

Evaluation of the European Commission framework for cooperation in youth policy

A Report to DG EAC under the Framework Contract on Evaluation, Impact Assessment and Related Services

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Preface

This report provides an overview of the views and findings presented by Member States in their national reports, in relation to the past cycle of cooperation in youth policy. Each country was asked six questions, and this report is structured according to the questions.

1 Evaluation of the past cooperation cycle at European level.

1.1 Main achievements of the past cooperation cycle at a European level

The evaluation highlighted a broad range of achievements at the European level, with each Member States suggesting between three and four differing key achievements. The achievements expanded upon below were suggested by two or more countries, and thus it can be determined that they reflect a consensus of opinion.

1.1.1 Platform for exchange of practices

Estonia and Sweden suggest that the cooperation cycle has resulted in heightened knowledge about living conditions and values and experiences of young people from across the EU Member States. The exchange of practices allowed France to better position their own national youth policy with respect to other Member States. Moreover exchange of good and bad experiences has, to some extent, served to provide models or lessons learnt for stakeholders across the EU (UK). Amongst others, Denmark, Greece, and Ireland state that better knowledge of practices in other member states was gained.

1.1.2 Dialogue and consultation

At least twelve countries feel that youth policy has developed as an arena for politics where stakeholders can truly be mobilised and involved in effective cooperation and dialogue. In particular active and ongoing dialogue is cited to have been established between the Council, the Commission and young people (primarily represented by the national youth councils and the European Youth Forum) and, as such, young people have gained greater influence on EU cooperation. In particular the cooperation cycle has facilitated in the area of dialogue with focus on priority areas:

- The development of regular and structural dialogue and the setting up of networks between young people, youth organisations and responsible politicians, in order to achieve greater citizen orientation and youth participation in political decision-making processes.
- Involvement of young people and youth organisations in specific consultation processes, for example on the European Constitution and Lisbon treaty
- Youth events organised by Presidencies, which give opportunities to young people to participate in European policy making process
- Regular meetings between experts in youth affairs

Italy is committed to the development of a stronger dialogue between young people and policy makers, increasing their consultation with surveys, on line forums, round tables

and debates. The new website of the Ministry of Youth (www.gioventu.it) has an online forum open to all young people invited to express their ideas on a specific topic (this month the topic was on the use of drugs such as ecstasy) or propose other focus of discussion for the future. One of the priorities of the Italian Government will be to open a broad round of consultation among youth organizations, social partners, local and regional institutions on how Italy can fulfil the challenges driven by the future framework of cooperation.

1.1.3 Incorporation of 'Youth' in EU policy

The past cooperation cycle has ensured that youth policy is part of the framework of the European Union, and a major component of social policy. The Youth Pact in particular, has provided a mechanism for youth policy to be integrated and mainstreamed into, for example, the Lisbon Strategy. Sweden and Germany, amongst others, depict this as one of the most significant advances to date in cooperation in the youth field, and the first successful example of a youth perspective being mainstreamed in a process that is relevant to young people.

Italy regards the main achievements as increased consideration given to the transversal dimension of youth policies, as an integrated framework of actions taken in several fields (education, employment, information and so on), in the same time the past cooperation stressed the importance to take more account of the youth dimension in sectoral policies. The past cooperation cycle also helped to identify priorities for EU youth policies (improvement of active citizenship, education, training, mobility, social and professional inclusion of young Europeans), and promoted a better knowledge about young people. Moreover, it gave the opportunity to set a first framework of cooperation among different actors involved in youth policies (Member States, European institutions, social partners and youth organizations), focused on the OMC.

In addition, key youth policy documents (A New Impetus for European Youth and European Youth Pact) are seen to be linked to strategic EU documents such as the White Paper on European Governance. Finland, Slovenia and Ireland highlight this as a direct consequence of the past cooperation cycle.

1.1.4 Facilitator of national policy and programme development

The past cooperation cycle in youth policy at a European level, has served to lay a foundation for enhanced youth policy and programme-based work at a national level. This is true for, for example, Poland, Slovenia and Ireland. The cycle has helped to establish a real international context for youth policy and has had an inspiring and supportive influence on youth policy. Moreover, the Czech Republic and Lithuania suggest that the formulation of specific objectives in the area of youth at a European level has contributed to better implementation and visibility at national level.

Spain reports the main achievements of the youth co-operation framework as including: the consolidation of youth policy in the EU context both from a political perspective as well as from an economic perspective, through the budget allocated to youth programmes; the consolidation of EU youth programmes, and the creation of tools to

follow up policies and framework documents (Open Method of Coordination, White Paper, European Youth Pact).

To enliven the above statements, here are some examples. In Bulgaria many programmes, activities and concrete measures have been implemented at the local and regional level as a result of the past cooperation cycle. In addition greater emphasis has been put on youth in other policies in important fields, for example health, employment and combating racism and discrimination. In Lithuania networks of volunteers, youth centres and youth information centres have increasingly developed and, based on recommendations from the European Commission, a life-long learning strategy (addressing young people amongst others) is being implemented in the country.

Italy reported that the current framework of cooperation played an important role at national and local level, mainly for what concerns the visibility and the importance of youth policies and of their transversal approach. Before 2006 youth policies were one of the social policies in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, so the Ministry for Youth Policies and Sport was instituted for the first time in May 2006. After political elections in April 2008, it became the Ministry of Youth (a new Office for Sports was set up in the Prime Minister's Office) with wider competences and more funds. The presence of a Minister of Youth will promote the cooperation with the Ministers responsible for transversal topics, such as education, labour, equal opportunities, family, childhood and so on.

In Luxembourg, structures have been set in place to address topics such as globalisation, mobility, integration and environment. Youth policy has played a key role in Luxembourg in mobilising networks addressing youth matters and in particular issues concerning disadvantaged youth.

1.1.5 Coordination and consolidation of youth policy procedures

The past cooperation cycle has ensured youth policy is coordinated and consolidated at a European level. This has been achieved from a political perspective through several political bodies (council of ministers, general directors' meeting) and policies (the White Paper and central youth-related topics in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination), and from an economic perspective through the budget allocated to youth programs.

Moreover, Finland suggests that the cycle has served to unify steering methods and procedures used in youth policy in countries with advanced youth policy structures.

1.1.6 Increased visibility of 'Youth'

As much as eleven countries suggest that one of the key achievements of the cooperation cycle is making 'youth' more visible in Europe, and increasing the role and visibility of youth among other policy fields at the EU level. In particular the White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth" and strengthened EU cooperation in the youth field, have meant that more attention is paid to issues such as living conditions of young people, the influence of young people and the importance of cross-sectoral youth policy, at both national and EU level.

1.2 Main difficulties in past cooperation cycle

The evaluation has also highlighted a range of difficulties in the cooperation cycle. Those which were highlighted by two or more countries have been expanded upon in this section.

1.2.1 Lack of understanding of diversity

The difficulty highlighted by a significant number of countries, relates to an apparent lack of understanding of the diversity of ‘youth’ in the cooperation cycle. Belgium (Flanders) suggests that the White Paper overlooks ethnicity, gender, disability and socio-economic background when addressing Youth. Moreover, participation initiatives delivered through the cooperation do not make sufficient attempts to address diversity, and even those participants from ‘vulnerable minority groups’ appear to be largely well-educated. Indeed Hungary suggests that European cooperation actions only reach a limited proportion of the age groups concerned; this compares unfavourably with the greater number of national level applications submitted in the area of youth affairs. Spain notes the lack of development of the cross-sectoral dimension of youth.

1.2.2 Lack of representativeness

Along the same lines, a number of countries purport that the cooperation cycle does not facilitate true representation of young people. While the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) encourages dialogue with young people through consultations with youth councils, data in Bulgaria, for example shows that only 15% of young people are involved in some kind of youth organisation. As such it is not possible to assume that youth representative bodies adequately reflect the opinion of young people. Italy mentions that youth organisation should be involved in preparing public consultations and young people should be informed before every launch.

In addition Finland suggests that not all stakeholders have equal opportunity to contribute to, or engage in, dialogue. As illustration, youth organisations have greater access to the EC through the European Youth Forum, and are therefore more satisfied with opportunities for dialogue. Alternatively the local youth service is the organisation least satisfied with opportunities for dialogue. Germany suggested that it is difficult to generate political attention for commonly adopted objectives at a national level, as stakeholders feel only very indirectly involved (if at all) in the formulation of objectives.

Belgium (German speaking) suggests that consultations often lack structure, coordination and transparency, and input from actors in other policy areas is often not possible due to a lack of financial and staff resources.

Spain reports that limited communication with young people is a difficulty, and that the Structured Dialogue proposal may become a tool that enables the inclusion of the opinion of a greater number of young people.

1.2.3 Definition of ‘Youth’ is too narrow

Belgium (Flanders), Netherlands and Hungary all suggest that the past cooperation cycle is oriented towards the 15 to 25 age group, and that not enough attention is given to children (and children’s rights). The Netherlands purports that the coherence between children (0-12) and families on the one hand, and youth (12-25) on the other hand, should be made clearer - and more attention should be given to these two groups as a whole.

1.2.4 Differences between countries

Another key difficulty related to the past cooperation cycle, is the differences that exist between Member States that are not sufficiently taken into account in the development of EU youth policy. Finland suggests that the recent enlargement from a Union of 15 fairly homogenous Member States to 27 Member States has made the EU more heterogeneous which has added to the challenges of programme management. These increasing challenges have not, however, been compensated with a corresponding growth in youth policy resources.

In addition, while objectives are by necessity kept very general (due to the need to be workable in 27 Member States) this serves to make follow-up and evaluation of the work more difficult. Similarly, Luxembourg mentions difficulties in interpreting reports, with respect to lack of definitions of the quality of progress on the objectives.

1.2.5 Low awareness of EU youth policy

Four countries highlighted that the profile of EU youth policy is a difficulty within the cooperation cycle. While young people may have considerably better access to opportunities made available through the cooperation cycle such as youth exchanges, they do not always associate the increase in opportunities with the EU.

1.2.6 Difficulties in communication

There are some difficulties in communication. Bureaucracy is also mentioned. Issues raised are the lack of uniformity in reporting on progress in youth policy field, and the structured manner of dissemination of collected information. The United Kingdom mentions ‘practical constraints in the mechanisms available to share experiences’. Also, Luxembourg mentions that the youth sector knows little about the hierarchy of formal national and international structures. This means that sharing practice across Europe has not been fully realised.

2 Progress towards political objectives at national or regional level

2.1 Influence on national youth policy

The framework for cooperation in the youth field has positively influenced national youth policy in the areas of participation, information, promoting voluntary activities among young people and employment. This seems particularly apparent in the new Member States, but is also true for old Member States.

In Bulgaria, a European decentralised model for participation of young people in the community life has been established and in Latvia, youth policy has been developed according to recommendations within the cooperation framework of the European Union. In Slovakia and Slovenia for instance, European cooperation has brought new impulses for youth policy and youth work and in the Czech Republic, the adoption of the cooperation framework has contributed towards a better visibility of youth topics and their incorporation at national level, into state policy on children and youth.

Spain highlights that, starting from a “small” competence framework on the basic text of the Union, a working method that is helping to boost youth policies in Europe has been implemented. This situation explains why, in a large number of cases, European cooperation progressed slightly behind local, regional and national initiatives developed in Spain.

Actions in employment and housing have received special attention over the last five years. As a result, Spain was one of the drivers of the European Youth Pact. In this regard, we believe that there has not been a clear reflection to find out how we can support the Lisbon strategy from youth policies and how to develop the Pact beyond declarations of intentions into more specific and tangible aspects, especially when facing young citizens. It is necessary to have a better and deeper connection between the Lisbon Strategy and the Pact.

The open method of coordination has had a significant influence on youth policy in Luxembourg. The youth pact has facilitated the taking into account of youth in particular via its capability to facilitate dialogue between politics, youths themselves and their organisations. Youth has been achieved a higher profile and has been taken into account in the reform programme. Youth is increasingly being consulted in the political field.

In Finland, one of the older Member States, the EU cooperation framework in the youth field has had a strong influence on the new Youth Act, the Child and Youth Policy Programme and a Government Policy Programme supporting it.

However in the new Member States in particular, it is also important to stress that while the EU cooperation priorities in the field of youth have had a significant impact on shaping youth policy priorities - the influence of EU Structural Fund planning and implementation is also very significant. Moreover the influence is not always uniform. In Estonia the priorities for youth in the White Paper (and agreed upon in the 2002 cooperation framework) have played a major role in national policy, however the influence of the European Youth Pact has been much more modest.

2.2 Development and achievement of national goals

In addition, the cooperation framework has also served to help develop and achieve national youth policy goals. Between 2005 and 2009, achievements in Latvia have included the development of an institutional system for youth work, an information system which ensures young people access to youth tailored information, non formal education systems developed in youth voluntary and extended possibilities for youngsters to leisure time activities.

Moreover in Hungary, the youth programmes of the European Union (Youth for Europe, European Voluntary Service, YOUTH, Youth in Action) are a predictable and reliable frame of reference in Hungary as the application system is transparent and systematic. This has assisted in the achievement of specific youth goals. The Slovak Republic is also very positive about the youth programmes.

However other countries, (in particular the old Member States - for example Sweden, UK and Germany) suggest that the priorities identified in the EU cooperation cycle, have been long standing objectives at a national level in their country. As such the development and achievement of these objectives can not really be attributed to the cooperation cycle. Spain suggests that there has not been a clear reflection to find out how youth policies should support the Lisbon strategy, and the Youth Pact should be developed beyond declarations or intentions, into more specific and tangible aspects.

Belgium (Flanders) indicated that such large-scale programmes with a more global vision do not always contribute to concrete realisations. As such the influence of the cooperation cycle at a national level is by definition, limited. France, where a strong youth policy had been in place for a long time, feels that their policy contributed to the construction of the framework, rather than the other way around (this is also true for the UK). However, the European cooperation framework has become a frame of reference for all national politics.

3 Appropriateness and effectiveness of main political instruments of the cooperation framework

3.1 Suitability of instruments

The majority of countries feel that the main instruments of the cooperation framework remain appropriate, particularly in view of the resources and means available for youth at a European level. The instruments serve to ensure greater account is taken of the “youth” dimension in other policies and are a suitable way for achieving the set of goals and maintaining the appropriate direction for youth policy. As Germany suggests “the Open Method of Coordination, the European Pact for Youth, youth policy as a horizontal task (youth mainstreaming), and the participation of young people in youth policy planning and decision-making in the EU (Structured Dialogue) are fundamentally suitable for helping to positively shape the living situations of young people in Europe”. In Austria the mainstreaming approach towards youth policies and the European Youth Pact, have brought significant positive effects with a "paradigm shift" in Austrian youth policy from problem-orientation to potential-orientation – with new networks of cooperation established.

However, many countries also suggest that it is important the instruments are further improved on and the quality of cooperation is increased. They feel it is possible to enhance the effectiveness of the main instruments even further. The Czech Republic and Greece, for example, suggest that objectives, priorities and working methods in the future youth cooperation framework should be formulated more specifically and more effort made to use the existing programmes and funds, for example the European Social Fund.

Furthermore the Netherlands and Estonia both highlight that the structure of instruments in the cooperation cycle are somewhat complicated and that it is not clear how, for example, the Open Method of Coordination, the Youth Pact, the White paper and structured dialogue are linked. There seems to be a relatively low level of connection between these implementation mechanisms. France suggests that the evaluation of instruments is difficult considering the relative short time of the frame of cooperation. Germany suggests that the OMC and the European Youth Pact have not yet been optimally networked; the OMC still tends to be a complex procedure with limited effectiveness and visibility, while the Pact is a catalogue of political topics that lacks the structures needed for implementation.

Italy welcomes the revision of the current cooperation, since it is an opportunity to reformulate it, allowing a focused and structured approach which should take into

account: fewer objectives and priorities, further development of the transversal nature of youth policies, and maintaining the OMC.

Luxembourg expresses the view that better definition of the procedures and structures for dialogue are proposed, to make the role of the various actors clearer together with the circumstances under which interventions are made. They highlight the importance of a sound understanding of appropriate and effective consultation mechanisms and give the example where the execution of a certain programme might be realised more effectively when continuous consultation with youth and civil society is carried out.

Overall while the instruments are indeed viewed as appropriate, it is also felt the opportunities presented have not been put to optimum use. It is a significant challenge to develop better and more structured development of knowledge, a more structured exchange of experience and improved follow-up.

While the framework and instruments have contributed to increased recognition of the need to work across the multiple policy fields of relevance (e.g. education, sport, culture and so on), there is evidence that there is still potential to further strengthen cross-sectoral approaches.

Particular comments have been made about the OMC and the European Youth Pact, and these are expanded upon in the sections below.

3.2 Open Method of Coordination

The majority of countries are advocates of the existing OMC and the opportunities it offers for sharing information. The OMC is largely viewed as an appropriate tool for helping achieve the priority goals of the cooperation framework agreed upon in the White Paper and in the Council of 2002. Particular strengths of the OMC highlighted through the evaluation include:

- Greater opportunities for increasing linkages and comparability with other fields
- Improved collection of information
- Opportunities for exchange of experience
- Dialogue, which in practice has taken place through ‘structured dialogue’
- The determining of priorities through multiannual implementation mechanisms, ensuring stable cooperation and planning to achieve common goals.
- Heightening attention to youth issues

In addition the OMC tools (questionnaires, reports) create a good foundation for cooperation between Member States. Moreover the need to provide situation overviews in various fields has formed a solid base from which developments and approaches can be compared.

However, it is suggested that the great potential that exists in the OMC has not been fully utilised, and the optimal way of mainstreaming a youth perspective in other fields not yet found. The reports highlighted a range of weaknesses in the OMC:

- The risk of the OMC is that 'peer-learning' means searching for the largest common denominator, which, for some countries, could even mean a weakening of the policy. There are no adequate instruments for responding to dissimilarities in youth policy structures and contents between the Member States (Belgium and Finland). However, related to this, Belgium (German speaking) suggested that the 'light version' of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is effective because it takes into account the differences between Member States.
- Too little use has been made of the information produced within the OMC and thus the dialogue has not penetrated national debate to any large extent. This includes for example, information produced from interim evaluations (Finland).
- Limited opportunities for combined analysis and thus making conclusions and determining future needs (Estonia).
- Very tight deadlines for submitting the necessary feedback as part of the OMC (often in one or two days (Malta).
- Accepting results of doubtful quality (Slovakia).
- The objectives of the OMC are fairly vague, the hierarchy of objectives is unclear and there are no indicators for follow-up and no identification of the key actors responsible for every phase of implementation (Italy). Moreover the objectives are more like the means to achieve an end, rather than hard targets (Sweden).
- The OMC questionnaires are not transparent enough, they are not all made public and it is not clear exactly how the data will be employed at the European level.
- National structures have trouble keeping up with the rapid changing policy areas in which OMC initiatives are taken (Austria).

3.3 European Youth Pact

The Youth Pact is viewed as particularly useful in enabling the youth dimension to become more visible in the context of the Lisbon Agenda and is seen by many countries as a real achievement in terms of European Union cooperation in youth policy field. It is highlighted that the European Youth Pact is the first visible example of how a youth perspective can be mainstreamed in a relevant policy area, serving to actively link youth work with employability issues. The Czech Republic purported that the decision to integrate the Youth Pact into national reform plans for reaching the Lisbon goals, carried the greatest importance of the tools used to implement the Youth Pact. However with regard to weaknesses, the following are named:

- Some youth policy stakeholders don't feel involved in the themes in the Youth Pact (Belgium).
- The Youth Pact must be developed as a real cooperation tool, and not just a base document. The potential of the "Youth in Action" program is an example of this (Spain).
- Common implementation of the European Youth Pact is not necessarily effective because of a lack of specific implementation tools as well as assessment mechanisms (Latvia).
- While the European Youth Pact contains very progressive ideas, the implementation, nevertheless, is at a more theoretical level (Slovakia).

4 Main social, economical and political challenges for youth to be tackled by youth policies in the coming years

The respondents highlighted a number of social, economical and political challenges that they feel are key for youth policy to address over the next few years. These relate to employment, youth participation, housing health, migration and mobility, social exclusion, education and balancing work and family life and are expanded upon in the sections below.

4.1 Employment

Unemployment remains an important topic for youth policy, in the majority of respondent countries (for example the UK). Related to this is a real concern about young people having access to 'decent' employment as opposed to unproductive, low skilled and low paid work - which violates the rights of young people. In addition some countries believe that too many young people are receiving 'activity compensation' (unemployment/disability benefit), which could lead to passiveness, and this is a key challenge to address.

The challenge of supporting young people to be prepared for future employment has also been identified. This includes providing access for young people to high quality education, training and opportunities, so that they can obtain a relevant qualification and acquire skills necessary for coping with changing societies. In addition young people need to be given a range of options, through work placements, volunteering and entrepreneurship. In relation, the Czech Republic states that a considerable challenge is the fact that potential employers are not fully prepared to employ disadvantaged young people.

4.2 Participation

Youth participation is viewed as a way of countering social exclusion among young people and promoting youth influence in society. Thus a key challenge highlighted by countries including the Netherlands, France, Lithuania, Poland and Spain is stimulating the participation of young people in political life and facilitating their contribution to society through social engagement, contributing ideas and active involvement in the local community, a positive attitude and citizenship. It is highlighted that priorities should be given to ensure young people have the skills and knowledge to be adaptable, flexible and 'European minded' to enable them to participate effectively.

The Italian national report takes the view that to allow youth participation it is necessary to provide young people with means, space, opportunities and support measures to their full involvement in youth policies, in order to contribute to the building of a better society, more tailored on youth needs. This includes key issues such as: good governance in schools, administrations and authorities; volunteering; guaranteed and supported associative life; support and capacity building of civil society and youth NGOs. In Italy participation in society will be strengthened also through the promotion of youth communities and the active involvement of young people and their organisations both in ministerial activities and in the policy actions affecting them.

Specific challenges within this are typically highlighted by the New Member States and relate to insufficient information for young people on how they can get involved in social and political affairs, the need to develop legal acts for defining voluntary activity, recognition of the competencies acquired by volunteers, improving and validating volunteer's status and improving conditions for organisations working with volunteers on a long-term basis.

4.3 Housing

Access to affordable housing is highlighted in Spain, Lithuania, Greece and Sweden as a major challenge. In addition it is suggested that young people are at greater risk of being evicted from their home than any other age group.

4.4 Health

Increasing health problems among young people is a key challenge for youth policy. In the Scandinavian countries in particular, mental health (especially among young women) is an increasing concern that needs to be addressed. In addition in other countries, the changing nature of work and lifestyle and increased requirements on young people, is highlighted as a cause of physical and mental deterioration. Ensuring young people have a healthy upbringing, grow up in a fair and healthy environment, and continue to have a healthy lifestyle, are key challenges.

4.5 Migration and mobility

In the new Member States, challenges related to youth emigration and 'brain drain' of higher educated young people to old Member States will be an increasing challenge. Migration of young people can serve to contribute to skills gaps and an ageing population. In addition Finland suggests that 'moonlighting' as a consequence of growing mobility, is giving rise to unhealthy competition in the labour market and under-paid occupations.

4.6 Social exclusion

The majority of responding countries (for example Greece, Denmark) cited social exclusion of young people as a major challenge for youth policy. Social exclusion manifests itself in a variety of ways including difficulties accessing the labour market, fewer opportunities, poverty, isolation and discrimination. The specific situation of social

exclusion among the young Roma population is highlighted in Bulgaria and Slovakia, as are limited opportunities and unequal conditions for young people in rural areas. Furthermore Hungary suggests that 42% of the 1,000,000 most financially disadvantaged people in the country are children or students aged under 20 years, hence they constitute a group exposed to the highest poverty risk.

4.7 Education

Formal and non-formal education should remain an important issue of youth policy. Access to, quality of, diversity in and recognition of education, as well as the development of entrepreneurship and other competencies will contribute significantly to all aspects of life of youth.

The Luxembourg national report highlights that during their education youngsters should learn to contribute actively to democracy, benefit from language and cultural skills, and acquire inter-cultural competencies to improve integration. However they also point out that these skills are not necessarily learned through traditional schooling so therefore education cannot provide all the required competences for good citizenship (professional, social, cultural and political integration).

4.8 Work/ family balance

The difficulties facing young families are highlighted extensively by countries. One of the key challenges that youth policy should address relates to young parents (and young mothers especially) and opportunities for their labour market participation. Moreover young parents are increasingly at risk of low economic standards. A number of countries suggest that establishing a wide network of crèches, and kindergartens supported by the state, along with greater support to young families, is key in enabling young women to reconcile their professional and family role. However there also concerns that parents working too much will also impact on the upbringing of the child, thus it is a delicate balance.

5 The challenges for youth from a European dimension

5.1 Introduction

At a European dimension, the range of challenges in the youth field identified by respondent countries narrows considerably. Most prominent are the challenges related to participation and active citizenship. Alongside this both health and social inclusion are also put forward by two or more countries.

While some countries suggest that all national challenges should be relevant at the European level, it is also purported that consideration needs to be taken as to whether it is appropriate to continue with making most topics of relevance to youth policy, the subject of European cooperation as well.

Below we outline the key challenges in a European dimension, beginning with participation and active citizenship.

5.2 Participation and active citizenship

The challenge most purported at a European level relates to the concept of active citizenship amongst young people - and this is seen as wholly relevant in the cooperation cycle. A number of countries suggest that young people should be helped to live not only as European citizens, but also as citizens who constantly transform the social space to become more viable, personally meaningful and socially beneficial.

It is suggested that to achieve active citizenship, it is important that young people strengthen their feeling of belonging to a common project and 'get hooked again into the European project'. The challenge is greater emphasis and commitment to programmes such as Erasmus and Youth in Action (e.g. Denmark). To achieve active citizenship, other mechanisms can be employed also, such as exchanging proven tools (and their standardisation at European level), recognition of practical competencies acquired through voluntary work and support for volunteering. Challenges within active citizenship relate to the volunteering legislation in some countries; it is depicted as vital that the EC 'create European space for volunteering'.

5.3 Social inclusion and labour market access

It is suggested by several countries that social inclusion of young people and their integration into the labour market continues to be relevant. For example The Netherlands

notes that participation does not work for young people who are not reachable. Therefore, social inclusion appears to be increasingly more important than participation. Sweden considers that the current focus on active citizenship and the social inclusion of young people and their integration into the labour market continues to be relevant. Estonia highlights the importance of increasing community/social cohesion and preventing alienation in society and the labour market, noting that it is therefore important to reduce fragmentation in society and to pay more attention to increasing the opportunities available to youth in unfavourable economic conditions. The importance of guaranteeing equal opportunities to voice opinions and for all youths to participate in society is also highlighted. Bulgaria points to integration of the Roma minority and addressing alienation from social and public problems as key issues for youth. Slovakia also notes the importance of supporting entrepreneurship of young people.

5.4 Health

It is highlighted that health issues should be addressed at a European level, with a closer examination of the overall situation in Europe regarding youth addiction, adiposity, suicides, migration and healthy life style issues. In addition youth safety, especially regarding traffic, delinquency, antisocial behaviour and internet and media issues should be addressed.

5.5 Priorities for dealing with these challenges

Most respondents are of the opinion that attention should remain focused on the current themes - active citizenship, volunteering, information, participation, better understanding and knowledge – and these should be elaborated upon. However in addition there is broad consensus that the focus should be on:

- Formal and non formal education, and the development of ‘equivalence of qualifications’ to identify and recognise non-formal learning and to support young people's mobility in the labour market and in other settings (the majority of countries suggest this).
- Youth policy, with ownership of actors involved in the process and solid representativeness of the youth
- Labour market policy
- Social inclusion to reduce fragmentation in society and to pay more attention to increasing the opportunities of youths in unfavourable conditions
- Promoting a positive and healthy youth
- Improving the quality of youth work

6 Instrument improvement and innovation

6.1 Existing tools and instruments

The evaluation has highlighted a range of specific improvements to the existing tools. These particularly relate to the OMC and the European Youth pact, and are outlined below:

- The OMC questionnaires and reports should be more transparent and comparable, and the completed questionnaires and reports of each country should ideally be made available to all countries. Moreover one country also suggested that the questions should have a larger scope. Aspects to be enhanced could include 'How we can train and teach youngsters to participate and/or be motivated towards active participation'.
- Experts from practise and research should be used alongside politicians to ensure quality in peer learning activities in the OMC.
- The objectives in the OMC have to be further specified. Objectives need to be more precise and procedures need to be more realistic and transparent.
- Vertical youth policy aspects in the OMC should be developed (youth participation and citizenship) and actual cooperation mechanisms should be revised and strengthened for implementation of new priorities and to achieve new common aims.
- Further communication should be facilitated between countries on issues such as the integration of young people, mobility, flexicurity and non-formal and informal learning.
- Dialogue should become more 'structured' with a clear division of tasks/ roles to ensure that every actor acts accordingly.
- Some objectives of the OMC need to be reconsidered so they are based on more ambitious predictions, address issues that have greater impact for youth and more closely cooperate with other policies.
- A compromise needs to be found in the OMC between advancing the youth policy agenda and excluding those actors with insufficient capacity.
- The number of issues in the OMC could be reduced in order improve cooperation (i.e. "less is more!")

- The mainly political character of the Youth Pact should give way to more concrete work.
- Monitoring and implementation of the European Youth Pact should make use of existing information, in order not to create a new administrative process. In this respect the initiative of the Commission of a triennial European Youth Report could be useful.
- The European Youth Pact could be adapted to include all aspects that influence youth socio-economical growth and facilitate youth autonomy. Moreover it could also address priorities such as creativity and innovation and entrepreneurship
- Youth in Action is a good funding programme and instrument in youth policy, but its resources need to be increased to cater for recent enlargement. In addition the compatibility of the programme with other policy instruments should be increased and National Agencies integrated in structural dialogue.
- Comparable data and knowledge about different countries should be made available on the web site of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy to maximise its use as a web-based service.
- More EU Youth Councils (of Ministers) are needed in order to promote the exchange of information and dialogue.

In addition it was suggested by a number of countries, that the Youth Pact and the OMC could be merged into a single youth policy framework which embodies all youth policy priorities. This would represent a key opportunity for realigning youth policy cooperation in the EU framework and should prove effective in achieving the goals.

6.2 New tools and instruments

With regard to recommendations for new instruments and mechanisms, just a few suggestions have been made:

- The Commission should establish an exchange framework for regional and local practice supported by the EU Youth Programme and organised in thematic learning ‘clusters’. This would maintain close links between practical exchange of experience and policy development.
- In order to enhance the use of the information produced by the OMC, various peer review methods could be adopted as steering and evaluation tools. As comparable knowledge is difficult to produce, regional modes of analysing information could be explored. One example provided is the ‘youth barometer’ in the Baltic Sea States, which will gauge the attitudes and values of young people in the region at certain intervals.
- Research mobility should be promoted using measures used in youth worker mobility as a model.

- In addition several countries highlight that the announced triennial European Youth Report could become an important instrument in the EU youth policy, as it would visibly bring together existing information from different EU processes, data from youth research networks and experiences in the Member States.
- Incorporation of the youth dimension in all relevant documents of the Commission. This would require a scientific basis which can be obtained through a European Youth Paper and a European Youth Survey.
- Incorporate a youth advising board that is not only limited to a European Youth forum but that can be associated in the process of decision making.
- The cooperation could be enriched by adding a practical dimension, by establishing a platform where various actors (project participants, decision makers in national- local- and regional organisations) can share their experiences.
- In addition, instruments should be developed in order to provide the non-organised youth a voice.