

Council conclusions on promoting young people's access to rights in order to foster their autonomy and participation in civil society

EDUCATION, YOUTH, Culture and Sport Council meeting
Brussels, 12 December 2014

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council,

RECOGNISING THAT:

1. The Council, in the framework of European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2014-2015¹, established the theme of youth empowerment as the overall priority of the trio presidency (IT, LV, LU), focusing on access to rights, autonomy, political participation and active citizenship.
2. Young people continue to be adversely affected by the economic and social crisis that has characterized the past few years. Demographic changes, youth unemployment and employment under precarious conditions, have consequently made it more difficult for them to achieve autonomy and exercise effectively their rights.
3. High levels of youth unemployment have contributed to the spread of poverty, marginality and social exclusion, health problems as well as a loss of confidence in the future. Research also shows that in some Member States an increasing number of young people are not in employment, education or training (NEETs)² and that there is a strong link between socio-economic status and political participation: NEETs are less likely to vote³, have less trust in political organisations and are less engaged in civic participation, compared to the rest of the young population.

¹ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a European Union Work Plan for Youth (2014/C 183/02).

² Study of EUROFOUND – ["NEETs - Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe"](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1254.htm) - <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1254.htm>

³ "Descriptive statistics for people aged 15–29 years show that NEETs are substantially less engaged in politics than the rest of the young population" (Study of EUROFOUND – "NEETs - Young people not in employment, education or training: Characteristics, costs and policy responses in Europe", p. 95) <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1254.htm>.

4. Nevertheless, young people represent a valuable resource for society. Their skills, competences and creative and innovative capacity should constantly be taken into consideration when implementing strategies for youth policies at European, national, regional and local level.

AWARE:

5. That there are indications that young people are becoming autonomous⁴ at a later age than in the past.
6. That the economic downturn has exacerbated intergenerational inequalities and might have long-lasting effects on the social cohesion and solidarity of our societies.
7. That the increasing youth mobility in Europe, also due to the search for employment in other countries, needs adequate attention, in order to make it a real opportunity for the personal and professional development of young people. In this regard, the Erasmus+ programme can play an important role in promoting both greater autonomy and participation in social life for young people through mobility as well as improving skills and competences important for employability and citizenship.
8. Of the joint conclusions⁵ of the EU Youth Conference, 13-15 October 2014, Rome⁶.

RECOGNISING THE FOLLOWING KEY CHALLENGES:

9. The combined action of the factors caused by the economic and social crisis, such as income reduction, lack of jobs and greater job instability, have diminished young people's capacity to become autonomous⁷.
10. It is now therefore necessary to develop appropriate measures and policies to support young people's autonomy and their transition to adulthood. This involves not only acting on policies that favour young people's transition from education to employment, but also on related areas such as access to financing, health and well-being and political and civic participation, in order to provide the necessary tools to help young people to become autonomous and participate in social life.

⁴ Preliminary condition for youth autonomy implies that young people have the necessary support, resources and opportunities to choose to live independently, run their own lives, have full social and political participation in all sectors of everyday life, and be able to take independent decisions. The ability of young people to become autonomous is not only embodied in the work sphere, but it also covers the ability of young people to develop their potential, make their own choices and live in an independent way having the tools to participate in a critical and active way in the social, political and economic life of their own communities.

⁵ Doc. 14429/14.

⁶ These joint conclusions were adopted by the EU Youth Conference in Rome which is a recurring informal event organised by the Team Presidency countries with the support of the European Commission as an integral part of the structured dialogue as adopted by the Council through the Resolution (2009/C 311/01) on the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field and the Resolution (2014/C 183/01) on the overview of the structured dialogue process including social inclusion of young people.

⁷ <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1404.htm>

11. With the aim of ensuring young people's access to rights, the EU needs to focus inter alia on combating youth unemployment, fostering active citizenship and diminishing the mismatch between the skills and competences that young people acquire and those required by the labour market while enabling them to contribute to the sustainable creation of new jobs by promoting high quality education as well as improving the communication of graduate skills and competences to employers.

IN THIS REGARD CONSIDERS THAT:

12. In the context of cross-sectoral cooperation in youth policy, the EU and Member States, within their respective spheres of competence and with due regard for the principle of subsidiarity, could promote measures, where appropriate, addressing the following issues:
 - supporting young people's autonomy and well-being and tackling and preventing all forms of discrimination faced by many young people;
 - investing in raising awareness among young people of their rights and how to assert them;
 - supporting the involvement of young people in the decision-making process at all levels and through the recognition of youth organisations as an important channel for participation and the development of active citizenship;
 - continuing the path taken towards the recognition of youth work as an instrument to encourage participation and the acquisition of skills and competences important for achieving autonomy;
 - boosting the opportunities for participation and their contribution to community life, also through media and information technology, particularly with regard to decisions that concern young people directly;
 - supporting media and digital literacy education as a means of cultivating young people's critical minds and active citizenship;
 - supporting recognition and validation of skills and competencies acquired through informal and non-formal learning such as voluntary activities and fostering young people's participation in civic, social and political life;

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

13. Progress towards the identification of barriers to the participation of young people in social and political life, considering the possible introduction of measures to address these barriers.
14. Endeavour to promote that young people have access to quality jobs with a fair wage and social protection, allowing them to be autonomous and have a secure and dignified life.
15. Promote equal opportunities and gender equality for young people, including in the areas of social, economic and political life. Consider taking steps to ensure that young people are able to reconcile work and private life.
16. Invest in prevention and intervention measures for reducing early school leaving, especially by framing policies aimed at providing equal access to quality education and offering targeted support to improve school environments. Attention should also be paid to removing obstacles to young people achieving their full potential in education.
17. Promote youth work, taking into account the findings of the study on the value of youth work⁸, as a fundamental tool in allowing young people to develop their own initiatives and supporting the transition of young people to adulthood.

⁸ "Working with young people: the value of youth work in the EU" (European Commission, 2014, http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/study/youth-work-report_en.pdf)

18. Consider promoting the development of social housing schemes⁹ that focus in particular on young people with low incomes, such as students and trainees and unemployed youth.
19. Consider ways to promote the establishment of schemes for young people with the aim of supporting their entrepreneurial projects.
20. Support the development of youth friendly information services that can help inform young people about their access to rights.
21. Support young people's access to cultural life with a view to helping them to contribute to the construction of a more cohesive society.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION, WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE AND WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, AND WHILE RESPECTING MEMBER STATES' RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUTH POLICIES, TO:

22. Continue investing in the promotion of autonomy for young people through the development and support of youth policies and youth work and, where appropriate, through adequate support and funding for independent and youth/youth-led organisations.
23. Promote the principle that the autonomy and participation of young people be regarded as an important aspect to be taken into account in the development of social and economic strategies in the EU.
24. Support campaigns and educational programmes aimed at raising awareness about human rights (including civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights) and on how young people can fully enjoy such rights, using also existing networks. Special emphasis should be placed on young people with fewer opportunities.
25. Promote the use of existing opportunities within the ERASMUS+ programme, including those relating to the training for teachers and youth workers on human rights (including civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights) so that they can act as multipliers in their education and training institutions.
26. Ensure that the EU Work Plan for Youth is implemented promptly via genuine cross-sectoral cooperation.
27. Use the Youth Guarantee as an instrument to promote structural reform in Member States and the exchange of good practices among the Member States, especially concerning the monitoring of the implementation in relation to young people's transition from education to employment.
28. Establish an exchange of best practice in the framework of existing structures to analyse and discuss the situation of young people regarding their autonomy, their participation in civil society and their well-being and develop the necessary improvements at all levels.

⁹ Housing solutions that the local government provides, which can be rented for a small amount of money.

CALLS ON YOUTH ORGANISATIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS TO:

29. Make the fullest use of the opportunities afforded by the ERASMUS + programme and promote this programme in order to equip young people with relevant skills and competences, supporting their autonomy and encouraging them to take part actively in society.
30. Inform young people about their access to rights in general and more specifically within the context of their activities and establish concrete initiatives such as information services in order to raise awareness on the issues related to their autonomy and access to rights.

INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:

31. Analyse, within the instruments of the renewed framework, the situation and barriers faced by young people in accessing their rights on the basis of the voluntary contributions from Member States and involving also experts, policy makers, representatives of youth and other civil society organisations. In addition, this analysis should be regularly reviewed so that it would also help Member States to exchange experiences and good practices.
 32. Reinforce the cross-sectoral approach to youth policy and make sure that the Commission takes into account young people's access to rights in the development of policies and programmes, where relevant.
 33. Raise awareness on issues related to young people's participation, including autonomy and access to rights, through the European Youth Portal.
 34. Propose possible measures aimed at encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe. In this regard, consideration should be given to the work conducted by the Council of Europe and the "Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth".
 35. Take into account the work on social inclusion - with a focus on outreach, access to social rights, and fighting new forms of xenophobia and discrimination - underway in the agreed framework for the "Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth".
-