemployment. Certain groups such as young people, women, the low-skilled, minorities and the disabled are more likely to be unemployed. While employment can offer a way out of social exclusion, being employed does not necessarily mean that a person is not socially excluded. In the European Union there are a significant number of working poor. Many people are employed in low-paid, precarious jobs. Furthermore, in some countries (notably in Southern Europe) an informal labour market employs people in conditions characterised by low pay, long hours and poor working conditions. In Central and Eastern Europe unemployment rates for young people have at least doubled in the post-communist period, with significant levels of long-term unemployment.

- Social Protection

In recent years there has been a trend among the Member States of the European Union to link the right to social security benefits to the requirement to search for employment or participate in a training course. In addition, social security benefits for the disabled, single parents and people taking early retirement have also been linked to active labour market policies. This has reduced the security previously offered by 'a safety net' of social protection measures in many countries and made people more vulnerable to social exclusion. Similarly in post-communist countries changes to the social protection system (or indeed problems in respecting the payments required by existing systems) have frequently led to a widespread decline both in terms of eligibility for social security benefits and in the level of benefit received.

- Housing

Poor quality housing or homelessness are a major aspect of social exclusion. It is estimated that 15 million people in the EU live in sub-standard or overcrowded accommodation. Moreover, there tend to be clustered areas of poor quality housing, often leading to areas of social exclusion and deprivation characterised by high crime and poor amenities (including schools). The number of homeless throughout the EU is estimated at 3 million people. The majority of homeless are men, but the number of women and young people becoming homeless is increasing.

- Health

The physical and mental health of people is important for their inclusion in society. Income is very closely linked to health, with those who have low incomes generally suffering from poorer health and reduced life expectancy. Although people are living for longer and longer, the quality of their health in the latter years of their lives can be very low. While modern medicine can increasingly prevent death from a number of illnesses and disease, it means people may live longer but often in a poor state of health.

- Family size and structure

Household sizes and structures have been changing across the European Union. There has been a trend towards smaller households made up of individuals and a move away from extended families living together. Nevertheless, for many young people the trend is only in evidence when they become financially independent. With the extension of the period of time spent in education and the prevalent high unemployment levels, young people have to depend on their families for a longer period of time and continue to live at home. Housing subsidies for young people have consistently been reduced and unless they are financially independent, young people have little choice but to remain within the parental home. This means that those who do not have the financial support of their parents face real difficulties in securing accommodation.

- Education and training

Education, and levels of literacy and numeracy in particular, are important factors in determining a person's participation in employment and inclusion in society. In the European Union levels of education have been consistently rising, with higher numbers of young people completing a full school education and entering some form of further education or training. However, the school drop-out rate is still very high in some Member States and education systems are not fully geared to providing the training in information and communication technology required by the labour market.

Another problem in the field of education is the illiteracy of 10 % of young people leaving school, due to rigid curricula and high numbers of pupils per teacher which reduces the possibility of adapting the teaching to the capacities and needs of every pupil. Pupils with special learning needs easily get overlooked and as a consequence

never learn to read and write properly or forget it when their knowledge is not enhanced after its acquisition.

- Discrimination

People can be pushed into low-paid jobs or unemployment, they can have less access to education, health services, housing and social security or be hindered in their participation in society due to discrimination. Discrimination on the grounds of their gender, age, race, ethnic origin, nationality, refugee status, mental and physical disability, sexual orientation, religion, culture and urban or rural living environment is a form of social exclusion. Young people suffering from social exclusion and being discriminated against for any reason often experience multiple discrimination. It will be even more difficult to include these people into society and enhance their full enjoyment of human rights because the mere access to income, employment, education etc. is not enough. In addition to measures giving them opportunities, it will also be necessary to change the opinions of people discriminating against them. E.g. for a young women from an ethnic minority who faces multiple discrimination due to her gender, ethnic background and age and who in addition is socially excluded because she did not have access to education and as a consequence is excluded from employment and income as well, it won't be enough to provide her with education and a job. Without accompanying measures against discrimination, it is rather probable that within school and her working place she will experience discriminating behaviour by her colleagues, teachers etc. and thus raising her drop-out potential.