



RESOLUTION

EU YOUTH STRATEGY

ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY/
VARNA, BULGARIA, 17-19 NOVEMBER 2016

Justification

This resolution is developed in the context of upcoming negotiations taking place at EU level regarding the adoption of a new cooperation framework in the youth field.

The current cooperation framework, the EU Youth Strategy, covers the period of 2010-2018. Therefore, as we enter the last phase of this period, it is already time to start defining our common position on what we want the future EU Youth Strategy to look like.

This resolution will serve as background for the advocacy work of the platform in particular towards the European Commission and the Council of the EU, as well as the European Parliament. As youth is a national competence, members will have a key role in defining the strategy with EU Member-State governments. The claims we are defining in this policy paper will be the ones we will be voicing to include in the next EU Youth Strategy.

Summary

The resolution on “EU Youth Strategy” of the European Youth Forum outlines the position and vision of young people and youth organisations across Europe for the next EU cooperation framework in the youth field – the EU Youth Strategy after 2018. Considering the numerous and diverse challenges young people in Europe are facing today and will face in the future, a more ambitious and effective strategy at a European level is needed – building on the achievements and learning from the shortcomings of the previous strategy.

Firstly, the text outlines four thematic priorities (quality education, volunteering and youth organisations, quality employment, non-discrimination and access to social rights), as well as specific objectives to achieve under these headings.

Secondly, the resolution puts forward principles on how to make the EU Youth Strategy more effective. These include having a cross-sectoral strategy and ensuring that youth is a cross-cutting priority. The Strategy should have a central coordination that engages all relevant stakeholders from different sectors. The Youth Forum also calls for rights- and evidence-based youth policy as well as a more focused strategy with fewer objectives, and these must be better monitored. Youth participation is key, so the systematic involvement of young people and youth organisations at all stages must be ensured.

The Structured Dialogue was one of the most visible aspects of the last Strategy. It must be improved in terms of quality policy recommendations and the monitoring of these recommendations. However the quantity should also be improved with more outreach thanks to better communication and partnership, and improved governance with triennial action plans for Member States to focus on ambitious and more successful implementation of fewer objectives. In order to achieve these improvements of the strategy, it is essential to have an increased financial support of the youth sector through Erasmus+ and other relevant programmes.

Introduction

The past number of years have come with new challenges for young Europeans: a combination of debt, unemployment, austerity policies and the increase in migration, precarious jobs and internships, the rise of extremist movements, demographic changes and rising housing prices, which have led to an increasingly fragmented society with young people often at the bottom. Consequently, the incomes and prospects of millions of young people across Europe are decreasing, resulting in unprecedented inequality amongst youth. In light of the upcoming negotiations to set up a new cooperation framework in the youth field at EU level, the European Youth Forum asks for an ambitious strategy that puts youth high on the political agenda and puts forward cross-sectorial and coordinated policy responses to deal with the challenges young people will face over the coming years. Indeed the current EU Youth Strategy shows quite a poor positive impact. The evaluation carried out illustrates that over the 2010-2014 period, young people's situation worsened in terms of access to work, increased risk of poverty or social exclusion, higher shares of NEETs and decreased physical and mental wellbeing¹.

In line with the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) that characterises EU youth cooperation, the role of the European Union is to set common objectives that will encourage all Member States to develop policies and programmes enhancing equal opportunities for all young people and ensuring that their basic human rights are covered. In addition, EU programmes give Member States, regional authorities and youth organisations the ability to put in place structures and activities that support young people and ultimately foster the access to their rights. Therefore, an ambitious youth cooperation framework and investment in youth are imperative. In the current Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 (MFF), only approximately €28 was spent per young person per year, with the budget for education, training and youth accounting for only 0.8% of the EU budget².

Moreover, the EU cooperation framework in the youth field must reflect the objectives of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development³ and must contribute to achieving the global objectives that we have set ourselves and in which youth policy has a key role to play.

This resolution, based on the experience of youth organisations across Europe, identifies major challenges and proposes new methods of implementing and monitoring European youth policy.

A) Key thematic priorities in the EU Youth Strategy

Based on a consultation amongst its member organisations, the European Youth Forum would be keen to see the priorities below included in the upcoming EU Youth Strategy as fixed priorities. In line with what has been previously expressed, the European Youth Forum would foresee more focused thematic priorities, fewer headings, and clearer objectives, to create a more focused EU Youth Strategy.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/youth/youth-strategy-2016_en.pdf, p. 41.

² Within Erasmus+, actions that had a direct impact on young people represent just 0.8% of the MFF budget.

³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

1) Access to quality education for all young people.

Access to quality formal and non-formal education and informal learning is essential for the development of a society based on social justice and equality of opportunities. Not only does education provide children, young people and adults with the knowledge and skills to be active citizens and to fulfill themselves as individuals, but it also contributes to reducing poverty and exclusion. All young people in Europe, including refugees, asylum seekers or youth in refugee-like situations, have the right to quality education and this should be ensured by the duty bearers. Quality formal and non-formal education and informal learning should be an inclusive space where all young people have the same opportunities and can learn, debate, fail, risk, and exchange ideas without the fear of being left behind.

Objectives:

- **Increase public investment in education and innovation** with the aim of providing free quality education and learning opportunities to all young people, ensuring that neither lower socio-economic background nor other underrepresented backgrounds become an obstacle to access to and retention in education. Furthermore, Member States should perceive investment in education as a means to ensure a sustainable future, both in social, environmental and economic terms, thereby safeguarding it against any cuts to national budgets.
- **Include citizenship education, education for sustainable development, intercultural learning and digital skills in formal curricula programmes.** Spaces for cooperation between formal and non-formal education providers, especially youth organisations in particular in these areas, should be created and supported, increasing opportunities for learning mobility within formal and non-formal education and informal learning, and ensuring that these are recognised.
- **Continue efforts to implement a national recognition and validation system for competences acquired in non-formal education activities, for example through youth organisations.** Member States must quickly implement the Recommendation on Validation of non-formal and informal learning of 2012.
- Ensure support for youth work and the **recognition of youth organisations**, as providers of education. Appropriate funding for non-formal education activities, particularly by youth organisations should also be provided.

2) Supporting volunteering and youth organisation to provide opportunities for participation.

Young people are enthusiastic and interested in political processes. But in times of declining youth participation at national and local elections, it is important to have a more realistic and appropriate approach to young people's democratic participation. Volunteering in organisations and participation in social movements, campaigning or other online or offline political participation are ways in which youth exercise their political engagement. However, the voices and concerns of young people are being left out of decision-making processes. Yet, if we want to rethink and strengthen the European project and to foster a cohesive democratic society, we need to truly involve young people at all stages of policy-making. This will not only enhance their sense of ownership and belonging, but will ultimately lead to better policies that truly match the needs of, and that are fully implemented by, all stakeholders involved in the process.

Objectives:

- In order to implement article 165-2 of the TFEU, **the implementation of participatory and transparent structures** for young people to be involved in

- policy-making, not merely through consultative or communication tools, should be put in place from a local to European level.
- Explore and promote the **use of digital democracy tools** in order to ease access and to engage young people, whilst being aware that some young people don't have access to those tools, nor the skills to use them.
 - **Encourage participative behaviours** (within and outside schools) by promoting associative engagement and improved cooperation between youth organisations and educational institutions.
 - **Support youth organisations and recognise their role** as providers of competences development and social inclusion. This should in particular include the provision of appropriate funds. Support the establishment of youth councils at all levels and work in cooperation with them.
 - Support the engagement of young people in volunteering through the implementation of all Policy Agenda for Volunteering in Europe (PAVE) recommendations⁴ and a more systematic consideration for competences acquired through volunteering in the validation process of non-formal and informal learning⁵.
 - Enable **access for all young people to cross-border mobility** opportunities. Focusing on volunteering schemes such as EVS, and other mobility programmes as well as including cross-border educational exchange programmes. This should go beyond EU borders and include candidate countries, neighbouring countries and third countries. Member States should also be encouraged to develop national initiatives to support these programmes.
 - Organisations and institutions should adopt measures and take specific actions to ensure young people from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds are able to participate and have a say on issues and decisions that affect them.

3) Access to quality employment

With a youth unemployment rate of 31% in the European Union⁶, job creation and employment is one of the priorities of the EU2020 strategy and should remain at the core of global engagement of the EU towards young people. Moreover, the format and ways of working have changed drastically in past decades, bringing forward more flexible jobs, new economic business models, extreme digitalisation of work etc. Considering the new forms of work that are available, the social rights of young people must be guaranteed. Exclusion from the world of work is the starting point of a vicious cycle where young people face poverty, can lose self-confidence, dignity and support with life-long consequences, such as potential mental health issues.

Objectives:

- Ensure **sufficient EU and national long-term funding for the Youth Guarantee scheme** until 2020 with youth organisations fully involved in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The International Labour Organisation estimates €21bn per year is needed. The Youth Guarantee has to define quality criteria for jobs and training, and further support to national public employment services in implementing the Youth Guarantee is needed.
- **Ensure the implementation of a quality framework for internships and apprenticeships** as based on the European Quality Charter for Internships and Apprenticeships.

⁴ <http://www.cev.be/pave-translations-by-cev-members/>

⁵ <http://www.ive-experienced.eu/>

⁶ <http://www.statista.com/statistics/266228/youth-unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/>

- Expand the vocational education and trainings sector (VET). We encourage further investment in VET institutions so they cover a broader scope of professions. They should be easily accessible after lower secondary education. Furthermore, VET institutions should work as dual education systems do, where students have concrete theoretical classes corresponding to practical sessions. Thus, young people who have more of a practical than theoretical way of learning will have access to an adequate education and therefore a better entry to the labour market. To facilitate this transition we encourage more recognition for the added value of practical based learning degrees.
- **Promote the creation of youth contact points** - one-stop-shops for young people, connecting public and private institutions and civil society organisations to deliver a wide range of services including financial guidance, career guidance and support, educational and employment opportunities.
- **Promote cross-border professional and vocational opportunities for young people.**
- **Create a life long-learning strategy in cooperation with different stakeholders that integrates different learning paths**, through formal and non-formal education and informal learning and identifies the competences that young people need to integrate in the world of work and into society as a whole. This strategy should also better identify, integrate and recognise the learning acquired through Youth Organisations and volunteering in general.
- **Ensure an environment where young entrepreneurs are empowered** to set up their own business, from an administrative, financial and educational perspective, which on the other hand provides them with social security.
- Support young people who are working in the sharing economy with access to their employment rights.
- Promote and invest in sustainable and quality jobs that give young people the opportunity to escape precariousness and build up their social rights.

4) Non-discrimination and access to social rights

Social exclusion is rising, income inequality has increased by 4%, young people are more at risk of poverty than before, and the interregional divide is still present. The welfare system that lies at the heart of the European social model is failing to protect the economic and social wellbeing of all. Social protection is often inaccessible to young people – access to unemployment benefits or income support is often conditional on age. The increase in the number of young people coming to Europe, escaping from war and seeking asylum, has further enhanced the urgency of social inclusion for all, including those who have just arrived on the European soil.

Objectives:

- Fight against all discriminations.
- Establish living wages that ensure that all young people can live a decent life.
- Encourage the application of the European Social Charter, in particular by abolishing lower ‘youth minimum wages’, and ensuring that measures are taken to close the gender salary gap.
- **Encourage measures to ensure social protection** is accessible to young people even when engaged in temporary contracts, and new forms of work and income generation

- Encourage **measures and engage in direct action to combat youth homelessness** as well as non-discriminatory housing support for all young people
- Put in place **pension system reforms** that are based on intergenerational solidarity, sustainability and fairness between current pensioners and future ones, and takes into consideration the mobility of today's workers in the common labour market.
- Ensure **universal free access to health care** regardless of sexuality, place of origin, educational attainment, employment or resident status including further actions to:
 - i. prevent and treat mental health issues and to remove the stigma around it;
 - ii. promote healthy lifestyles and reduce health harmful behaviours by, inter alia, addressing the social determinants of health among children and young people;
 - iii. ensure access to sexual and reproductive health.

B) How to achieve an ambitious and impactful youth strategy?

Key principles for an EU Youth Strategy

The European Youth Forum would like to insist on a few key principles that must be taken into account when developing the future EU Youth Strategy.

1) Cross-sectoral youth policy

We believe that **the cross-sectoral nature of youth policy requires a better approach in the way the strategy functions, is being used and by whom**. Youth policy is by definition a cross-sectoral policy where coherent and co-ordinated efforts across different policy and administration sectors should be ensured through integrated actions. There is a natural distinction made between “vertical issues” (also known as ‘core youth policy’, such as volunteering, youth work, non-formal education, participation) and “horizontal issues” (that are seen as belonging to another sector but that still influence strongly young people, such as education, employment, social rights etc.).

The evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy⁷ published in March 2016 highlights the existing tension between the interest in, and urgency of, cross-sectoral areas (such as employment notably) and the limited impact actually achieved. Indeed, the report reveals that it is in “vertical areas” that the EU Youth Strategy has seen more progress. For the European Youth Forum, this reveals the limitations of current cross-sectoral cooperation at EU and national levels.

The European Youth Forum believes that both aspects of youth policy must remain part of the upcoming EU Youth Strategy. Yet, for this to happen successfully, the tools for both aspects must differ in order to best serve the purposes and specificities of the sectors covered.

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/youth/youth-strategy-2016_en.pdf

The European Youth Forum believes that:

- **The EU Youth Strategy should be a common strategy** including all relevant actors in the different EU institutions: the European Commission (DG Education and Culture, DG Employment and others) and in the formations of the Council of the EU and its preparatory bodies (Youth Working Party, Education and Employment Committee etc.).
- To live up to expectations, the next EU Youth Strategy must ensure **stronger links** between the EU Youth Strategy, the Education and Training 2020 Strategy, and the Europe 2020 Strategy, particularly regarding the social targets related to employment, poverty reduction and education.
- **The EU Youth Strategy requires an integrated** approach, where the actions in different areas are coordinated into one comprehensive strategy, but where responsibilities for implementation remain in the relevant DGs of the European Commission, with DG Education and Culture in the lead. Clear goals and targets for the different stakeholders involved would ensure that the responsibility of the EU Youth Strategy doesn't only lie with the youth sector, as such an approach wouldn't be coherent with the content of the Strategy.
- **Coordination mechanisms should be put in place** within and among institutions, improving the communication flow. In particular, the Youth Forum would be keen to see the development and to participate in a **cross-sectoral and inter-institutional working group** (including all the relevant stakeholders) at EU level monitoring the EU Youth Strategy implementation.
- The European Parliament (in particular the Culture and Education Committee and the Youth Intergroup) should be involved in the EU Youth Strategy implementation.

2) A rights-based & evidence-based youth policy

In order to build rights-based and evidence-based youth policy, the EU Youth Strategy must follow the principle of equality and non-discrimination and be anchored in the real needs of young people, which should be gathered through research and outreach.

For the past number of years, access to quality employment and social rights has been one of the biggest challenges for young people across Europe. Since mid-2015, two new important issues have arisen that particularly concern young people: namely the increase in migration (with 2/3 of the refugees and asylum seekers being under 30) and the rise of violent behaviours and extremist identities. This reminds us of the need for the EU Youth Strategy to ensure some flexibility to be able to adapt to evolving realities.

The European Youth Forum believes that:

- The European Commission should take into account data from the youth monitor and also to take advantage of existing European-wide surveys, in particular the Generation What⁸ initiative, that are reflecting the views of a wide range of young people.
- The European Commission should undertake a study of barriers that prevent young people from accessing their rights.
- Youth organisations should be further involved in the monitoring of human rights compliance.
- The Council of Europe's Council of Ministers recommendation on young people's access to rights⁹ should be mainstreamed.

⁸ <http://www.generation-what.eu/en/>

⁹ https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016806a93e2

3) A more focused and effective EU Youth Strategy

We should **take stock of the lessons drawn from the current EU Youth Strategy.**

The European Youth Forum therefore calls for:

- A more focused EU Youth Strategy, with **fewer areas** covered and **fewer and more measurable objectives** for each of them.
- Objectives **that are more ambitious** and should in particular address those countries that already have well-developed youth policy.
- A strategy that implements a more **systematic monitoring** of the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy (including of the Structured Dialogue).
- A strategy that primarily addresses the root causes of issues that young people are facing.
- The European Commission to set **fewer fixed priorities** (the backbone of the strategy) that would be **completed with flexible priorities** within the next EU Youth Strategy. The priorities should be developed and selected in consultation with the European Youth Forum and its members.
- Flexible priorities could be defined and agreed upon in the triennial EU Work Plan on Youth, hence enabling the strategy to be more receptive to societal happenings.
- A **direct integration of** both the fixed and flexible priorities into their national youth priorities by the Member States.

4) Participatory youth policy

The European Youth Forum is calling for participatory youth policy, as one of the standards that define quality youth policy¹⁰. Participatory youth policy does not only engage young people in the creation of policies affecting youth, but also in the implementation and the monitoring.

First of all, the European Youth Forum advocates for the **genuine involvement of all young people**, in particular those who are excluded from traditional, participative, structures, as well as **youth organisations, in the process leading to the adoption** of the next EU cooperation framework for youth post-2018.

The European Youth Forum strongly demands increased partnership with youth organisations throughout the different stages leading to the adoption of the future EU Youth Strategy.

Such a partnership should continue during the full length of the cooperation framework, in particular at the stage of negotiations on the EU Work Plan on Youth to set flexible priorities. It should also include the monitoring of relevant EU programmes that aim to achieve the EU Youth Strategy.

Ensuring a wide ownership of the strategy is absolutely crucial for guaranteeing the implementation of the strategy. Therefore, the European Youth Forum also insists on the importance of involving other relevant actors in this process, whether it is from governmental or non-governmental structures. In particular we refer to DG

¹⁰ [http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2016/04/0112-16 Resolution Quality Standards Youth Policy FINAL WEBSITE.pdf](http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2016/04/0112-16%20Resolution%20Quality%20Standards%20Youth%20Policy%20FINAL%20WEBSITE.pdf)

Employment and Social Affairs, regional authorities, the EESC, Members of the European Parliament etc.

Last but not least, the European Youth Forum believes that the EU Youth Strategy should aim to become a reference strategy for EU candidate and neighbouring countries.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls on the European Commission:

- To organise **several EU stakeholder meetings** where a number of Youth Organisations, together with other relevant stakeholders, would be invited and would have the space to share expectations and ideas on the future EU Youth Strategy.
- To launch a **series of national thematic stakeholder** meetings where the future of the EU Youth Strategy could be discussed and the content included in the agenda of the European stakeholders meeting.
- To ensure that the procedure for drafting, approval and implementation of the EU Youth Strategy is transparent and open. This will increase the trust of young people in this key political process for youth.

5) Improved Structured Dialogue

Since 2010, the EU Youth Strategy has set Structured Dialogue as the main tool to ensure the participation of young people in EU policy-making. The positive assessment of Structured Dialogue from the Shadow Report on Youth-Policy¹¹ reveals that 65% of the youth organisations (members of the European Youth Forum) recognise Structured Dialogue as a tool to influence EU policy making. It is a unique chance to engage in a meaningful participation process, despite some rigidity in the structure and functioning. At a European level, the European Youth Forum sees the development of Structured Dialogue as a way of bridging the gap between European institutions and young people. This is crucial in the context of the debate on the future of Europe and how the European Union could be closer to its citizens - primarily the young.

The European Youth Forum believes that the Structured Dialogue should remain as the main participation tool at EU level. Indeed we believe that multiplying consultation and outreach tools can overburden youth organisations and may lead to confusion for the young people being consulted. There is also no clear reporting by States on how conclusions are implemented.

The process of building young people's confidence in Europe is long and requires specific efforts for long-term initiatives. Moreover, young people should know which political outcomes their input leads to in order to develop trust in the political systems they are contributing to. Therefore, the political commitment to work on implementation, provide feedback in a real dialogue with young people, and to focus on evaluation and monitoring results are crucial. In the long run, one-off consultations without follow-up leave young people indifferent, at best, while at the worst, political disappointment and mistrust is increased.

¹¹ <http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2015/10/Shadow-Report-on-Youth-Policy.pdf>

Therefore, the European Youth Forum warmly encourages the European Commission to keep the Structured Dialogue with young people as its main participative tool, while further developing and improving it.

The European Youth Forum would like to seize the opportunity of the new cooperation framework to bring about some further improvements to the Structured Dialogue.

The evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy is complimentary of the Structured Dialogue and reminds us that it is a tool that is very much appreciated by stakeholders, both young people and decision-makers.

It also outlines weaknesses of the Structured Dialogue that have already been identified by the National Working Groups and International Youth Organisations (INGYOs) in the Structured Dialogue.

The three biggest challenges identified are about outreach, namely the difficulty in reaching out to a wide number of diverse young people. The second is the impact measurement, namely that so far nobody is able to highlight what were the positive impacts of the Structured Dialogue. One of the recommendations of the evaluation report in fact concerns the establishment of a *“monitoring framework linked to the Strategy’s intervention could be designed and implemented”*.

The third challenge is to ensure that in parallel to the national perspective, the Structured Dialogue also has a strong European dimension. This is particularly important given the need to improve young people’s involvement in democratic processes under Article 165-2 of the TFEU. Recognising the transversal aspects of youth issues, Structured Dialogue outcomes should also be integrated further in European programmes (eg Erasmus+, Youth Employment Initiative) and other policies which touch upon young people.

The European Youth Forum agrees that we must work on these elements, yet we want to stress the importance of promoting quality participation and empowering youth organisations in reaching out to a more young people. The Structured Dialogue cannot only be about the number of young people that have answered a survey, but must look at improving the quality and long-term involvement of the diverse group of young people.

Moreover, we do believe that putting in place a strong monitoring system for the Structured Dialogue will ultimately positively influence the participation of young people in this process.

The European Youth Forum therefore proposes:

Better outreach:

- The “Structured Dialogue” must be more appealing and promoted in a wider manner. The European Youth Forum welcomes the use of **a name and branding** decided in cooperation with young people.
- Inspired by the success of the “Generation What” initiative (more than 600,000 answers from young people across Europe in only two months), we would like to propose to **establish a structured cooperation between the youth and media** at national level, supported and encouraged by cooperation at European level (with the MEDIA programme).

- The support of big media providers across EU Member States would be a unique opportunity to reach out to more young people, in particular those who are not involved in youth organisations. **The media sector could support designing a more youth friendly and appealing survey** that would engage young people because it speaks their language and was designed to take into account any possible barriers to their participation, such as literacy or accessibility.
- Branches of “Generation What” would be keen to partner with national governments and youth organisations to support the outreach of the process and to co-construct the process.
- The consultation phase could be a mix of a high number outreach survey in cooperation with Generation What and quality discussions taking place during events coordinated by the National Working Groups (NWGs) and INGYOs.

Implementation monitoring:

- Young people need political commitment and to see the result of their contribution if we want them to continue participating in this process. In coordination with the overall EU Youth Strategy monitoring system, we strongly recommend that the European Commission put in place a monitoring system.
- The European Youth Forum would envisage the following system to be put in place in order to improve the visibility of the impact of the Structured Dialogue:
 - At the end of each cycle, the **Member States would pick one recommendation** from the adopted Council Conclusions, on which they would commit to work specifically and explore its implementation at national (or regional) level. INGYOs would be asked to select one recommendation, and would commit to advocating for its implementation.
 - The High Level Policy Debate (which takes place before the end of the cycle, between the second and third EUYC) would be the place where ministers share their point of view on the proposals.
 - At the end of each cycle: the European Commission would launch **an assessment report of the previous cycle**, by investigating the progress of the Member States on the implementation of the one recommendation they had committed to work on. This would enable the European Commission to produce an assessment report each cycle illustrating the progresses from the previous cycle.
 - Based on this assessment report, the National Working Groups would be encouraged to share in an **open session during the last EU Youth Conference of the cycle**, the progress regarding the implementation of the recommendations they had chosen.

Increasing the political relevance:

- The Structured Dialogue and the EU Youth Conferences are a unique setting which enable young people and decision-makers across Europe to meet and exchange ideas.
- Therefore, the European Youth Forum also welcomes the idea of using the space of the EU Youth Conferences to **debate and collect ideas of young people on more “ad-hoc” topics that are relevant to the political context**. This can be done with an addition of a half-day to the EU Youth Conference, but should not impact on the time allowed for the Structured Dialogue process.
- Structured Dialogue should also endeavour to include other relevant stakeholders at a European level. The European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, other

relevant Directorate Generals, National Working Groups, as well as the Permanent Representations, should be responsible for follow up at a European level.

- INGYO and NYCs, considering their diverse and complementary strengths, are seen as equal partners in this process.
- The European Youth Forum welcomes the decision of the European Commission to amend the timeline for use of Erasmus+ funds to allow for an 18-month cycle as an alternative to the 12-month cycle. The European Youth Forum calls for the speedy implementation of this decision.

6) Towards a co-managed youth strategy

In the long term, the European Youth Forum envisions an EU Youth Strategy that is co-managed with young people, following on the model of the Council of Europe “Joint Council on Youth”.

The European Youth Forum believes that:

- Co-management should take place at specific points within the development of the EU Youth Strategy, particularly regarding the selection of priorities, and the management and monitoring of the implementation process.
- The monitoring of EU funding programmes related to youth, such as Erasmus+, should be co-managed by young people and youth organisations.

Involving a number of representative youth organisations in the management of the policies that affect them goes beyond structured consultation, and should be the model for youth involvement at EU level. Youth organisations are keen to take more responsibility and to engage in the process of designing the priorities and the actions of the EU Youth Strategy. An improved Structured Dialogue would be a first step toward this goal.

7) Governance of the EU Youth Strategy

The Open Method of Coordination applied in the Youth field can be defined as the lowest level of policy convergence and is based on voluntarism when it comes to the implementation framework. This has been clearly identified since its establishment. For the European Youth Forum, it is evident that the shortcomings and the slowness in achieving the goals reveals the weakness of the process itself, and points to the need to redefine the balance between its flexibility and effectiveness.

In line with the recommendations of the European Parliament and the Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy, the European Youth Forum is convinced that the effectiveness of the process can be boosted through the development of measurable indicators and a benchmarking system for the implementation of the objectives, along with the introduction of specific national action plans.

As highlighted in the evaluation, the existing tools (the EU triennial Youth Report and the dashboard of youth indicators) have often failed to capture the actual progresses of the Member States in the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy.

The European Youth Forum strongly encourages the European Commission to put in place a monitoring system that is more systematic and would put less weight on the Member States’.

This would enable the European Commission to have an overview of the initiatives that have been taken at national level which were directly influenced by the EU Youth

Strategy. Moreover, by targeting the efforts of the Member States in one or two specific objectives, they feel fewer burdens and can concentrate with more ownership and commitment on developing quality proposals.

The European Youth Forum wants to stress that Member States have to systematically involve National Youth Councils in the implementation and the assessment of the EU Youth Strategy. As pointed out in the Shadow Report on Youth Policy 2015, youth organisations play a great role in achieving the objectives set in the Youth Strategy.

The European Youth Forum calls for:

- A more “à la carte” **system** in which every 3 years, each **Member State would choose at least one objective from at least two focus areas** of the EU Youth Strategy, on which they commit to work.
- On these minimum two objectives, the Member State would be asked to prepare a **specific action plan** that they would also share with the other Member States.
- Each Member State would report at the end of each 3-year cycle, based on the action plan they had submitted.
- The Member States could also choose one objective of one of the “flexible priorities” that would have been proposed in the EU Work Plan on Youth.

8) A more ambitious funding system

Erasmus+ is the main EU financial programme that supports the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy. However, Erasmus+ has a bigger scope and covers policy areas far beyond the youth sectors. Those include education, training, youth and sport sectors. Due to the complexity of the Erasmus+ programme and its wide objectives, better coherence between the EU Youth Strategy and the Erasmus+ Programme should be ensured. In specific regard to this, the objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme (in particular of its youth chapter) should be in line and coherent with the EU Youth Strategy in order to better contribute to achieving its objectives while also making it possible for stakeholders, especially youth organisations working in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme, to provide activities adapted to the specific needs of the young people within their scope. Currently this is not entirely the case, as the timeframe for the development of those two instruments is not fully aligned.

Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for a better alignment of the development of the future EU Youth Strategy with the post 2020 youth programme. The European Youth Forum is convinced that in this way the EU financial programme would be more effective in supporting the political objectives of the EU Youth Strategy.

Moreover, the European Youth Forum calls for increasing investment in the education, training and youth policies in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). At the moment investment in education, training and youth represent only the 0.8% of the overall MFF. This is definitely not enough to tackle increasing common European challenges and to reinforce cohesive, equal and inclusive societies, with intercultural dialogue.

Moreover, the youth sector has proven its ability to absorb increasing levels of funding and to deliver quality projects and results as shown by the analysis conducted by European Commission. The youth sector mobilises 25% of participants of the Erasmus+ Programme with only 10% of resources.

The European Youth Forum calls for:

- Increasing resources for the youth sector and supporting the implementation of the future EU Youth Strategy.
- Youth mainstreaming in other key European financial programmes, including health, environment, development, agriculture, employment and social affairs that will amplify the benefits of EU Youth Strategy implementation. The Erasmus+ shouldn't be the only programme available for youth organisations and the youth sector, but should be complemented by the support of programmes covering other policy areas as youth organisations address a full range of societal challenges, including social and environmental problems, participation, sustainable development, social inclusion etc.

Investing in youth, education, training, culture and citizenship is the key to facing increasing common European challenges affecting young people and future generations.