



European Youth Forum Contribution to the “Consultation on the future EU 2020 Strategy”

The European Youth Forum¹ (YFJ) welcomes the open consultation on the Future “EU 2020” Strategy, as a sign of openness from the side of the European Commission to want to hear the views of civil society when shaping one of the most crucial strategies for the whole EU, the EU 2020 Strategy as a follow up to the Lisbon Strategy. Nevertheless, the YFJ believes that the deadline for such consultation was too short, which shows a lack of concrete willingness to hear what the broader civil society has to say. Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure that the outcomes of the consultation are properly followed up, to avoid the risk of pursuing procedural democracy without real impact. The YFJ sincerely hopes that the process of adoption will not fall hostage to the need for swift results, but will be one which will carefully follow a thorough consultation and reflection, and which will lead to a coherent, implementable and measurable strategy.

Additionally, the European Youth Forum believes that the Commission's working document falls short of presenting a coherent EU Strategy for Social and Sustainable Development, one that would place people and their well-being first, which should be the follow-up to the Lisbon Strategy. The Commission's working document presents hints on how the European Commission believes the EU can make a full recovery from the crisis, while speeding up the move towards a smart and green economy. Nevertheless, the new strategy shows significant insufficiencies in addressing how social cohesion mechanisms for all groups in society, including young people, fit in the EU 2020 Strategy.

The YFJ welcomes the focus put on education and creativity, on prevention of early school leaving, on investing in a green environment, as well as on empowering people. However, there appears to be a lack of strategy regarding reconciling the economic needs and aims with the social inclusion and solidarity dimension, as well as regarding the reconciliation of private and professional life.

The YFJ believes that the proposal as it stands does not put people at the core of the strategy but instead instrumentalises them, both as work force and consumers; the proposal does not aim at boosting the social, cultural and creative skills of European citizens, and especially that of the young people among them. If it is important, on the one hand, that education for example contributes to a highly skilled labour force, it is also crucial to ensure a smooth transition

¹The European Youth Forum (YFJ) is an independent, democratic, youth-led platform, representing 99 National Youth Councils and International Youth Organisations from across Europe. The YFJ works to empower young people to participate actively in society to improve their own lives, by representing and advocating their needs and interests and those of their organisations towards the European Institutions, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

between education and professional life. Moreover, in this process it is imperative not to forget the intrinsic value of knowledge as such, as well as the value of education in overcoming poverty and tackling inequalities, thus preventing that education becomes solely dictated by the rules of the market.

The YFJ welcomes the fact that the working document puts forward the importance and value of exchanges and mobility, but regrets that the proposed actions nevertheless fail to address the issue of recognition of such experiences. The YFJ strongly believes in the need for recognition of competences acquired through exchanges as well as through non-formal education, where youth organisations are among the most important providers. In addition, conditions for the recognition of non-formal education and of the added value of volunteer-based organisations, should be set in a structured way. Non-formal education and volunteering are documented sources of competences that cannot only enhance the employability of young people but that at the same time significantly contribute to economic growth and to creating a sustainable and green economy.

The YFJ welcomes the focus put on flexicurity and would like to make sure that the security and social protection co-exist with flexibility in the labour market, and that security is not overruled by excessive flexibility which can put workers in vulnerable situations. The YFJ is convinced that flexible labour markets need to exist together with solid social security measures, available for all, and alongside active labour market policies, to also ensure that in light of demographic change everyone, including young people, can reconcile their private and professional lives in a balanced way and can reach real autonomy from their families.

Moreover, the YFJ believes that civil society organisations play a key role as creative drivers of a social and sustainable economy and is concerned to note that the working document falls short of acknowledging their relevant contribution for society as a whole. Civil society should be recognised as an indispensable actor because it crucially contributes to social cohesion, development of democracy and active participation. Especially youth organisations work to ensure that younger generations learn about democratic values and active citizenship. Such grassroots approaches should thus be strongly supported.

Seen the variety of realities in the different parts of the EU, in order to ensure a balanced and sustainable development of all of its regions and to reach all its people, the EU needs to overcome infrastructural inequalities, for example by ensuring fast and affordable internet connection in all regions and by improving mobility between regions as well as by providing on-going support to disadvantaged areas.

Additionally, the Commission's working document fails to present concrete and measurable implementation mechanisms and targets which must be part of the strategy. As an example, there is no mention of the economic and employment guidelines which have been part of the structure of the Lisbon Strategy so far. In this regard, the YFJ would like to raise the question about the future of the current guidelines as well as encourage the inclusion of a specific mention of how to overcome youth unemployment in the employment guidelines, given the extremely high levels of youth unemployment which have reached 20% in the past months in

the EU.

The YFJ further strongly calls for the European Youth Pact to be updated and renewed as an integral part of the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy.² The European Youth Pact is a cross-sector policy instrument which was adopted in 2005 and which ensures that a set of policies and measures which concern the needs of young people constitute a fully integrated part of the Lisbon Strategy. As the Lisbon Strategy will be revised in 2010, young people in Europe want to make sure that youth-related policies will still be integrated in the post-Lisbon agenda. The YFJ believes that investment in youth is one of the foundations that will make the renewed Lisbon strategy a successful one. The EU Member States have agreed on common goals and strategies in the field of youth, and a youth dimension in the EU 2020 should feature as an indispensable instrument for the realisation of the EU's ambitious goals. Young people should not merely be a target group but also recognised as initiators, participants, decision-makers and leaders.

The YFJ sincerely hopes that these concerns and proposals can be taken on board.

² For details, see 0742-09, the European Youth Forum Position on the Renewed and Updated European Youth Pact.