

European Youth Policy: how does it work?

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WHY?

The youth policy became a concept in the second half of the 20th century when the Western European countries realised they needed to develop a special long-term strategy that would respond to the needs of young citizens. Such a strategy should not only solve the problems of young people as a social group, but also consider them as an important resource that can contribute to the development of the whole society. FOR WHOM?

WHAT?

Youth policy in Europe has been recognised as an important aspect of public policy not only by national governments, but also – even more specifically – by international organisations, such as the Council of Europe, as well as by the European Union. Since 1993, the Treaty establishing the European Community has had a legal basis for youth. In the Treaty of Lisbon the legal basis for the youth policy is provided for in article 165, which foresees that the EU action should be aimed at [...]. Encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of educational instructors, and encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe.

Following the Treaty, main institutions of the EU, with European Commission in particular, declare that „Europe's future depends on its youth”. It means that young people are supposed to be a priority of the EU's vision, what has even greater importance in the current time of economic crisis the EU is seeking to favourable conditions for youth to develop their skills, fulfill their potential and achieve the autonomy.

EU Youth Strategy

With a great scope of various dimensions of European reality, development of concrete actions addressed to young people need to be well structured. It should be also realistic, operational and based on research results. In respond to such demand, for the current period of 2010– 2018, European Commission has been drafted the EU Youth Strategy, adopted by the EU Council (representing EU Member States) on 27 November 2009.

The nineyear Strategy is divided into three cycles. By the end of each cycle, an EU Youth Report is drawn up assessing results and proposing new priorities for the next three year cycle. The strategy finally covers 8 areas that affect young people the ~~med~~ education, employment, creativity and entrepreneurship, social inclusion, health and sport, civic participation and volunteering, the last field of activity is called “Youth and the World” and refers to raising awareness and encouraging young Europeans to get involved in global policymaking at all levels (local, national and international) to address climate change and the UN Millennium Development Goals. It is also a good basis to develop global youth cooperation and support international mobility of young people!

An important aspect of the strategy is also its crosssectoral nature

Two main objectives of the Strategy are:

- x to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and in the labour market;
- x to encourage young people to be active citizens and participate in society.

“Youth in Action”: programme for young people for 2007-2013

“Youth in Action” is the European Union programme that has helped young people, since 2007 boost their skills and develop their personal capacities through non-formal learning and wider mobility. It is open to all young people (aged 13– 30), regardless of their educational, social and cultural backgrounds. It ~~en~~erages intercultural dialogue and the inclusion of all young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities. It strengthens European values everywhere it operates in the EU and in 140 countries beyond. It funds a wide variety of youth activities, including exchanges, initiatives, democracy projects, and a voluntary service. The Programme is also dedicated to youth workers and members

On the European level, it brings together the European Commission, Member States, national youth councils and European Youth Forum. On the national level, special working groups (composed of youth representatives, people from government institutions and experts) carry out consultations with young people within the country. One structured dialogue cycle lasts 18 months and focuses on one chosen topic, such as youth employment or youth participation in democratic life. Additionally, each Member State holding EU Presidency aligns specific subjects of consultations with its national priorities.

What is important about this process is that every six months young people work on specific recommendations that are presented during the meetings of ministers responsible for youth affairs. This means that politicians in Europe have a real opportunity to hear the young people's voice!