



“Embracing the Future”

Bureau Position Paper on the Green Paper
on demographic change

*European Youth Forum / Forum Jeunesse de l'Union européenne / Forum
des Organisations européennes de la Jeunesse*

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The demographic issue: It is time for a European renewal

The European Youth Forum welcomes the Green Paper on demographic change issued by the Commission on March 16th 2005 as a way of deepening and widening the debate on demography. Recognising the major role that young people can play in addressing the European demographic challenge is a major step forward. Young people have indeed a lot to contribute to update and then redesign the European Social Model by taking into account the new reality of the European society: a society in which both younger and older people are in a vulnerable position and deserve special attention from policy makers.

On behalf of young people in Europe, the European Youth Forum calls for a full inclusion of youth organisations in the debate and policy-making process regarding demographic change.

I. How to build trust for a vulnerable generation of young people

Population ageing was rightly identified, together with the management of enlargement and globalisation, as one of the three main challenges that the European Union will have to face before 2010, concerning social policy¹. The European Youth Forum recognises that although increased life expectancy generated some problems to deal with, it remains one of the main European achievements in the last decades.

In addition, the demographic issue in Europe should be linked to the international demographic situation which requires a global management in relation to the promotion of sustainable development.

The European Youth Forum strongly supports the development of a new Intergenerational Pact and is committed, in collaboration with older peoples' representatives, to working towards such a pact in the coming years. Although we believe that there are no trade offs to be made between young and older people, we share the analysis conveyed in the High Level Group report that this new Intergenerational Pact should be "focused on young people and based on confidence in the future".

We believe that the changing nature of European birth rates should be addressed. However this is not the only issue that European decision makers have to focus on. **The main problem is that the necessary opportunities are not given to young people to live the life they want to lead.** The European Youth Forum believes that the priority must be given to policies aimed at addressing young peoples' needs. If opportunities are guaranteed, then we are convinced that the Europeans will actively contribute to the European economic and social renewal that the Lisbon strategy looks for.

Today, young people face many challenges. They are particularly at risk of poverty², are twice as likely to be unemployed as the average³ and even, when working, encounter the most precarious working conditions, often without being entitled to State subsidies when unemployed.

¹ "Report of the High level group on the future of social policy in an enlarged European Union" published by the European Commission DG EMPL in 2004.

² 19% of the 16-24 in 2004.

³ 17,9% in December 2004.

In this context, young people are forced in many European countries to postpone their entry into adult life stages, for instance by extending their higher education years and accumulating degrees. Although it varies from region and member state, many young people remain longer in their parents' house than they did in previous generations because they cannot afford to live on their own. Young people are less likely to settle down with a partner and have children because of the lack of necessary means, and even when they do, it is much later in life than before.⁴

The work done to date on **"youth autonomy"** should play an important part in transforming this vicious circle into a virtuous one. It is vital that we make progress on the basis of the working paper issued by the European Commission on May 26th 2004 following the proposal in the White Paper "A New impetus for European Youth" to set up an expert group on the subject of youth autonomy. The recent announcement made by the Commission that a study on youth autonomy had been launched in July 2005 has been welcomed by the European Youth Forum. This study is just a first step, addressing the youth autonomy from one perspective only. However we need to move beyond discussion and debate and towards real and meaningful action. To achieve youth autonomy more needs to be invested so as to pave the way for young peoples' full integration into society. Youth organisations have an important role to play in the design and development of policies to address young people's realities regarding employment, training and education, financial security, social protection and housing. Therefore public authorities should engage with youth organisations when developing policies and they should establish the necessary structures to facilitate that the youth perspective is duly taken into account.

Young people need to have opportunities now if they are to have a better and more fulfilled life in the future and if they are to achieve their potential and contribute to democracy, stability, prosperity and welfare for all. It is the role of the member states and the EU to provide these opportunities. If we are to build a Europe as envisaged in the Lisbon Strategy, then member states and the EU needs to invest more in young people. If Europe is to achieve the aims as set in the Lisbon objectives to build the most competitive **"knowledge economy"** of the world, it must provide young people with the opportunities, resources and support to acquire the necessary skills. Therefore the European economy must concentrate on high value added products and services and the European Union must spend more on research and development to increase opportunities and encourage innovation. Measures in this area would lead to eradicate precarious work, low pay and poor working conditions, as outlined in the Lisbon agenda. These issues particularly affect young people, and if unaddressed will hamper social inclusion and economic growth.

The European Youth Forum stresses that the real challenge is to develop a **"knowledge society"** in Europe, alongside the "knowledge economy". A situation needs to be achieved in which more people are better educated to avail the opportunities of life and where phenomena such as young people leaving school without qualifications are eradicated. Education must be thought of more holistically and methods of learning developed to correspond to modern societies. The further we move from the era of industrial societies, the more difficult it is for conventional education systems to meet the learning needs of individuals and communities.⁵

⁴ The Green Paper has revealed the existing gap between the number of children that Europeans would like (2,3) and the number of children they actually have (1,5).

⁵ 'Building Bridges for Learning : the recognition and value of non-formal education'.

To that end, Member States should promote better links between the educational/training institutions and the labour market, and between formal and non formal education. They should also offer multiple entrance and exit points for the formal education system with recognition of prior learning achievements. The European Youth Forum believes that making higher education systems more comparable and working towards easier recognition of degrees and credits in Europe through the Bologna process would be a very positive evolution to provide all European young people with high quality comparable and compatible curricula. Moreover, we can increase the **mobility of workers** in Europe if measures are simultaneously taken to build a genuine European labour market. The European Youth Forum calls for actions to increase mobility in Europe, especially within the new Member States and hopes that the 2006 European year of workers' mobility will contribute to that effect. In this framework also obstacles to mobility of young people, especially through long, bureaucratic and expensive Visa-procedures must be overcome.

Alongside the formal education system, **non formal education** contributes to the development of young people, empowering and enabling them to actively participate in a rapidly changing environment. Volunteering within youth organisations should be recognised by society as a relevant experience for the labour market.

The European Youth Forum is concerned by the gap that exists between business and school, preventing many young people from choosing in full knowledge their future working life. We believe that steps should be taken urgently to develop **new orientation tools** that would help young people to meet at an early stage the employers that can offer them to realise their professional expectations. It is particularly necessary in the current context in which transition between school and work is more than problematic for many young people. The cooperation between education and the business sector should neither lead to the commercialisation of education nor to the exploitation of young people.

We believe that young people should be in a position to consider a career where they become self employed or where they engage in **entrepreneurship, and get the necessary support if they wish to do so**. This could be encouraged by simplifying procedures, by providing financial supports to young entrepreneurs and ensuring that there are public services and facilities in place to provide training and/or advice and support in starting a business. Developing a business or enterprise involves risks that can eventually lead to business failure and unemployment. Every person, employed or self employed, should have the right to a professional second chance and the development of comprehensive life long learning schemes is critical to that end. But even more important in the next years' agenda should be to encourage a change of mentalities so that failure in business is not anymore stigmatised by society as an overall failure in life.

The European Union must rapidly determine ambitious targeted objectives if the Lisbon process is to succeed. The **European Youth Pact** as adopted by the March European Council has been agreed at the highest political level, which indicates the growing acknowledgement of the necessity to address the needs and aspirations of young people from a European perspective. The European Youth Forum welcomes this important initiative, but also expresses its strong desire that the European Youth Pact should lead to measurable results. In other words that it should be "a Pact with

Impact”⁶. We believe that ambitious targets such as the reduction of youth unemployment from 18% to 9%, the reduction of the average transition period between school or training and obtaining a paid job by 50%, the increase of the number of young entrepreneurs by at least 50%, and the reduction of the number of people living in poverty by 50% are necessary and should be implemented if we want to obtain results before 2010. We recall the importance of the Lisbon national programmes that will be adopted by Member States this autumn and look forward to them translating the potential of a European Youth Pact into reality.

II. Developing a new intergenerational Pact

A. Developing the employment participation of all generations

The European Youth Forum believes that the **increased participation** of older people and of younger people in the labour market should be at the core of the strategy on demography. The European Youth Forum believes that younger and older people have mutual interests for increased participation in the labour market. With a shrinking labour force, we believe measures should be taken to assist and support young people into employment when they are ready and prepared to do so.

Many young and older people are today in a situation where they want to work but cannot find a job. The labour market discriminates on the basis of age to the detriment of both younger and older workers. The priority of European policies must be to create enough **employment opportunities** so that every person has the opportunity to work if they so wish.

Besides age **discrimination**, people can be discriminated in the labour market on other grounds such as gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and/or disability. We need to create a Europe where all citizens are supported and protected to achieve their highest potential, to live life fully and with dignity and in turn are in a position to make a contribution to their community and society. The increased participation of Europeans in a labour market which is open to all, and which creates and maintains better and secure employment is one of the key solutions to the challenges of the population ageing. In this regard, it is vital that existing anti-discrimination measures are rigorously implemented and where necessary new measures are introduced, so that all workers and potential workers are protected and the full potential of our citizens is harnessed. The European Youth Forum welcomes the recent Commission proposal to designate 2007 as the “Year of Equal opportunities for all”. We look forward to being fully involved in this initiative.

In the short term, significant inward **migration** will be necessary to compensate for the growing number of people retiring. The European Youth Forum reaffirms the priority that Member States should give to integrating new migrants into host societies. Member States should give migrants the same rights than nationals and thus avoiding the mistakes of the past. Special attention should be given to prevent discrimination, not only in the labour market but also in education, housing policies and in other spheres. The European Youth Forum is particularly concerned with the situation of younger migrants who are often victims of multiple discriminations not only based on their nationality but also on their age. The European Youth Forum will closely follow the ongoing European debate on economic migrations, launched by the Commission Green Paper published on January 11th 2005.

⁶ See the European Youth Forum Position Paper ‘For a European Pact with Impact’ adopted by the Council of Members in April 2005.

The productivity of work may only increase if policies are implemented to raise the **quality of work**. The promotion of security and health at work and the reconciliation of working and family life are two important ways to increase job quality. The European Youth Forum encourages the Commission to further work on the concept of the “working life cycle” that appears as a good tool in promoting individuals’ freedom of choice. This new organisation of work life would allow young people to decide when to work, thereby increasing their motivation when working and positively impacting upon total labour productivity. Youth organisations’ expertise in young peoples’ real life conditions should be valued in these reflections.

As indicated in the Commission Communication on “European policies concerning youth” published on May 30th 2005, the Commission and Member States have made young people a priority in the mutual learning programme on employment in 2005. In order to represent the interests and concerns of European young people the European Youth Forum asks to be fully involved in the European Employment Strategy.

B. Rethinking “intergenerational solidarity”

The European demographic evolution is very challenging not only for the European Union’s future economic development, but also for our social systems and communities. Between 2005 and 2030, the working age population (15-64) is due to fall by 20,8 million. Moreover, the demographic dependency ratio as defined as the ratio of the population aged 0 to 14 and over 65 to the population aged between 15 and 64 years will rise from a rate of 49% in 2005 to 66% in 2030. An ageing population requires the reform of our social systems, of our pensions systems and requires us to consider the costs of developing a better and greater infrastructure of care to name a few. This situation is particularly challenging for young Europeans.

Therefore it is important to reflect on how we can maintain the existing principles and guarantees of the **European Social Model** while reshaping it to meet the challenges of the 21st century. It is vital that young people and youth organisations are involved in these debates and decisions.

In this regard, the European Youth Forum welcomes and intends to take an active part in the initiative of the United Kingdom’s EU Council Presidency to convene an informal European summit on the European Social Model in October 2005. We believe that it is time to give full consideration to the important changes that have taken place in Europe during the last decades and to the fact that our modern societies do not produce the same risks as they did in the past. Today, many young and older people are experiencing very challenging living conditions in our “long term unemployment” societies. These important changes must be taken into account in the way in which European social systems work so as to offer more opportunities to young people.

The European Youth Forum calls for a broad debate on **pensions**, giving full voice to the representatives of the civil society, including older peoples’ and younger peoples’ organisations. This could be done by revisiting the Open Method of Coordination on Pensions, in force at the European level since 2001, at the occasion of the 2006 streamlining of the Open Method of Coordination on social inclusion/social protection.

The European Youth Forum does not contest the fact that a significant proportion of older people are at higher risk of poverty, notably those who remained home to work, raising their children and/or other dependants, and never received social insurance. Indeed such policies, far from encouraging one partner to remain home, only lead to financial dependence on a partner working outside the house and to social non-recognition⁷. The European Youth Forum calls for a better social and economic recognition of the work carried out at home, primarily by women, and for the revision of policies and measures so that they are awarded rather than penalised for working home and/or caring for their children and/or other dependants full time. In particular, we need to work towards the greater availability of childcare and ensure the better reconciliation of working and family life for both women and men. We should also enhance the entitlements of parents to paid maternity and paternity leave. The European Youth Forum supports the need to ensure that older people are offered adequate pensions so as to live in dignity. The necessary development of services and infrastructures of care for very elderly people may in addition generate employment for younger people.

The European Youth Forum calls for the design of an **“intergenerational solidarity plan”** in which the European Social Model would take into account the demographic changes that have taken place in European society during the last decades. This plan should avoid presenting the demographic issue as a conflict between young and older people, but rather promote social cohesion, notably between the different generations. Broad guidelines would be defined at the European level and Member States could adapt these guidelines to their realities and traditions. This new Intergenerational solidarity plan would facilitate the more effective targeting of young peoples’ needs by investing more and more efficiently in them. At the national level, a specific focus on youth issues should be incorporated every year in the Lisbon reform programs. It would present actions taken by Member States in the frame of the European Youth Pact and the Youth Autonomy Scheme in order to offer better opportunities to young people. It would also assess the results obtained and adapt the contents of the youth policies on the basis of this evaluation.

C. Building “intergenerational learning”.

Every year greater numbers of Europeans are reaching the age of retirement. The European Youth Forum believes that the retirement of older people without ensuring the transmission of their knowledge is a waste of valuable human resources. We therefore call for the design of an “intergenerational learning scheme”.

The intergenerational scheme proposal would be to accommodate a job sharing scheme between older workers who want to progressively move towards retirement and younger people in the process of entering or moving within the labour market. The older worker would be able to have shorter weeks of work and would be able to actively contribute to society by educating a younger worker for the future. This “intergenerational learning scheme” is all the more important as it would contribute to social cohesion and mutual understanding in a European society in which it will happen that more and more people from four different generations will live simultaneously and side by side. However, it is only an example of what could be done to link young and older people.

⁷ In 1996, 50% of European women said that they had to choose between working and having children.

Conclusion

In conclusion, rather than allowing ourselves to be the victims of inevitable changes, we must in Europe embrace the future with confidence. As the group in society with the largest interest in and with a considerable role to play in addressing the challenges of demographic change, the interests of young people must be given greater priority. **The makers and shapers of policy must ensure that young people have the resources, opportunities and support to reach their full potential in all aspects of their lives now and in the future.** In doing so, decision-makers would go a long way towards addressing the needs and aspirations of young people, while laying the foundations for an even more socially cohesive and prosperous Europe.