

FINAL DOCUMENT

of the Slovenian Presidency Youth Event
18th - 21st of April 2008, Ljubljana and Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia

The Ministry for Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia and its Office for Youth invited more than 150 young people from all European Union and EFTA Member States, EU Candidate Countries and the Western Balkan Countries (38 countries altogether) to attend the Presidency Youth Event “Promoting the Participation of Young People with Fewer Opportunities in Society” in Ljubljana and Brdo pri Kranju, from 18 to 21 April 2008. The event, gave the participants an opportunity to discuss this issue and reflect upon ways to achieve active participation of young people with fewer opportunities in decision-making processes, debates and in society. Organised in five working groups, the participants discussed the following topics in detail:

1. Improving the mobility of young people with fewer opportunities
2. More and better employment for young people with fewer opportunities
3. Non-formal education and competence building with young people with fewer opportunities
4. Integration of young people with fewer opportunities in society and their political participation
5. Role of young people in intercultural dialogue

The conclusions of each of these working groups are the following:

Working Group 1 - Improving the mobility of young people with fewer opportunities

Mobility is one of the crucial tools for empowering young people with fewer opportunities and for fostering their social integration. Despite of this fact, young people still face numerous administrative, socio-cultural, educational, informational and financial obstacles in exercising their right to mobility.

The visa system remains a serious obstacle to mobility of young people. It should be reformed in line with the demands of the European Youth Forum’s campaign Get VISABLE (www.getvisable.org). We reiterate our demand of a standardized, transparent and respectful visa application procedure. Furthermore, we request that visa cost for young people in education and training and volunteers is abolished, and that inviting organisations are allowed to cover social and medical security costs.

We demand that educational institutions cooperate with youth NGOs and provide means to facilitate information and promote mobility to young people with fewer opportunities, though their surroundings, e.g. families and peers, starting from an early age. Successful practices in some Member States have shown that appointing young people a mentor to provide personal support, encouragement, information has positive effects on increasing the mobility of young people with fewer opportunities.

New methodologies and strategies are necessary in order to increase mobility of young people with fewer opportunities. We believe that EU policies and programmes on mobility must be specifically adapted to them, e.g. user-friendly application forms and guides, more short-term EVS projects, etc.

Lack of accessibility to and usability of various facilities and public transport is discriminatory. This is why the aforementioned must be an integral part of grant requests and a basic standard for projects which include persons with disabilities.

Education systems must foster motivation of young people with fewer opportunities, involving them actively in mobility programmes and projects, e.g. providing grants - not based on academic performance - to students who want to study abroad but do not have the economic means to do so.

We demand that EU mobility programme grants are paid punctually and that 90% of the full amount is paid to organisers of activities upon approval of projects.

Working Group 2 - More and better employment for young people with fewer opportunities

4,7 million young people in the EU are unemployed. This represents a staggering 38.5% of the entire unemployed population. Young people in the EU, especially those with fewer opportunities, are facing difficulties in entering the labour market. Once in the labour market precarious working conditions become the unfortunate reality for the Youth of Europe.

It is therefore high time that policies are developed and strategies are implemented in a close co-operation between EU Institutions, National Governments, National Youth Councils and Youth NGOs to combat this unacceptable situation for young people. This should be done coherently at the EU, national, regional and local levels.

Integrating professional guidance in the educational systems is a crucial element in the process on eliminating social exclusion. The EU Member States have to take the responsibility to make the information accessible for all young people with a special focus on young people with fewer opportunities.

The value of vocational training has to be emphasized because the EU needs highly qualified young people in the labour market. The appreciation of highly qualified young professionals leads to a positive economical development in the EU.

The EU must provide the framework for internships in order to give the possibility to all young European people to have a practical formation connected with their vocational and academic formation in order to guarantee that internship do not substitute a regular contract.

The labour market has to recognise the competences gained through non-formal education.

Every young person in the EU must have the possibility for full participation and emancipation in society. Therefore we want the European Council to set European wide standards for working conditions which ensure employment in dignity.

In view of meeting the Lisbon strategy commitments for young People, we call upon the European Institutions to make sure that the ongoing implementation of the European Youth Pact is done in a close cooperation between policy makers and other relevant stakeholders such as National Youth Councils and Youth NGOs.

Young People require that youth concerns are taken on board by policy makers when defining flexicurity strategies at the National level. This should be done through a dialogue between National Governments and National Youth Councils.

Young People call upon the European Institutions to fully integrate the concerns of young people in the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market process.

Working group 3 - Non formal education and competence building with young people with fewer opportunities

One of the main aims of non-formal education is to create competence based environment and to promote active social participation of all young people, including those with fewer



opportunities. Even if often used to describe the situation of, the term fewer opportunities, does not only refer to young people with disabilities. It is a broader concept including young people with poorer, ethnic minority or migrant background. It also refers to young people facing health problems, young people dropping from schools or living them early, young people residents of rural areas and many more .

Decision-makers should take into consideration the importance to act not only for but also with young people with fewer opportunities, i.e. to empower them and make sure that their representatives take active part in all stages of the processes. In terms of non-formal education, it is vital that key decision-makers provide space for permanent structured dialogue. This should provide young people with fewer opportunities opportunity to raise their concerns, express their approval or discontent with existing policies and tools and build-up their competences and skills . This must be applied through regular meetings and subsequent follow-up events where the existing policies can be reviewed based on the grassroots level feedback and amended accordingly. Furthermore, national youth ministries and agencies have to provide opportunities and sources for active interaction, information campaigns and peer-to-peer learning events.

Young people with fewer opportunities should benefit from the provision of non-formal education and in that regard a safe environment must be created through a specific legal framework, i.e. national directives and regulations dealing with, for instance, issues related to status and skills necessary for youth workers and certified recognition of acquired competences.

In addition, there must be a European database of NGOs that will include information on results of exchange of best practice and methods so to improve the knowledge of youth workers dealing with similar issues. This tool would positively influence the structured dialogue between the national bodies, service-providers and beneficiaries.

Last but not least, National Youth Ministries and Agencies must put efforts to simplifying the administrative burdens and obstacles when applying for funding in the youth field by for example adopting the existing Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci approach of initial approval of an organisation and subsequent funding based on this evaluation.

Working group 4 - Integration of young people with fewer opportunities in society and their political participation

Integration of young people with fewer opportunities in society and their political participation firstly requires their primary needs being met. Poverty strikes young people hardest, therefore the EU and the Member States must stick to and fulfill their commitments of eradicating poverty in the EU by 2010.

There is a strong need for political and human rights education from an early age. In this context, non-formal education is as important as formal education. In order to make politics accessible to and comprehensible for young people we urge politicians to build relationships with those with fewer opportunities on the grass-root level so as to crush the notion of politics as a sector only for the privileged in society. We urge structured dialogue with disadvantaged young people in order to build bridges and find solutions with them and not only for them. Therefore already existing participation structures should be strengthened.

Youth organisations play a significant role in increasing participation of young people with fewer opportunities. We demand sustainable and sufficient resources for youth organisations to develop and implement youth projects based on the needs of young people with fewer opportunities in order to give them platforms to make their voices heard. Making the Youth in Action program accessible for everyone is important aspect in this regard.

Public political debate is often difficult to understand for everyone. Therefore we insist that all political issues are publicised in an accessible and easily understandable format. Further we request lowering the voting age to 16 and more direct democracy initiatives on the local level.

In order for all young people to realize and exercise their ideas and potentials we must combat problems concerning citizenship laws and discrimination in each country.

Working group 5 - Role of young people in intercultural dialogue

Human rights are universal and as that they belong to young people with fewer opportunities while they are not always able to receive the full benefit of them. Therefore in engaging with intercultural dialogue it is important to keep this aspect in mind. We are diverse in our opportunities and background and we believe that this diversity amongst young people can be one of our greatest strengths. As it creates an opportunity to work collectively to meet the challenges faced in many different contexts within Europe.

It is our belief that the empowerment of young people requires an open attitude. To effectively make an impact to the lives of young people we must be recognised not as a reference group but rather as equal partners in the work of intercultural dialogue. It is important to remember that we talk about actual people, individuals, affected by structures and values of society in which they are disenfranchised. It is the nature of intercultural dialogue that it can take on a non-formal aspect.

It is not only with legislation or regulation that barriers are broken, but this is done as much within our communities and through our day-to-day interactions. It is the individuals who want to create change that will create understanding, which will find similarities and use it to help promote respect and thereby remove cultural barriers in society. Creating spaces where one can openly talk about their prejudices and work to overcome this can be done in such spaces as youth centers, the media, the internet, the workplace and schools.

We must accept ourselves for who we are to be prepared to accept others. We must understand that it is ok to be different from the norm, and we see intercultural dialogue as a tool to emphasize this aspect. The methods developed in the creation of the "All different-All equal" campaign is a perfect example of this especially in schools and through youth organisations.

We see formal and non-formal education as a structured way of reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities. Working together on a local level, through education and youth organizations reduces tension and creates social cohesion. Reaching out to people at an early age prevents the fostering of intolerance throughout our development at a time where we are creating our own identity and where it is common to try and conform to the norms of society.

Youth led voluntary projects in Europe show the importance of the joint action of individuals and how those give young people the chance to get involved thus developing skills and taking on responsibility. It is important that the resources exist and are accessible at the national level for local projects aiming to include more young people with fewer opportunities. It is also important to recognize there are funds but we believe that the creation of a specific EU-wide fund aiming to benefit and bring new options to young people who have fewer opportunities in life is vital. These funds should be used to facilitate the development of youth led local projects to ensure a greater fostering of understanding and equality amongst the participating young people.

Our goal is an equal society where there are greater changes for young people with fewer opportunities within society and culture, where discrimination in any form is rejected.