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Delegations will find in the annex the 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), adopted by the Council at its 2428th meeting held on 23 November 2015.

**ANNEX**

# 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)

Young people's human and social capital is one of Europe's greatest assets for the future. The European Union and its Member States need to invest in the potential that 90 million young Europeans represent in terms of skills, creativity and diversity.

The economic crisis has hit young people particularly hard. It has widened the gap between those with more and those with fewer opportunities. Some young people are increasingly excluded from social and civic life. Worse still, some are at risk of disengagement, marginalisation or even violent radicalisation.

This is why the Commission and the Member States continued working together in the period 2013-2015, to improve young people's employability, their integration in the labour market, their social inclusion and participation. In the face of a growing socio-economic divide, policy must continue tackling the deep social problems that many young people are facing. We need to identify sustainable solutions to fight youth unemployment, strengthen social inclusion and prevent violent radicalisation. This requires more systematic cooperation across a range of policies at EU and Member State level, such as employment, education, training, non-discrimination, social policy, citizenship (including citizenship of the Union) and youth, but also culture, sport and health.

In 2016-2018, the cooperation framework for youth[1] should aim to empower more and more diverse young people, especially those at risk of exclusion. It should help them find quality jobs and participate in social life. EU funding under the Erasmus+ programme will complement policy cooperation on youth work, voluntary activities and participation in democratic life. Other instruments, the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), will provide funding targeted at the inclusion of young people in the labour market and at developing their human capital.

## 1. Introduction

The EU supports young people's employment, employability and social inclusion, especially under its agenda for jobs, growth and investment, the Europe 2020 strategy and through EU funds such as Erasmus+, ESF and YEI.

Furthermore, the EU supports, coordinates and supplements Member States' actions through a cooperation framework in the youth field in accordance with Articles 6 and 165 of the TFEU. The cooperation framework calls upon the EU and the Member States to:

- create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market; and

- promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people.

Through actions including evidence gathering, mutual learning and dialogue with youth, the framework supports action in eight fields: education and training, employment and entrepreneurship, health and well-being, participation, voluntary activities, social inclusion, youth and the world, and creativity and culture.

[1] Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), OJ C 311, 19.12.2009, p. 1-11.

This report evaluates progress towards the goals and priorities of the cooperation framework in the period 2013-2015, based on an assessment of young people's situation and policy measures taken at EU and Member State level.

## 2. Young Europeans today[2]

Since 2013, the effects of the crisis continued to resonate strongly on young people. Transitions from child to adulthood have become more complex and individualised, a trend that has risen sharply since 2008. These transitions are marked by key changes - from education to work, from being financially dependent to managing one's own budget - and a need to acquire autonomy which exposes young people to fluctuating economic, social and environmental conditions. Policies should accompany young people in this journey and help them realise their full potential.

The data below provide a snapshot of the situation of youth aged 15-29.[3]

***This generation of young people is better educated than any other …***

Education indicators reveal positive trends. Although considerable divergences across the EU remain, early school leaving is now in decline.[4]

Higher-education attainment rates improved from 33.8 % in 2010 to 37.9 % in 2014.[5] Even if the EU unemployment rate increased for those with tertiary education, it is still much lower than for those with the lowest levels of education. Yet, these groups can also be confronted with underemployment and being overqualified for the opportunities in the labour market.

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2 For details and data sources underpinning the analysis, see staff working document SWD(2015)169 on the situation of young people in the EU.

3 Unless otherwise indicated.

4 Eurostat indicator 'early leavers from education and training', from 13.9 % in 2010 to 11.1 % in 2014 for the age group 18-24 (high percentages persist notably in Spain, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Romania).

5 Eurostat, population aged 30-34 with tertiary education attainment.

Many young people build social networks combining global connectivity with local roots: 82 % participated in online social networks in 2014. Young people engage in new forms of political participation, often using social media, but tend to vote less than older generations. Still, many remain active members of their local community; about one in two belonged to at least one organisation in 2014; one in four is a volunteer.[6] This differentiated picture of young people's engagement challenges current understandings of the concept of citizenship.

***… but the crisis has created new divisions***

Many young people struggle to find quality jobs which seriously hampers their path towards independence. In spite of a decrease in most Member States after its 2013 peak, youth unemployment remains a serious concern: 8.7 million young Europeans cannot find work[7] and the proportion facing long-term unemployment or involuntary part-time work remains high.

In total, 13.7 million are neither in employment nor education or training (NEETs).[8] Close to 27 million are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Poverty rates are higher for young people than for the overall population and involuntary part-time work or protracted temporary positions expose this generation to a risk of long-term poverty.[9]

Inactivity, poverty and exclusion do not strike evenly. Those starting life with fewer opportunities tend to accumulate disadvantages. Young people with a migrant background, low educational achievers or young people with health issues are more likely to become NEETs.[10] Unemployment among native-born youth with immigrant parents is almost 50 % higher than among other young people in the EU.[11]

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6 Flash Eurobarometer survey 408, 2014.
7 Eurostat, 2014.
8 Eurostat, 2014.
9 *Rising inequality: youth and poor fall further behind*, OECD, 2014.
10 'NEETs', Eurofound, 2012 and OECD, 2015.
11 *Indicators of immigrant integration - Settling in 2015*, joint OECD and European Commission study.

The gap is widening between young people who study, are confident of finding a job and engage in social, civic and cultural life, on the one hand, and those with little hope of leading a fulfilling life and who are at risk of exclusion and marginalisation, on the other hand.

These divides threaten to undermine the social fabric and sustainable long-term economic growth.[12] Europe's ageing population makes integrating all young people (while respecting their diversity) even more necessary and urgent.

Young people on the wrong side of this divide find it difficult to express their political voice. The less educated or less involved they are in social activities, the less they take part in voting, volunteering or cultural activities.[13] For instance, NEETs have less trust in public institutions and participate less in social and civic activities than their peers.

***No single policy has the solution, but all policies can help***

All young people deserve fair and equal opportunities, but this demands long-term investment. In their respective areas of competence, the EU and its Member States need to mobilise all policies that can help improve young people's prospects.

To convert recent signs of recovery into lasting and sustainable growth, the EU has taken action to boost job creation, growth and investment, including efforts to help the young back into quality jobs. The EU and the Member States can build their efforts on the Youth Guarantee,[14] the European Social Fund and the Investment Plan for Europe.

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**12** *In it together: why less inequality benefits all, OECD, May 2015.*

**13** Flash Eurobarometer survey 408, 2014.

**14** Council recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee, OJ C 120, 26.4.2013, p. 1.

Jobs are crucial but not always enough to ensure full inclusion. Education and training can provide young people with skills needed in the labour market and help overcome inequalities and promote upward social mobility. The urgent challenge for education and training across the EU is to invest and modernise quickly enough to realise this potential.[15] Youth policy, operating outside the classroom, can also help young people acquire the right mix of skills to prepare them for life and work.

Young people should be able to grow up in inclusive and pluralist communities, based on European democratic values, the rule of law and fundamental rights. To safeguard tolerance, diversity and mutual respect, the EU Security Agenda involves action to address the root causes of extremist violence and prevent radicalisation, including by promoting inclusion and participation of young people.[16] This year's terrorist attacks, starting in Paris and Copenhagen, have brought new urgency to these complex challenges. In a declaration adopted in Paris in March 2015, EU education ministers and the Commission committed themselves to taking further action to preserve European values.

**15** Education and Training 2020 Joint Report, COM(2015) 408.
**16** COM(2015) 185.

## 3. EU and Member State action in 2013-2015[17]

### 3.1. EU action: employability, inclusion and participation

***Action across EU policy areas***

Youth employment and employability remained top priorities throughout 2013-2015.

To improve educational outcomes, Member States took action under the European Semester to bring down early school leaving and promote higher-education attainment to reach the Europe 2020 headline targets. Their efforts were underpinned by the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training as well as the Erasmus+ programme. Since 2012, following the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, Member States are starting to introduce measures to allow young people make the most of what they learn outside formal education.

The EU and Member States undertook to reduce youth unemployment by easing transitions from education to work. In 2013, the Youth Guarantee was introduced as a structural framework to offer young people a job, an apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education within four months of leaving school or becoming unemployed. The ESF and the YEI set aside at least €12.7 billion for youth activation and employment. Around €27 billion of ESF funding will be spent on education measures from 2014 to 2020. Young people will also benefit indirectly from around €11 billion of ESF funding for other initiatives such as modernising employment services or supporting self-employment. Actions under the YEI are expected to foster cooperation across different institutions and services to assist especially NEETs in an integrated way.

[17] More details are provided in the staff working document (SWD(2015)168) on the results of the open method of coordination in the youth field; http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/report_en.htm.

Since 2013, the European Alliance for Apprenticeships has drawn support from the private sector, while since 2014 the Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships[18] aims to facilitate quality learning and fair working conditions. The Commission improved information for young jobseekers under the EURES system for information-sharing on job offers and launched 'Your first EURES job' to help young people find a job abroad.

Further to the EU Security Agenda and the Paris Declaration, Member States undertook to step up efforts to foster the inclusion and participation in society of all young people. Through actions including the European Youth Week, the Commission mobilised civil society to work on inclusion, citizenship and intercultural dialogue. All these areas will enjoy greater funding under Erasmus+. These efforts complement the work of the EU-funded Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) which points to the preventive role of education and the teaching of critical thinking and democratic values in tackling radicalisation. In this context, the Commission has been emphasising the importance of encouraging young people to think critically about extremist messages[19] and stressing the potential of Erasmus+ in supporting learning mobility and partnerships between stakeholders, which can ultimately help youth develop resilience to extremist views[20].

***Specific youth policy actions***

EU cooperation focused on social inclusion and youth empowerment, including access to rights and political participation. The Council called for a greater contribution from youth policy to the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy and confirmed its intention to better include NEETs and promote youth entrepreneurship.

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18 OJ C 88, 27.3.2014, p. 1.

19 COM(2013) 941 'Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response'.

20 http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-prevent/index_en.htm

Youth work has been high on the EU youth agenda since 2013. A Commission study showed the value of youth work for young people in different aspects of their lives[21] and in 2015, the Second European Youth Work Convention identified the most urgent challenges and called for a European agenda for youth work.[22] Furthermore, the Council invited the Commission to consider making a proposal for a Council Recommendation on Youth Work, in the light of the results of the relevant studies and work of the expert group.

In light of concerns about young people's withdrawal from traditional forms of participation, the Commission gathered evidence[23] that they are still keen to participate, but that they ask for more and *different* channels of participation. The challenge to policy-makers will be to work out how best to respond. The 2015 Council Resolution on encouraging political participation of young people in democratic life in Europe provides a framework to answer this challenge.

***From policy to change on the ground: Erasmus+***

In 2014, the EU launched the Erasmus+ programme for education, training, youth and sport. With a budget of €14.7 billion for the period to 2020, Erasmus+ supports the learning mobility of four million young people and educators, with 10 % of the budget reserved for youth activities, which fund an estimated 400 000 participants in youth exchanges and 100 000 in the European Voluntary Service (EVS). This represents an 80 % increase in funding as compared with the previous Youth in Action programme.

Erasmus+ better links policy and programme than before. It funds strategic partnerships between education providers, stimulating cross-sectoral cooperation. Youthpass[24] continued to support the recognition of non-formal and informal learning: National Agencies for youth have delivered nearly 250 000 certificates since its inception. To widen the impact of Youthpass, the Council proposed to introduce in other sectors and to support the use of national recognition tools inspired by it.

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21 Study on *Value of youth work in the EU*, 2014; expert group reports on the creative and innovative potential of young people and quality approaches in youth work.

22 http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8491-2015-INIT/en/pdf

23 Study on *Youth participation in democratic life*, 2013.

24 Youthpass is a recognition tool for non-formal and informal learning in youth work; it is used for projects funded by the youth part in Erasmus+. https://www.youthpass.eu/en/youthpass/.

***Widening outreach***

Using both online and offline tools, the Commission undertook to better inform young people about the opportunities offered by EU policies and programmes. More importantly, it sought to listen to their views and ideas. With 1.5 million unique visitors in 2014, the European Youth Portal has become the pillar of these activities, advertising opportunities for cross-border volunteering and connecting to EURES information on job and traineeship offers. In 2015, the Commission collected ideas from young people in 'Ideas Labs' during the European Youth Week, which overall reached 137 000 people in events and 1.2 million via social media.

The Commission will further improve the design and functionality of the European Youth Portal and other online platforms. It will work more closely with networks in direct contact with young people, such as the Eurodesk network with its 1 200 information specialists.

### 3.2. Action by Member States

Member States increasingly pursue transversal youth policies, with employment, social and civic inclusion as primary concerns. They have taken many measures to integrate young people into the labour market, often as part of Youth Guarantee schemes and backed by EU funds available under the ESF and the YEI. In addition, 18 small scale pilot projects were carried out in 2014 with direct Commission support. All Member States have submitted Youth Guarantee Implementation Plans. Progress on their implementation is assessed within the European Semester. Most Member States involved youth organisations, and two thirds involved youth services in the partnerships set up in the context of the Youth Guarantee.

In response to concerns about the growing social exclusion of young people, nearly all Member States took measures to enhance the inclusion of NEETs. Most undertook to improve young people's access to quality services and 80 % supported youth work and youth centres. However, youth work has suffered from budget cuts across Europe[25], while the growing share of youth at risk of poverty and exclusion increases the demand for intervention.

[25] Study on *Value of Youth Work in the EU*, 2014.

As to participation, 27 Member States developed mechanisms for dialogue with young people; 25 provided public support for youth organisations and two thirds promoted the use of online media and provided greater opportunities for debate. Although Member States have sought to involve young people across the socio-economic spectrum, given the persistently lower participation among some groups, policy-makers at all levels can still do more to involve under-represented groups.

## 4. Governance and implementation of the youth cooperation framework in 2013-2015

Member States' reports on the implementation of the cooperation framework provide a solid basis from which to continue EU youth cooperation. The framework helped advance national youth agendas and cross-sectoral cooperation in support of young people, backed by relevant evidence and exchanges of experience.

To make the framework's implementation more effective, the Commission and Member States could improve the sharing of relevant data and other evidence outside the youth field. At the same time, they could use these as a basis for more output-oriented youth policies. Both should support uptake of youth concerns in other policies. At EU level, mutual learning can be diversified, for example by creating additional opportunities for peer learning tailored to different needs of Member States. The Structured Dialogue with youth should be made more inclusive.

The main activities and instruments are reviewed in detail below.

### *The framework as an agenda setter*

The framework gave a strong impulse to national youth agendas. Nearly all Member States have introduced initiatives or tools in this field since 2010. In two thirds, the framework reinforced national youth policy priorities and in one third it influenced the local and regional level. 11 Member States reoriented their national youth policy in line with the framework.

The framework encouraged cross-sectorial cooperation. Nearly all Member States have institutionalised mechanisms to ensure a cross-sectoral approach to youth policy, such as inter-departmental structures and regular inter-ministerial meetings.

The first Council EU Work Plan for Youth (2014-2015) aimed at boosting the framework's implementation, and most Member States took part in its activities. Twenty-three felt that the Work Plan succeeded in its aim and reflected the national priorities well, but some warned of risks of incoherent or parallel approaches to the nine-year framework.

***Evidence-based policy-making: quantitative and qualitative developments***

The situation of young people in the EU is measured regularly on the basis of a dashboard of 41 indicators on conditions affecting young people.[26] Member States are increasingly using these indicators, even if this has not yet produced systematic output-oriented youth policies.

The indicators and further evidence from Eurostat, Eurofound and the partnership between the Commission and the Council of Europe, notably through analysis by the Pool of European Youth Researchers (PEYR), will help Member States and the Commission to discern new trends and adapt priorities accordingly.

The Commission and the Member States need to share this evidence - beyond the remit of youth policy – with others working with young people. At EU level, the new youth monitor[27] provides user-friendly online access to data. As of 2016, a new youth wiki will provide up-to-date information on national policies, legislation and programmes in the youth field. This will be complemented by a new Indicator Framework for Monitoring the Youth Guarantee, for which first data will be expected end 2015.

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**26** SEC(2011) 401.

**27** http://ec.europa.eu/youth/dashboard/index_en.htm.

***Mutual learning: exchange of experience***

Member States have learned from each other, primarily through participating in expert groups. In 2013-2015, experts addressed ways of supporting the creative and innovative potential of young people, the contribution of youth work to young people's challenges in the crisis, and youth-work quality. The findings fed into work in the Council as well as into discussions in the Education, Training and Youth Forum.[28] The 2015 report on quality youth work[29] informed Council conclusions on reinforcing youth work to ensure cohesive societies[30], which called for a reference and guidance tool on quality for national youth work organisations.

Member States also learned from each other through activities organised in partnership between the Commission and the Council of Europe; smaller groups of Member States organised specific exchanges on matters of common interest, such as local youth work.

To make the most of the various mutual learning activities, the next work plan should include the development of a flexible framework to facilitate access to information and the outcomes of the activities. It should encourage uptake of findings and help match partners with shared interests.

***Structured Dialogue: increasing outreach and anchoring dialogue in the policy agenda***

The EU Structured Dialogue between policy-makers, young people and their representatives is widely seen as a promising tool for listening to young people. Its first 18-month cycle, which ended in 2011, helped to shape subsequent EU initiatives on youth unemployment. In 2013-2015, the Dialogue addressed social inclusion and youth empowerment and its recommendations have subsequently been addressed in the Council.

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28 Council resolution on a European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2014-2015, 20 May 2014.

29 *Quality Youth Work - A common framework for the further development of youth work*, http://ec.europa.eu/youth/library/reports/quality-youth-work_en.pdf.

30 May 2015.

The Structured Dialogue has evolved since 2013 and is better anchored in the youth policy agenda. The number of participants has more than doubled and some 40 000 young people responded in the last cycle, many of them on behalf of larger groups. Also, national dialogue processes are taking inspiration and beginning to emerge.

The Structured Dialogue has yet to fulfil its full potential: It still fails to reach a wider group of young people with fewer opportunities and a weaker political voice. The Commission encourages greater outreach through Erasmus+ grants in support of national efforts and an online consultation tool launched in 2014. A further challenge is to monitor the uptake of the Dialogue's results in EU and national policy. Finally, in the interest of accountability and to motivate young people to stay engaged, policy-makers at all levels should provide better feedback on their responses through the European Youth Portal and national working groups. The findings of the 2015 EU Youth Report and of the ongoing interim evaluation of the EU cooperation framework for youth can inspire future improvements of the Structured Dialogue.

## 5. The way forward in EU youth cooperation (2016-2018)

***Equal education, job and participatory opportunities in inclusive communities***

On the basis of the EU's political priorities, Member States' reports on the implementation of the Framework, data and evidence gathered, the future work cycle of the cooperation framework should prioritise:

- increased social inclusion of all young people, taking into account the underlying European values;
- stronger participation of all young people in democratic and civic life in Europe;
- easier transition of young people from youth to adulthood, in particular the integration into the labour market.

With regard to these priorities, and while Member States and the Commission's action shall be directed towards all young people, particular emphasis shall be given to the following groups:

- Young people at risk of marginalisation
- Young people neither in employment nor education or training (NEET)
- Young people with a migrant background, including newly arrived immigrants and young refugees.

The Commission and Member States will take action in these areas, including through the EU Work Plan for Youth, the framework's instruments and cooperation with other policies as appropriate, to promote:

- social inclusion and outreach practices to reach young people of diverse backgrounds, especially those suffering from disadvantages, to ensure their full participation in social and civic activities;

- the capacity of youth work, youth organisations and networks to act as forces of inclusion by assisting young people to engage, volunteer and drive positive social change in communities;

- the recognition of quality youth work, building its capacity for outreach and responsiveness to emerging societal, behavioural and technological changes;

- new forms of participation in democratic processes and access to political decision-making through both online and offline tools;

- evolving skills demands, including citizenship, media and digital literacy, critical judgment and intercultural understanding;

- young people's access to their fundamental rights and of the practice of non-discrimination and intercultural understanding; and

- volunteering, including through EU programmes such as the EVS and the new EU Aid Volunteers Initiative, as a way of combining learning with civic engagement[31]; greater complementarity between national and international actors to scale up cross border volunteering and better link national volunteering with the EVS.

Reflecting these priorities, the EU Structured Dialogue with youth should promote the inclusion of all young people in tolerant, diverse and democratic societies. The next Dialogue must reach a much wider audience of youth groups, especially those that have not engaged in the Dialogue so far, among others by using lighter engagement tools tailored to the needs and habits of young people.

***Youth policy within a broader EU agenda***

Youth policy cannot work in isolation. Cooperation and complementarity with policies such as employment, education, training, health and well-being, culture, digital media, sustainable development, citizenship and sport is essential.

The cooperation framework can underpin such cooperation through its mechanisms. Through the EU Work Plan, the Commission and Member States can further implement and refine cross-sectorial structures and working methods. This contributes to reaching the overall objectives in the youth field: to create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market and promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people.

European cooperation in the youth field should be part of a broader political agenda for young people. To have real impact, policy-makers at EU and Member State level must work together with practitioners, service providers, educators and businesses on the ground to mobilise resources and funds to reach a critical mass of young people. They should aim to deliver innovative solutions to the complex phenomena that are marginalisation, exclusion and lack of participation.

[31] At EU level, in spite of doubling the number of beneficiaries under EVS, cross-border volunteering remains modest.

Ultimately, there is an urgent need to scale up efforts. To offer more young people the genuine prospect of becoming full and engaged members of their communities, we need a comprehensive approach to match the challenge ahead. This requires a coherent policy agenda, backed by Erasmus+, the Youth Guarantee and EU funding instruments with greater outreach, such as the ESF or the YEI. National and regional resources must support these efforts where possible.