

Future of the EU Youth Strategy

Policy document on “More Efficient Cross-Sectoral Tools for Youth Education, Inclusion and Employment”

Framework Service Contract to Provide Expertise and Support for European Cooperation in Education, Training, Youth and Sport (EAC/07/2015)



Future of the EU Youth Strategy: More Efficient Cross-Sectoral Tools for Youth Education, Inclusion and Employment

Introduction

This paper summarises the key outcomes of a Focus Group focusing on “More Efficient Cross-Sectoral Tools for Youth Education, Inclusion and Employment” conducted as part of the preparations for the Stakeholder Conference on the future of the EU Youth Strategy. The Focus Group, organised by the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture - DG EAC), took place in Brussels on 16 March 2017 and involved participants representing a range of stakeholder organisations including youth organisations, youth researchers, national agencies and PES representatives. This paper provides a brief overview of the policy context for the topic addressed in the Focus Group, a summary of the key points emerging from the discussions and, on this basis, provides some suggestions for potential topics for discussion on this theme at the EU Youth Strategy conference.

Policy context

Findings from the Interim Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy indicate that the strategy has been successful in triggering concrete changes at the national and organisational levels and in the adoption of common approaches and principles across the Member States. Most of the identified changes were in areas that are core to youth policy, i.e., volunteering, internationalisation and mobility, youth work and *cross-sectoral approach* to youth policy.¹

Furthermore, the interim evaluation finds that the EU Youth Strategy supported the institutionalisation of a cross-sectoral approach to youth policy in several Member States (e.g., the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Portugal). By encouraging a holistic approach to youth policy and the mainstreaming of a youth focus in other policy fields, the EU Youth Strategy supported the Member States' efforts to create or improve cross-sectoral cooperation mechanisms at national level². For instance, through the establishment of a Youth Chamber to act as a cross-sectoral advisory body for drafting, implementing and evaluating current and future youth policies, or the setting-up of an ad hoc interdisciplinary team of experts to consider youth issues holistically. According to the 2015 EU Youth Report³, nearly all Member States (with the exception of Denmark and Cyprus) now have institutionalised mechanisms to ensure a cross-sectoral approach to youth policy, such as inter-departmental structures and regular inter-ministerial meetings.

Organising cross-sectoral cooperation at national level is a challenging and time-consuming process. The interim evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy indicates that this is the case particularly in countries with a very decentralised public administrative structure, and in countries where support mechanisms are not

¹ European Commission (2016), Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU, Final Report, https://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/20160531-eu-youth-strategy-evaluation_en

² Ibid.

³ European Commission (2015), EU Youth Report 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/reports/youth-report-2015_en.pdf

already in place. Hence, the interim evaluation advocates that there is a more general need to strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation and develop effective tools supporting the cross-sectoral cooperation in the field of youth.⁴

Key points emerging from Focus Group discussions

How to encourage the development of effective tools for tackling youth issues in a cross-sectoral dimension?

New tools or better knowledge about existing tools?

A key message from the focus group was that many very relevant tools to aid cross-sectoral cooperation in youth policy-making have already been developed at national or regional level, so one of the main roles for the EU would be to support the dissemination of practices and the mutual learning between youth policymakers.

Youth work should be invited in

Youth work and youth organisations are sometimes left out in policy development both at national level and EU level, as this type of stakeholder is considered not to be a proper policy sector – which is a large mistake, according to the focus group. Structured Dialogue⁵, where youth workers and young people are invited to make young people's voice heard in the European policy-shaping process is a valuable tool as long as policymakers really listen to what is being said.

Structured Dialogue is a means of mutual communication between young people and decision-makers in order to implement the priorities of European youth policy cooperation and to make young people's voice heard in the European policy-shaping process.

It is a consultative process, implemented by the European Commission, that aims to increase cooperation with civil society and get firsthand input from young people. It is made up of one main event, the EU Youth Conference organised by the EU country currently holding the EU presidency.

Anchoring responsibility

The focus group pointed out that some partnerships fail to achieve results because none of the partners takes the lead and ensures progress. In all forms of cross-sectoral cooperation, it is vital to place the main responsibility with one of the partners. A useful tool in this context is a **working plan** defining who is driving the cooperation, who will implement what, the objectives of the initiatives, and who will follow-up. In Luxembourg for example, specialised agencies within the ministries were given this task.

Schemes and initiatives are anchor points for cooperation

Concrete schemes and policy initiatives can provide very useful tools to foster cross-sectoral cooperation, as they provide an occasion for the different policy sectors to get in touch with each other. The Youth

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Structured Dialogue is a consultative process, implemented by the European Commission, that aims to increase cooperation with civil society and get firsthand input from young people. It is made up of one main event, the EU Youth Conference organised by the EU country currently holding the EU presidency.

Guarantee was mentioned in this respect as an example of a scheme that had - at least in some Member States - led to increased collaboration between the employment and education sectors.

Funding is needed to underpin cross-sectoral cooperation

Funded schemes, including EU and national schemes, can aid the development of cross-sectoral cooperation. An example is the Latvian Project 'Know and Do'. Within this project municipalities work to create strategic partnerships, for example, with national and local institutions, NGOs, youth centres, social partners and other institutions that are engaged in youth work with the goal to reach the target group. EU initiatives can support this cooperation by making funding available for pilot projects. The EU Social Fund and Erasmus+ are examples of a funding source that often funds cross-sectoral pilot projects.

Trust and personal relations are as important as ever

Support mechanisms such as peer learning, peer counseling, or peer reviews are a good way to break down sectoral barriers because it is much easier to cooperate when you are familiar with people from different sectors. Furthermore, cooperation within peer learning activities is binding on all partners ensuring that the intended cross-sectoral cooperation actually takes place. The EU Youth Guarantee was an effective way of getting sectors to cooperate on youth unemployment. Most Member States now have Youth Guarantee coordinators who are responsible for cross-sectoral cooperation in this field. In Norway, the Youth Guarantee has been used to make the employment and education sectors reach out to each other by placing employment agents in schools.

Legal requirements as a tool

Another example of a tool fostering cross-sectoral cooperation is the 'Youth Impact Assessment' introduced in France. As is the case with other types of impact assessment, proposals for new legislation have to undergo the Youth Impact Assessment to ascertain whether a proposed act may be detrimental to or exclude young people. The Youth Impact Assessment is an efficient tool for cross-sectoral cooperation as it encourages all other sectors to take youth issues into consideration when drawing up a new act. In Italy, the status of youth policy has been increased by attaching the policy field to powerful and influential offices, i.e. youth policy now belongs under the prime minister's office. This is another way of ensuring that youth issues are taken into account in different policy areas.

How to make sure that the future EU Youth Strategy addresses cross-sectoral cooperation in an operational way?

Sectoral 'habits' is a challenge

In most countries and regions, the policy process is closely tied in with 'thinking within sectors'. Cross-sectoral cooperation is often seen as the 'cream on top of the cake'. Policy makers are used to working within sectors and they have large workloads making it difficult for them to prioritise cross-sectoral cooperation. Further to this, in most cases the youth field does not have much political influence. Youth policy is not recognised as a policy field in all of the Member States, hence youth policy as a field is very much dependent on the policy fields with who it cooperates.

The OMC in youth could learn from other policy fields

All trans-national cooperation – and trans-sectoral cooperation at EU level takes place on a voluntary basis, and Member States will only implement EU policies if they see an added value for their own country. Compared to other fields where the EU does not have hard legislative power (education and

sports were mentioned), the youth strategy appears overly ambitious, especially as there are few policy tools that can readily be adopted by national policy makers to help them reach the goals.

Is the Youth Strategy too fragmented?

The focus group agreed that the current EU Youth Strategy is too diffuse – it wants to achieve a multitude of objectives and addresses itself to all situations that young people may find themselves in i.e. education, employment or cultural activities. Instead, it was argued, it would be advisable that the new strategy be focusing on the most urgent and critical challenges for young Europeans. A first step would be to identify which groups within the European youth field are facing the most urgent challenges, and the nature of these challenges. This would enable policy makers to ascertain which sectors need to be involved the most in cross-sectoral cooperation.

Potential topics for further discussion

The following topics were discussed as possible points to cover at the EU Youth Strategy conference:

- Could a more focused European Youth Strategy lead to stronger cross-sectoral cooperation on youth policy issues at the national level?
- What type of mutual learning activities could be supported that would improve the situation in relation to cross-sectoral cooperation?
- How could awareness about already existing and proven policy tools for national youth policy makers be made better known to a larger share of national policy stakeholders?

The information and views set out in this document are those of the author(s) and meetings participants and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Commission.

Neither the Commission nor any other person acting on the Commission's behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

