

## **Building an impactful and open EU Youth Dialogue,**

*A proposal by the European Youth Forum*

### **Executive Summary**

With the new EU Youth Strategy being currently negotiated in the Council of the EU, the momentum is here to build an impactful and open EU Youth Dialogue - a youth participation instrument that will succeed the Structured Dialogue with young people as of 2019.

This proposal is based on the [European Commission Communication on the new EU Youth Strategy for 2019-2027](#) and further explores how the new EU Youth Dialogue should be implemented. It is built on the Proposal for a New Structured Dialogue<sup>1</sup> by the European Youth Forum, and forms a vision for a bottom-up process that contributes to local, national and EU policy-making, involving young people from diverse backgrounds in decision-making process and developing their citizenship and belonging as active EU citizens.

The proposal is based on 6 key principles:

- Meaningful youth participation;
- Inclusive for diverse voices;
- Contributing to local, national and EU policy-making;
- Youth-led process;
- Recognising the role of the National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations;
- Youth friendly implementation.

Furthermore, it argues for clear governance structures that connect different partners and youth services in order to achieve common goal to make the process inclusive for young people from different backgrounds, including those who are not engaged in youth activities today.

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<sup>1</sup> Proposal for a New Structured Dialogue, European Youth Forum, 2017 -<https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/Proposal-for-a-new-Structured-Dialogue.pdf>

## Key principles that the EU Youth Dialogue should follow:

- **Meaningful youth participation** - the EU Youth Dialogue should be a quality process, where young people engage in a meaningful conversations with decision-makers and with each other. The activities run by the National Working Groups and International-Non Governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs) should aim to foster quality engagement of young people. Young people participating in the dialogue should hear what happened with their ideas and inputs to the policy processes and projects on all levels.  
*Through face-to-face dialogue with decision-makers and interactive online tools (while using online tools is encouraged, the goal to involve more young people and reach higher numbers should not overshadow the quality of the EU Youth Dialogue).*
- **Inclusive for diverse voices** - EU Youth Dialogue should be open for all young people and focus its efforts to reach out to and engage young people who are less active and coming from marginalised backgrounds. There is potential to explore doing school/university/community dialogue with young people to ensure that all voices are equally heard.  
*Ensuring that starting from a local level activities, the EU Youth Dialogue takes an inclusive approach.*
- **Contributing to local, national and EU policy-making** - ideas that can be implemented immediately on a local and national levels must be taken forward to local and national authorities and implemented together with young people.  
*Relevant ideas for European level should be channeled and discussed at the EU Youth Conferences, contributing to the EU Council Conclusions.*
- **Youth-led process** - the EU Youth Dialogue should be a youth-led process, with a strong involvement of National Youth Councils, INGYOs and other youth organisations in planning, delivery and follow up of activities.  
*The EU Youth Dialogue itself also needs to be designed together with young people.*
- **Recognising the role of the National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations** - National Youth Councils and INGYOs need to be recognised as key partners in EU Youth Dialogue with certain responsibilities (acting as multipliers, ensuring outreach to diverse young people, engagement in consultation and follow up to implementation) and rights (support, recognition and a voice).  
*Youth Organisations have been a strong support for the implementation of Structured Dialogue in Member States and therefore need to be fully recognised in this process.*
- **Youth friendly implementation** - for the process to be as meaningful, simple, fun and engaging as possible for both young people and decision-makers.  
*With a thought to methodology, youth friendly language, fun visibility and simplicity of other details.*

## A. Introduction

The new EU Youth Dialogue, proposed by the European Commission in the [Communication on the next EU Youth Strategy for the time period of 2019-2027](#), should be built on the achievements of the Structured Dialogue with young people. Undoubtedly, the Structured Dialogue has not achieved its full potential, and further improvements in the new EU Youth Dialogue are vital to the impact and quality outcomes of the process. That's why this discussion and reform come at the right time, giving an opportunity to critically reflect and advance this youth participation mechanism for the next generation.

Nevertheless, the Structured Dialogue has established well functioning working structures on national level - national working groups - that are of key importance for the new EU Youth Dialogue to be a success. These structures are essential, because they bring together wide variety of actors in the youth sector, including governments, youth organisations, youth work organisations, National Agencies for Erasmus+ (hereafter "National Agencies") and more, that have the know-how and channels to reach out to and work with diverse groups of young people on the ground.

The answer on how to reach out to young people on the periphery of participation or from marginalised backgrounds can be found locally. By engaging as many local actors that do day-to-day work with diverse young people - youth workers, youth organisations, schools, youth services and so on. The principle is to bring these actors together, have enough resources to support them in their work, and to reach out to young people systematically and proactively, not waiting until they will find these opportunities by themselves.

## B. Objectives of the EU Youth Dialogue

- **Enabling youth participation in decision-making processes:** the EU Youth Dialogue should inform young people about their right to participate and engage young people in policy-making. The gathered ideas should be followed up and implemented by decision-makers together with young people, from local to European levels.
- **Developing young people's skills for active citizenship and sense of belonging:** through the EU Youth Dialogue young people develop skills and attitudes that form their views and interest to participate, listen to others and engage in a meaningful and constructive conversations. It also develops sense of belonging to their communities and Europe.

## C. The new EU Youth Dialogue step by step

This section unfolds different aspects of the EU Youth Dialogue, including how the process should be governed on European and Member States level and what are different stages of the cycle, from consultations to implementation.

## **a. Governance**

The process should follow 18 months cycles - with one thematic priority per cycle that is linked to one of the priorities of next EU Youth Strategy and one of the [EU Youth Goals](#). The priority is decided by the European Steering Committee, taking into account policy processes on the EU level. The connection to the Youth Goals would ensure continuity from the previous Structured Dialogue processes and connect the new EU Youth Dialogue to wider variety of policy areas that affect the lives of young people, including citizenship, climate, employment and many others.

**On EU level** the process should be governed by the European Steering Committee, consisting of Trio Presidencies' teams (Ministry representative, National Youth Council representative and the National Agency representative), the European Commission and the European Youth Forum. The Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Field of Youth, EURODESK, ERYICA and any other actors or experts<sup>2</sup> that the European Steering Committee identifies should be involved in the work of the European Steering Committee. The involvement of EURODESK and ERYICA is a strategically important to improve outreach and visibility of the process, ensuring that the national multipliers would be mobilised to reach out to young people who are not active and harder to engage.

**On national level** the National Working Groups lead and implement the EU Youth Dialogue. The work of the National Working Groups should be closely linked to the work of the European Steering Committee and aim to achieve common objectives, while respecting subsidiarity and different national contexts. National Working Groups should consist of representatives from the Ministry in charge of youth, National Youth Council (coordinator of the National Working Group), youth organisations, National Agency, youth information offices, representative from youth workers organisations, youth researchers, as well as Ministry directly connected to the theme of the Cycle (employment, education, health etc) and other relevant actors<sup>3</sup>.

## **b. Flow of the Cycle**

### **1. Activities taking place throughout the entire 18-month Cycle**

#### EU Youth Dialogue: from local to European level

- In a bottom up approach from local to European level, different challenges and ideas for solutions would be discussed, exchanged and the most relevant ones will be

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<sup>2</sup> Experts can be youth researchers, youth workers, National or European youth policy experts, trainers or anyone else that has been identified by the European Steering Committee to contribute to EU Youth Dialogue process on European level.

<sup>3</sup> National Working Groups are encouraged to invite other actors or experts when necessary, depending on the theme of the EU Youth Dialogue cycle.

brought to the next level (discussions following the common thematic priority that is agreed on the European level).

- These activities should be carried out with the support, planning and delivery of the National Working Groups (engaging with a wide range of actors to reach the objective to include young people from diverse backgrounds).
- On the European level, the INGYOs, organised in a European Working Group, would be organising dialogue activities, and providing a transnational view on the selected theme. Therefore adding another, genuinely European perspective on the topic.
- Young people and local or national level decision-makers would participate in the EU Youth Dialogue and also discuss solutions to the identified problems (local solutions can be immediately followed up on a local and national level).
- Online spaces and tools can be used to get broader input, for example on the topic, but also to keep everyone who participated in offline activities at some stage engaged and active throughout the EU Youth Dialogue cycle and beyond. The online spaces should be complementary to offline activities. The youth dialogue with decision-makers must remain the main and central element throughout the EU Youth Dialogue, that should be one of the catalysts of quality of the process.
- On European level, the EU Youth Dialogue would be organised through the EU Youth Conferences (see the section on European level activities). In addition, through a common online platform, on an ad-hoc basis, the inputs and dialogue activities on the European level might be extended. In that case it would aim to collect complementary inputs and raise awareness on EU policy topics. When engaging young people with online tools on the EU level, attention must be given to language accessibility and accessibility to digital technologies, that is not equal among young people across and within Member States.

### Implementation and follow up

- Throughout the process, young people and decision-makers at all levels are encouraged to jointly implement their ideas, even if they have not been retained and brought to national or European levels. This must be seen as one of the priorities of the EU Youth Dialogue, being in line with the attempts of the Erasmus+ programme to have higher systematic policy implications on national youth policy frameworks.
- Ideas with a local relevance (for instance, young people suggesting to open a youth centre in a municipality) should be directly followed up on a local level together with local authorities (taking into account local, national or European relevance for implementation).
- National Working Groups should be coordinating and supporting the follow up on the implementation on a local and national level.
- National Working Groups would be responsible to note the ideas that will be channeled to the European level discussions (collect from local and national discussions and identify which aspects can be important for the implementation and discussions on European level).
- The European Steering Committee with the support of the European Working Group (made of INGYOs) would be overseeing the implementation on the EU level (EU

Council Conclusions, projects etc), with close involvement of the EU Youth Coordinator.

- An interactive online follow-up tool should be designed and made available for the use of young people, policy-makers and organisations in order to map the impact of the EU Youth Dialogue. This tool would allow to pin down different projects and ideas that are being implemented, connect them to Youth Goals, as well as gather inspiration and connect with relevant partners on national and European levels.

## **2. European level activities**

### EU Youth Conferences and events

- Now is the time to reflect on the EU Youth Conferences and their frequency. There should be at least one traditional EU Youth Conference (i.e. as currently organised) organised during the Cycle, when the European Steering Committee has identified the input to EU policy processes and a clear contribution to the development of the EU Youth Dialogue (such as to which EU Council Conclusions or other policy processes the Youth Conference outcome will contribute). However it is possible that other formats would offer better fora and flexibility for discussion and may produce better outcomes. Such a blended solution of one EU Youth Conference, complemented by other smaller events in different formats, may produce more creative and engaging solutions to the problems that young people are facing today. The European Steering Committee should assess and decide if other formats (smaller seminars for example) are a better fit to achieve the envisaged outcome.
- Each of the EU Youth Conferences or smaller events would have their unique purpose that is decided by the European Steering Committee according to the aims of the Cycle. However, it should follow the framework where the first conference - Kick-off Conference - is focusing on framing common vision and going into depth of theme through methodology of blue-sky thinking; where second conference - Progress Conference - is providing space to exchange best ideas and solutions; where the third conference - Achievement Conference - is dedicated for implementation plans and activities, and input into the EU Council Conclusions;
- Following the logic where National Working Groups select the ideas that are the most relevant for European level that would be discussed at the EU Youth Conferences, the National Working Groups together with the youth delegates (see point below) would be required to prepare for the EU Youth Conferences;
- The National Working Groups should be responsible for the selection of youth delegates that represent their country at the EU Youth Conferences, taking into account the purpose of the EU Youth Conference, as well as the diversity of representation. Three person delegations should be consisting of at least one young person that most likely has not been involved in youth activities before (through an open call on local and national level, taking into account the theme of the cycle, and giving an attention to ensure equal opportunities); and of at least one young person coming from a National Youth Council or other youth organisation if delegated so by the National Youth Council. The open call to young people must ensure that everyone who has been participating locally and nationally in grassroots activities

(online or offline) has a chance to attend the conference. The selection criteria could even be adjusted to the theme, ensuring relevant contributions. The participation of National Youth Councils is important to ensure democratic representation of young people. Furthermore, youth organisations are multipliers of the process in their countries, and they are an important means to reach out to more young people, including marginalised young people. They also have a key role in following-up the outcomes when returning to national and local contexts.

- INGYOs have a unique transnational experience and expertise that can contribute to many topics related to European integration, youth mobility, and beyond. Acknowledging that, the EU Youth Conferences should have this transnational element. In addition to the national youth delegates, youth delegates from INGYOs (selected similarly) would take part in each of the conferences. INGYOs could also share their expertise on various topics, considering they work with young people from all Europe, including from diverse groups, such as youth with migrant backgrounds, ethnic minorities, young people from lower-socio economic backgrounds.
- All EU Youth Conferences should bring together young people and decision-makers. The participation of decision-makers is imperative to the EU Youth Dialogue and youth participation.
- EU Youth Conferences should be supported with a team of experienced facilitators that are selected by the Presiding countries and the European Youth Forum.

#### Coordination activities for National Working Groups

- At least once during every Cycle coordinators of National Working Groups (National Youth Councils) and the National Agencies representatives should hold a meeting to coordinate the activities and implementation through the Cycle.
- This space is essential not only to ensure smooth coordination, but also to ensure that youth conferences are spaces for inputs from youth delegates. The coordinators that are responsible for organising the EU Youth Dialogue would have their own space that is lacking at the moment.
- It should be co-organised by the National Agency of the Presiding country (or other interested National Agency if agreed so with the Presidency) and the European Steering Committee, with the funding of the Transnational Cooperation Activities for cooperation of National Agencies.

#### **D. Adequately funded EU Youth Dialogue**

While the proposal from the European Commission aims to increase the outreach of the next EU Youth Dialogue, ambitious targets cannot be achieved without allocation of adequate financial resources. The funding should be proportionate to the ambition to involve more young people, therefore - requires an increase.

### **a. Erasmus+ grants for the National Working Groups**

Currently, the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020 provides co-financing for the National Working Groups through grants - Action 3.72<sup>4</sup>. These grants are welcome and in the next Erasmus + programme period should be increased, to reach out to more and diverse groups of young people through the EU Youth Dialogue.

The current maximum EU contribution per National Working Group<sup>5</sup> is set according to the Member State, with the maximum co-funding rate from the EU being 80%.

It is evident that with an increased financing, more concrete tasks and deliverables could be required from the National Working Groups. Most importantly, it would mean increased capacity to proactively engage young people who are currently left out of this process.

Additionally it must include systematic follow up and engagement of decision-makers on local and national level. While the Structured Dialogue is a mechanism for youth participation in policy-making, the Shadow Report on the Mid-Term Evaluation of Erasmus+ Programme Youth Chapter conducted by the European Youth Forum, revealed that no high level impact on the national youth policy could be identified, despite the existence of the Structured Dialogue.<sup>6</sup> It reveals that there is much more potential for policy impact of the EU Youth Dialogue process not only on European level, but also local and national level, and it deserves a considerable attention in the debate about future EU Youth Dialogue.

Moreover, it is important to mention that the grants should be administered in a timely manner, with no delays.

Besides the required increase of the National Working Group grants, the grants should be reorganised from 2 year period to 3 year period. National Working Groups face continuous challenges in terms of planning, reporting and implementation of activities, because the 2 year period is not synchronised with Structured Dialogue cycle that lasts 1,5 years or the duration of 3 EU Presidencies (one trio). 3 years grants would allow to cover 2 full EU Youth Dialogue Cycles and ensure smooth transition from one cycle to another. These grants could be complemented by 1,5 years long work plans that would outline precise activities, following the flow of the EU Youth Dialogue.

### **b. New grants for the European Working Group (INGYOs)**

Considering the policy demand to reach out to more young people, as well as diversity of themes that the EU Youth Dialogue will cover, it is necessary to ensure quality debate on transnational dimension of chosen themes. That means providing necessary resources for the INGYOs who are organised in the European Working Group, to facilitate this debate and provide perspective of young people who have transnational experience, being it a camp,

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<sup>4</sup> The grants for action 3.72 are administered by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, and National Working Groups need to apply every 2 years through a restricted call. The call outlines the foreseen tasks of the National Working Groups.

<sup>5</sup> Annex II, Action 3.72, invitation to submit an application, EACEA 2016 -

[http://strukturovanydialog.sk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/SD-2017-2018\\_Annex-II.pdf](http://strukturovanydialog.sk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/SD-2017-2018_Annex-II.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Shadow Report on the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ Youth Chapter, European Youth Forum, p. 81- <https://www.youthforum.org/shadow-report-mid-term-evaluation-erasmus-youth-chapter>

exchange project, school mobility or anything else. INGYOs who work with specific groups of young people (young people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, young people living in poverty and others) can bring an added value and perspective to the policy dialogue on European level.

These grants should be a part of the next Erasmus+ programme<sup>7</sup>.

### **c. Erasmus+ grants for youth projects on EU Youth Dialogue**

Another EU support mechanism that is imperative for youth participation and success of EU Youth Dialogue is Erasmus+ grants for youth projects under the current Key Action 3: “*Structured Dialogue: meetings between young people and decision-makers in the field of youth*”. While some Member States have been successful in establishing links between the Structured Dialogue process that is organised by the National Working Group, and the available grants for the youth projects to organise dialogue with decision-makers, it is not the case everywhere.

In this regard, further synergies between the process coordinated by the National Working Groups and the grants available for youth projects (administered by the National Agencies ) should be established. The admitted youth projects under this action should be connected to the overall implementation of Structured Dialogue in respective country. These synergies can be facilitated through cooperation between the National Working Groups and the National Agencies, together shaping the priorities, as well as providing communication channels between the National Working Groups and the project grantees.

### **E. Youth Dialogue in the EU candidate countries**

As an EU initiative implemented only in the Member States, until now, the Structured Dialogue has not reached beyond the EU. However, by their own initiative, the National Youth Council of former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (NYCM-FYROM) has successfully participated in the Structured Dialogue activities in current Cycle. It includes organising events and consultations with young people in the country, as well as contributing to wider European processes, such as Youth Goals development.

This is a positive example how the EU initiatives can have an impact and foster democratic processes in the candidate countries.

At the moment the National Working Group grants are limited to the EU Member States, excluding candidate countries. These grants should be made available also to candidate countries, acknowledging that youth participation is important for fostering EU values, such as democracy, equality, human rights and strengthening the civil society.

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<sup>7</sup> Policy Paper on the Erasmus+ Successor Programme, European Youth Forum, p.11 - [https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0119-17\\_PP\\_ErasmusPlus\\_Successor\\_Programme.pdf](https://www.youthforum.org/sites/default/files/publication-pdfs/0119-17_PP_ErasmusPlus_Successor_Programme.pdf)