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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering
A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities**

1. INTRODUCTION

"Europe's future depends on its youth¹. Yet, life chances of many young people are blighted". This is a conclusion of the Commission Communication on the 'Renewed Social Agenda'² which seeks to create more opportunities for EU citizens, improve access to opportunities for all and demonstrate solidarity.

Youth are a priority of the European Union's social vision, and the current crisis compounds the need to nurture young human capital. This communication responds by setting out a strategy for the future of policies for youth in Europe. It proposes a new, stronger Open Method of Coordination (OMC) that is flexible and simplified in its reporting and reinforces links with policy areas covered by the European Youth Pact in the Lisbon Strategy for Jobs and Growth. Adopting a cross-sectoral approach, it embeds short-term responses in a long-term effort to empower young people. The strategy would create favourable conditions for youth to develop their skills, fulfil their potential, work, actively participate in society, and engage more in the building of the EU project. Young people are not a burdensome responsibility but a critical resource to society which can be mobilised to achieve higher social goals.

2. TODAY'S YOUTH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Europeans are living longer, having children later and there are fewer young people. The 15-29 age group is projected to represent 15.3 % of Europe's population in 2050, whereas it is currently 19.3%³. These demographic changes affect families, intergenerational solidarity and economic growth. Globalisation can bring growth and jobs, but it can also bring about specific challenges for vulnerable workers such as youth, as demonstrated by the crisis⁴. Climate change and energy security issues call for adjustments in the behaviour and lifestyles of coming generations. Key competences flexible enough to develop appropriate skills throughout one's life are vital, and early school leaving is still a key issue.

Young people value friendship, respect, tolerance and solidarity and this generation is perhaps the highest-educated, technically-advanced, and most mobile ever. However, like the rest of society, they face greater individualism and competitive pressures and do not necessarily share the same opportunities.

Through extensive consultation across Europe⁵, the following specific challenges have been identified as topping the list of young people's concerns: education, employment, social inclusion, and health. Europe's youth need to be equipped to take advantage of opportunities such as civic and political participation, volunteering, creativity, entrepreneurship, sport and global engagement.

¹ Meaning broadly speaking teenagers and young adults from 13 to 30 years old. For statistical purposes, the same range has not always been used throughout the text.

² COM (2008) 412

³ Source: Eurostat

⁴ COM (2009) 34

⁵ See accompanying Impact Assessment and reports on consultation

Difficulties in education, employment, inclusion and health, further combined to problems in finance, housing or transport, make it difficult for young people to achieve autonomy, a situation where they have the resources and opportunities to manage their own lives, fully participate in society and decide independently.

3. THE NEED FOR A NEW FRAMEWORK

3.1. EU Cooperation

Youth cooperation is a well structured and developed EU policy field. EU programmes for youth have been implemented since 1988. The policy process was developed with the 2001 White Paper⁶ and is currently based on three pillars:

- Active citizenship of young people via the OMC with four priorities (participation, information, volunteering and better knowledge of young people), common objectives, Member States reports and structured dialogue with youth;
- Social and occupational integration through the implementation of the European Youth Pact⁷ under the Lisbon Strategy, with three priorities (employment/social inclusion, education/training, reconciliation of work and private life). The Commission Communication "Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society"⁸ went further in proposing additional actions;
- Youth mainstreaming in other policies (such as anti-discrimination, health).

3.2. Evaluating Youth Policies

Member States were consulted on the current framework and possible future actions. The European Parliament conducted a hearing on youth in February 2009. As part of structured dialogue, there were debates with thousands of youth all over Europe. Meetings with the European Youth Forum as well as National Youth Councils were organised. An on-line consultation generated over 5000 answers. Researchers and Youth-in-Action programme managers also gave their views.

Overall, the OMC is viewed as an appropriate tool for cooperation, and its priorities as still relevant. The framework inspired youth-related legislation or strategies at national level. More countries involve youth organisations in their policy-making. The European Youth Pact raised the profile of youth within the Lisbon Strategy, particularly with regards to education and employment, and progress was achieved in anti-discrimination and health.

However, the framework – set to expire in 2009 – has not always proved its efficiency and capacity to deliver. It is not coordinated enough to tackle all challenges. There is consensus for a reinforced cross-cutting approach, as requested by the European Parliament in a 2008 Declaration on Youth Empowerment. Structured dialogue should also be better organised and facilitate greater outreach to unorganised youth, particularly those with fewer opportunities.

⁶ COM (2001) 681

⁷ Presidency Conclusions of the European Council, March 2005 (7619/05)

⁸ COM (2007) 498

4. YOUTH – INVESTING AND EMPOWERING

4.1. The EU's Vision for Young People

Young people should make the best of their potential. This vision is addressed to all, but actions should focus on those with fewer opportunities. It is based on a dual approach:

- **Investing in Youth:** putting in place greater resources to develop policy areas that affect young people in their daily life and improve their well being.
- **Empowering Youth:** promoting the potential of young people for the renewal of society and to contribute to EU values and goals.

Greater collaboration between youth policies and other policy areas such as education, employment, inclusion and health will be developed, with youth activities and youth work playing a supporting role. The renewed OMC in Youth will encourage 'joined-up' policy making by 'feeding in' the other processes of policy coordination with its specific expertise and by providing young people with an opportunity to have a say and make their voices heard. The EU's contribution is to help Member States, who are responsible for youth policies, cooperate better.

4.2. A Long-term Strategy for Youth with Short-term Priorities

Based on the current knowledge of the situation of youth⁹, a new strategy is proposed with three overarching and interconnected goals that closely link to those of the Renewed Social Agenda:

- **Creating more Opportunities** for Youth in education and employment
- **Improving Access** and full participation of all young people in society
- **Fostering mutual Solidarity** between society and young people

Under each goal, two to three 'fields of action' are proposed with objectives for the first three years, 2010-2012. Inside each field is a list of possible specific actions which can be undertaken by Member States and/or the Commission. The challenges and opportunities facing youth of the day will be regularly assessed and prioritised every three years to ensure flexibility and to ensure that the fields of action reflect the changing needs of newer generations. Adjustments can also be made once the follow up to the EU Strategy for Growth and Jobs beyond 2010 is set.

4.2.1. *Creating more Opportunities for Youth*

Field of Action 1 – **Education**

Nearly 80 % of young people between 20 and 24 in Europe have completed upper secondary education. Nonetheless, a quarter of 15-year olds are low achievers in reading literacy¹⁰ and 6

⁹ EU Youth Report 2009
¹⁰ COM (2008) 425

million young people leave school without any qualifications. Greater mobility makes the EU an open space to develop youth talent and potential¹¹ but still remains limited.

The European Commission proposed a new Education OMC¹² addressing the following long-term strategic challenges: Lifelong Learning and Mobility, Quality and Efficiency, Equity and Citizenship, Innovation and Creativity, as well as a new approach for matching labour market needs and skills for the 21st century¹³. Enhancing formal education is a key priority, but skills can be acquired outside the classroom through youth work and the use of new technologies.

Objective

Complementary to formal education, non-formal education for young people should be supported to contribute to Lifelong Learning in Europe, by developing its quality, recognising its outcomes, and integrating it better with formal education

Actions by Member States and Commission within their respective spheres of competence

- Develop non-formal learning opportunities as one of a range of actions to address early school leaving
- Fully use the range of tools established at EU level for the validation of skills and the recognition of qualifications¹⁴
- Promote learning mobility of all young people
- Encourage cooperation between education and youth policy makers
- Address gender stereotypes via formal and non-formal education systems
- Make available good quality guidance and counselling services for young people
- Develop participative structures within the educational system as well as cooperation between schools, families and local communities

The Commission will further develop the self-assessment function of Europass, in particular for skills developed in non-formal settings and provide certificates such as Youthpass

Field of Action 2 – Employment

Young people's transition periods from education to employment have become significantly longer and complex. Unemployment among young people is on average at least twice as high as for the overall workforce; the current economic crisis puts further pressure on the labour market opportunities for the young. They frequently work in low-quality, temporary jobs and are poorly paid. Youth unemployment is often a result of lack of skills or skills mismatch. Guidance and counselling systems on qualification pathways and future job opportunities are needed.

¹¹ Such as Erasmus and Youth-in-Action programmes

¹² COM (2008) 865

¹³ COM (2008) 868

¹⁴ The former being ensured through tools such as Europass, EQF or ECVET, and the latter by Directive 2005/36/EC.

Promoting labour market access and quality employment has been a key priority of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the European Youth Pact. This momentum is to be maintained. The impact of the financial and economic crisis on labour markets adds urgency to addressing youth employment for both the short- and long-term. The free movement of labour, especially relevant for young people at the start of their careers, is a cornerstone of the Single Market.

Objectives

Employment policy action in Member States and at EU level should be coordinated across the four components of flexicurity in order to facilitate transitions from school to work or inactivity or unemployment to work. Once in work, young people should be enabled to make upward transitions.

Increase and improve investments in providing the right skills for those jobs in demand on the labour market, with a better matching in the short term and better anticipation in the longer term of the skills needed.

Actions by Member States and Commission within their respective spheres of competence

- Ensure that youth employment remains a priority
- Promote cross-border professional and vocational opportunities for young people, including early familiarisation of young people to the world of work
- Develop youth work as a resource to support youth employability
- Encourage cooperation between employment and youth policy makers and youth involvement in employment policy
- Ensure that the EU funds available for promoting youth employment, in particular the European Social Fund, are effectively used
- Develop short-term measures in their recovery plans to stimulate youth employment as well as structural measures in favour of youth
- Develop career guidance and counselling services
- Lower barriers to the free movement of labour across the EU
- Promote quality internships within education and training and/or employment schemes
- Improve childcare so as to help reconciliation between professional and private life of young adults

Field of Action 3 – Creativity and Entrepreneurship

Technology offers today's 'net-generation' new opportunities for learning, creating and participating, while it also brings challenges regarding privacy, internet safety and media literacy.

Encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation for young people is part of the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme 2007-2013 and the European Reference Framework on Key Competences – which includes culture. Creativity and innovation are also the themes for the 2009 European Year and one of the strategic challenges identified in the new OMC in education and training.

Young people should be encouraged to think and act innovatively and young talent should be recognised. Culture stimulates creativity, and entrepreneurship education should be viewed as a means to promote economic growth and new jobs as well as a source of skills, civic participation, autonomy and self-esteem.

Objective

Talent development, creative skills, entrepreneurial mindsets and cultural expressions of young people should be encouraged amongst all youth

Actions by Member States and Commission within their respective spheres of competence

- Further develop 'start up' funds and encourage recognition of junior enterprise
- Make new technologies readily available to empower young talent and attract interest in arts and science
- Promote contribution of youth work to the creativity and entrepreneurship of young people
- Widen access to creative tools, particularly those involving new technologies

4.2.2. Improving Access and Full Participation of Young People in Society

Field of Action 4 – Health and Sport

The EU Health Strategy (2008-2013) identifies health of children and young people as a priority for action, and has been confirmed by a Council Resolution¹⁵. The health of many young people is at risk because of stress, poor diet, lack of physical exercise, unprotected sex, tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse. Broader environmental and socio-economic factors also influence poor health which in turn can obstruct active participation. The specificity of youth in health issues thus needs to be tackled cross-sectorally. In addition to improving the physical health and psychological well-being of young citizens, sport has an educational dimension and plays an important social role¹⁶.

Objective

Encourage healthy living for young people and physical education, sporting activity and collaboration between youth workers, health professionals and sporting organisations with a focus on preventing and treating obesity, injury, addictions and substance abuse, and maintaining mental and sexual health

Actions by Member States and Commission within their respective spheres of competence

¹⁵ 2008/C 319

¹⁶ COM (2007) 391

- Implement the Council Resolution on Health and Well-being of Young People and encourage youth fitness and sport by applying the EU Physical Activity Guidelines¹⁷
- Promote training opportunities on health for youth workers and youth leaders
- Encourage cooperation between health and youth policy makers, and youth involvement in health policy
- Mobilise all stakeholders at local level to detect and help young people at risk
- Develop tailor-made information on health for young people, particularly those at risk of social exclusion, and mobilise youth information networks
- Encourage peer-to-peer health education at school and in youth organisations

Field of Action 5 – **Participation**

Full participation of young people in civic and political life is an increasing challenge, in light of the gap between youth and the institutions. Implementation of current common objectives for participation and information shows that there is still room for improvement, particularly regarding support of youth organisations, participation in representative democracy or 'learning to participate'. Policy-makers must adapt to communicating in ways receptive to young people – including on civic and European issues – particularly in order to attract unorganised or disadvantaged youth.

Objective

Ensure full participation of youth in society, by increasing youth participation in the civic life of local communities and in representative democracy, by supporting youth organisations as well as various forms of 'learning to participate', by encouraging participation of non-organised young people and by providing quality information services

Actions by Member States and Commission within their respective spheres of competence

- Develop quality standards on youth participation, information and consultation
- Further support politically and financially youth organisations, as well as national and local youth councils
- Promote e-democracy to reach out to more non-organised youth
- Further develop opportunities for debate between European/national institutions and young people

The Commission will revamp the European Youth Portal and promote greater outreach to young people

¹⁷ Recommended Policy Actions in Support of Health-Enhancing Physical Activity, 2008

4.2.3. *Fostering Mutual Solidarity between Society and Young People*

Field of Action 6 – **Social Inclusion**

Society needs to show solidarity towards youth, particularly those who are disadvantaged. One-fifth between 16 and 24 were at risk of poverty in 2006. Exclusion may be caused by unemployment, disability, societal and individuals' attitudes towards migration, discrimination, physical and/or mental health, addictive behaviour, abuse, family violence and criminal record. It may also lead to radicalisation and violence.

Breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty and exclusion features high on the political agenda of the social OMC¹⁸. Addressing youth at risk of poverty and social exclusion involves a wide range of policy fields and requires integrated action. In this context, child, family and youth policies are closely linked and this Communication is complementary to the Commission Communication 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child'¹⁹.

Objective

Prevent poverty and social exclusion among disadvantaged youth groups and break their intergenerational transmission by mobilising all actors involved in the life of youth (parents, teachers, social workers, health professionals, youth workers, young people themselves, police and justice, employers...)

Actions by Member States and Commission within their respective spheres of competence

- Address issues related to teenagers and young adults, in particular those with fewer opportunities, in social protection and inclusion policies
- Optimise the use of EU Funds and experimental programmes to support social integration of young people
- Realise the full potential of youth work and youth community centres as means of inclusion
- Develop intercultural awareness and competences for all young people
- Encourage youth involvement in inclusion policy and cooperation between policy makers
- Recognise challenges overcome by disadvantaged youth, including through special awards
- Address homelessness, housing and financial exclusion
- Promote access to quality services – e.g. transport, e-inclusion, health, social services
- Promote specific support for young families

Field of Action 7 – **Volunteering**

¹⁸ COM (2008) 418 - COM (2005) 706

¹⁹ COM (2006) 367

Showing solidarity to society through volunteering is important for young people and is a vehicle for personal development, learning mobility, competitiveness, social cohesion and citizenship. Youth volunteering also contributes strongly to intergenerational solidarity. In its recent Recommendation, the Council has called for the removal of barriers to cross-border mobility for young volunteers²⁰.

Objective

Support youth volunteering, by developing more voluntary opportunities for young people, making it easier to volunteer by removing obstacles, raising awareness on the value of volunteering, recognising volunteering as an important form of non-formal education and reinforcing cross-border mobility of young volunteers

Actions by Member States and Commission within their respective spheres of competence

- Enhance skills recognition through Europass and Youthpass
- Recognise contributions of youth organisations and non-structured forms of volunteering
- Reflect on ways to better protect rights of volunteers and assure quality in volunteering, and associate young people and their organisations on the occasion of a possible European Year of Volunteering (2011)
- Develop national approaches on cross-border mobility of young volunteers
- Develop national approaches for promoting intergenerational solidarity through volunteering

Field of Action 8 – Youth and the World

Young Europeans are very concerned by global challenges, such as violation of fundamental rights, economic disparities, and environmental degradation. They wish to demonstrate solidarity with the rest of the world by fighting discrimination, helping others and safekeeping the environment.

²⁰ 2008/C 319

Objective

Mobilise youth in global policy-making at all levels (local, national and international) using existing youth networks and tools (e.g. structured dialogue) and address climate change and the UN Millennium Development Goals

Actions by Member States and Commission within their respective spheres of competence

- Encourage 'green' patterns of consumption and production with young people (e.g. recycling, energy conservation, hybrid vehicles etc.)
- Promote entrepreneurship and volunteering opportunities with regions outside of Europe
- Support the development of youth work on other continents
- Raise awareness on fundamental rights and development issues worldwide with young people

4.3. A New Role for Youth Work

Youth work²¹ is out-of-school education managed by professional or voluntary 'youth workers' within youth organisations, town halls, youth centres, churches etc., which contributes to the development of young people. Together with families and with other professionals, youth work can help deal with unemployment, school failure, and social exclusion, as well as provide leisure time. It can also increase skills and support the transition from youth to adulthood. Despite being 'non-formal', youth work needs to be professionalised further. Youth work contributes to all fields of action and their identified objectives.

Objective

Youth work should be supported, recognised for its economic and social contribution, and professionalised

Actions by Member States and Commission within their respective spheres of competence

- Equip youth workers with professional skills and promote their validation through the appropriate European instruments (Europass, EQF, ECVET)
- Promote youth work through, inter alia, Structural Funds
- Develop mobility of youth workers as indicated in the EC Treaty
- Develop innovative services, pedagogies and practice of youth work

The Commission will develop its analysis of the economic and social impact of youth work

²¹ Commonly-used term for work with young people - 'socioeducational instructors' is the legal term for 'youth workers', as cited in Treaty Article 149(2)

5. DELIVERING THE VISION IN A NEW INTEGRATED COOPERATION FRAMEWORK

5.1. A Cross-sectoral Approach

The range of issues that affect youth mandates cross-sectoral policy approaches at EU and national level. Youth policy cannot advance without effective coordination with other sectors. In turn, youth policies can contribute to delivering results in areas such as child and family policy, education, gender equality, employment, housing and healthcare.

Member States should consider implementing at national level cross-sectoral policy-making. Cross-sectoral cooperation should also be developed with local and regional actors, which are crucial for implementing youth strategies. The Council could envisage setting up cooperation between different Council formations and the Commission will strengthen its internal coordination through inter-service groups. Attention will be paid not to duplicate existing mechanisms. Improved knowledge-base and effective dissemination of best practice are also needed.

5.2. Dialogue with Youth

Structured dialogue monitors the implementation of the Strategy and is a space for joint reflection on its priorities. As part of their national youth policies, Member States are invited to organise a permanent and regular dialogue with young people. With the cooperation of Commission Representations, this dialogue could include EU themes.

A working group with Member States and the European Youth Forum will be set up in 2010 to review the structured dialogue (involvement of local, regional, national youth councils, participation of unorganised young people, role of EU events, follow-up, etc.). Social partners and newly-emerging youth policy stakeholders (such as industry, foundations, charities, and youth media) will be involved when appropriate.

A structured dialogue cycle with young people is proposed for every year. The themes for the next period will be co-determined with dialogue participants and could be:

- Youth Employment (2010)
- Youth and the World (2011)

5.3. Peer-learning for Better Policy-Making

Two types of peer-learning processes between Member States are proposed: 'High-Level Seminars' when political cooperation is essential, and 'Clusters' when technical expertise is needed. Stakeholders should be involved in these peer-learning exercises.

Proposals for the next period

- High-Level Seminar on Cross-sectoral Cooperation (2010)
- Cluster on Youth Work (2011)
- High-Level Seminar on Youth Volunteering (2011)
- Cluster on Youth Health (2012)

- High-Level Seminar on Creativity (2012)

5.4. Implementation

Member States are the key force behind this Strategy's implementation. The cross-sectoral approach as well as the reinforcement of OMC tools should be of much help. Kick-off meetings for the priorities should be organised at national level with stakeholders and other ministries. Regional and local authorities should also be involved. The coordination and participation of relevant actors throughout the full policy cycle are essential.

Meetings of the Directors-General for youth should have a key role in implementing the new cooperation framework.

5.5. Evidence-based Policy-Making

Better knowledge is a must for sound policy. Current tools (e.g. Eurostat data, national reports, European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP), EU Research Framework Programme) are a first step, as well as the triennial report on Youth in Europe. There is an equal need to share research results and for networking of researchers throughout Europe. The Commission proposes to:

- Consolidate EKCYP by completing the country profiles
- Review existing trends for the priorities through Eurydice
- Design a dashboard of existing indicators and benchmarks concerning youth in education, employment, inclusion and health
- Set up a Working Group to discuss possible 'descriptors' (light indicators) for the priorities of participation, volunteering, creativity and youth in the world, as well as for NEETs (youngsters Not in Education, Employment or Training)
- Launch studies on:
 - "Baby Bonds" - the use of funds held in trust to support youth autonomy later in life (2010)
 - Social and Economic Impact of Youth Work (2011)
 - Youth e-participation and Information Society (2012)
- Launch regular youth Euro-barometers
- Promote use of the EU Research Framework Programme for youth research and follow-up.

5.6. Simplified Reporting

Every three years, a joint Council/Commission report on the implementation of the abovementioned priorities will be presented. This would be based on similar reporting by the Member States, accompanied by 'Youth in Figures', an EU overview of the situation of youth prepared with Member States and youth organisations. The Commission recommends that national reports be published.

5.7. Mobilisation of EU Programmes and Funds

The Youth-in-Action programme supports youth policy and its priorities, in particular cross-border mobility, volunteering, participation, youth work and political cooperation (e.g. peer learning, structured dialogue, studies, Eurobarometers and better knowledge tools). Other programmes and funds also offer many opportunities for all youth and should be made better known to them, such as Culture, Lifelong Learning, PROGRESS, MEDIA, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, Competitiveness & Innovation Programme and Structural Funds.

5.8. Cooperation with other EU Institutions and International Organisations

The European Parliament regularly contributes to youth policy. The Commission invites it to react to this Communication and intends to keep the Parliament up-to-date on its implementation. The Commission also intends to cooperate with the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions in their respective fields.

The Commission will continue cooperation with the Council of Europe on areas of common interest, such as youth participation, youth work and better knowledge of youth.