

INDEX

Editor's Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	3
Chapter One - Recent Youth Policy Developments in Europe	4
• The European Commission White Paper A New Impetus for European Youth	4
• Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council regarding the Framework of European Cooperation in the Youth Field	8
• The Paneuropean perspective on youth policy: the Council of Europe	18
• Conclusion	23
Chapter Two - Education	24
• Formal Education in the European Union	24
• The Bologna Process	38
• The Value and Contribution of Non-formal Education	41
• How youth organisations can recognise the non-formal learning that takes place in youth organisations	43
• Conclusion	44
Chapter Three - Employment	45
• Conclusion	75
Chapter Four - Social Inclusion	76
• The European Union Social Inclusion Process	84
• Youth Organisations and Social Inclusion	91
• Conclusion	93
Conclusion	94
Bibliography	95
Credits	100

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The final acknowledgement has to go to the member organisations of the European Youth Forum. It is they who provided so much of the inspiration behind the work of the Youth Forum and make it such a unique organisation. I would particularly like to thank those who contributed examples of best practise for this report.

Katy Orr
Brussels, June 2004

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The European Youth Forum has long been active as a platform of national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations in Europe. Indeed, I am very proud of the fact that it can claim to be one of the biggest pan-European platforms, including members not just from the European Union, but from all over Europe. The objectives behind producing this report were varied and many.

Firstly, as an organisation we have often noted that while many statistics are gathered and much research is carried out concerning young people and youth policy, it is infrequently brought together in a single document at the European level. This report brings together information on young people in relation to youth policy, education, employment and social inclusion in the European Union. It allows a comparative analysis to be made of the situation in the Member States and shows which countries have been more successful in dealing with problems such as high youth unemployment levels.

The fulfilment of this first objective helps to support the second objective of the report: to promote the development of knowledge-based youth policies. Only by fully understanding the challenges can appropriate measures be developed. The elaboration of youth policy must be done hand-in-hand with youth organisations for it is they that have an in-depth knowledge of the problems and challenges faced by young people. Thus, in each of the chapters of the report there is an example of best practise which demonstrates the value of the work that youth organisations do and the contribution that they can bring. It is our firm conviction that this should be fed into policy development by means of the participation of young people and youth organisations in policy development.

The third objective of the report is to analyse policy development and implementation from the youth perspective. The report therefore includes frequent references to the large body of policy and position papers adopted by the European Youth Forum on a wide range of issues of concern to young people. The report also considers how European Union policies have been implemented from the youth perspective and what changes or adjustments are needed to make them more successful.

I hope that this report can be used as a tool and a resource by many different actors. It can provide young people in one country an idea of what is happening in other countries. It can demonstrate to policy makers the contribution that the involvement of youth organisation and young people can bring. It can highlight the need to strengthen the youth aspect of other policy areas. Most of all, however, I hope you find it interesting and to use some of the many languages from the recently enlarged European Union, I wish you Buona Lettura! Dobro branje! Ihnen eine interessante Lektüre! Boa leitura! Καλό διάβασμα! Feliz lectura! Veel leesgenot!

CHAPTER ONE – RECENT YOUTH POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE

By Anna Sellberg and Katy Orr

Over the last few years there have been considerable developments in promoting more coherent youth policies at the European level. Both the Council of Europe and the European Union have been very active in the field and the European Youth Forum has provided inputs to both institutions. This chapter begins by considering the European Commission's White Paper A New Impetus for European Youth and the agreement of Common Objectives by the Council. It then turns to the key role that the Council of Europe has had in promoting youth policy at the national level in the context of a broader Europe.

In the Chapter on the European Commission's White Paper, the consultations that led to the White Paper as well as the content of the adopted White paper and Youth Forum's reaction to it are outlined. The chapter on the Council Resolution goes through the open method of coordination in the youth field with its common objectives and the Youth Forum's involvement and reactions to the process and the objectives, as well as the horizontal aspects of youth.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION WHITE PAPER A NEW IMPETUS FOR EUROPEAN YOUTH

The New Impetus for European Youth had its roots in Viviane Reding's announcement as Commissioner-Designate for Education and Culture - in the context of her European Parliamentary hearing for Commissioner-Designates in the summer of 1999 - that she planned a White Paper on youth and youth policy in Europe. This resulted in the launch of a broad and far-ranging consultation process, leading to the adoption of the European Commission's White Paper 'A New Impetus for European Youth' in November 2001.¹ This proposed an open method of coordination in the youth field - which has since been launched on the basis of two Council Resolutions - and greater policy coordination in relation to a number of horizontal issues.

In order to prepare the White Paper, the European Commission launched a wide-ranging and broad consultation process. This had four pillars: the consultation of young people themselves, the relevant government ministries or authorities in the Member States, youth researchers from all over Europe and civil society (the Youth Forum had insisted from the very beginning on the importance of consulting civil society). Very valuably, the consultation also included the then candidate countries as well as countries from the European Economic Area. In all, seventeen national consultations were held in the Member States and candidate countries, resulting in the consultation of thousands of young people and some 440 suggestions for the development of youth policy.

1. European Commission White Paper 'A New Impetus for European Youth' COM(2001) 681 final: http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth/whitepaper/download/whitepaper_en.pdf

A European Youth Gathering was organised under the French Presidency in October 2000 with 450 young delegates from 31 countries reaching agreement on 80 suggestions. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) played host to a civil society hearing in February 2001, which was attended not only by youth organisations but also by other social NGOs working on or interested in youth issues.² The European Youth Forum collected and made a compilation of written contributions from the participants in the EESC hearing. There was also a public hearing organised by the Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport of the European Parliament, attended by over 300 people with interventions from MEPs, the Commission, researchers and representatives of youth organisations in the European Parliament. The European Economic and Social Committee also produced an opinion on the ‘White Paper: Youth Policy’.³

In addition to a researchers’ conference taking place, a researchers’ network to work on youth issues from the European perspective was also established, which produced a final report.⁴ A Eurobarometer report on Young Europeans was carried out in order to gauge the opinions of young Europeans on a variety of issues such as participation, employment, the information society, immigration, Europe and languages and mobility.⁵ Representatives from DG Education and Culture also held meetings in each EU national capital with policy-makers and administrators, and in some cases with National Youth Councils.

The whole White Paper consultation process was concluded at the Umeå Youth Gathering under the Swedish Presidency in March 2001 which brought together representatives from the four pillars (youth, governments, researchers and civil society) together in order to develop some of the main conclusions coming out of the consultations. The European Commission then produced the White Paper, which was adopted by the College of Commissioners in November 2001. The White Paper was presented at the Ghent Youth Colloquium from 26-28 November 2001 under the Belgian Presidency.

For its part, the European Youth Forum and its member organisations were very involved in the hearings and consultations organised both at the national and European level during the 18 month long consultation. The Youth Forum also provided expert support to the European Economic and Social Committee and made two written contributions to the White Paper consultation.⁶ The latter contributions were the product of many meetings and discussions within the Youth Forum on the key objectives for a European youth policy.

The consultation process in the Member States, the candidate countries and at the European Union raised considerable expectations among young people and youth organisations. The Commission had stated to young people that ‘You should tell us what you want to do, and what we can do together,

2 The Report of the Hearing on Youth Policy, 20 February 2001 can be found at the following website: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/youth/ywp/civil.html>

3 Op.cit.

4 The report is available on the following DG Education and Culture website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/youth/whitepaper/contres/research_en.html

5 Eurobarometer 55.1. ‘Freeze-frame on Europe’s Youth... for a new impetus: The main results of the Eurobarometer 2001 survey on youth’ European Commission 2001.

6 Youth Forum’s reaction to the White Paper, European Youth Forum resolution on the White Paper on European governance and the future of Europe Strategy and Key objectives for a Youth Policy in the European Union and Second Contribution of the European Youth Forum to the European Commission’s White Paper on Youth Policy (April 2001) <http://www.youthforum.org/en/press/reports.#YouthPolicyinEurope>

in order to ensure that you really are involved in the various aspects of the decisions concerning the future of our societies. You can be sure that we shall do everything we can to ensure that your ideas are translated into concrete measures and that your voice is heard, especially in the places where decisions are taken every day'⁷. The White Paper identified four key messages from the consultation: increasing the active citizenship of young people, expanding and recognising areas of experimentation, developing autonomy among young people and for a European Union as a champion of values.

⁷ Speech by Commissioner Reding at the Paris European Youth Gathering, October 2000.

⁸ Paragraph 37 of the Lisbon European Council Conclusions (p.12) identify four key elements of such a method:

- fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium and long terms;
- establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practice;
- translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences;
- periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes.

The White Paper was the first time the European Commission presented a coherent strategy for an EU youth policy and it is therefore very important. The role of a White Paper is to outline the future scope for a policy that has not been an EU policy before. The White Paper A New Impetus for European Youth considered the challenges related to young people and youth policy, summarised the key messages that emerged from the consultation exercise and presented a proposal for how to move forwards to develop youth policy in the European Union. It also included substantial annexes which reported on the results of the consultation and which provided an overview of already existing European Union policies of relevance to young people.

In order to translate the four key messages mentioned above into youth policy, the White Paper proposed the introduction of an open method of coordination (OMC) in the field of youth and that more account should be taken of youth in other policies. The open method of coordination is a relatively new means of coordinating policies which remain the competence of the Member States at the European level. One of the first and best examples of the open method of coordination is the Luxembourg Process of the European Employment Strategy (this is described in detail in chapter three). The open method of coordination was defined in the Lisbon European Council conclusions and has since been adopted in a number of other policy areas such as the Social Inclusion Process described in chapter four or in immigration policy.⁸

The model for an open method of coordination in the youth field proposed by the European Commission in the White Paper identified four areas for action: participation, information, voluntary service among young people and a greater understanding of youth. The methodology for implementing the open method of coordination was much looser than that used in other policy areas or the one defined in the Lisbon conclusions. The Commission proposed the following plan:

- Acting on a proposal from the Commission, the Council of Ministers periodically decides on priority areas of common interest.
- Each Member State appoints a coordinator, to act as the Commission's interlocutor, for youth-related issues. The various coordinators submit to the European Commission details of policy initiatives, examples of best practice and other material for consideration on the chosen topics.

- The European Commission submits a summary and an analysis of this information to the Council of Ministers, accompanied by proposals for common objectives.
- The Council of Ministers sets out common guidelines and objectives for each of the topics and lays down monitoring procedures, and where appropriate, benchmarks based on indicators.
- The European Commission is responsible for periodic monitoring and evaluation, and reports on progress to the Council of Ministers for Youth.
- The European Parliament must have an appropriate role in this process and in the monitoring arrangements. The Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions also have to have the opportunity to give an opinion.
- Young people are consulted on the priority themes and on their follow-up.
- Applicant countries are associated as far as possible.⁹

9 op.cit. pp.21-22.

10 Ibid., p.25

11 The Commission is preparing a proposal for the future YOUTH Programme and it is expected that the White Paper priorities will form the basic principles of the Programme.http://www.europa.eu.int/youth/index_en.html

12 European Parliament Report on the Commission White Paper on a new impetus for European Youth (A5-0126/2002) 19 April 2002; Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth, SOC/094 25th April 2002; Opinion of the Committee of the Regions of 3 July 2002 on the European Commission White Paper A New Impetus for European Youth, EDUC-005.

13 op.cit., p.6.

14 op.cit., p.19.

15 op.cit., p.7.

The White Paper also identified five priority areas where the youth aspect should be taken into account: education, lifelong learning and mobility; employment; social integration; young people against racism and xenophobia; and autonomy for young people. The White Paper stated that ‘the European Commission will ensure that guidelines concerning young people will be taken more into account of in these policies’ and that ‘the ministers responsible for youth policy should also ensure that youth-related concerns are taken into account in these other policies at national level’.¹⁰ The White Paper also made a commitment to adapt the priorities of the YOUTH Programme so that they are in line with the White Paper.¹¹

Thus the European Commission White Paper made a proposal which tried to incorporate the key points emerging from the consultation. The European Economic and Social Committee, the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions all produced responses to the White Paper.¹² All of these institutions welcomed the White Paper and the initiative taken by the Commission. The EESC commended the ‘European Commission for having made a qualitative leap forward in the promotion of European co-operation in the youth field’.¹³ Nevertheless, the White Paper was very much seen by these institutions as a first step and that some questions were raised about the method for implementing the process. The Parliament, for instance, noted that ‘the procedure proposed by the Commission for applying this method needs to be defined more precisely’ with regard to the priority areas, common guidelines and objectives and the monitoring and reporting mechanism.¹⁴ Similarly, the EESC called on the Commission to ‘define more comprehensively the issues for which the open method of co-operation is applied and to publish a Communication laying out how youth is effectively taken into account in other key policy areas’.¹⁵

In a response adopted at the beginning of 2002, the European Youth Forum welcomed the White Paper, recognising that it represented a very important

and significant development in youth policy in the European Union.¹⁶ It also very much valued the consultation process and the opportunity to contribute to the White Paper. However, it highlighted many of the concerns expressed by its member organisations about the lack of ambition in the White Paper¹⁷ and the need to build on the Commission's proposals in order to develop a policy which would 'genuinely make a difference to the socio-economic situation of young people and their ability to participate fully in society as active citizens.'¹⁸ However, as the European Commission very much stressed that the White Paper was a result of the consultations and only made proposals for future developments, the focus now shifted to the Council and the Resolution on Youth Policy to follow-up on the White Paper, which was foreseen for June 2002.

The Youth Forum developed a position paper on the Resolution in April 2002.¹⁹ This position paper complemented the European Youth Forum's response to the White Paper by focusing on the elements that the European Youth Forum wished to see included in the Council Resolution. It called for an annual cycle of the open method of coordination with thorough reporting, including benchmarks and examples of best practice. It also called for a broad involvement of young people in the process and the setting up of structures for this.

RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL AND OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL REGARDING THE FRAMEWORK OF EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN THE YOUTH FIELD

In response to the White Paper, the Council adopted a Resolution on the Framework of European co-operation in the field of youth²⁰, at the Council meeting in June 2002. The Council Resolution represented the consensus among the Member States on how the youth policy field could and should be developed in the future.

THE OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION

The Resolution stressed that an open method of coordination should 'be applied with a flexible approach in a manner suited to the youth field, with due regard for the competencies of the Member States and the principle of subsidiarity'. It endorsed the four thematic priorities of participation, information, voluntary activities among young people and a greater understanding and knowledge of youth. It invited the Commission to draw up questionnaires with the Member States for each priority and on the basis of the answers identify good practices and innovative approaches and use these to prepare drafts for common objectives for the Council. It also proposed an indicative timetable for this procedure. In relation to the horizontal aspects and the Commission's proposal to take more account of the youth dimension in other policies, the Resolution called for 'the inclusion of the youth dimension in other policies and programmes, both at national

16 European Youth Forum Response to the European Commission's White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth. Adopted by the Bureau of the European Youth Forum, 30 January 2002. <http://www.youthforum.org/en/press/reports/001102e.pdf>

17 Many of the Youth Forum's member organisations were very active in the White Paper process, and seventeen of them produced responses to the White Paper. These can be found on the Youth Forum's website: http://www.youthforum.org/en/our_work/white_paper/wp.html

18 European Youth Forum Response to the European Commission's White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth, p.2.

19 European Youth Forum 'Position Paper on Council Resolution on Strategies and Guidelines for Future Cooperation in Youth-related issues', adopted by the Bureau of the European Youth Forum, 5 April 2002 <http://www.youthforum.org/en/press/reports/028002e.PDF>

20 Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council regarding the Framework of European Cooperation in the Youth Field. Official Journal C 168/2 of 13 July 2002 or: <http://www.youthforum.org/en/press/reports/c0020713en00020005.pdf>

and European level, in line with the priorities set out in the White Paper (education, lifelong learning, mobility, employment and social integration, combating racism and xenophobia, autonomy) and other priorities to be defined by the Council in cooperation with the Commission²¹.

The Council Resolution also followed-up on the Commission proposal to continue involving young people and youth organisations in the development of the OMC and horizontal measures. It stated that 'young people, whether organised or not, as well as youth associations as representatives of youth, should be associated with the cooperation framework both at the European and national level'. More specifically, it foresaw the consultation of the European Youth Forum (the platform of national youth councils and international non-governmental youth organisations), in the preparation of an evaluation report on the OMC after it had been initiated. Thus, the key document for the youth OMC shows a genuine commitment to the consultation and involvement of civil society, both in the form of individuals and civil society organisations.

Following the adoption of the Council Resolution, the European Commission drew up questionnaires for the two first priorities: information and participation. These were sent to the Member States and the candidate countries in July 2002. Member States were asked to consult young people "as they deemed appropriate" on the responses to the questionnaires.²¹ The results from the questionnaire were then used by Commission to prepare proposals in the field of participation and information which were presented to the European Youth Forum as a formal partner within the OMC in a meeting in February 2003²². The Communication containing the final Commission proposal was adopted by the College of Commissioners in April 2003.²³ The Communication proposed common objectives to enhance the participation of young people and encourage them to be active citizens. The following three sub-objectives were identified in order to achieve this overall objective:

- greater participation by young people in the life of the community in which they live;
- greater participation by young people in the mechanisms of representative democracy;
- learning to participate.

The common objectives to improve information for young people were linked to the global objective of 'improving young people's access to quality information in order to enhance their participation in public life and their development as active and responsible citizens in an enlarged European Union.'²⁴ Three sub-objectives were also identified in this field:

- improving young people's access to information services;
- provision of quality information
- enhancing young people's participation in the shaping and dissemination of information.

21 The European Youth Forum prepared a synthesis report on how the National Youth Councils were involved in the consultations on the questionnaires within the Open Method of Co-ordination which showed that experience was very mixed, ranging from the establishment of a Steering Committee with members of both government and Allianssi, the National Youth Council of Finland. In other countries, particularly the candidate countries, national youth councils were not consulted at all or were merely asked to respond to some points in a letter.

22 European Youth Forum policy paper "Guiding Principles for Participation and Information of Young People", Malta, November 2002. The policy document outlines how the European Youth Forum would wish to see the development of common objectives on participation and information within the Open Method of Co-ordination in the youth field. It calls for ambitious common objectives and the involvement of the Youth Forum throughout the whole process. It outlined the Youth Forum's key principles in the areas of participation of, and information to, young people.

23 Communication from the Commission to the Council 'Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth. Proposed common objectives for the participation and information of young people, in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2000 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field. COM(2003) 184 final.

24 Ibid., p.8.

The European Youth Forum adopted a position paper on the Commission proposals for common objectives in April 2003.²⁵ The position paper called for the Council to adopt ambitious and far-reaching common objectives, complemented by strong and concrete measures to achieve these objectives in order to fully assess the development of youth policy in Europe. Moreover, the Member States should efficiently and effectively implement and monitor these measures at the national level and actively involve young people and youth structures in this work. Finally, the importance of allocating adequate financial resources to this process was underlined.

The proposals for common objectives were then presented to the Council and discussed in the Council meeting in May 2003. At the European Youth Event in Rethymno in June organised by the Greek Presidency, 140 young people met to give their opinions on the Common Objectives²⁶. After the Youth Event in Rethymno, the Council started the discussion on the proposals for common objectives and adopted their slightly revised objectives in November 2003.²⁷ The Council Resolution identified the following overall common objectives:

CONCERNING PARTICIPATION to develop the participation by young people, by introducing and supporting action to encourage them to exercise their citizenship actively and by enhancing their effective participation in democratic life:

1. increase the participation by young people in the civic life of their community;
2. increase participation by young people in the system of representative democracy;
3. greater support for various forms of learning to participate,

CONCERNING INFORMATION to develop information for young people by improving access for young people to information in order to increase their participation in public life and facilitate the realisation of their potential as active, responsible citizens:

1. improve access for young people to information services;
2. increase provision of quality information;
3. increase participation by young people in youth information, for example in the preparation and dissemination of information.

Following the adoption of the Resolution, the Member States have until the end of 2005 to implement measures in accordance with these guidelines and then to report on their progress by the end of 2005.

The European Parliament, the Committee of Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee do not play a formal role in the Open Method of Co-ordination. However, they must be informed about the developments by the Commission and they receive all the documents produced and have

25 European Youth Forum position paper "implementing common objectives to enhance the participation of young people and to improve the information to young people", Brussels, April 2003.

26 Reactions and proposals to the Common Objectives on youth participation and youth information, Rethymno, 24 June 2003 can be accessed on the European Youth Forum website: <http://www.youthforum.org/en/home/downloads/Reactions%20and%20proposals%20to%20common%20objectives.FINAL.pdf>

27 Council Resolution of 25 November 2003 on common objectives for participation by and information for young people (2003/C 295/04) http://www.youthforum.org/en/press/reports/c_0031205en00060008.pdf

the right to put forward their opinion on the proposals. Both the Parliament and the Committee of Regions have issued a report/opinion on the common objectives.

The second cycle of the OMC has repeated the process and timeframe of the first cycle. Questionnaires on voluntary activities and a greater understanding of youth were sent to the Member States and candidate countries in 2003 and the results were being analysed by the Commission in order to prepare two Communications to the Council on common objectives which were adopted on 30th April 2004.²⁸ Both the European Youth Forum and the Council of Europe were consulted on the formulation of the questionnaires before they were finalised and the European Youth Forum was consulted on the Commission's key themes for common objectives in a meeting on 21st February 2004.²⁹

The Communication on a greater understanding and knowledge of youth identified four common objectives:

- Objective 1 - Identify existing knowledge in priority areas of the youth field (namely participation, information and voluntary activities) and implement measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it.
- Objective 2 - In a second stage, identify existing knowledge in further priority areas of interest to the youth field and implement measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it.
- Objective 3 - Ensure quality, comparability and relevance of knowledge in the youth field by using appropriate methods and tools.
- Objective 4 - Facilitate and promote exchange, dialogue and networks to ensure visibility of knowledge in the youth field and anticipate future needs.

The Communication on voluntary activities similarly presented four common objectives:

- Objective 1 - Develop voluntary activities of young people with the aim of enhancing the transparency of the existing possibilities, enlarging the scope and of improving quality.
- Objective 2 - Making it easier for young people to carry out voluntary activities by removing obstacles.
- Objective 3 - Promote voluntary activities with a view to reinforcing young people's solidarity and engagement as citizens.
- Objective 4 - Recognise voluntary activities of young people with a view to acknowledging the personal skills and their engagement for society.

The communications were very much welcomed by the European Youth Forum. They take into consideration several of the Youth Forum's proposals from the consultation with the Commission held on 20 February and they

28 Communication from the Commission to the Council on the follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth. Proposed Common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth, in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field. COM(2004) 336 final. Communication from the Commission to the Council on the follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth. Proposed common objectives for voluntary activities among young people in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European Cooperation in the youth field. COM(2004) 337 final

29 European Youth Forum policy paper "Guiding principles for common objectives on voluntary activities and greater understanding of young people", Rome, November 2003. This paper outlined how the European Youth Forum would wish to see the development of common objectives on voluntary activities and greater understanding of young people within the Open Method of Co-ordination in the youth field. It called for ambitious common objectives and the involvement of young people throughout the whole process, stressing that the Commission should take into consideration the need for a stronger legal basis for young volunteers, more promotion of voluntary activities for young people, greater recognition of young people's voluntary activities, greater communication and co-ordination between different actors in the youth research field, better involvement of young people and their organisations and youth workers in youth research and a harmonised European methodology for youth research

also include a number of recommendations brought forward by young people at the Irish Presidency Youth Ministerial Conference in Ennis, Ireland on 4-7 March 2004.

The Youth Forum was happy to see that the Commission proposals to a large extent reflect the views of the European Youth Forum, developed in the policy paper from November 2003 and articulated in the consultation in February. The Commission shares the Youth Forum's view of the need to develop, promote and recognise voluntary activities of young people. In particular, the Youth Forum welcomed the proposal to establish a European Union Network of Youth Knowledge, with representatives from youth organisations. Also the Youth Forum welcomed the cross-sectoral approach to youth identifying knowledge in additional areas to the OMC themes, in order to gain a greater understanding of young people.

It is foreseen that a Council Resolution will be agreed in autumn 2004. In the two Communications, the Commission suggests that the Member States agree 'to achieve all the common objectives approved and submit reports on the national contributions to the implementation of the common objectives on voluntary activities by the end of 2006.' In relation to a greater understanding and knowledge of youth, the Member States are requested to inform the Commission on the implementation of the first common objective in 2005, on the second common objective by the end of 2008 and on the third and fourth common objectives within the reports on participation and information in 2005 and on voluntary activities in 2006. The European Youth Forum now calls on the Council to take on board these proposals and to adopt concrete and ambitious common objectives at their meeting during the Dutch Presidency in November 2004.

HORIZONTAL ASPECTS

The Council Resolution of June 2002 also confirmed that the cross-sectoral character of youth policy should be taken into account by considering youth in other policies and programmes, both at the national and the European level. This is in line with the priorities outlined in the White Paper (education, lifelong learning, mobility, employment and social integration, combating racism and xenophobia, autonomy). The Council also called on the Commission to explore the ways in which young people can be taken into consideration in its proposals and in Community programmes and initiatives.

The Commission has not proposed a plan on how this will be effectuated in a coherent way and how the Youth Forum will be involved in the process. However, work is being done in this area. Regarding social inclusion, the Irish EU Council Presidency adopted a Resolution on the social integration of young people in Europe and a Declaration on racism and intolerance as it relates to young people during its Presidency.³⁰ In the field of employment the Council Youth Working Party commented on the Employment Committee's proposal

for a new European Employment Strategy (EES). However, this is the field in which the European Youth Forum believes it is important to make progress. The European Parliament Report on the Follow-up to the White Paper by rapporteur Lissy Gröner, “European Youth: opening up the decision-making process to young people, follow-up to the White Paper” (adopted by the parliament in March 2004) also stressed the need to work on the horizontal aspects, such as social inclusion, xenophobia and non-formal education. Now that the OMC process is nearing establishment, the next focus of attention should be the horizontal aspects of youth policy.

AUTONOMY

Youth autonomy emerged as an issue of major importance from the White Paper consultations and the Commission therefore decided to make youth autonomy a priority in White Paper. However, due to the complexity of the issue, it was decided to set up an expert group to advise it on this matter. This approach was supported by the Youth Council in its Conclusion of 14 February 2002 and its Resolution of 27 June 2002. To provide input to this group and the Commission, a two-day seminar on youth autonomy was organised in Brussels in October 2003. The aim of the seminar was to get a clearer picture of youth autonomy and exchange best practices but also to consider possible concepts of youth autonomy and discuss how to proceed further. The work was concentrated around three working groups which were deemed to be the key elements for youth autonomy: education, employment and social protection, financial security and housing. The seminar was attended by various actors in the field: representatives from youth organisations, youth researchers, government officials and representatives from local authorities etc. When closing the seminar, Pierre Mairesse - the Head of the Youth Unit - stressed the importance of young people demanding developments in this field and called on the European Youth Forum to plan an active role in this sense.

The European Youth Forum developed a policy paper on Youth Autonomy, which was adopted in April 2004.³¹ It focused on a series of tools which could help young people to become autonomous, including education, training, employment, financial support and social protection, participation and active citizenship, and housing and transport. It also called for a close link between the European Commission’s plans in the field of autonomy and the horizontal aspects of the follow-up to the White Paper.

As a follow-up to the seminar on youth autonomy held by the European Commission last October, a report was presented to the Directors General for Youth in Ireland in March. The Commission was given the mandate to develop a working paper on how to proceed on the issue of autonomy for a meeting of the Directors General in Ireland from 2-3 June 2004.

31 European Youth Forum policy paper on Youth Autonomy adopted at the European Youth Forum Council of Members in Brussels, Belgium, 2004.

THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

In the view of youth organisations, the implementation phase is the real test for the White Paper process. Will the White Paper have any impact on the realities of young people? Will there be improvement for young people in Europe?

After the adoption of the common objectives on participation and information in November 2003, the Member States started the process of implementing the objectives at the national level. They should present progress reports to the Commission and the Council by the end of 2005 on the work that they have performed in these two fields. In order to make the vision of the White Paper a reality in improving the lives of young people in Europe, the implementation is the crucial phase in the open method of coordination. As previously stated, a similar implementation process has been proposed by the Commission for the Common Objectives on volunteering and a greater understanding of youth, but with a later timetable.

In order to follow the implementation process, the Council Youth Working Party (YWP) has set up three working groups on the implementation of the common objectives for the Member States to meet and share information and best practice on their implementation of the objectives. The working groups are the following:

1. Young people's commitment (chaired by France)
2. Young people's participation at the local level (chaired by Italy)
3. Information (chaired by Spain)

The European Youth Forum believes that it is of the utmost importance that the Member States establish concrete measures to make the common objectives come true and that they involve young people throughout this process. In order for them to do this, guidelines to support them in this process should be established and for the results in the different Member States to be transparent and comparable, they also need guidelines on how to present the progress reports in a coherent manner.

The open method of coordination is to be evaluated by the Commission in consultation with the European Youth Forum in 2005. The Youth Forum has already started to look closer at the functioning of certain aspects of the OMC, such as the consultation process of youth organisations at the national level.

In order to get an overview on how young people were consulted by the ministries on the questionnaires on participation and information, the European Youth Forum asked the National Youth Councils in the European Union and the candidate countries to report on their perceptions of the consultations. How were they consulted? Were the consultations meaningful? The answers received from the NYCs were summarised in a

synthesis report, presenting the views of the National Youth Councils on the national consultations on the questionnaires. It gives an overview of the consultations in the different countries and serves as a tool to compare the way the ministries perceive they consulted young people with the views of the youth organisations. The report finally draws some conclusions regarding the national consultations and presents recommendations for the ministries and the European institutions for the next questionnaires. This exercise was then repeated for the questionnaires on voluntary activities and greater understanding of young people. Together, these two synthesis reports represent the first step in the Youth Forum's evaluation of the method, which will provide input to the evaluation of the whole method by the European Commission starting at the end of 2004.

At the European Youth Forum's Council of Members in Brussels, 23-24 April 2004, there was also a plenary discussion with the European Commission on the review of the open method of coordination.

CONSULTATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL ON THE COMMON OBJECTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION AND INFORMATION, 1 JULY – 31 OCTOBER 2002

From the information provided by the Youth Forum's member organisations it is evident that in most countries, young people and youth organisations were consulted in one way or another on the answers to the questionnaires on participation and information sent out by the Commission to the Member States and the then candidate countries. However, in many cases there was no establishment of a special instrument in order to facilitate the involvement of youth organisations in the process, which made the process rather unclear for the youth organisations.

The main comments from the National Youth Councils in relation to the consultations were the following:

- Lack of time to fill in the questionnaires;
- Lack of resources to fill in the questionnaires - both human and financial;
- No clear information on how the consultation and the comments made would be taken into account in the final answers sent to the Commission;
- No information on or possibility for input to the final version sent to the Commission.

On the basis of these comments, the European Youth Forum concluded that governments need to develop a more coherent system of consulting young people and youth organisations on the answers to the questionnaires and called for special instruments to be established in order to ensure a broad involvement of young people in the process. Furthermore, the governments should also give clear indications to the National Youth Councils on the role

of the consultations and how the input from the youth organisations will be used. Youth organisations also felt the constraints of not always having the financial resources necessary to be able to effectively consult young people and to provide well prepared comments, and the point needs to be emphasised that without adequate funding, there is no real participation.

Another criticism was due to the fact that youth organisations were not given the possibility to see the final answers to the questionnaires. By making the answers to the questionnaires public, the European Commission would provide good comparative information for youth research and benchmarking. The short time given to filling in the questionnaires was also a problem. The short time frame made it difficult for national youth councils to launch a broad consultation and to do sufficient research. The European Youth Forum therefore felt that it should be given the opportunity to give input to the content of the questionnaires before they are transmitted to the Member States.

As regards the candidate countries, their involvement in the process before enlargement on 1st May 2004 was voluntary. A few of the candidate countries have not answered the questionnaires and some of those who have answered the questionnaires have not consulted young people on the answers. Despite their participation in the consultations leading up to the White Paper, the EEA countries are not involved in the Open Method of Co-ordination. Norway has asked the Commission for permission to take part in the OMC but the request was rejected. The European Youth Forum would welcome the voluntary participation of the EEA countries in the process (as is the case in the “objectives process” which is also steered by DG EAC).

CONSULTATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL ON THE COMMON OBJECTIVES FOR VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES AND GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF YOUNG PEOPLE, 1 JULY 2003 – 31 OCTOBER 2003

The Youth Forum also compiled and summarised information from the National Youth Councils on their involvement in answering this second set of questionnaires on voluntary activities and a greater understanding of young people. As was the case with the first set of questionnaires on participation and information, most Member States and candidate countries did consult young people and their youth organisations in some form on the answers to the questionnaires. Nevertheless, as with the first questionnaires, the format of the consultations on the national level varied greatly between the different countries.

In some countries, structured channels for consultation and dialogue were set up in the first consultations and this was used again in the second exercise. However, in some countries, the consultations were again set up on an ad-hoc basis. In addition, in some countries the structures set up last year have not been used this time because the government deemed their functioning as less successful. However, some countries that did not consult

young people in the first consultation decided to do so for the second and some structures have been set up or been improved.

As regards financial and human resources, some National Youth Councils stressed that second consultation was more difficult due to a more limited period of time to respond and that financial cut-backs within ministries have resulted in a reduced number of consultations.

The process of the consultations was often lacking in transparency and many of the National Youth Councils did not receive a copy of the final answers sent by the governments to the Commission. Thus, it was difficult for them to assess the outcome of the consultation and their influence. This served to underline that fact that even if the governments consult young people, in the end it is the government who decides on what to do with the answers to the questionnaires and whether to include the input of young people.

Both sets of consultations highlighted the need to develop a coherent and structured approach to the consultation of young people, with clear guidelines on how their input should be used. By making the answers to the questionnaires public, the whole process would be given more legitimacy and transparency. For youth organisations, more time and financial support would have been beneficial to providing well-researched and prepared input.

32 This text on the consultation of Allianssi is based on a contribution by Jaakko Aleksi Weuro

BEST PRACTICE – THE PARTICIPATION OF ALLIANSSI IN THE WHITE PAPER PROCESS IN FINLAND

The example of the consultation of Allianssi - the Finnish National Youth Council - shows how constructive a well-prepared and genuine consultation of youth organisations can be.³² In Finland, there has been a long tradition whereby whatever is happening of importance in the youth field, the Ministry of Education always gathers together all the relevant actors, namely the representatives of the public sector (different ministries concerned and municipalities), the national youth council and youth researchers together. There have been several good examples of this policy in the past with one-off events, such as the establishment of a working group for arranging an important conference in the youth field. Also, in relation to ongoing issues, youth organisations are always involved in the decision-making processes. For example, with the Youth Programme (and its predecessors), since the very beginning in 1994, a steering group was founded in which Allianssi had a strong role in taking the decisions related to the funding and implementation of the Programme in Finland.

With the White Paper, Allianssi and its member organisations were also strongly involved from the very beginning. From the first national consultative seminar to all the national and international gatherings, Allianssi had the possibility to appoint its own representatives. The Ministry of Education also

took Allianssi's views into consideration when it finalised the position of Finland before the publishing of the White Paper in November 2001.

This close co-operation also continued after adoption of the White Paper. In early 2002, there was an ad-hoc working group in the Ministry in which Allianssi was involved, and in September 2002, the Minister founded an official working group with a mandate to coordinate the implementation of the White Paper until the end of 2004. This working group consisted of 16 members, of which three are appointed by Allianssi and the other 13 by different ministries, regions and municipalities and the association of youth researchers.

This working group has prepared contributions on all the four questionnaires and has also discussed all the other matters related to White Paper and its follow-up. The opinions of Allianssi have been well taken into consideration in the preparation of the official responses by Finland.

In addition to the working group, Allianssi has also been very active in promoting the White Paper and the OMC in other fora. It has arranged several seminars for youth organisations and youth workers, and we have also been consulted by various parliamentary committees during the last two years.

THE PANEUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH POLICY: THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The Council of Europe is the architect of European youth policy. It first turned its attention to youth issues in the 1960s and its standard-setting work has been of major importance over the years. The Council of Europe also applies a unique co-management system between governments and non-governmental youth organisations in its decision-making. The importance of the Council of Europe in terms of youth policy in Europe was stressed in a European Youth Forum position paper on the future of the youth sector of the Council of Europe in November 2001.³³

1. CO-MANAGEMENT

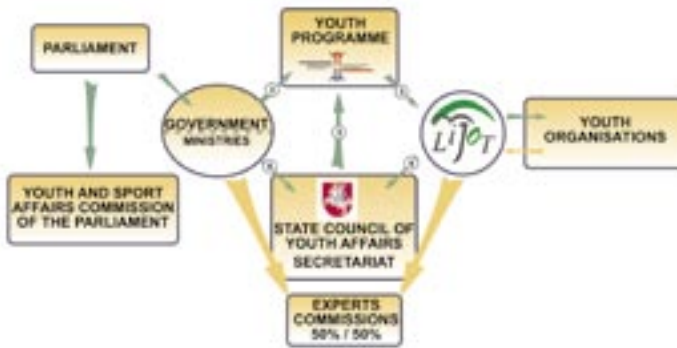
The principle of youth participation is embodied in a system of co-management through which the Council of Europe develops its youth policy. Representatives of non-governmental youth bodies and government officials sit together in committees which set priorities for the youth sector and make proposals for the budget and programme. These proposals are then adopted by the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe's decision-making body.

The principle of co-management has also been adopted in the youth sector in other countries. Lithuania provides a very good example of this. The co-management structure in youth policy has been in place in Lithuania since

33 European Youth Forum position paper on 'The future of the youth sector of the Council of Europe', November 2001 <http://www.youthforum.org/en/press/reports/0694-01-e-FINAL.pdf>

1996. The structure, shown in the diagram below, consisted of an equal number of young people representing the Council of Lithuanian Youth Organisations (LiJOT) and different Ministries dealing with youth issues (education, culture, social security etc).³⁴ Thus, young people have the opportunity to present their ideas, projects and expectations, as well as to raise any concerns that they might have, to the State Council for Youth Affairs.

THE CO-MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE FOR YOUTH POLICY IN LITHUANIA



34 This diagram and the description of the co-management structure is taken from an article by Gaja Bartuseviciute for the 'Youth and the Council of Europe' Youth Opinion, European Youth Forum, 2004.

35 This section draws on an article written by Tanya Basarab for the 'Youth and the Council of Europe' Youth Opinion, European Youth Forum, 2004.

2. YOUTH POLICY REVIEWS AND ADVISORY MISSIONS

A key means of providing an input into the support and development of youth policy in Europe has been the youth policy reviews and advisory missions carried out by the Council of Europe.³⁵

Among its duties in the field of youth policy in Europe, the Council of Europe Directorate of Youth and Sports runs a special type of advisory mission to conduct youth policy reviews. These allow the institution to fulfil its role of supporting youth policy at the national and local levels. The reviews are carried out by small teams, comprised of three youth researchers, a government representative and a young person active within the statutory bodies of the Directorate of Youth and Sport. That in itself represents a good quality mix of knowledge, background and experiences that creates a positive impact on the work and its results.

The Council of Europe conducts a youth policy review following an invitation from a Member State. This means that before the group of experts conducts its two fact-finding missions to the country, some homework has to be done by the Member States, namely to produce the national youth policy review. This review is then submitted to the team who carry out the advisory missions.

Advisory missions are of a different type, they are run on an ad hoc basis when the Member State invites the Council of Europe to run a short visit and give advice on a specific feature of the youth policy. Mission members are governmental and youth representative together with the youth researcher. The team is headed by the person responsible within the Council of Europe Directorate of Youth and Sport Secretariat.

At the grass roots level, the external analysis of youth policy issues is of help to the national and local authorities in their effort to understand their situation and improve the way youth policy works. These missions have a great potential in themselves but with one condition: the potential can be realised only when the people are committed and willing to improve youth policy and its implementation. If this is the case, investment in youth policy will reap rewards. Furthermore, the reviews and missions help to make the efforts of developing knowledge-based youth policies more systematic by involving researchers in the development of political agenda. They also provide the chance to make a comparison on a number of key criteria in relation to the other countries in Europe, allowing a comparative perspective and identifying examples of good practice. The other advantage of youth policy reviews and advisory missions is the possibility they provide to put youth policy issues on the national agenda and reinforce the promotion of youth issues at the governmental level.

In his report of 2002 'Supporting young people in Europe: principles, policy and practice',³⁶ Howard Williamson made an interesting analysis of the reports that have been made at that point by the Council of Europe: Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Romania, Luxembourg, Spain and Norway (the Lithuanian, Maltese and Dutch reviews have since been completed).³⁷ At the same time, eleven youth policy indicators were identified and successfully adopted by many youth workers and practitioners. They became the cornerstone of the discussions on youth policy. The development of these tools allows young people at the national and local level to benefit from the existence of the Council of Europe. Yet, many Member States of the Council of Europe have still not proposed a review, among them the biggest countries with the largest youth population and National Youth Councils have a role to play in encouraging their governments to undertake a review.

3. YOUTH POLICY INDICATORS

In order to contribute to the process of developing European standards for youth policy development, the Council of Europe also initiated an expert group composed of individuals from various backgrounds, but all with a research profile, to meet and make policy recommendations to be addressed to the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) and the Advisory Council to develop indicators in the field of youth policy. The group produced a report in March 2003³⁸.

36 Howard Williamson 'Supporting young people in Europe: principles, policy and practice', Council of Europe 2002.

37 These reports can be downloaded on the Directorate of Youth and Sport website: http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Cooperation/Youth/5_Information_services/Resources_by_type/downloadable.asp#P35_1471

38 Experts on Youth Policy Indicators: Third and concluding meeting 26 - 27 March 2003, European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, Final Report DJS/YR/YPI (2003) 1 March 2003

The report and the recommendations are also submitted to the Directorate 'Youth, Civil Society, Communication' of the European Commission, with the intention to contribute to the new co-operation in the youth field of the European Union as this has taken off following the publication of the White Paper on Youth.

4. YOUTH POLICY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

In 2003, the Council of Europe selected a committee of experts to meet and establish guidelines for the formulation and implementation of youth policies in the Member States. The task of the selected committee of experts was to elaborate guidelines for youth policy formulation and implementation and to develop recommendations for the ministers. After the committee's first meeting in May 2003, a draft document was developed identifying the general principles and objectives of youth policy and defining a "package of opportunities" for youth policy (key domains and issues). At the committee's second and last meeting the aim was to elaborate guidelines on effective methods of implementation of youth policy and to exchange views on elements to be included in a draft recommendation. The recommendations will be added into the revised draft document from the last meeting by the Council of Europe Secretariat to be presented to the CDEJ and then to the ministers.

39 http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Cooperation/Youth/TXT_charter_participation.pdf

40 This section draws on an article written by Didi Bänziger for the 'Youth and the Council of Europe' Youth Opinion, European Youth Forum, 2004.

5. THE REVISED EUROPEAN CHARTER ON THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL LIFE

The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life³⁹ was adopted on 21 May 2003 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLRAE)⁴⁰ of the Council of Europe, 11 years after the creation of the first charter.

The Charter was revised by a group of both youth representatives from the Advisory Council on Youth and local government representatives from the CLRAE. This represented another example of the Council of Europe's commitment to working with young people and youth organisations and provided proof of the fact that strategies to promote youth participation can be successful when young people are fully involved and treated as equals.

Building on and further developing the principles and recommendations of the original Charter, the revised Charter embraces a whole range of policies that concern young people. It calls for the meaningful involvement of young people in decisions and actions on issues that have a major impact in their lives such as employment, housing, education and transport. In that context, the Charter also clearly states that while participation is important

in helping to develop active citizens and building democracy, youth participation must be meaningful for young people now and not seen solely as a form of training to make young people better citizens in the future. To this end, the Charter outlines not only the political and administrative measures required to enhance youth participation but also the social and cultural conditions necessary to help young people get involved in the life of their communities.

The Charter highlights the very important role of youth organisations in providing a unique space for participation by young people and stresses the broader role of civil society. It recommends the development of real partnerships between public bodies and young people and their organisations, along the lines of the co-management system in the youth sector of the Council of Europe. The revised Charter seeks to promote the concept of participation in every aspect of young people's lives, such as the recommendation that schools should not only be places where young people learn about the theory of democracy and citizenship but should also provide the opportunity to practise and experience it. The Charter also acknowledges that young people are not a homogeneous group and that actions must be adapted to meet the needs of different young people. In particular, measures to encourage the participation of the most excluded and isolated young people should be actively pursued.

While it is positive that we have a revised and updated Charter, the goal of youth organisations is now to make sure that it becomes a living document, which makes a real difference in the lives of young people all over Europe and which in turn enhances all our democracies and societies. There is a need for it to be disseminated and promoted at a local level so that it becomes a widely known, recognised and utilised document for furthering the participation of young people. This will give young people and youth organisations an opportunity to challenge local and regional authorities to stop talking about youth participation and to start taking some action.

6. COVENANTS: EUROPEAN UNION – COUNCIL OF EUROPE PARTNERSHIP ON YOUTH

In 2003 the Council of Europe and the European Commission agreed to cooperate over a period of two years in the area of youth research within a partnership agreement. The aim of the partnership is to connect detailed research knowledge of the situation, needs and lifestyles of young people in Europe today in order to inform European youth policy and educational practice. It will build on the in-depth research knowledge and experience of the Council of Europe to assist the European Commission in the follow-up to the White Paper on Youth and development of the YOUTH Programme, and to enhance the Council of Europe's monitoring of youth realities across Europe in the form of national reviews and youth policy advice missions.

In the field of training, the European Union and Council of Europe are now working in the context of their fourth covenant in this field. Their partnership has resulted in training courses, T-Kits (training manuals) on various topics and Coyote, a magazine on youth training in Europe.⁴¹ The partnership has provided a means for spreading expertise in the field of training, as well as breaking new ground through pilot courses, such as the one organised on European citizenship or the Advanced Training for Trainers course.

The third area of partnership is that on Euro-Mediterranean youth co-operation. This aims to use youth work as a tool to build intercultural dialogue and awareness of human rights. The programme consists of training for youth workers, the production of educational materials and training for trainers courses for those working on Euro-Med activities

41 The T-Kits and previous editions of Coyote can be found on the Council of Europe website : http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Cooperation/Youth/5_Information_services/Resources_by_type/downloadable.asp#P13_137

Thus the Council of Europe has contributed for many years in a varied and significant way to the development of youth policy in a wider Europe. Its work is particularly important because it involves the majority of countries in Europe, rather than only the 25 who are members of the European Union. It has also built up considerable expertise in the field during this period and organises many activities that contribute to the dissemination and transmission of this knowledge. For young people and youth organisations, the co-management structure of the Council of Europe is always held up as a model of how young people can be equally involved in decision-making structures.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explained the important developments that have taken place in youth policy over the last few years in Europe. A major new initiative has come from the European Union in the form of the European Commission’s White Paper on Youth Policy and the Council Resolutions that have established an open method of coordination in youth policy. In many ways this is still at the early stages as, although the objectives have been identified, the implementation still has to be reported on and assessed. The first reports in 2005 will prove to be the test of the added-value that the OMC has brought to youth policy in the European Union and the changes that it has made to young people’s lives.

The continuing and ever-evolving work of the Council of Europe plays a vital role in youth policy all over Europe. The co-management model provides an inspiration and example of what can be achieved with the involvement of young people. Particularly important, and to be encouraged, are the national policy reviews and the contribution they play in the development of youth policy in Europe, as projects such as the 50:50 training courses and the contribution made to research on youth issues. The work of the Directorate for Youth and Sport must be supported in the wider context of the Council of Europe as it plays a unique role in the youth policy field in Europe.

CHAPTER TWO – EDUCATION

By Katy Orr and Roisin Mc Cabe

Education - in all of its forms - is of central importance to young people. An increasing proportion of those aged 16-25 are still in formal education, whether it is secondary or tertiary. Many young people participate in non-formal education through their involvement in youth or other voluntary organisations, and informal education is an ongoing process that continues throughout the course of life.

In order to find working definitions of the various forms of education, the European Youth Forum has drawn on the definitions elaborated by UNESCO, the European Commission and the member organisations of the Youth Forum. While formal education is typically provided by formal education institutions and is sequentially and hierarchically structured leading to certification, non-formal education is an organised educational process which takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to certification. Individuals participate on a voluntary basis and as a result, the individual takes an active role in the learning process. Unlike informal education where learning happens less consciously, the individual is usually aware of the fact that he or she is learning. Although the work of the Youth Forum concentrates primarily on promoting non-formal education in the way that it takes place through youth activities, this chapter will first consider formal education in the European Union before continuing to an exploration of the particular value of non-formal education.

FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

In terms of formal education, the level of education achieved by young people has a fundamental effect on many other areas of their lives and plays a crucial part in determining the type of job they have as well as their earning capacity. In the European Union, education - like employment - remains a competence of the Member States and in many Member States the key responsibility for delivering education rests at a regional, federal or even local level, while overall education policy goals are generally agreed at the national level. Thus the principle of subsidiarity has to be respected in relation to education policy.

Education, like employment and social inclusion, has become a policy area of importance at the European Union level because of its role in relation to the Lisbon goals and the commitments to building a 'knowledge-based society'. In order for the European Union 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world'⁴² it was recognised that there was a pressing need to raise educational standards in the

European Union, especially in relation to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), in learning languages but also in improving basic literacy and numeracy levels. The Lisbon conclusions recognised that 'Europe's education and training systems need to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment. They will have to offer learning and training opportunities tailored to target groups at different stages of their lives, including young people.

One of the specific commitments made at Lisbon was to halve the number of 18-24 year olds with only lower-secondary education who are not in further education and training by 2010 (this is examined in more detail in chapter three - on employment - as this commitment was incorporated into one of the guidelines in the European Employment Strategy). There were also commitments to improving IT skills, foreign language skills, entrepreneurship and social skills and to foster the mobility of students, teachers, and training and research staff. Very significantly, the European Council also asked the Education Council 'to undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns and priorities while respecting national diversity'. This latter request resulted in the initiation of an Open Method of Coordination in education and training. However, before examining policy developments at the European Union level in this field, this chapter will first look at education trends within the previous fifteen Member States of the European Union and in the new Member States.

The European Union Member States are also among the 29 countries who signed up to the Bologna Declaration in 1999. The Bologna Declaration is linked to the reform of tertiary education systems and aims to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010. The implementation of these objectives has also had a significant impact on higher education systems. A European Higher Education Area is to be achieved through the implementation of measures such as the adoption throughout Europe of a university system based on two main cycles, the implementation of the European Credit Transfer System and the introduction of a comprehensive system to ensure quality in education.

The principal change in education patterns in the European Union relate to the prolongation of the period spent in education and the increased level of educational achievement. When young people have the resources, the opportunities and the motivation, they are choosing to spend longer periods in education, with more continuing to some form of higher education. In 1967, 59% of people aged 25-34 had only completed lower secondary education. By 1997, this figure had dropped to 32%⁴³. In 2001, 75% of those aged 25-29 had completed upper secondary education (at least), compared to only 52% of the 50-63 age-group, thus showing the quite dramatic changes in educational attainment over the last three to four decades. Similarly, figures collected by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show that in OECD countries, a person of 15 could expect to be in

43 European Commission, *The Social Situation in the European Union 2000*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

education for 5.3 years between the ages of 15 and 29 in 1985, but by 1996 that figure had risen to 6.7 years.⁴⁴ Evidence indicates that both the number of young people dropping out of compulsory education and the number not continuing to upper secondary education is falling.

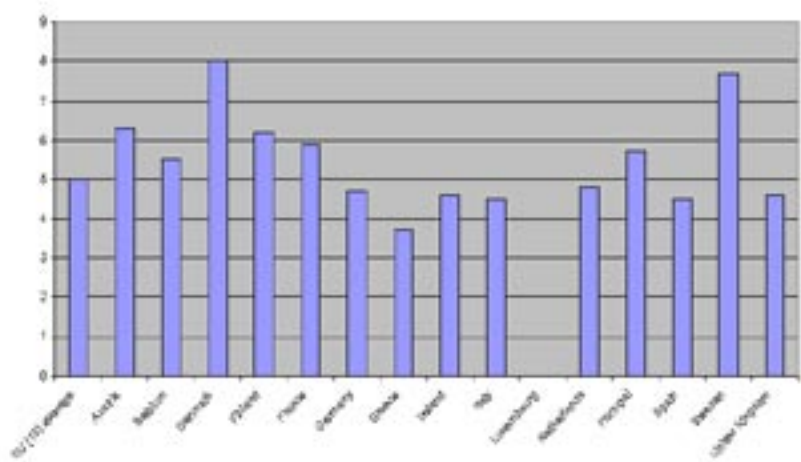
Educational attainment levels vary considerably within the European Union, with higher levels of achievement in the Nordic countries, Germany, France and Austria and lower levels in Ireland, Spain, Italy and Portugal. Having said this though, the latter countries have also experienced significant improvement in educational achievement over recent years. For example, young Greeks are twice as likely as the older generation to have completed upper secondary education. The recent enlargement of the European Union will also result in an increase in overall educational levels due to the higher levels of education attained in the majority of the new Member States.

In part, differing educational attainment levels in the European Union can be explained by levels of expenditure. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has established that in most European Union countries, there was an increase of more than 5% in public spending on education between 1995 and 2000, reflecting the increasing numbers of those in education.⁴⁵ The graph below shows educational expenditure as a percentage of GDP for 1999. From this graph it is clear that those countries with higher levels of educational achievement, such as Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Austria also invest higher amounts in education as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) than those countries with lower educational attainment levels, such as Greece, Italy and Ireland.

44 OECD, 'Education at a Glance', Paris: OECD, 1998.

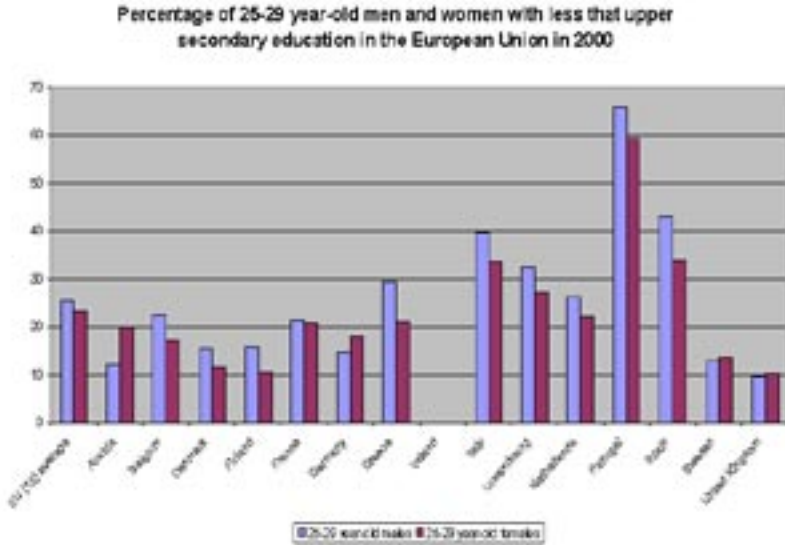
45 'Education at a Glance 2003', OECD Paris, 2003, Chapter B.

Total public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP in the European Union in 1999



Source: Eurostat

It is interesting to compare completion rates in less than upper secondary, upper secondary level and tertiary education in the European Union. The huge differences which exist between countries can best be analysed by looking at each level of educational attainment in turn for young men and women aged 25-29 years old.⁴⁶ The graphs below show the percentage of 25-29 year olds in the old fifteen Member States and in the new ten Member States who did not have a full upper secondary education in 2000.⁴⁷



Source: Eurostat

The graphs highlight the problems of low educational achievement in some Member States, most notably in the old fifteen and particularly in Portugal.⁴⁸ The problem is particularly pronounced in the Member States where there was previously the possibility to leave school before reaching the age of sixteen and many of the other southern Member States, such as Italy, Greece and Spain, as well as Luxembourg, have higher than average percentages of the population with low levels of education. Again, it is noticeable that the Nordic countries, as well as the UK, have relatively low proportions of this age group with less than upper secondary education.

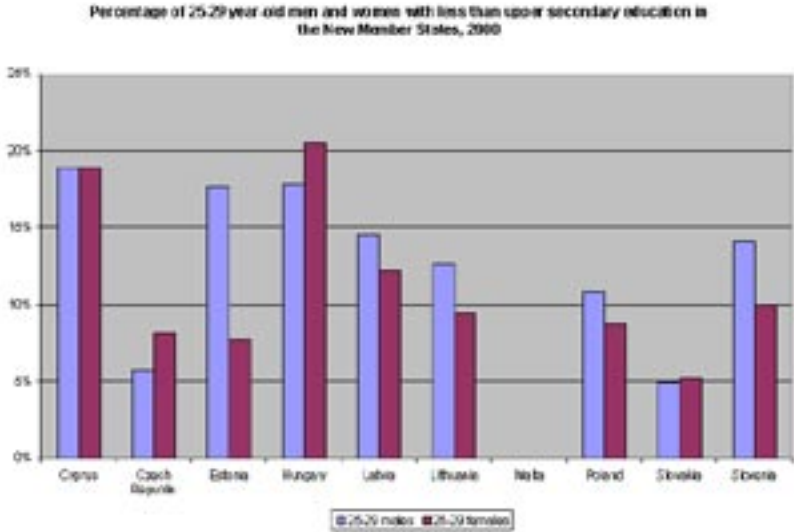
The differences between the old fifteen and the new ten Member States are also quite striking. On average, less than 20% of 25-29 year-olds in each of the new Member States have less than upper secondary education, while there remain significant variations between the old fifteen Member States. It is also interesting to compare the differences in rates between the sexes.

46 Statistics for educational achievement are only available for the 25-29 age-group, the 30-49 age-group, the 50-64 age-group and for the 25-64 age-group. The statistics are only collected for those over the age of 25 as it is only at this point that it educational achievement in terms of higher education can be realistically measured.

47 Unfortunately statistics broken down according to age-group are not available for Ireland for 2000.

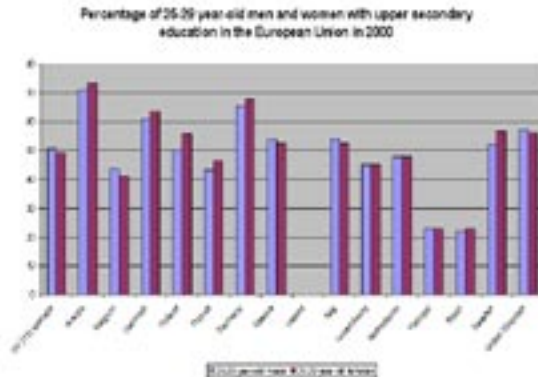
48 The educational attainment statistics are taken from 'The Social Situation in the European Union 2003', and there are no figures available for either Ireland or Malta.

On average in the European Union, there is a difference of 2.1 percentage points between the number of men and women in this age group with less than upper secondary education, reflecting the higher levels of educational attainment that women have in the majority of Member States.

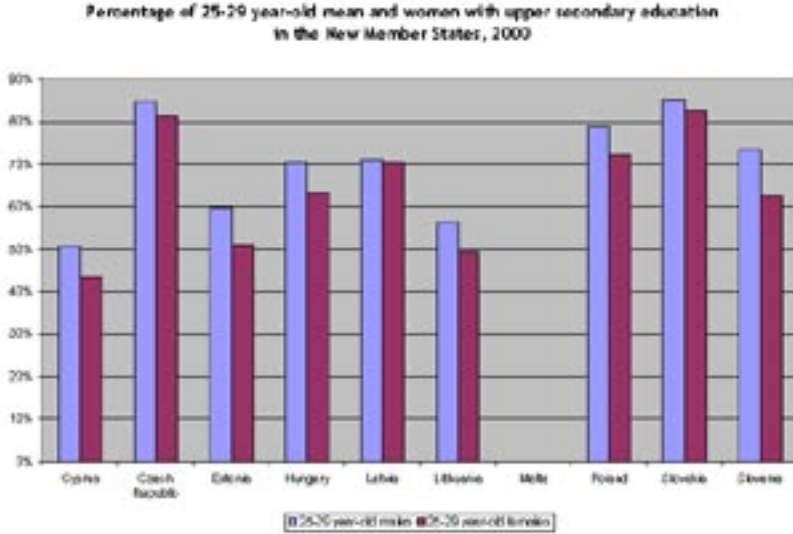


Source: Eurostat

The graphs below look at the percentage of men and women of the 25-29 age-group who have successfully completed upper secondary education in the fifteen old and the ten new Member States. This encompasses those who have not only remained in secondary school for the whole period but have also passed the relevant examinations.



Source: Eurostat

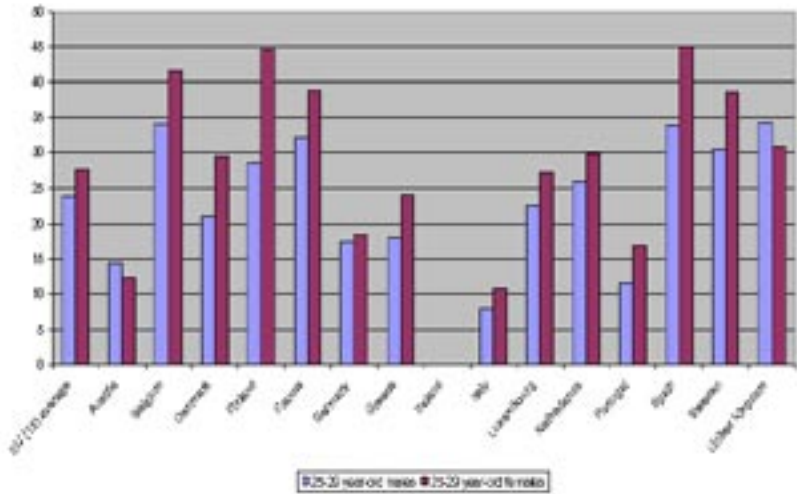


Source: Eurostat

An examination of the EU average for the old fifteen Member States in the above graph indicates that more than 50% of 25-29 year-olds in 2000 had attained the level of upper secondary education. The figure is similar for the new Member States with only Cyprus having a secondary education completion rate of less than 50%. Among the old Member States, the lower figures for Portugal and Spain are particularly noticeable in this, reflecting the problem in these countries with young people leaving school early. Here there is a 1.6 percentage point difference between the sexes, but with fewer women achieving the level of upper secondary education this time. The reason for this, however, is that more women go on to higher education than young men. The graphs also allow a comparison in educational attainment at the secondary level between the old and new Member States, and it is clear that more young people are completing secondary education in the new Member States, with five out of ten achieving rates of more than 70%.

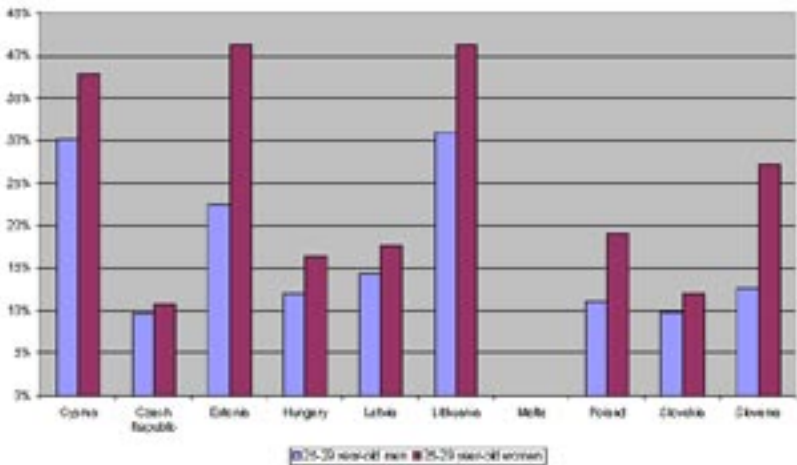
The graphs below show the percentages of men and women in the 25-29 age-group with tertiary education. The proportions in both the graphs above and the ones below are important as together they provide an indication of how close each member state is to achieving the Lisbon objective of 85% of all 22 year-olds having completed upper secondary level education.

Percentage of 25-29 year-old men and women with tertiary education in the European Union in 2000



Source: Eurostat

Percentage of 25-29 year-old men and women with tertiary level education in the new EU Member States in 2000

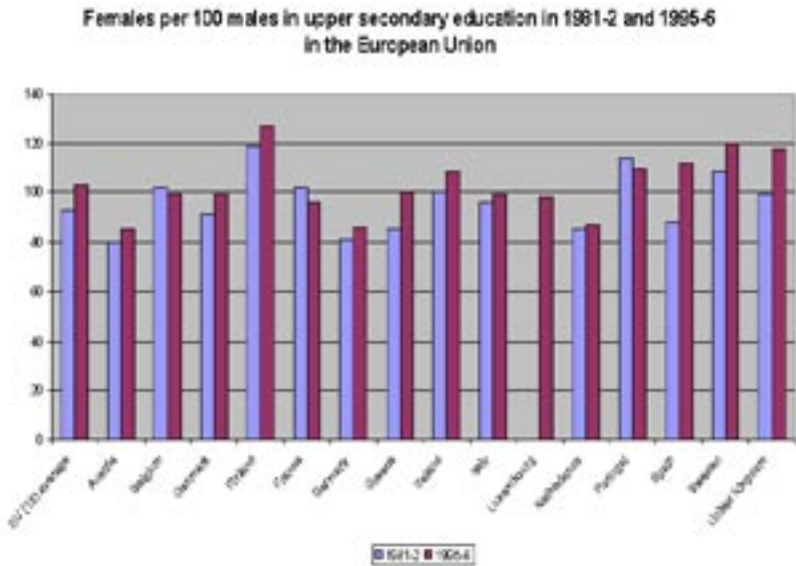


Source: Eurostat

These graphs, like the previous ones, show some very interesting results. Spain proves to be something of a phenomena as almost 40% of the 25-29 age-group have tertiary level education and relatively few (22%) have achieved upper secondary education only. Thus in Spain a young person is most likely to have either a low level of educational attainment, or a high level of educational attainment. This is the opposite to the general trend of the majority of the population achieving the upper secondary education category. Among the new Member States, fewer of the 25-29 age-group have achieved tertiary level education, although higher levels are evident in Cyprus, Estonia and Lithuania.

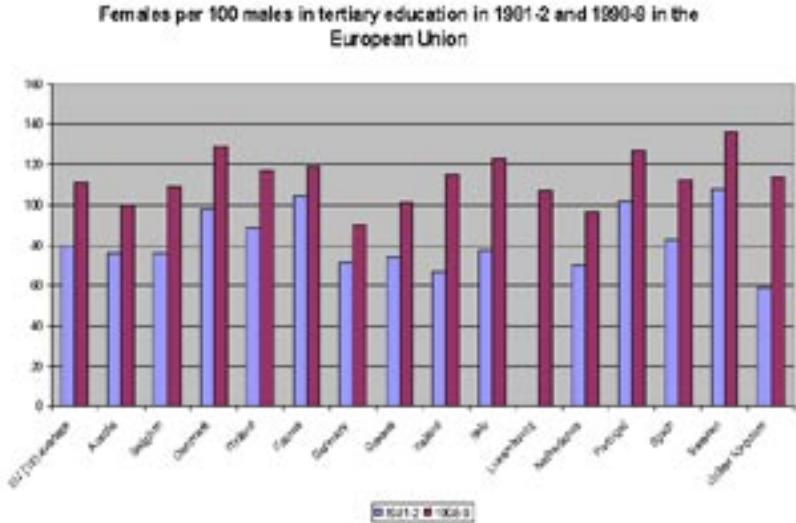
There are also some very significant differences between the sexes with a 3.8 percentage point difference between the overall percentage of young women achieving tertiary level education and young men in the old fifteen Member States. This latter trend is very pronounced in certain countries, notably Spain, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Cyprus and Sweden where far more women are completing tertiary level education.

The tendency for women to be achieving tertiary levels of educational attainment is a relatively recent phenomenon. Young women are now consistently reaching higher levels of education than young men in the European Union as a whole, and if this trend continues, their level of attainment will be higher than that of men in all of the Member States. The graph below shows the change in the proportion of women to men in upper secondary education between 1981-2 and 1995-6.



Source: Eurostat

The graph shows a significant increase in the participation rates of women in secondary education in the fourteen year period examined. In 1981-2, in six countries the proportion of girls equalled boys in upper secondary education, but by 1995-6 that figure had risen to eight countries. A similar trend is evident in post-secondary education. The graph below shows the changes in the proportion of women to men in tertiary between 1981-2 and 1998-9.



Source: Eurostat

The statistics for tertiary education are even more remarkable, partly because they show the changes in seventeen year period. In 1981-2, there were more women than men in tertiary education in only three countries. By 1998-9 that figure had risen to thirteen countries. Moreover, the difference between the number of young women and young men in tertiary education in countries such as Sweden, Denmark or Italy is remarkable. The rate of change has also been phenomenal, with increases evident on an almost yearly basis. A similar trend is evident in the new Member States, where it is most notable in Latvia and Lithuania, where there were respectively 160 and 150 females in tertiary education per 100 males in 1998-9. The continuation of this trend will mean that serious efforts may need to be made to promote young male participation rates in both upper secondary and tertiary education. However, as chapter three shows, success in education has not yet translated into corresponding success in the labour market. Young women continue to have higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of participation in the labour market than young men in the large majority of Member States. While a higher level of education is more likely to secure employment for young men, this is not the case for young women.

Educational achievement is linked both to the chances of getting a job and to the earning capacity when in employment. In the European Union, the unemployment rate of people with a tertiary education qualification was 4% while 6% of people with upper secondary education and 9% of those who had only completed compulsory education were unemployed in 2001.⁴⁹ Similarly the income of those with tertiary education was 149% of the national median. Furthermore, the chances of a household with one person who had completed tertiary education living in the low-income bracket were only 3% compared to 12% among low-educated households.⁵⁰

49 The Social Situation in Europe 2003, op.cit. p. 122.

50 Ibid.

To summarise, while there have been and continue to be considerable improvements in educational achievement in the Member States of the European Union, there often remain vast differences between the Member States, some of which can be linked to higher levels of expenditure on education. Whilst the higher educational levels in the new Member States will contribute to achieving the Lisbon goals, there remain many problems in some countries, particularly in relation to reducing school drop-out rates, combating illiteracy and increasing the proportion of the population that achieve upper secondary education is quite distant for some countries and therefore education will remain an area in which greater cohesion is needed for some years to come. In addition, quite remarkable differences are becoming apparent in terms of educational achievement between the sexes. Over the last two decades the situation has been completely reversed, with young women now performing much better in education - particularly in tertiary education - than young men. This may require a new focus on young men and the reasons that limit their educational achievement levels in some Member States.

ACHIEVING THE LISBON EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES – THE CONCRETE FUTURE OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS

This analysis of educational attainment and educational expenditure is relevant to the coordination of education and training systems within the European Union because the latter is aimed at promoting economic and social cohesion within the Union, higher employment rates and with improving the competitiveness of the Union on the world stage in the context of the move towards knowledge-based economies. Following the Lisbon European Council, the Education Council requested the Commission to prepare the Report on the Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems, which the Council adopted in February 2001 and submitted to the Stockholm European Council meeting. The thirteen priorities of the Concrete Future Objectives were grouped under three ‘concrete strategic objectives’:

Objective 1: Increasing the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the European Union

1.2: Improving education and training for teachers and trainers

- 1.2: Developing skills for the knowledge society
- 1.3: Ensuring access to Information and Communication Technologies for everyone
- 1.4: Increasing the recruitment to scientific and technical studies
- 1.5: Making best use of the resources

Objective 2: Facilitating the access of all to the education and training system

- 2.1: Open learning environment
- 2.2: Making learning more attractive
- 2.3: Supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion

Objective 3: Opening up education and training systems to the wider world

- 3.1: Opening up education and training systems to the wider world
- 3.2: Strengthening the links with working life, research and society at large
- 3.3: Developing the spirit of enterprise
- 3.4: Improving foreign language learning
- 3.5: Increasing mobility and exchanges

The Barcelona European Council in March 2002 welcomed a detailed work programme presented by the Commission and Council for the follow-up of these objectives.⁵¹ Additionally, the Barcelona Council agreed that ‘the highest quality will be achieved in education and training and Europe will be recognised as a world-wide reference for the quality and relevance of its education and training systems and institutions’. The common objectives committed to making the European Union’s education and training systems among the highest in the world by 2010. The aim was for the common objectives to provide a basis for the Member States to work together at the European level to support the Lisbon goals and also the objectives of the European Employment Strategy.

The work programme foresaw that actions should be launched for all the objectives by 2003 under an Open Method of Coordination, with a report to be sent to the Spring European Council in 2004. The work programme identified a number of key issues and indicators, along with a calendar of action for the introduction of measures in accordance with the priorities under the common objectives.

The common objectives are of direct relevance for young people in that they seek to promote a whole series of improvements in the field of education. Many of these are linked to lifelong learning, but they are also directed at formal education, informal and non-formal education. As they include such areas as teacher training, improving the acquisition of basic skills, the integration of information and communication technology skills into the

school curricula as well as the acquisition of equipment, improving language learning, providing better guidance systems and making forms of education more flexible, they are of real relevance to young people.

In order to implement the thirteen specific objectives, a series of working groups were established with experts and stakeholders from 31 European countries. Each of these working groups supports the implementation of one or more of the common objectives with the exchange of best practice, study visits and peer reviews. To date, a whole series of reports have been produced by these working groups, as well as on the implementation on the national level.⁵² These have fed into a Communication on Education and Training 2010 adopted by the European Commission in November 2003.⁵³ The report examines the implementation of the work plan and the follow-up of the common objectives. Whilst the Commission recognises that implementation is at an early stage it has used the national reports, available indicators and figures to analyse the situation. It comes to a pessimistic conclusion: 'efforts are being made in all the European countries to adapt the education systems to the knowledge-driven society and economy, but the reforms undertaken are not up to the challenges and their current pace will not enable the Union to attain the objectives set'.

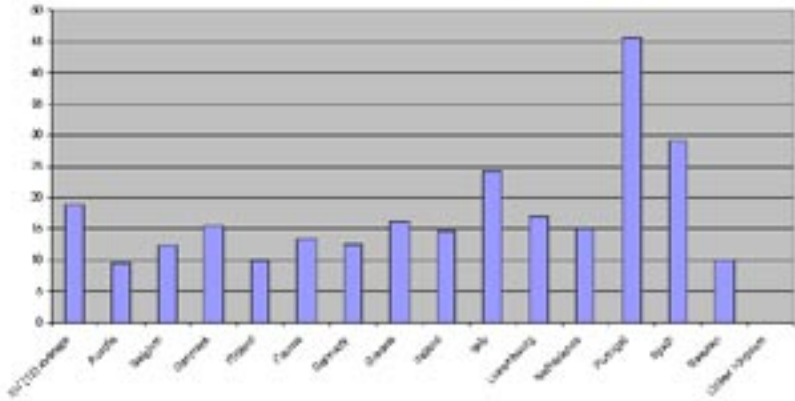
The report presents evidence on three of the Lisbon objectives which are of particular relevance to young people: the aim to reduce the proportion of those leaving school early, the commitment to combat literacy and numeracy problems and the percentage of 22 year-olds who have successfully completed upper secondary education. The report estimates that almost 20% of young people aged 18-24 in the European Union leave school early. It argues that 'a big effort will be needed in most Member States, even if the arrival of the acceding countries will substantially improve the average'.⁵⁴ The statistics from 2002 presented in the annex of the report on early school leavers can be seen in the graph below. As also shown in chapter three, this problem is particularly acute in Portugal and to a lesser extent in Spain and Italy. The improvement of the 'drop-out' rate is central to addressing the problem of poor basic skills, and even severe literacy and numeracy problems among some sections of the population. The Report also provides statistics on the percentage of pupils with reading literacy proficiency level 1 or lower in accordance with the PISA reading literacy scale, meaning that they do not have the minimum competence required and the Union is far from reducing the percentage of those with literacy problems by 20% by 2010. Thus considerable improvement needs also to be made in tackling literacy problems among pupils in the Member States.

52 These can be accessed in the 'Education and Training 2010' section under 'policy areas' on the DG Education and Culture website of the European Commission.

53 Communication from the Commission "Education & Training 2010" The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms, COM(2003) 685 final, 11.11.2003.

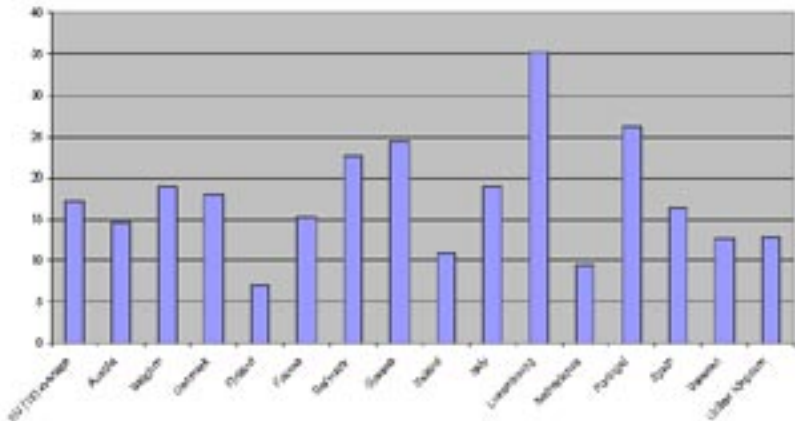
54 Ibid., p.10.

Share of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education and not in education or training, 2002



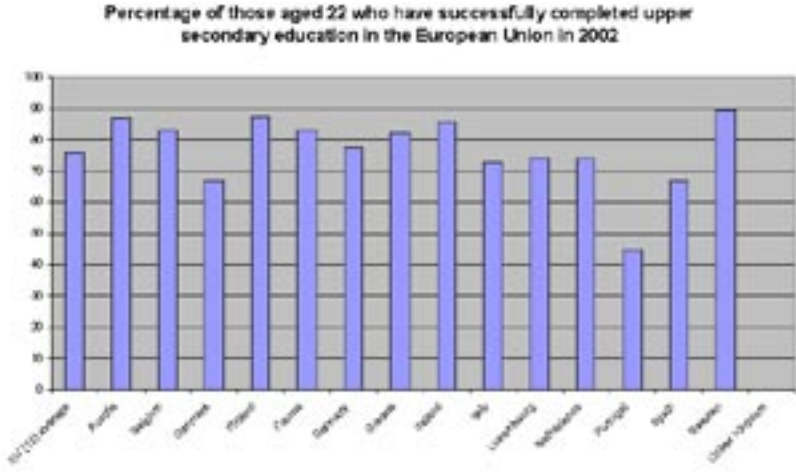
Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

Percentage of pupils with low reading literacy proficiency in the European Union in 2000



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

The percentage of young people successfully completing upper secondary education has been included as an objective in the European Employment Strategy. Chapter three shows that the Member States provided mixed information in their Employment national action plans for 2003 on their success in making progress towards this, but the Report provides statistics for 2002 for this indicator. The results are presented in the graph below.



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

55 Report from the Commission to the Spring European Council 'Delivering Lisbon: Reforms for the Enlarged Union'. COM(2004) 29 final.

56 Ibid., p.11.

The Report is also critical of progress made in promoting lifelong learning, another key element of the Lisbon Strategy, on general levels of investment in tertiary education, the failure to make vocational training an attractive alternative to general education and levels of mobility in training and education.

The general conclusion that can be drawn is that little real progress has been made in the field of education and training since the Lisbon European Council four years ago. The Open Method of Coordination set in place at the Stockholm and Barcelona European Councils in 2001 and 2002 has yet to have a real impact on contributing to the Lisbon objectives. Much responsibility for this has to lie with the Member States. The fourth annual report to the Spring European Council also makes it clear that there is a 'need for an energetic implementation of reform' in order to give the 'necessary impetus to carry the Lisbon strategy forward'.⁵⁵ It notes that 'investment - both public and private - in human capital is still inadequate' and that there is a clear 'need to invest more effectively'.⁵⁶ For young people, the commitment is there in terms of policy objectives, it is backed up by implementation mechanisms, but without a renewed effort it does not seem that the agreed objectives of relevance to young people will be reached by 2010 and that slow progress has been made in other areas such as improving the quality of education.

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

In 1999, 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration, which expressed their wish to work towards the creation of a European Higher Education Area. In order to do this, it was agreed that it was necessary to promote the European dimension in higher education⁵⁷, particularly with regard to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research. The main objectives were the following:

57 The Bologna Process uses the term 'higher education', whilst the European Union statistics refer to 'tertiary education'.

58 The Diploma Supplement is a supplement attached to the degree which explains the contents of the degree and terminology that might not be apparent in countries other than the one where the degree was conferred.

- 1) The adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees (through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement⁵⁸) in order to promote European citizen's employability and to improve the international competitiveness of the European higher education system.
- 2) The adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles: undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of the first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The degree awarded after the first cycle should also be relevant to the European labour market and the second cycle should lead to masters and/or doctorate degrees.
- 3) The establishment of a system of credits (such as in the European Credit Transfer System) as a proper means of promoting student mobility. Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts including lifelong learning, provided they are recognised by the universities concerned.
- 4) Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with a particular focus on:
 - access to study and training opportunities and to related services for students
 - Recognition and valorisation of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, without prejudice to their statutory rights.
- 5) Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
- 6) Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

At the Prague meeting in 2001, the Ministers of Education involved in the Bologna Process emphasised lifelong learning and stated that 'lifelong learning is an essential element of the European Higher Education Area'. They called on higher education institutions and students to be involved in shaping a compatible and efficient European Higher Education Area. Ministers

affirmed that students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and higher education institutions. Ministers also reaffirmed the need to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna process. They also called on the higher education sector to 'increase the development of modules, courses and curricula at all levels with 'European' perspective.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BOLOGNA REFORMS

The implementation of the Bologna objectives has been mixed in the countries that have signed up to it. For the two-cycle structure, some countries have introduced it for some courses only, some have made the necessary adaptations while others already had a similar system in place. For example, in Denmark and Finland, the two-cycle structure of undergraduate and graduate degrees was applied in certain fields of study only before 2002/2003. In Germany, a new system of Bachelor's and Master's degrees was introduced in 1998 in universities, theological colleges, colleges of education, colleges for art and music and the universities of applied sciences. In Ireland, the UK, Iceland, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Malta the two-cycle structure had been in place for a long time before 1999. Many countries in Central Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia adopted the two cycle structure when their education systems were thoroughly reformed following the fall of communism.

In terms of the Bologna objective to introduce a European Credit Transfer System, the results have been similarly mixed. The ECTS is now operational or is in the process of being introduced in the great majority of countries, with the exception of one part of Belgium, Luxembourg and Portugal. In the first case, this is because of the special nature of higher education in Belgium and the small size of the German-speaking Community concerned. In Luxembourg, the higher education system is about to undergo a major reform that, once enacted, will involve the introduction of ECTS, and in Portugal, the 2003 law for the reform of higher education referred to the need to introduce it.

The Diploma Supplement has been introduced in the majority of countries through recent legislation and represents an important means of supporting and promoting mobility through the recognition of qualifications. In certain countries such as Denmark, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Estonia and Slovakia, the Diploma Supplement is mandatory and issued automatically with higher education qualifications. In other countries such as Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, Iceland, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia, the Diploma Supplement is not compulsory but is recommended by law or has to be issued when requested by a student. In Greece, Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta there is an ongoing debate but no legislation has yet been introduced.

While outgoing and incoming student mobility has increased across Europe, incoming mobility has grown more in the EU than in the new Member States and accession countries. Teaching staff mobility has increased in the majority of higher education institutions in more than two thirds of the signatory countries. Public funds for mobility have increased in the majority of EU countries but only in a minority of the new Member States and accession countries. The report claims however that the number and level of mobility grants for students is not sufficient to allow for equal access to mobility for those from financially less privileged backgrounds.

All Bologna signatory countries have established or are in the process of establishing agencies which are responsible for external quality control. 80% of higher education institutions in Europe already undergo external quality control in some form or another (quality evaluation, accreditation etc). A growing interest in accreditation and the use of criteria and standards can be observed in Western Europe, while there is an increase in improvement-orientated evaluation procedures in Eastern European countries.

According to the 'Trends 2003' report, 82% of the heads of higher education institutions stated that they have internal procedures to monitor the quality of teaching and 53% have internal procedures to monitor the quality of research.⁵⁹ The report states that the ultimate challenge for quality assurance in Europe consists of creating transparency, exchange of good practice and enough common criteria to allow for mutual recognition of each others' procedures, without mainstreaming the system and undermining its positive forces of diversity and competition.

The 'Trends 2003' report reveals that in 2003 the majority of countries either intend to or are in the process of developing a lifelong learning strategy. Such policies already exist in one third of Bologna signatory countries, namely Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden and the UK. A majority of student associations have observed changes in attitude to lifelong learning over the last three years at institutions in their countries. Nearly half of the student representatives noted changes with respect to the courses offered in non-traditional areas of study, while a third observed greater encouragement of lifelong learning culture among students.

While there is widespread support for the Bologna Process among heads of higher education institutions, administrative staff and students seem so far to be less included in deliberations on the implementation of Bologna reforms. The student contribution to the deliberations on the Bologna reforms has been particularly strong on issues of the social dimension of Higher Education and the emphasis of higher education as a public good and in connection with discussions of the possible consequences of GATS⁶⁰ on higher education institutions. Students have continuously stressed the values of student-centred learning, flexible learning paths and access as well as a realistic, empirically-based estimation of workload in the context of establishing institution-wide credit systems.

59 Trends 2003: Progress Towards the European Higher Education Area, Sybille Reichert and Christian Tauch, European University Association, 2003, p. 11

60 The World Trade Organisation General Agreement on Trade and Services

THE VALUE AND CONTRIBUTION OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Although formal education is of great importance both in terms of ensuring a smooth transition to the labour market and a secure place in it and of providing young people with the chance to develop other skills, there has always been a very important - and often undervalued - role for non-formal education. In the last century, formal education institutions developed a strong role on the provision of education due to their power to certify learning outcomes and due to the structure and visibility that they could give to the learning process. Nevertheless, non-formal education has a long history and in many countries it continues to be the way that people learn and develop to participate in society.

Indeed, one of the most important challenges that education policy makers will have to face in the coming years will be to find ways to increase recognition of the value of non-formal education among young people. The Council of Europe has written a joint paper with the European Commission on increasing the recognition of non-formal learning in the youth sector.⁶¹ In recent years, employers have begun to look increasingly for people who have obtained not only academic qualifications but who can also demonstrate that they have a wider range of practical skills than those learned in formal education institutions. The inadequacy of civics' courses in schools and universities to promote active citizenship among young people is also symptomatic of the need for complementary non-formal education methodologies to pass on the skills and competences necessary to be an active citizen in society. These 'soft skills' cannot easily be 'taught' in formal education institutions because they are learned through 'hands-on' practical experience and thus are much more effectively gained in non-formal environments.

Youth organisations are very important providers of non-formal education but young people are not always aware of the fact that they are acquiring a wide range of skills through their participation in youth activities. One proposal made to the European Commission during the consultation on the White Paper process was for youth organisations to 'regularly publicise the wide range of non-formal learning opportunities and the outcomes of non-formal learning projects.'⁶² The European Commission Communication on Lifelong Learning calls for an 'inventory of methodologies, systems and standards for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal and informal learning'.⁶³ In response to this, the European Youth Forum developed a policy paper on 'Youth Organisations as non-formal educators'.⁶⁴

The European Youth Forum and its member organisations have long been involved in the promotion and recognition of non-formal education.⁶⁵ In terms of recognition, this may take a number of forms, depending on who is recognising the learning and for what purpose. Forms of recognition range from 'certification' which is 'the process of issuing certificates or diplomas, which formally recognise the achievements of an individual,⁶⁶ to 'political

61 'Pathways Towards Validation and Recognition of Education, Training and Learning in the Youth Field', Council of Europe and the European Commission, February 2004.

62 European Commission White Paper: A New Impetus for European Youth, October 2001, p.37.

63 European Commission Communication: Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality', November 2001, p.17.

64 European Youth Forum, 'Policy Paper on Youth Organisations as non-formal educators - recognising our role', adopted by the European Youth Forum Council of Members, Rome, Italy, November 2003.

65 See Pasi Sahlberg 'Building Bridges: The Recognition and Value of Non-Formal Education', European Youth Forum 2001 and European Youth Forum Position Paper on 'Life-wide Learning for Active Citizenship', adopted at the European Youth Forum Council of Members, Brussels, Belgium 2002. These are available on the European Youth Forum website: <http://www.youthforum.org/en/press/reports.html#TowardsALearnerCentredEducationinEurope>.

66 Communication From the Commission: Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a

recognition' where legislation can be introduced giving individuals the right to the validation of competence acquired, to 'general recognition' where society acknowledges the value of competences acquired in non-formal settings, to 'self-recognition' where the individual assesses what he or she has learned by reflecting on the process.

As a direct consequence of not being part of any certification system, non-formal education has not received a level of visibility and credibility which reflects the contribution it makes to individual development. As Manuela Dubois-Reymond succinctly states 'it has a less clearly framed curricula and much less 'certification power' which gives it a weaker social and financial position.'⁶⁷ Due to this lack of certification, it is also more difficult to promote mutual recognition of non-formal education between different countries.

The methods used in non-formal education are very different in nature to those used in formal education institutions. Rather than learning 'hard knowledge' from text-books, young people 'learn by doing'. Due to the participatory nature of the activities, young people are forced to take responsibility for their own learning and engage actively in the process. Youth activities provide 'real life' situations that cannot easily be reproduced in a classroom. Learning takes place in specific contexts and is therefore more meaningful.

Through their interaction with other people and the local environment in youth activities, young people learn 'soft skills' such as interpersonal skills, people management skills, teamwork, self-confidence, discipline, responsibility, leadership skills, planning, project management, organising, co-ordination and practical problem solving skills. 'Non-formal education could empower young people....to set up their own projects, step by step, where they are at the centre of the educational activity, feel concerned, have personal interest, find strong motivation, get self-confidence and as result, develop capacities and skills by doing.'⁶⁸ These skills are extremely valuable in the world of work, for active participation in society and complement the 'hard knowledge' acquired in formal education institutions.

One of the greatest added values of non-formal education is the fact that there are opportunities at the national, European and international level; it is however most accessible at the grass roots level. Youth organisations can reach out to young people from a wide variety of backgrounds in the local context and encourage them to learn and gain skills through their participation in non-formal education. Young people feel less intimidated in non-formal learning environments because they are familiar with them. Due to the fact that participation is voluntary, they often find learning more enjoyable. Non-formal education can provide an alternative learning pathway to those whose needs are not met in the classroom. In addition, 'young people who have left school early or who are in precarious situations in society could benefit from non-formal education as a second chance that could have a strong impact in their lives'.⁶⁹

Youth organisations have trodden a very careful path between arguing for greater recognition, but in a way which will not result in the formalisation of non-formal

67 A Study on the Links Between Formal and Non-Formal Education', Manuela du Bois Reymond, University of Leiden, p.5

68 'T-Kit on Social Inclusion', Council of Europe and European Commission Partnership, p.39

69 Ibid., p.39

education and the loss of the unique and particular value of non-formal education. There is a need to promote greater awareness and visibility of the methods used and outcomes achieved, as well as to ensure quality standards among education providers, without changing the nature of the non-formal education processes themselves.

During the past decade, the majority of Member States in the EU, together with countries outside the EU, have initiated work to establish methodologies and institutions for facilitating identification, assessment and recognition of the learning that takes place outside formal education and training institutions. However, no common, unified European approach exists due to the fact that initiatives have been taken at different points of time and within the context of different systems.

The European Commission has developed a set of 'Common Principles for the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Education' and these were adopted by the Education Council of Ministers under the Irish Presidency on 27 May, 2004. These principles aim to make visible and to value the full range of knowledge and competences held by an individual, irrespective of where or how these have been acquired. They aim to enable the transfer and acceptance of all learning outcomes across different settings. It is important to note that the Council Conclusions state that 'this does not result in a formal certificate or diploma but may provide the basis for such recognition.'⁷⁰ The principles support social integration, employability and the development and use of human resources in civil, social and economic contexts. They are to be applied on a 'voluntary basis' while fully respecting the rights, responsibilities and competences of the Member States and stakeholders. The 'Common Principles' include equal access to recognition of non-formal and informal learning, quality assurance mechanisms, guidance, counselling and information. The Conclusions call on the Member States to disseminate and promote the use of the Common European Principles, to encourage the social partners and non-governmental organisations to adopt them, to support the exchange of experiences, to strengthen co-operation with international organisations and to develop and support coherent and comparable ways of presenting the results of the identification and how existing instruments such as the Europass framework can contribute to this.⁷¹

70 Conclusions of the Education, Youth and Culture Council, Brussels 27 May, 2004, p.20

71 The Europass framework is a single portfolio of documents reflecting the qualifications and competences of citizens looking for a job or for admission to a lifelong learning scheme in Europe. The Council reached an agreement on a draft version on 27 May, 2004.

72 For more details on this project, please consult the following website: <http://www.ukyouth.org/>

HOW YOUTH ORGANISATIONS CAN RECOGNISE THE NON-FORMAL LEARNING THAT TAKES PLACE IN YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

Many of the Youth Forum's member organisations have introduced methods to record and recognised the learning that takes place through their activities. One such method is the 'Youth Achievement Award' given by UK Youth, a member organisation of the British Youth Council and the European Confederation of Youth Clubs: which are both member organisations of the European Youth Forum.⁷² It was launched in 1997 and is aimed at young people aged fourteen and older. It is designed to accredit young people's achievements and learning in youth work and to help youth workers to develop more effective participatory youth work practice.

Young people taking part in the award select challenges that are part of their normal group programme activities. There are four levels: bronze, silver, gold and platinum and individuals progress from one to the other. At the bronze stage, young people are given the award for their participation in activities with four challenges. At the silver stage, they receive the award for taking an active part in planning and running a youth activity with six challenges. They receive the gold award for taking the responsibility for planning and running a programme with eight challenges. The final award, platinum, is given for taking a leadership role in a youth activity where they have to prepare a personal development plan, undertake training, apply this in a leadership or peer education role and prepare a presentation of their achievements. Support is provided to enable youth people to review and record their challenge experiences, achievements and learning. In this way, they obtain the evidence needed for accreditation. The challenges can be carried out individually or in groups.

The awards are delivered in approximately 600 youth projects around the United Kingdom and approximately 2000 young people achieved recognition through the Youth Achievement Awards in 2003. Other member organisations of the Youth Forum issue similar awards and this example illustrates the impact such a scheme can have on helping young people to learn through youth activities.

CONCLUSION

This chapter shows how more and more young people are spending longer in education and that there is a general trend towards improving educational levels in the European Union. However, success in achieving the Lisbon objectives in relation to education have been very mixed and considerable progress needs to be made in many countries to implement the Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems. The examination of the Bologna Process shows the steps that have been taken in trying to standardise higher education systems and facilitate the recognition of qualifications and student mobility. Together, the Lisbon and the Bologna Processes have had a significant impact in improving, modernising and standardising education systems in Europe. More investment and greater commitment is needed, however, to make the objectives become a reality.

In the field of non-formal education, there has been a growing understanding of the value of this form of education and recognition of the work of youth organisations, for whom it is a central tool. Non-formal education has an important role to play in providing young people with skills that they cannot learn in more formal environments, yet for many youth organisations still struggle to receive proper recognition for their work and frequently encounter funding problems. The adoption of 'Common Principles for the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Education' by the Council of Ministers is therefore a very welcome development and it should be followed by an improved recognition of non-formal learning and the provision of more resources for it.

CHAPTER THREE – EMPLOYMENT

By Katy Orr

For young people, unemployment is an issue of key concern in the European Union. A Eurobarometer study in 1997 showed that 75.7% of young people put unemployment as the priority area for action at the European Union level.⁷³ In Member States with high unemployment levels, the percentage of young people identifying unemployment as the principal problem faced by them was even higher. The same concern was evident in a Eurobarometer study carried out conducted in April 2003 among young people in the then 13 candidate countries, ten of which are now the new Member States of the European Union.⁷⁴ For young people in these countries, accession to the European Union was perceived as a means of improving employment levels. In consultations of young people carried out by the European Commission in preparation for its White Paper on Youth Policy, employment emerged as an area of great importance to young people. This reflects the fact that unemployment is a very real problem for most young people, particularly during the transition from education to employment, but the likelihood of them becoming unemployed varies enormously both between and within Member States. Youth unemployment has been a cause of much concern for the European Youth Forum and its member organisations for many years and it has consistently argued for increased efforts to improve employment levels among young people as well as their working conditions.⁷⁵

For young people, the transition from education to employment is a risky one: the success or failure of the transition not only has high short-term costs, but can have a continuing impact throughout the life cycle. Young people may become disillusioned as a result of the difficulties they face in trying to obtain employment or because of poor employment conditions. If they are unemployed for a long period of time, this can adversely affect their future success in the labour market. Young people are particularly vulnerable at the time of the transition because they may not have a sufficient income to cover their living costs, especially if they cannot depend on familial or state support structures. Thus the period of the transition is one when young people risk poverty, or even social exclusion in the most extreme cases.

In the last two decades the transition from education to employment has become ever more complex in the European Union and the rest of Europe in the context of high levels of youth unemployment, increasing amounts of time spent in education and structural changes in the labour market. Although the general trend is towards a decline in unemployment levels in the European Union in the context of steady economic growth, youth unemployment has been a serious problem throughout the Union in the last twenty years and youth unemployment rates remain typically double those of the rest of the adult population. Moreover, all Member States have faced

73 European Commission, Eurobarometer 47.2: Young Europeans. Brussels, 1997.

74 Ref Eurobarometer study

75 See the Cardiff Declaration adopted by the European Youth Forum General Assembly in Salzburg, Austria in 1998 and the two position papers on the European Employment Strategy on the European Youth Forum website: <http://www.youthforum.org/en/press/reports.html#Employment>. The European Youth Forum also organised a Hearing on youth employment and social inclusion at the Economic and Social Committee in 2000 entitled 'Get In!'. This report is also available on the Youth Forum website.

either high structural levels of youth unemployment or temporarily high levels during periods of economic recession. Consequently, many Member States are still battling with the problem of youth unemployment. Whole generations of young people have faced enormous difficulties in entering the labour market due to endemic or cyclical unemployment trends. Partly as a result of this, young people are spending longer periods of time in education and are therefore entering the labour market with higher levels of education than previous generations. With the decline of traditional manufacturing industries and the growth in new technologies and the service sector, there is an increasing demand for new types of skill and higher levels of education. Thus, unemployment has been a stark reality in the lives of generations of young people in Europe over the last twenty years, and one which has contributed to changes in transition patterns among young people.

A successful transition from education to employment is central to a young person's security in the employment market in the European Union. This was recognised in the guidelines central to the Luxembourg Process - a key component of the European Union's Employment Strategy - during its first five years of operation. This chapter starts by considering the experience of young people during the transition and analyses the measures being taken to address the difficulties encountered by young people in making the transition in the context of the European Employment Strategy and examines the situation in the Member States on the basis of the National Action Plans for 2003.

Policies and measures to relieve youth unemployment are increasingly focusing on the transition from education to employment. There has been a growing recognition that this transition is not a simple step from school, college or university to the labour market. Instead it is a process that can consist of a number of steps - both forwards and backwards - until the individual has a secure footing in the labour market on equal terms with other adults possessing similar qualifications. One metaphor that has been employed to describe the process of transition for young people has been that of the 'Yo-Yo' of progress, followed by regression.⁷⁶ In order to respond to this, it is clear that a broad range of policy and support measures is needed to ensure a smooth and successful transition, thus reducing the chances of unemployment.

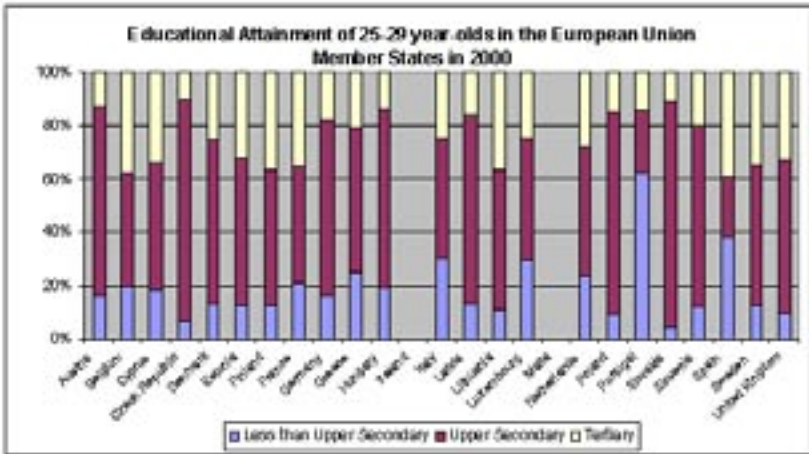
Over the last two decades there have been three main changes in the education to employment transition pattern. Firstly, the timing of the transition now occurs at a later stage in the individual's life-course due to increasing participation in education. Secondly, the duration of the transition has become longer due to greater insecurity in the labour market and participation in part-time work while studying. Thirdly, there is evidence to indicate that young people have become more vulnerable during the transition due to changes in social protection allocation, labour market deregulation and the decrease in average youth income. These changes have also had an impact on other transitions, delaying the move to autonomy and independence.⁷⁷

76 See Serrano Pascual, Amparo (ed.) 'Tackling Youth Unemployment in Europe'. Brussels: ETUI 2000.

77 See European Youth Forum 'Taking Steps: Young people and social protection in the European Union'. Report by D. Green. 1999; European Youth Forum 'Sinking or Swimming in the Waves of Transformation? Young People and Social Protection in Central and Eastern Europe'. Report by Dr Silyka Kovacheva, 2000

The principal change in the transition from education to employment is the prolongation of the period spent in education. When young people have the resources, the opportunities and the motivation, they are choosing to spend longer in education. As the previous chapter shows, levels of educational attainment have increased consistently in the Member States of the European Union over the last three decades as young people spend longer in education. Evidence indicates that both the number of young people dropping out of compulsory education and the number not continuing to upper secondary education is falling.

Chapter 2 of this study has shown the variations in educational attainment broken down according to gender and level of attainment. The graph below shows the variations among the 25 Member States (although the statistics date from 2000).

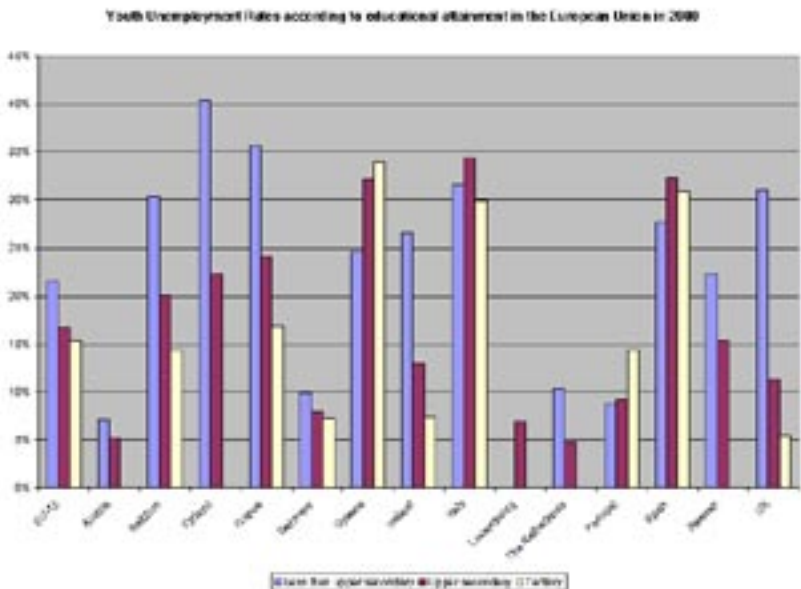


Source: Eurostat

As chapter 2 also showed, educational attainment differs slightly according to sex, with young women improving the level of education achieved throughout the European Union. Young women are now consistently reaching higher levels of education than young men in the European Union as a whole, and if this trend continues their level of attainment will be higher than that of men in all of the Member States. There has been quite a remarkable increase in the participation rates of women in secondary and tertiary education in the last two decades. In 1996 there were more young women than young men in secondary education, and in ten out of fifteen Member States there were more women than men in tertiary education. However, success in education has not yet translated into corresponding success in the labour market. Young women continue to have higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of participation in the labour market than young men in the large majority of

Member States. Although a smooth transition to employment and success in the labour market is generally related to level of education, higher levels of female youth unemployment would seem to indicate that this is not the case with young women.

In the majority of countries, those that leave education later fare better in the labour market. The next graph shows the percentage of youth unemployment among the 15-24 age-group according to their level of education for 2000. On the whole, young people with higher educational qualifications encounter fewer first-entry problems in the transition, they are less likely to be unemployed and their earning capacity is higher.



Source: Eurostat

Although a higher level of education improves an individual's employability, young people often feel that they are provided with insufficient guidance and information at school on the opportunities in increasingly complex labour markets. With rapid technological development, school systems and the educational curricula are not sufficiently geared to the needs of today's labour market. Young people feel that they need to be provided with education and training which is relevant to the labour market and which will help them find employment. The growing complexity of the labour market requires not only new skills, but also the ability to continually adapt to new demands. The importance of a good basic education is vital for the development of skills through lifelong learning. Continuing education throughout the life-cycle will become increasingly fundamental for individual

security and success in the labour market. The development of opportunities to participate in lifelong learning and individual pathways is necessary to secure this. Guidance, support, information and advice are increasingly needed not just in formal educational structures, but throughout the life-cycle to help people through labour market transformations. In this context it is interesting to note that the 25-34 age-group⁷⁸ participate more actively in lifelong learning than any other age-group.

The time spent in education is increasing and consequently educational levels are improving throughout the European Union, yet low educational levels still prove a problem for employers in some countries and young people are still not receiving the education that is needed for today's labour market. With the decline of traditional manufacturing industries and the growth in new technologies and the service sector, there is a demand for new types of skill and higher levels of education. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills are increasingly required by employers, and in many areas there are skills gaps, skill mismatches and unfilled posts due to the lack of adequately or appropriately educated and trained people in the workforce. For example, the European Commission estimated that half a million jobs were vacant in this sector in 1998 and this figure is expected to reach 1.6 million by 2002.⁷⁹ The problem of inadequate education and training is one of the key areas that needs to be addressed in order to maximise employment potential and provide young people with the skills they need.

⁷⁸ The percentage of 25-34 year olds participating in lifelong learning was 14% in 1999, compared to an average of 8% for the 25-64 population in the European Union.

⁷⁹ European Commission 'Strategy for Jobs in the Information Society, COM(2000)48 final.

The transition from education to employment is generally more straightforward for those with higher levels of qualification and skill. They pass more quickly and more smoothly into the labour market. Young people with poor education and few skills encounter many more problems in entering the labour market, let alone gaining a secure footing in it. For the latter group, the transition is a time of risk. In the most extreme cases, young people who fail to enter the labour market may have no direct source of income and even risk entering social exclusion. For others the impact of a period of unemployment may reduce their employability and lead to more enduring difficulties in the labour market. The position of the young unemployed and the transition from education to employment is made more problematic by the inadequacy of social protection in many Member States.

The second major change relates to the length of the transition. The OECD defines the transition as consisting of two components: the period spent in post-compulsory education and the period taken to settle into work after leaving school. To calculate the total length of the transition they use the difference between the compulsory school leaving age and the age at which 50% are in employment. The OECD identifies significant differences in the length of this transition in the eighteen OECD countries analysed, ranging from five years in the UK to 11.3 years in Italy. It is also calculated that the average duration of the transition increased by two years from 1990-96. This increase is due to delays in entering the labour market in some

countries - for example Sweden and Denmark - and an extension in the period of initial education in others. This indicates that first-entry problems have also contributed to an extension of the time taken to settle into the labour market.

There is less direct evidence on the length of the transition for all of the European Union Member States (although eleven are included in the OECD study). However, Eurostat figures show that in 1999 young people made up a large proportion of temporary workers (38.5%) and part-time workers (15.6%), indicating that participation in temporary and part-time work is common between the ages of 15-24 before young people gain a firm footing in the labour market.⁸⁰ Evidence from individual countries supports this. In the Netherlands there has been a clearly identifiable trend towards young people combining part-time work and study. On the basis of the OECD study and evidence from individual Member States it is possible to conclude that there is a pronounced trend towards the prolongation of the transition from education to employment in the majority of European Union Member States, caused in part by high levels of youth participation in part-time and temporary employment.

The third change in the transition from education to employment is difficult to quantify and the impact is hard to assess accurately. Changes in the provision of social protection over the last two decades have increased the level of risk faced by young people in some European Union countries.⁸¹ The growing tendency to use social security benefit provision as an activation measure has meant that unemployment benefit may be linked to participation in an education or training course, or in a work experience scheme. Social security benefits have also been pared down, resulting in lower levels of unemployment benefit, particularly for young people. As many young people become unemployed on leaving education, they have not built up sufficient credit within the social security system to be entitled to full unemployment benefit. Therefore, social protection does not provide an adequate safety net for young people during the transition from education to employment and those that cannot rely on family support are very vulnerable to poverty or even social exclusion.

Labour market deregulation has also had an impact on young people in terms of job-security, working conditions and wages. In the 1980s and 1990s there was an identifiable trend towards labour market deregulation as an adjunct of free market economics, notably in the UK. This contributed to the lowering of wages for young people, and a reduction in employees' protection. These factors have increased the insecurity of young people when they first enter the labour market in some countries, making the transition from education to employment more complex and longer. It has exacerbated the 'Yo-Yo' effect of young people entering and then leaving the labour market, either due to short-term contracts or dissatisfaction with employment conditions.

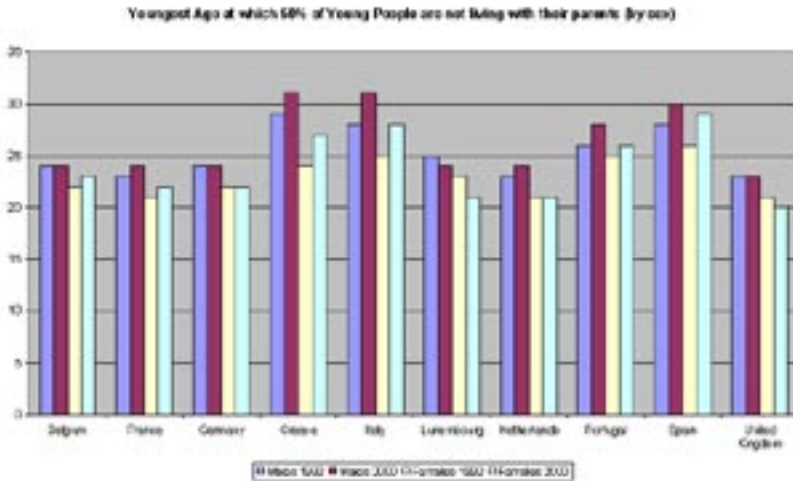
The transition from education to employment is also closely linked to other

⁸⁰ European Commission, *The Social Situation in the European Union*, 2000.

⁸¹ 'Taking Steps: Young people and social protection in the European Union', Op.cit.

important transitions in the life-cycle, such as the transition to economic independence, to autonomy and independent living and to the establishment of a household and eventually of having children. Certainly, it is clear from those countries that have a late average transition into the labour market, that age at marriage or age at birth of first child is also later.⁸² Thus, the changes which have led to a longer transition from education to employment have also had an impact on other transitions, effectively causing them to be postponed to a later stage in the life-cycle. On the basis of statistics from ten countries, it is possible to see that in the majority of countries the age at which young people left home increased between 1992 and 2000. This evidence is shown in the graph below.

⁸² European Commission, 'The Social Situation in the European Union', 2000.



Source: Eurostat

It is clear from this graph that young people are becoming autonomous at a later age, that there are significant variations between countries and that young women tend to leave home much earlier than young men.

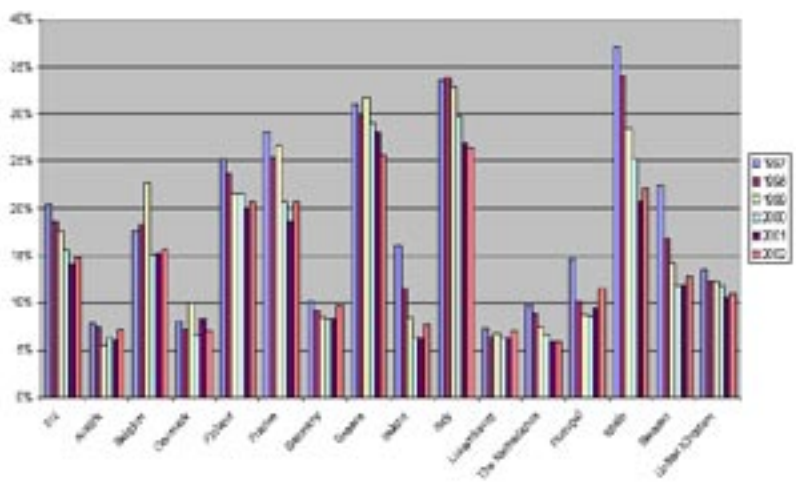
A young person’s experience of the transition from education to employment is influenced by many factors. Young people in the European Union have a very different experience of the transition according to many factors, including where they grow up and are educated, their socio-economic circumstances, their race, their gender, the economic conditions in their country, the level of support given to young people during the transition and their level of education and skills. In addition, young people’s experience of the transition is changing as they adjust to new demands placed by labour market. One cannot talk of a single ‘youth perspective’ in Europe, but instead must consider the multiple influences on the young person’s experience of this import life-cycle transition.

There are strong national and regional variations in the incidence of youth unemployment. Recent economic growth in the European Union has been reflected in a reduction in average unemployment from 9.2% in the European Union in 1999, to 8.0% in December 2003, with youth unemployment at 15.4%.⁸³ Average youth unemployment has also been reduced, although it rose for the first time in many years in 2002. This reduction can also partly be explained by the increase in the amount of time spent in education. While youth unemployment levels have fallen in the European Union as a whole in the last five years, rates vary hugely between the Member States and in some countries levels have actually risen. The following graph shows the changes in youth unemployment levels in the Member States from 1997-2002. From this graph it is clear that youth unemployment has been consistently high in Finland, France, Italy and Spain at over 25%, and lower in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands at around 10% or less. Not only is the problem of youth unemployment less severe in some countries than others, but the fight against unemployment has clearly been more successful in certain countries. For example, youth unemployment has declined significantly in Ireland and Spain, although levels in Spain were the highest in Europe until 1999. Thus, although there is a general trend towards a reduction in youth unemployment in the context of economic growth, the problem remains chronic in many countries and enormous disparities exist in the rates between countries.

83 Eurostat Press Release, February 16th 2004.

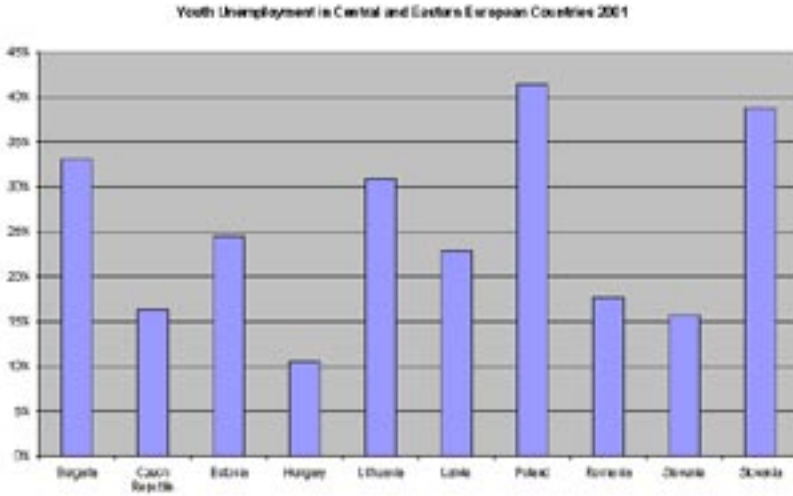
84 European Commission 'Employment and labour market in central European Countries'. Eurostat 2003.

Youth Unemployment in the EU 1997-2002



Source: OECD

In the Central and Eastern European countries there are similar differences visible between countries. Eurostat statistics for 2001 show that youth unemployment was the highest in Poland and the lowest in Hungary.⁸⁴

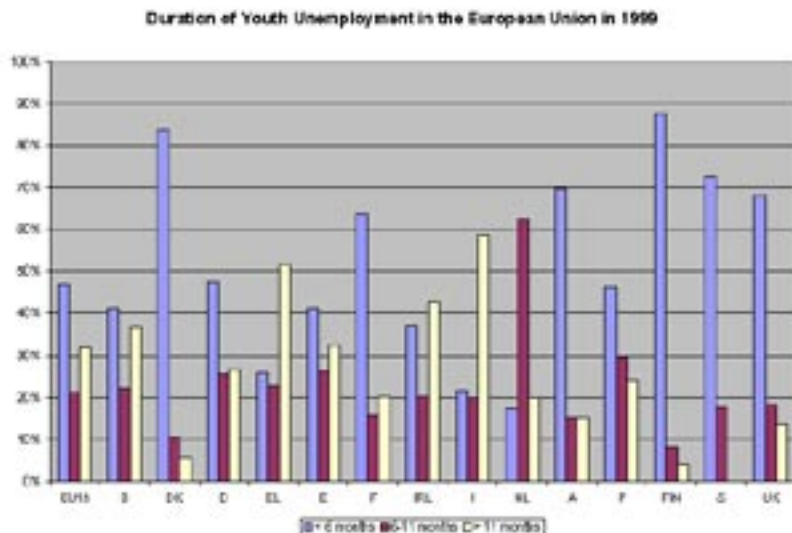


Source: Eurostat

Youth unemployment levels are very closely linked to the success of the transition from education to employment. The OECD has calculated that first-entry problems account for 80% of youth unemployment in Finland, Greece and Italy, but only 20-25% in Austria, Germany and the UK, and 15% in Denmark.⁸⁵ Smooth pathways into employment help to reduce the overall youth unemployment rate. In general, the transition to employment is more successful in countries where young people work part-time during their education, such as the Netherlands or Denmark, or where a dual-system of education, training and work experience is in place, such as Germany and Austria. A large proportion of youth unemployment is caused by difficulties experienced in entering the labour market for the first time. However, even when young people have found their first job, their employment is often not secure. The European Commission estimated that 45% of young people between the ages of 15-24 become unemployed at least once, and 20% are unemployed two or three times.⁸⁶ Furthermore, in some Member States - notably Greece and Italy - there are chronic long-term unemployment problems, with a large proportion of the unemployed remaining without work for over a year. The following graph shows the duration of youth unemployment for each Member State in 1999.

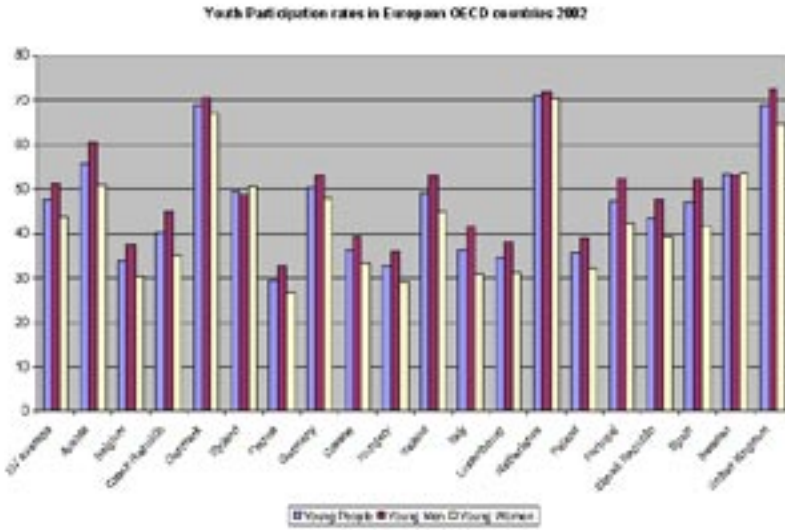
85 OECD, 'Employment Outlook', Paris: OECD, 1998

86 European Commission, Implementing the European Employment Strategy. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities 1999.



Source: Eurostat

An examination of youth employment or participation rates (i.e. the percentage of young people actually in employment) also reveals huge disparities between Member States. The following graph shows the percentage young men and women of the 15-24 age-group in employment in European OECD countries in 2002. Very large differences in employment levels among young people in Europe are visible from this graph, ranging from 26.5% for young French women to 72.3% for young British men. Overall, the difference between young male and female employment rates in 2002 was seven percentage points, which is lower than in the older sections of the workforce although it is important to remember that young women are less likely to be caring for children. Nevertheless, this might be indicative of a gradual reduction in the employment rates between men and women. The disparities highlight both the economic problems in some Member States, and the need for the development of measures to promote employment opportunities for young people. Moreover, there has been no improvement in employment rates for young people, and it would seem important to focus on improving employment levels among this group in order to contribute to achieving the Lisbon and Stockholm objectives. This is particularly important as youth unemployment high in many Member States, but their youth employment levels are also exceptionally low. This means that young people in employment are an exception in these countries.



Source: OECD 2003

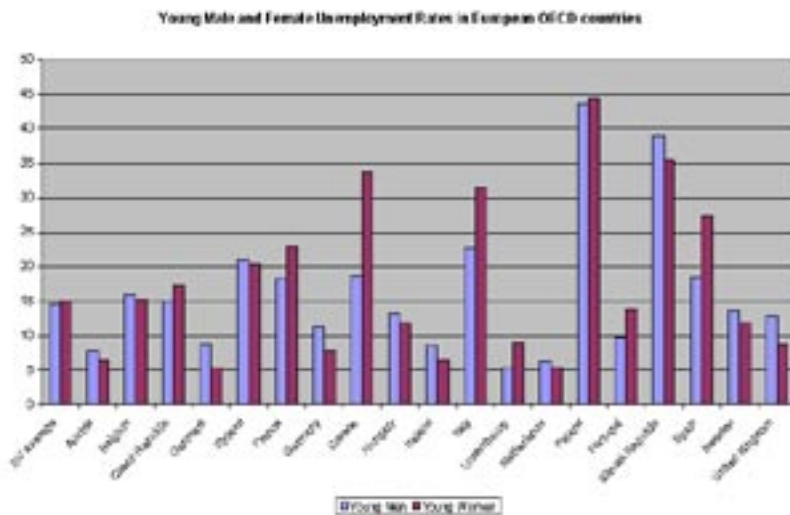
87 European Commission, Employment in Europe 2000. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2000.

88 European Commission, The Social Situation in the European Union. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2000.

The gap between male and female employment and unemployment levels remains despite evidence indicating that the educational level achieved by young women is higher than that for young men in the majority of Member States. Female employment rates can be examined in the graph above, and male and female unemployment rates are shown in the graph below. Young female unemployment is higher than young male unemployment in many countries. Young female unemployment is particularly high in Greece, Italy and Spain. Moreover, the gap between young male and female unemployment rates has broadened over the last few years. The European Commission has shown that this general improvement in employment levels has not been experienced equally between young men and women.⁸⁷

Equal opportunities between men and women in the labour market need to be improved in order to tackle the large discrepancies in employment levels and salaries that exist. Women’s wages are lower than men’s, with the pay difference increasing with age. Eurostat statistics show that the average monthly wage of women aged 25-29 in the European Union was 87% of the average for men in the same age group in 1995, and was 71% for those over 55.⁸⁸ The young women’s perspective on the transition from education to employment is therefore quite different from young men’s, with young women suffering from discrimination in the labour market despite their higher levels of education.

⁸⁹ European Commission, Labour Force Survey 1999. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2000.



Source: OECD

Young women are not the only group to experience discrimination in the labour market. Young people from ethnic minorities, young migrants and the young disabled also face discrimination in the labour market. For these groups the transition from education to employment is more difficult and the risks of poverty or social exclusion are higher. Few countries collect statistics on these groups so it is difficult to provide an accurate assessment of degrees of discrimination, or to design programmes and introduce measures to combat discrimination against these groups in the labour market.

Not only are there significant variations in youth employment rates between Member States, but also within Member States. The European Labour Force Survey for 1999 provides data on the highest and the lowest rates according to regions, which can differ by as much as 40%.⁸⁹ Therefore, even young people who live in countries with low average levels of unemployment can have difficulties during the transition due to high local unemployment levels in depressed areas.

For young people who experience unemployment during the transition, their situation has been made more difficult by the tightening of social protection legislation and provision. As mentioned above, young people in some countries do not receive unemployment benefit if they refuse to participate in a scheme or programme to improve their employability. This linkage runs the risk of inadvertently encouraging the growth of the number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) and pushing them in to social exclusion. Whilst evidence on young people not in education, employment or training is difficult to collect, there are estimates that 9.5%

of young people in the UK have either refused to take part in an activation programme or have dropped out of one.⁹⁰ OECD figures indicate that this is not unique and that approximately 10% of young people in Belgium, Greece, Italy and Spain are also in a similar situation.⁹¹ The European Commission indicates that as many as 19% of early school leavers were not in further education or training in 2001 in the European Union.⁹²

Young people may also suffer severe financial problems during the transition due to the lack of provision or the low level of social security benefits. In many countries young people have not made sufficient social security contributions to qualify for unemployment benefit. The Eurobarometer survey of 1997 showed that despite high levels of youth unemployment in Greece, Portugal and Italy, only 2% of young people were dependent on social security benefits.⁹³ Furthermore, the financial position of young people in employment has worsened due to reductions in minimum wage levels or the general decline in average youth incomes.

During the transition from education to employment, young people often have low incomes even if they are employed. For those who experience unemployment, the situation can be much more serious as they may only qualify for low social security benefits, if at all. In the most extreme case, young people - particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds - can enter social exclusion during this period of their lives. However, perhaps the main effect has been to extend young people's dependence on familial networks for financial support. The European Commission has shown that income transfers, particularly from parents to young people, have increased as a result of the decline in state provision and the lengthening period that young people spend in education. Thus, not only is the transition important for the long-term success of the individual's participation in the employment market, but also to promote the autonomy⁹⁴ of young people and reduce their dependence on family for financial support, poverty or social exclusion either in the short or long term.⁹⁵

It is also hard to get at a real picture of the type of jobs that young people have through official statistics. Young people frequently have a very precarious position in the employment market. They are twice as likely to have temporary contracts as the working population as a whole and are also more likely to have part-time contracts and therefore lack security in the employment market. Temporary and part-time contracts are most common in the service industries, in which there are few trade unions and young people therefore lack support for their employment rights. As young people frequently earn less than the 'adult' minimum wage they also figure as a significant proportion of the 'working poor'. Young people are also more likely to work in the informal economy, without any formal rights as employees. On the basis of this evidence it is clear that there are still significant improvements necessary in the situation of young people in relation to the employment market.

90 P. Bivand, 'Outside education and work: do the numbers add up?' Working Brief, Issue 119, pp.12-13, 2000.

91 OECD, 'From Initial Education to Working Life'. Paris: OECD, 2000.

92 'The Social Situation in the European Union 2003', The European Commission 2003.

93 European Commission, Eurobarometer 47.2: Young Europeans. Brussels, 1997.

94 This point is tackled in the European Youth Forum Policy Paper on Youth Autonomy, adopted by the European Youth Forum Council of Members in Brussels, Belgium, April 2004.

95 European Commission, The Social Situation in the European Union, op.cit.

The youth perspective of the transition from education to employment varies significantly throughout the European Union. The transition is becoming longer and at the same time more complex. Young people have become more vulnerable during the transition due to changes in social protection provision and the difficulties of entering secure employment. While youth unemployment levels have declined there are still pockets of very high youth unemployment in the European Union, especially in the south. However, decision-makers both at the national and the European Union level are increasingly recognising the importance of the transition to employment and are introducing measures to ease the transition for young people. The OECD concluded that 'effective transition systems appear to have one thing in common: underlying them are societies that assume responsibility for young people's transition from education to work'.⁹⁶ The recognition that a co-ordinated and multi-faceted approach is needed to reduce transition problems has been central to measures related to young people in the European Employment Strategy.

The establishment of the European Employment Strategy has been one of the key policy developments in the European Union in recent years. The broad aim of the European Employment Strategy is to increase employment levels in the European Union through both demand and supply side measures. At the European Council meeting in Luxembourg in 1997, the Heads of State and Government agreed to bring forward the agreement that would be contained in the future Treaty of Amsterdam on employment and to start the immediate coordination of their employment policies.⁹⁷ Tackling youth unemployment has been central to the strategy since its inception due to the widespread and persistent nature of the problem. The annual employment guidelines, implemented for the first time under the Luxembourg process in 1998, have consistently included measures to improve the employability of young people and ease the transition from school to work.

The Lisbon European Council, held in March 2000, boosted the aims of the European Employment Strategy. The European Union Heads of State and Government agreed at the Lisbon European Council on 'Employment, economic reform and social cohesion - for a Europe of innovation and knowledge' to 'regain the conditions for full employment', and committed themselves to increasing employment levels to 70% (60% for women) by 2010.⁹⁸ This was part of the wider strategy to make Europe the 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'.⁹⁹ This was again reinforced by the Stockholm European Council in March 2001 which set a target EU employment rate of 67% overall by 2005 and 57% for women by 2005 and 50% for older workers by 2010. The Barcelona European Council of March 2002 reiterated that full employment was one of the overarching objectives of the European Union. The 2004 enlargement of the European Union combined with relatively slow growth rates in employment levels means that employment levels will have to rise significantly for the Lisbon and Stockholm objectives to be met.

⁹⁶ OECD, 'From Initial Education to Working Life'. Paris: OECD, 2000

⁹⁷ The legal basis for the coordination of the Member States employment policies is to be found in the Employment Title agreed at the Treaty of Amsterdam. This is contained in Annex I.

⁹⁸ Presidency Conclusions, Lisbon European Council, 23-24 March 2000, p.2.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

The Employment in Europe Report 2003 notes that 'reaching the Lisbon employment target of 70% for an enlarged EU will require the creation of about 22 million jobs, equating to net employment creation of 3 million jobs per year.'¹⁰⁰

The move towards the knowledge economy would be supported by the adaptation of social protection systems and the co-ordination of national policies to combat social exclusion. The Lisbon conclusions did not introduce any new instruments for improving employment levels, but instead called for the improved co-ordination of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines and the Luxembourg, Cardiff and Cologne processes.¹⁰¹ Of the three processes which compose the Employment Strategy, the Luxembourg process is the most directly relevant to young people. Education and training was seen as central to the development of the knowledge-based economy. To this end, it was agreed at Lisbon to increase the investment in human resources by developing multi-purpose learning centres to facilitate life-long learning, especially in IT skills. Mobility in education and training will be given a new impetus through the removal of obstacles and through the improvement in the mutual recognition of qualifications. The new basic skills listed in the previous chapter - including IT, foreign language and social skills - are to be developed in all sections of the population, and this includes the specific commitment to halve the number of 18-24 year olds with only lower secondary level education by 2010.

The Lisbon conclusions have and continue to be extremely relevant to young people in the European Union for a number of reasons. The commitment to full employment entails the reinforcement of measures at the Member State level to ease the transition from education to employment. As the number of young people declines in proportion to the total population, their participation in the labour market will become more crucial. Similarly, measures to promote the employment of women should help to reduce the discrimination that young women face in the labour market in some countries. The emphasis on improving educational levels and providing training in the skills required by the 'knowledge economy' should improve the opportunities for young people in education and training, thus alleviating many of the problems currently faced by young people during the transition.

The Luxembourg Process is the strand of the European Employment Strategy of most relevance to young people. It exemplifies the 'open-method of co-ordination,' which was extended to a number of other policy fields by the Lisbon Council.¹⁰² In the first five year period of the Process, it consisted of the following specific steps:

- In the autumn, the European Commission presents the 'autumn package' consisting of a proposal for a Council Decision on the Guidelines for the following year, a draft of the Joint Employment Report and a proposal for recommendations to the Member States on their employment policies. After the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, the

100 'Employment in Europe', European Commission, September 2003, p.9.

101 The Luxembourg, Cardiff and Cologne processes are all named after the European Council at which the processes were agreed. The extraordinary Luxembourg Summit on employment, held at the end of 1997, brought forward the implementation of the Employment Title introduced in the Amsterdam Treaty before the Treaty was formally ratified by all of the Member States. It initiated the annual process of Guidelines, NAPs and evaluation, now known as the 'open method of co-ordination'. This was followed by the Cardiff Economic Reform process, which concerns the reform of product and capital markets, such as the effect of national regulation on tax regimes and capital markets, the integration of financial markets and market liberalisation and regulatory reform. The Cologne Process refers to the co-ordination of macroeconomic policy between the Council, the Commission and the social partners together with the European Central Bank.

102 The 'open method of co-ordination', as defined in the Lisbon Conclusions, will also be applied to other areas including the development of SMEs, the promotion of social inclusion and Research.

Employment Committee and the Economic Policy Committee give their opinion, the package is endorsed at the December European Council.

- The Member States submit National Action Plans (NAP) in late spring explaining how their employment policy reflected the Employment Guidelines, providing information on the previous year's achievements and announcing new policy initiatives.
- A comparative assessment of the NAPs is made in the Joint Employment Report (JER) issued by the European Commission and the Council.

The whole process was and is closely monitored by the Employment Committee (EMCO), which has 'advisory status to promote coordination between Member States on employment and labour market policies.'¹⁰³ The Committee is also given the specific tasks of monitoring 'the employment situation and employment policies in the Member States and the Community', and formulating 'opinions at the request of either the Council or the Commission or on its own initiative, and to contribute to the preparation of the Council proceedings'.

In the first five years of the Luxembourg Process, of the four pillars - Improving Employability, Developing Entrepreneurship, Encouraging Adaptability of Businesses and their Employees and Strengthening Equal Opportunities Policies for Women and Men - the first was of greatest significance to young people.

The first pillar included guidelines that aimed to reduce youth unemployment and ease the transition from school to work. Under guideline 1, each Member State was to ensure that 'every young person is offered a new start before reaching six months of unemployment' by 2002. Following the Lisbon European Council, the education element under the first pillar was strengthened to include the commitment made by the Lisbon European Council to reduce by half the number of 18-24 year olds with only lower secondary level education who are not in further education or training by 2010. The fourth pillar was also important in that it mainstreamed gender equality and referred to gender gaps in the employment market. This guideline was very valuable for young women due to the higher levels of unemployment that they experience. The employment guidelines therefore included many measures that should theoretically improve the position of young people in the labour market during the transition from education to employment.

In 1999, the candidate countries began to be involved in the Strategy through the development of employment policies which reflected the guidelines central to the Luxembourg Process. The candidate countries and the European Commission began to analyse their employment policies and considered the main challenges that these countries would face in terms of labour market

¹⁰³ See article 130 of the employment title in the Treaty contained in annex I.

reform and employment policy in accession to the European Union in the 'Joint Assessment Papers on employment priorities' (JAPS). Starting in 2000, a JAP was produced for each of the new the Accession countries, who also sent progress reports on the implementation of key commitments in Spring 2002 with a more in-depth review taking place in 2003. The new Member States will now take part in the 2004 cycle of the Luxembourg Process on the basis of the employment guidelines adopted at the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council on 1 June 2004.

Many of the recommendations relate to investment in human capital and lifelong learning through the modernisation of education and training systems and efforts to reduce school drop-out rates. Issues such as the inclusion of minority groups, women and the disadvantaged in the labour market are also stressed. Estonia, Poland and Slovakia are singled out as countries where specific efforts need to be made to integrate young people into the employment market.

The implementation of the guidelines and their impact on young people in the first five years of the Luxembourg Process varied considerably between the Member States. While the majority of Member States implemented guideline one fully by 2003, Belgium, Greece and Italy still had not done so fully. Thus, the guidelines were successful in promoting the introduction of employability measures in the majority of Member States, even if the quality of these measures is not uniform. Similarly, the guidelines referring to the transition from school to work were implemented in qualitatively different ways, with the experience of the transition from education to employment improving in some countries more than others. The school drop out rate decreased but it currently looks unlikely that the objective of halving it will be achieved by 2010. The gender gap in employment rates is decreasing, but the higher success rates of young women in education are still not reflected in their access to the employment market. The geographical differences in the youth experience of unemployment remain, but these have been highlighted through the comparison of Member State performance, notably in the Joint Employment Report and the annual recommendations issued by the Commission. Overall, the employment guidelines in the first five years promoted the introduction of structural measures in the majority of Member States to improve the employability of young people and to ease the transition into employment. These measures represented an investment in young people which is not dependent on the economic cycle, and which will help to ensure greater equality between successive generations of young people in all of the Member States.

Following the review of the Employment Strategy, the timing of the annual cycle has been altered so that it coincides with that of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines.¹⁰⁴ In the revised Guidelines for 2003, adopted by the Employment and Social Affairs Council in July 2003, there were three overarching and interrelated objectives. These were full employment, the promotion of quality and productivity at work, and fostering social cohesion and inclusive labour markets. Of the ten new Guidelines, there is only one specific mention of

104 Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions taking stock of five years of the European Employment Strategy COM (2002) 416(01).

young people. Guideline 1 continues to state that Member States will ensure that 'every unemployed person is offered a new start before reaching 6 months of unemployment in the case of young people in the form of training, retraining, work practice, a job, or other employability measure, combined where appropriate with ongoing job search assistance'.

The draft Joint Employment Report (adopted as a Communication from the Commission to the Council in January 2004) notes that youth unemployment increased in the first half of 2003 and that very high levels continue to be the case in Greece, Italy, Spain, Finland, France and Belgium.¹⁰⁵ The draft JER also recommends that the Member States 'address the specific needs of the most vulnerable, including disadvantaged younger people and people with disabilities'.¹⁰⁶ In the European Union as a whole, the draft JER notes that considerable progress still needs to be made in achieving the 2010 Lisbon target of 85% of all 22 year-olds have completed upper secondary education as the 2002 figure is only 75.5%, only a 0.3% increase on 2001. In order to increase the investment in human capital, the Employment Taskforce calls for the promotion of access by a larger share of young people to university and improve the quality of education and training and emphasises the need to cut the number of young people who drop out of school early and give everyone a right of access to secondary education and a minimum level of basic skills.¹⁰⁷

The European Youth Forum has long advocated for stronger efforts on the part of both individual governments in Europe and the European Union in order to tackle the problem of youth unemployment. Two papers have been adopted in relation to the European Employment Strategy: one in 1999 following the initiation of the strategy, and one in 2003 following its revision.¹⁰⁸ The European Youth Forum has consistently called for a quantitative commitment to increasing youth employment levels in the European Union. Such a commitment would complement the existing employment objectives which were agreed at Lisbon and Stockholm. It would result in a reduction in youth unemployment levels and the resulting long-term difficulties experienced by many in the labour market. In the context of demographic change there are also strong economic arguments for an investment to reduce youth unemployment, which are also linked to the Lisbon agenda of promoting a knowledge economy. The burden of the increasing costs of health and pension expenditure due to an ageing population will largely need to be financed by tax revenues paid by those in employment. Thus it will be vital to maximise employment levels among the population of working age. An investment in young people would contribute to the Lisbon objective of making the European Union workforce the most highly educated and trained in the world, in order to support the development of the knowledge economy.

As part of its ongoing work, the European Youth Forum monitors the implementation of the annual National Action Plans for employment. The following section looks at each of the fifteen Member States' National Action Plans for 2003.

105 Communication from the Commission to the Council 'Draft Joint Employment Report 2003/2004', COM(2004) 24 final/2. 27.1.2004, p.17.

106 *ibid.*, p.19.

107 *ibid.*, p.26 & 31.

108 European Youth Forum Policy on the European Employment Strategy and Young People, adopted by the European Youth Forum Executive Committee in Potsdam, Germany 1999, and the European Youth Forum Position Paper on the Revised European Employment Strategy adopted by the European Youth Forum Council of Members, Rome, Italy, 2003.

AUSTRIA

Employment levels in Austria are high in general. It has had an overall employment rate of almost 70% for the last two years and over 60% of women have been in employment since 2001. It also has a low unemployment rate, at 4.3% in 2002. Since 1996, Austria has cut the inflow into youth unemployment by almost 6% (from 9%-3.4%). The youth unemployment rate was 7.8% for young men and 6.5% for young women in 2002, with employment rates of 60.6% for young men and 51% for young women.

Austria achieved the guideline 1 objective of providing training, education or work experience for all young people unemployed for more than six months in the first five years of the Luxembourg Process. It has a number of specific measures directed at young people. In September 2002, the government concluded a pact with the social partners called the 'pact for youth, employment and training', with the aim of stimulating the economy and making youth training more attractive. Between October 2002 and October 2003 it introduced a special programme aimed at reducing youth unemployment by creating 9,000 apprenticeship places. It also passed a Youth Training Consolidation Act in order to better coordinate and consolidate trainee opportunities. Interestingly, Austria also recognises the importance of extra-curricula work for young people and the value of acquiring skills that facilitate labour market integration. This includes creating incentives for projects enabling young people to work in the NGO sector, where they can benefit from non-formal education. Austria has also developed a 'training passport' which lists young people's activities in extra-curricula projects and activities, which can be shown to potential employees. There are also projects to provide a safety net for 'high-risk' youth.

In terms of education, the number of 22-year olds having completed upper secondary education is 87% (thus already above the Lisbon objective of 85%), and the drop-out rate was 9.5% in 2002: the lowest in the European Union.

BELGIUM

Employment is currently a priority of the new federal government in Belgium in the context of low economic growth and little improvement in employment rates. The overall employment rate was 59.9% in Belgium in 2002, compared to an average rate of 64.3% in the European Union as a whole. Young male unemployment was 16% and young female unemployment 15.2% in 2002, with young male employment rates of 37.3% and young female employment rates of 30.2% in 2002.

Belgium has not fully implemented guideline 1, as only about 60% of young people in 2002 benefited from an individual action plan before reaching six months or unemployment, although this is an improvement on the figure of 51% in 2001. At the regional level there have been some specific measure directed at young unemployed (such as the 'Jobkaart' in Flanders) and the

Brussels capital Region initiated a pilot project for young people. At the federal level, the 'Rosetta Plan' (first-job agreements) has been in place since 2000, and it was expanded in 2002. It aims to make self-employment more accessible for young people and to facilitate the access of the more excluded into employment. However, it is clear that for the country as a whole there is a need for a more systematic effort to tackle the problem of youth unemployment, which is higher than the EU average.

In terms of education, almost 82% of 20-24 year-olds had completed upper secondary education in 2002 so Belgium is close to achieving the Lisbon objective of 85%.

DENMARK

Denmark has consistently had employment levels which are either the highest or almost the highest in the European Union and has therefore already reached the Lisbon and Stockholm objectives for employment levels. Denmark has also set itself targets to increase employment levels from 75.4% in 2000 to 78% in 2010 among the 15-64 age-group. Young male unemployment was 8.8% and young female unemployment was 5.2% in 2002, while young male employment was 70.6% and young female employment was 67% in 2002, therefore among the highest levels in the European Union (the Netherlands and the UK also have higher than average youth employment rates). Despite this, Denmark is keen to increase labour supply among young people and plans to extend the measures currently in place for the unemployed between 18-24 to also cover the 25-29 age-group to encourage young people to finish either their studies or training more quickly.

Only 10% of young people in Denmark remain in unemployment for as much as six months. Denmark takes an individualised approach to the unemployed, trying to identify the measures that the individual needs to help him or her find a job. An individualised job plan is supported by an intensive contact approach and support measures. This approach is obviously successful in dealing with the problem of youth unemployment.

Denmark operates a policy of free access to youth education programmes, higher education programmes and adult and vocational training. Denmark already reaches the target of over 85% of 22 year-olds completing upper secondary education. In 2002, the Government introduced an action plan for 'Better Education and Training', which aims to increase quality, flexibility and delivery of education and training. For young people, the Danish Parliament adopted an Act in 2003 to provide more coherent and independent occupational guidance for young people by merging the school, youth education and higher education guidance systems.

FINLAND

The current Finnish government has set the objective of raising employment

by creating 100,000 new jobs by 2007 to support the goal of increasing the overall employment level to 75% in Finland by 2011. Finland has achieved the mid-term objectives set by the Stockholm European Council with an overall employment rate of 67.7% and a female employment rate of 66.2%. Youth unemployment levels were above the EU average in Finland in 2002, at 20.9% for young men and 20.5% for young women. Youth employment rates were 48.8% for young men, and higher for young women at 50.5%. Finland recognises the importance of maximising employment potential in the context of an ageing population. The NAP states that 'as the labour supply decreases, vocational education and training will have to be intensified further, along with opportunities for lifelong learning. The Government aims to speed up the transition from basic education to higher education, and from studies to work.'¹⁰⁹

109 Finland's National Action Plan for Employment 2003, p. 3.

Finland implements guideline 1 comprehensively in its national employment policies. In 2002, 99% of young people either ceased to be unemployed or had a job-seeking plan before they had been unemployed for six months and for the period 2003-7, the government aims to offer training, a traineeship or a workshop job to every unemployed person under 25 after three months of unemployment at the latest.

In 2000, 84% of 22 year olds have completed upper secondary education and the drop-out rate from education is low. The Finnish government is concerned with the delays in beginning post-secondary studies, which are generally begun at 21 in Finland, with the majority graduating between the ages of 25 and 27. There is therefore an increasing focus on improving the transition between school and further education and between school and employment. Measures to allocate vocational training places more quickly, to develop personal student counselling and reinforce practical training opportunities will all be increased and incentives to complete studies on time introduced.

FRANCE

Not only does France have relatively high youth unemployment rates (18.4% for young men and 22.8% for young women), but its youth employment rates are the lowest in the European Union at 32.7% for young men and 26.5% for young women. The overall employment rate in France is 63% and the female employment rate is 56.7%. The 79.5% of those in employment in France are concentrated in the 25-54 age-group. Thus economic growth and employment creation will be crucial for France to achieve the Lisbon objectives by 2010.

France has a system of Personalised Action Plans (PAPs) for the unemployed which are adapted to the needs of the individual job seeker. In 2003, almost half of all job seekers benefited from a PAP. In general, a particular focus is on promoting access to employment among young people, especially those who are less qualified. One particular programme directed at young people

is the Youth-in-Business contract to try and promote the participation of young people in the market sector. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Research is also keen to promote entrepreneurship among young people and an Observatory (Observatoire des pratiques pédagogiques en entrepreneuriat) was established in 2001 with the mission to train young people in entrepreneurship and initiate projects in this area. The observatory has initiated a campaign at all levels of the educational system to promote entrepreneurship and established an internet site.¹¹⁰ Another programme is the New Services/Jobs for Young People programme which seeks to expand the third sector as a source of sustainable employment for young people.

70% of school students complete upper secondary education, although only 62% are awarded the baccalaureate. Others complete secondary education in the form of training. France is investing in its educational system with a view to both improving the quality of education and the quantity of those that can benefit from it. It aims to ensure that all pupils acquire basic skills and have learnt about information and communication technology. The former concern is linked to the fact that approximately 2 million people are functionally illiterate in France.

The draft Joint Employment Report highlights the 'weak position of young people and or immigrants in the labour market' and recommends that the reduction of 'early school leaving and easier access to apprenticeships should be pursued.'¹¹¹

GERMANY

In the context of a general trend towards an increase in unemployment levels in 2002, the young male unemployment rate was 11.3% and the young female rate was 7.9%, whilst 53% of young men were in employment and 47.8% of young women were. This represented an approximate increase in youth unemployment of 53,500 people. In 2003 the Ausbilden jetzt - Erfolg braucht alle (Training now - Success needs everybody) initiative was launched in conjunction with the social partners in order to offer a job or vocational training every young unemployed person. The maximum time that a young person can receive unemployment benefit will now be twelve months. This new initiative is in addition to the Immediate Action Plan for the Reduction of Youth Unemployment, which was started in 1999. The Jump Plus programme, launched in July 2003, is also directed at providing help in finding a job or obtaining qualifications for 100,000 young people.

In 2002, 78.1% of 22 year olds had completed upper secondary education and the completion rate is even higher for those currently finishing school. The Länder have committed to modernising school systems and improving the quality of education.

¹¹⁰ <http://www.entrepreneuriat.net>

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.44.

GREECE

Greece has recently experience strong economic growth, being second only to Ireland in the European Union. This was reflected in 2003 in an increase in employment rates, which are now 57.9% for the population as a whole. There has also been a significant reduction in youth unemployment rates over the last five years. In 2002, young male unemployment stood at 18.7% and young female unemployment at 33.7%, with 39.4% of young men and 33.2% of young women in employment. Youth unemployment also tends to be of a longer duration in Greece than other EU Member States. Furthermore, despite higher increases in female employment rates (double those of the male rates), the Greek employment market remains characterised by significant differences in male and female employment rates with the latter standing at only 44% and Greece will need to make significant progress to achieve the Lisbon objectives. Thus the young and women are the two groups most likely to be unemployed in Greece.

For young people, personalised services are being introduced in accordance with guideline 1 to give every unemployed young person a job offer or training opportunity within six months of unemployment. In terms of education, a new IT and telecommunications infrastructure is planned for schools, there will be subsidies to reduce interest levels on student loans and Second Chance Schools and Free Choice Schools are being developed. There is also a New Jobs Programme aimed at creating 5,000 jobs for young people aged 18-30 and the Young Self-Employed Professionals Programme for 10,000 young unemployed.

82% of 22-Year olds completed upper secondary education in Greece in 2002 so Greece is on target to reach the Lisbon objective of 85% by 2010. However, there remains a significant skills gap in Greece with an estimated deficit of 30,000-50,000 people for certain jobs. Greece is therefore committed to investing in IT opportunities to increase skills in this field and increasing participation rates in Lifelong Learning, which stand at only 1.2% of the working age population.

IRELAND

Ireland has experienced extraordinary economic growth in recent years and consequent increases in employment levels (an increase of 43% of those in employment between 1993 and 2000). However, 2002 saw a reduction in employment growth levels to an annual rate of 1.4%. The employment rate at the end of 2002 was 65%. (74.9% for men and 55% for women aged 15-64). Youth unemployment rates were well below the EU average at 8.7% for young men and 6.6% for young women, whilst 53.1% of young men were in employment, compared to 44.9% of young women.

Shortly after the initiation of the Luxembourg Process, the Irish instituted

a systematic engagement with young people as soon as they reached six-months of unemployment. In addition to this there are various programmes to promote entrepreneurship (Junior Achievement, Youth Enterprise Ireland and Young Entrepreneurs), as well as schemes to strengthen the links between businesses and schools.

Ireland aimed to meet the Lisbon objective of 85% of 22 year olds completing upper secondary education by 2003 and aims to increase this figure to 90% by 2006. It is also committed to reducing illiteracy rates and the proportion of young people who leave school early. The Youthreach programme aims to offer second chance education and training to 15-18 year olds and integrate the unskilled into the labour market and provide more extensive lifelong learning. It is also committed to improving Information and Communication Technology training and developing language skills among its population.

ITALY

The employment rate for the population as a whole in Italy is low at 56.4% (the female employment rate is very low at 42%) so considerable progress will be needed for Italy to meet the Lisbon objectives. The Government objectives are to reach a general employment level of 58.5%, a female employment rate of 46% and an employment rate of 40% among elder workers by 2005. Youth unemployment rates are high at 22.6% for young men and 31.4% for young women. Moreover, Italy had youth employment rates among the lowest in Europe at 41.4% for young men and 31% for young women in 2002.

In 2003 Italy made a major reform of the employment market and introduced a welfare to work strategy for the period 2003-2006. The new law also includes instruments to improve the transition from school to work, improve and modernise the education system and develop lifelong learning. For young people, it is envisaged that they should be found a new start within four months of becoming unemployed.

65% of 22 year olds have completed upper secondary education, a figure which rises to 71.4% if those who completed vocational courses are also included. It is therefore clear that Italy has to make rapid progress to meet the Figure of 85% set at Lisbon. The Italian government and regions have reinforced efforts to achieve this objective by reforming the school system with the 'diritto-dovere' (right and duty) principal for twelve years of education or training. Substantial funds have been allocated to supporting combined education and training and creating new initiatives in this field. They are also trying to improve participation in lifelong learning. The draft JER notes that 'educational reform should contribute to the prevention of early school leaving and increase the labour market relevance of tertiary education'.¹¹² The latter is important as youth unemployment is higher among those with a university education than among those only with upper secondary education.

LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg had an employment rate of 65.4% in 2002 and an unemployment rate of 2.8%. Young men experienced an unemployment rate of only 5.3% in 2002, compared to 9% for young women. The youth employment rate was 38.2% for young men and 31.2% for young women.

Luxembourg's employment policy responds to guideline 1 by providing that all unemployed have access to a work contract or apprenticeship before they have been unemployed for six months. The NAP outlines the importance of training in order to encourage girls and young women to value their basic training in terms of the employment market and to take part in training, which, in order to contribute to the general growth in female employment, is intended to lead to employment and careers in areas where they are still underrepresented.

Luxembourg proposed a number of measures in the 2002 NAP in order to improve primary and secondary education with a view to achieving the objective of 85% of 22 year olds completing upper secondary education, as only 74.2% had achieved this level in 2002. Given the relatively high number of children who are from different cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds, there is a strong need for schools to adapt to take account of their needs in achieving this goal.

THE NETHERLANDS

Despite a reduction in economic growth and a concurrent increase in unemployment, the Netherlands had an overall employment rate of 75.8% and a female employment rate of 66.8% in 2002, so it has therefore already met the Lisbon and Stockholm employment objectives. Youth unemployment is very low at 6.3% for young men and 5.5% for young women, with 72% of young men working and 70.2% of young women working: the highest youth employment rates in the European Union.

The Dutch government submitted an Action Plan on youth unemployment to the Dutch parliament in June 2003. It set an objective for the 2003-2007 period that youth unemployment (15-22 year olds, excluding school children and students) should not be more than double the total unemployment rate. It also committed to ensuring that no young person was unemployed for more than six months. There is also a previous commitment to reduce the number of young people with no basic qualifications by 30% by 2006 and by 50% in 2010 in comparison to the situation in 1999. The Dutch employment policy satisfies guideline 1 of the Employment Guidelines through the Action Plan, which aims to ensure that every young person is either studying or working within six months of becoming unemployed. Given the significant proportion of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, there is also a commitment to raise the employment rate among this group to 54% by 2005, a factor which will also be important as young people make up a large proportion of this group.

For this reason, the draft JER recommends that consideration should be given to ‘...facilitating the integration of minorities and non-nationals into both the school system and the labour market.’¹¹³ There are also individual programmes for young people who are ‘at risk’, which include personal counselling, training in completing job applications and short job-related courses.

In terms of education, 77% of 22-23 year olds have completed upper secondary educations, a figure which will need to increase by 8% to meet the Lisbon objective. In order to do this, measures have been put in place to reduce the school drop out rate by improving career planning and guidance and through educational reform.

PORTUGAL

Since 2001 Portugal has experienced a significant increase in unemployment rates. In 2002 the overall employment rate was 67.2%, with a rate of 60.7% for women. Thus Portugal has met the Stockholm target of 67% but has to increase its overall employment rate slightly in order to reach the Lisbon objective of 70%. Youth unemployment rates were 9.7% for young men and 13.9% for young women, with 52.3% of young men and 42.2% of young women in employment. The gap between the average unemployment rate and the youth employment rate improved in 2000, but increased again to 6.4 percentage points in the first quarter of 2003, a figure higher than the difference of 5.3 percentage points in 1998. This is a reflection of the particular vulnerability of young people to economic downturns.

A series of temporary measures have been introduced in Portugal with youth as one of the priority target groups. There have also been some changes to the existing INSERJOVEM programme. This includes counselling, professional traineeships, vocational traineeships, incentives to hire young people, support to self-employment and enterprises taking on the unemployed, promotion of access to vocational training.

Portugal has one of the lowest educational levels in the European Union, and has actually experienced a reduction in the proportion of the resident population with basic education or less between 1991 and 2001. Portugal has still to make substantial progress in reducing the average rate for leaving school early, from 35% of 18-24 year olds in 2006 to 25% in 2010. In 2002, only 44.9% of 22 year-olds have completed upper secondary education. It has therefore set the target of increasing the proportion to 55% in 2006 and to 65% in 2010. There is a commitment to improving the quality of basic education through developing educational itineraries, providing better access to ICT and making structural reforms of the education system. Nevertheless, the draft JER places considerable emphasis on the importance of tackling this issue, stating that ‘urgent measures are required to reduce the level of early school leavers, and to assure the provision of an education system with greater quality and more responsive to labour market needs’.¹¹⁴

113 *ibid.*, p.49.

114 *ibid.*, p.51.

SPAIN

Spain experienced 2% economic growth in 2002 and the same level of employment growth. In 2002, 58.8% of the overall population was in employment, and 39.8% of women were. Thus Spain is unlikely to meet the Stockholm objectives and will have to make substantial progress in employment creation to meet the Lisbon objectives in 2010. Nevertheless, the forecast is for an annual increase in employment of 1.8% until 2006. Youth unemployment rates are high for young people in Spain. This is particularly the case for young women who experienced unemployment at a rate of 27.3% in 2002, compared to 18.5% for young men. The employment rate for young men was 52.4% and 41.4% for young women.

In response to guideline 1, Spanish employment policy aims to offer occupational training, employment of 'social interest', employment for the disabled and career guidance and advice on self-employment for the young unemployed. However, current provision does not appear to be sufficient to deal with the quantity of young unemployed in Spain.

Participation in secondary education is increasing (from 73.6% in 1997 to 77.1% in 2003) but only 66.6% of 22 year olds had completed upper secondary education in 2002.

SWEDEN

Sweden experienced a slowdown in economic growth in 2003, although this is expected to be reversed with GDP growth of 2% foreseen for 2004. The overall employment rate in Sweden in 2003 was 74.9%, with the female employment rate at 72.4%, and an older workers employment rate of 68% so Sweden has already met the Lisbon objectives in all three areas. Youth unemployment was around three times the average of 4% for the 25+ age-group at 13.8% for young men and 11.9% for young women in 2002. Youth employment levels were 53% for young men and 53.6% for young women.

In relation to guideline 1, the Swedish National Action Plan for 2003 reports that more than 97% of young people were offered a new start in the form of employment or an employability measure. It also recognises that to 'meet future labour requirements and prevent men and women from being permanently excluded from the labour market, the labour reserve must be mobilised. This reserve currently comprises young and older people, those born outside Sweden, and people with disabilities'.¹¹⁵ Thus, the mobilisation of young people into employment is accorded importance in Swedish employment policy.

In terms of education, 86.5% of 22 year-olds have completed upper secondary education in Sweden, with slightly higher rates among young women than young men. Sweden is committed to increasing this proportion as it considers

115 Sweden's Action Plan for Employment 2003, p.14.

full upper secondary education a prerequisite for successful integration into the labour market. In 2002, 10.4% of the annual cohort of school students left school early. The newly established Swedish National Agency for School Improvement has the remit to develop ways to tackle this problem. In addition, a major expansion of higher education has also been initiated in order to reach the target of 50% of the annual cohort to start studying in higher education before the age of 25 (in 2002, the figure was 43%). The draft JER therefore recommends that Sweden should 'ensure the school system takes effective action to reduce early school leaving, and increase access to training for the low skilled, particularly inactive youth.'¹¹⁶

UNITED KINGDOM

In terms of its overall employment rate, at 74.7%, the UK already meets the Lisbon target. Youth unemployment rates are 12.9% for young men and 8.8% for young women. The UK has the second highest youth employment rate in Europe after the Netherlands. 68.8% of young people are in employment, 72.3% of young men and 64.8% of young women. The UK's activation strategy is based on rights and responsibilities, with the Jobseeker's Allowance been provided only to those who can actively prove that they are in search of a job. The New Deal programme responds to guideline 1 for young people, providing 13-26 weeks of work experience, job-focussed training or self-employment support. No figures are given for the number of 22 year-olds have completed upper secondary education either in the NAP or in Eurostat statistics. However, it should be noted that there is considerable emphasis on increasing access to lifelong learning in the United Kingdom.

The employment guidelines include principles for 'good governance in the implementation of the employment guidelines', with a specific reference to the 'involvement of parliamentary bodies, social partners and other relevant actors'. The Employment Title in the Treaty provides the basis for the consultation of the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions in the Luxembourg process and the social partners (the Trade Unions and Employers) have been consulted as part of the process since its initiation. Currently there is little consultation of civil society groups, either at the European or the national level.¹¹⁷ One exception to this was the consultation of a broader range of organisations in the evaluation of the first five years of the strategy which included the European Anti-Poverty Network.

An examination of the National Action Plans for employment for 2003 shows a variety of information both in relation to the employment situation of young people in the European Union and the measures and policies in place to try and tackle the problem of youth unemployment in the European Union. It is clear that although the Luxembourg Process has been in place for six years now, there are still some Member States who have not adequately confronted the problem of high levels of youth unemployment in their countries or that youth unemployment is so closely linked to the need for

¹¹⁶ op.cit. p.53.

¹¹⁷ One exception to this relevant to the youth field is the consultation of the National Youth Council of Ireland as a social partner by the Irish government.

considerable economic growth that the problem will remain endemic. Having said this though, a number of Member States have made significant progress in reducing youth unemployment and in tackling the problems linked to the transition between education and employment. There has also been a widespread effort to reform education systems and improve educational standards with a view to improving the skills, knowledge and education of the workforce and provide the workers needed by the knowledge society.

For the future, especially in light of the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, it is clear that efforts to tackle youth unemployment in certain countries and regions will need to be reinforced. Currently the situation faced by a young person growing up and going to school in Denmark is a world apart from a person of the same age in Poland, or even parts of the present Member States. Furthermore, as the Employment Taskforce report notes the 'failure to use the potential of Europe's human resources to the full and achieve higher rates of economic growth'¹¹⁸ The demographic context provided by the ageing of the population means that 'improving the participation of women and older workers along with other groups who are underrepresented in the labour market is also central to meeting the goals of increasing economic growth and achieving greater social cohesion'.¹¹⁹ The other groups referred to by the Employment Taskforce must include young people. It is interesting to note from the NAPS that some countries are beginning to recognise the importance of maximising their employment potential and that they perceive young people as part of this, but the promotion of high quality standards of education, the smoothing of the transition from education to employment and the commitment to reduce both the length and incidence of youth unemployment are also crucial to this. By ensuring the optimum participation of all young people in the employment market as soon as they are ready to work, some of the current and future problems related to a shrinking workforce can be addressed. There is also a need to address the problems that young people face more than any other section of the population, in terms of low pay, poor working conditions, pressure to work in the informal economy and short-term contracts. The European Employment Strategy could thus benefit from an increased consideration of the young in the Luxembourg Process.

118 'Jobs, Jobs, Jobs: Creating more employment in Europe' Report of the Employment Taskforce chaired by Wim Kok, November 2003, p.13

119 *ibid.*, p.14.

HOW YOUTH ORGANISATIONS CAN WORK WITH THE YOUNG UNEMPLOYED

Many of the European Youth Forum's member organisations have run projects at the national level to help young people enter the labour market. Such projects have been particularly successful with marginalised or socially excluded young people. As the projects presented at the Youth Forum Hearing on Employment and Social Exclusion at the European Economic and Social Committee showed in 2000, employment projects organised by young people themselves are more successful at engaging young people than state-run projects. Youth organisations can have a clearer understanding of the

problems faced by young people in the labour market and are used to using non-formal learning methodologies that can be very successful with those that have difficulty with more formal structures. These projects also provide evidence of how well young participants relate to their peers as project leaders.

An example of a project organised by young people for young people is that of LaborX - a member of the Vlaamse Jeugdraad (the Flemish Youth Council in Belgium).¹²⁰ LaborX is an organisation which focuses on social employment projects. It became aware from youth workers of the problems faced specifically by deprived youth, who could not afford to be involved in long-term or formal training programmes that did not provide them with an adequate income. LaborX therefore decided to try and develop an employment project which would provide young people quickly with temporary jobs paid at market rates. The result was the establishment of the Instant A (Instant Arbeid, meaning Instant Work) office in Antwerp in 1999.

Instant A acted as an employment agency, but instead of being established in the city centre it was set up in an area where there were many unemployed and socially excluded young people. Young people were initially brought in to the project by street workers and youth workers, and then by word of mouth. In Antwerp it was a success story from the very beginning with 75 young people working for 4,717 hours in the first two and a half months. By 2000, 830 previously unemployed young people had found work through the Instant A agency. In Spring 2000 a contract was signed with the Flemish government to extend the project to Mechelen, Ghent, Ostend and Vilvoorde.

Instant A has been particularly successful with working with young people from ethnic minorities: 42% who do not have Belgian nationality and 18% are naturalised. The founders of LaborX had a very good understanding of young people as a peer group and took the approach of combining aspects of a traditional job agency with support measures for the participants. Each office has a social guide who is concerned with the young people as individuals and provides guidance as needed before, during and after an employment contract. They also provide additional services - such as a transport service - to help young people with little or no income overcome the practical hurdles that prevent them from entering the labour market. In working with young people who are not Belgian, the Instant A agencies also provide them with support in dealing with the authorities on such issues as work permits. The Instant A approach has been successful in motivating young people and providing them with work experience, believing that 'each employment, however short, is a good step in the right direction'. The Instant A agencies represent an innovative approach to successfully integrating more deprived young people into the labour market, and an example of youth organisations can use their understanding of their peers to develop a project that successfully responds to young people's needs.

¹²⁰ This section is based on a description of the Instant A agencies provided by the Vlaamse Jeugdraad. More information is available on the project at www.instanta.be or by contacting wolf@instanta.be or ellen@instanta.be.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown how youth unemployment remains a problem in many European countries. It has also analysed the particular problems faced by young people in finding a permanent foothold in the labour market, and the difficulties they experience in terms of poor working conditions and precarious employment. In the European Union, the European Employment Strategy has contributed to addressing these issues in some countries, but much more work needs to be done. An increased focus on the specificity of the problems encountered by young people in the employment market is needed, combined with a quantitative commitment to increasing youth employment levels.

In developing employability projects for the young unemployed, a lot can be learnt from the involvement of youth organisations with their unemployed peers. The integration of non-formal methods with more formal training or work experience can be very successful in engaging young people, especially the socially disadvantaged or those that feel alienated by authorities and formal structures. The widespread development of such projects on the ground at grass-roots level is important to complement the more centralised programmes and to reach out to those that are most socially isolated. The successful engagement of the young unemployed and the development of smooth transitions from education to employment are vital to ensure that young people from all backgrounds and regions in Europe have the opportunities to enter the employment market and participate actively and autonomously in society.

CHAPTER FOUR – SOCIAL INCLUSION

By Katy Orr

The terms ‘social inclusion’ and ‘social exclusion’ have become an increasing part of our vocabulary over the last decade, but many people remain unsure of exactly what they mean, how they differ from ‘poverty’, how they can be measured and who the socially excluded are. In the Joint Report on Social Inclusion in 2003 the following definitions of poverty, social exclusion and social inclusion are given:

Poverty: People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantages through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation. They are often excluded and marginalised from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted.

Social exclusion: Social exclusion is a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from job, income and education opportunities as well as social and community networks and activities. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and thus often feeling powerless and unable to take control over the decisions that affect their day to day lives.

Social inclusion: Social inclusion is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights.¹²¹

Similarly, the European Commission’s Communication on ‘Building an Inclusive Europe’ defined social exclusion as being the result of ‘several types of deprivation and barriers which alone or together prevent the full participation in areas such as education, health, environment, housing, culture, access to rights or family support, as well as training and job opportunities.’¹²² In general social exclusion is used as a broad concept

121 Joint Report on Social Inclusion summarising the results of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (2003-2005). Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. COM(2003)773 final, p.9.

122 European Commission, Communication ‘Building an Inclusive Europe’ COM (2000) 79 final, p.6.

which can take into account a variety of factors which act alone or together to limit an individual's opportunities and affect their quality of life. Social exclusion not only affects living conditions and material well-being, but also results in 'the denial (or non-realisation) of the civil, political and social rights of citizenship'. Social exclusion is most likely to be caused by unemployment and poverty, but its character and impact are frequently multi-dimensional.

People can be socially excluded because they have low incomes, if they are unemployed, because they have poor health, housing, education, training and skills, because of a lack of civil rights, because of their gender, ethnic origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, because of a physical or mental disability, or because of their nationality or place of residence. Moreover, social exclusion is often experienced dynamically. Some people may become trapped in social exclusion for most of their lives, while others experience social exclusion temporarily. People are also more vulnerable to social exclusion at certain points in the life cycle, such as during childhood, the transition from education to employment and old age. The least likely to be socially excluded are those aged 25-50.

This chapter examines social exclusion as it is experienced by young people aged 16-24 in the European Union. The European Youth Forum has campaigned against youth poverty and social exclusion, organising - for example - a Hearing at the European Economic and Social Committee on youth social exclusion and employment in 2000.¹²³ It has also commissioned reports on social protection in the European Union and in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as adopting a policy paper on young people and social exclusion.¹²⁴

Although social exclusion has become a commonly used term in many countries to describe the combination of factors which act to restrict income, diminish well-being and full participation in society, comprehensive methods for quantifying social exclusion are relatively new. While statistics existed in such areas as poverty, unemployment, health, education, and housing, these figures were infrequently examined together in order to understand their combined impact on individuals. This has changed to a significant extent since the initiation of the Social Inclusion Process by the European Union. Following a broad-ranging consultation of experts and the Member States by the European Commission after the Lisbon European Council, the Social Protection Committee adopted a report on indicators in 2001 which aimed to develop a common and compatible approach to collecting indicators, which were endorsed by the Laeken European Council.¹²⁵ This report collects together a large number of indicators in order to reflect both the multidimensional character of social exclusion and the varying traditions and realities in the Member States. It identifies eighteen indicators, which it groups into two areas: primary and secondary indicators. Although many of these are very technical, it is nevertheless interesting to list these as they help to give a better understanding of social exclusion. They are as follows:

123 See 'Get In! Report on the European Youth Hearing on Social Exclusion and Employment <http://www.youthforum.org/en/press/reports/better/0134-2k.pdf>

124 David Green 'Taking Steps: Young People and Social Protection in the European Union', European Youth Forum, 1998. Silya Kovacheva 'Sinking or Swimming in the Waves of Transformation: Young People and Social Protection in Central and Eastern Europe', European Youth Forum 2000. European Youth Forum Policy on Young People and Social Exclusion, adopted by the European Youth Forum Executive Committee Geneva, Switzerland, November 1999. <http://www.youthforum.org/en/press/reports/better/0134-2k.pdf>

125 Social Protection Committee 'Report on Indicators in the field of Poverty and Social Exclusion' October 2001.

126 The extent of low income is measured in terms of the proportion of the population with equivalised income below 60% of the median equivalised in each country. The median income is preferred to the mean income as it is less affected by extreme values in income distribution. The 'poverty gap' is defined as the extra income necessary to bring the household equivalised income of a person under the poverty line level with income at the poverty line.

127 The Gini coefficient is an index for comparing income distribution across the entire income range with a theoretically ideal distribution in which everyone has the same income (gini = 0%).

128 Ibid., p.3-4.

129 The Social Situation in Europe 2002, European Commission 2002, p.13 & 93.

130 Ibid.

131 Thus there is greater equality in Denmark, Sweden and Austria for example, than there is in Portugal, Belgium, Spain, Greece and Italy. The UK is something of an exception to this rule as although it has above average income, it also has above average inequality. Ibid., p.89.

132 This is the title used by Eurostat to define the percentage of those who have less than 60% of median equivalised income.

Primary Indicators

1. Low income rate after transfers with low-income threshold set at 60% of median income (with breakdowns by gender, age, most frequent activity status, household type and tenure status; as illustrative examples, the values for typical households)¹²⁶
2. Distribution of income (income quintile ratio)
3. Persistence of low income
4. Median low income group
5. Regional cohesion
6. Long term unemployment rate
7. People living in jobless households
8. Early school leavers not in further education or training
9. Life expectancy at birth
10. Self perceived health status

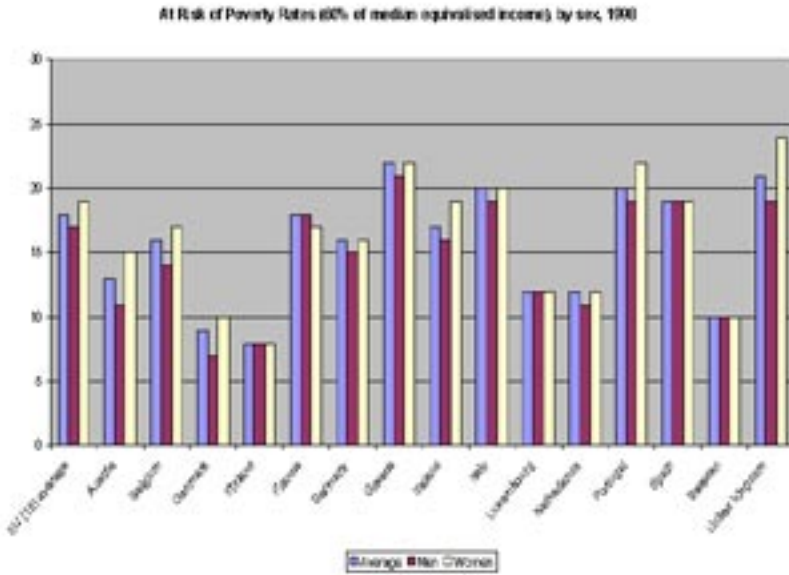
Secondary Indicators

11. Dispersion around the 60% median income threshold
12. Low income rate anchored at a point in time
13. Low income rate before transfers
14. Distribution of income (Gini coefficient)¹²⁷
15. Persistence of low income (based on 50% of median income)
16. Long term unemployment share
17. Very long term unemployment rate
18. Persons with low educational attainment¹²⁸

In order to assess the extent and nature of social exclusion it is necessary to focus on poverty and unemployment. At the European Union level, indicator number 1 referred to above effectively sets the 'low income threshold as 60% of the national median equivalised income level' following income transfers. Using this definition, 18% of the European Union population lived in poverty in 1998, with over half of them at risk of persistent poverty.¹²⁹ In addition, it is also interesting to examine income distribution among the population. In 1998, the poorest 20% of the population received only 8% of the total income, while the top 20% received 39% and statistics indicate that this 'gap' between rich and poor is widening in the European Union rather than diminishing.¹³⁰ Countries with lower levels of average income also tend to have higher levels of inequality.¹³¹ By considering 'at risk of poverty figures' according to country and age-group, it is possible to develop a comparative picture of how young people are effected by poverty in the European Union.¹³²

This graph below shows that there were significant variations in poverty rates in the European Union in 1998 (the most recently available statistics), with the lowest rate evident in Finland at 8%, and the highest rate in Greece at 22%. This broadly reflects the North-South divide in terms of wealth and GDP level, as well as a commitment

to redistribution of wealth and equality. A further interesting factor which is shown in this graph is the gender dimension of poverty. The EU rate for men is 17%, while the rate for women is 19%, thus indicating that women suffer disproportionately from poverty. In Belgium, Denmark, Austria, Portugal and the UK, the difference between the average male and female rates are 3 percentage points or more.

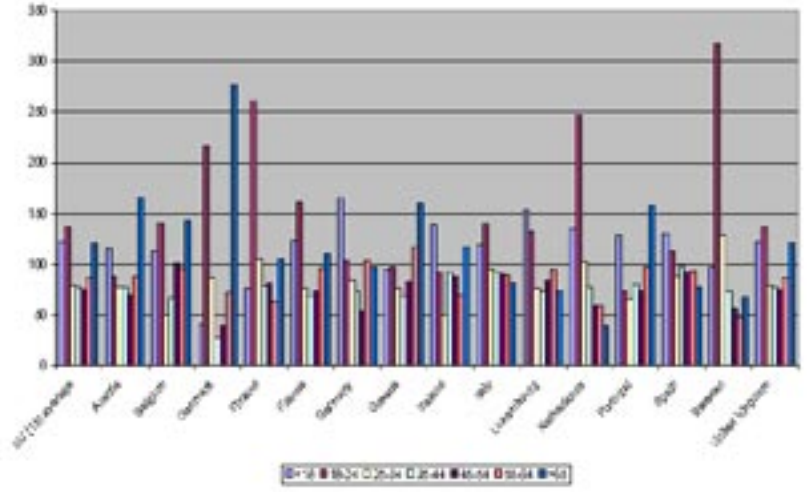


133 Eurostat 'European Social Statistics. Income, poverty and Social exclusion: 2nd report. Data 1994-1997' Luxembourg, 2002, p.48.

Source: Eurostat

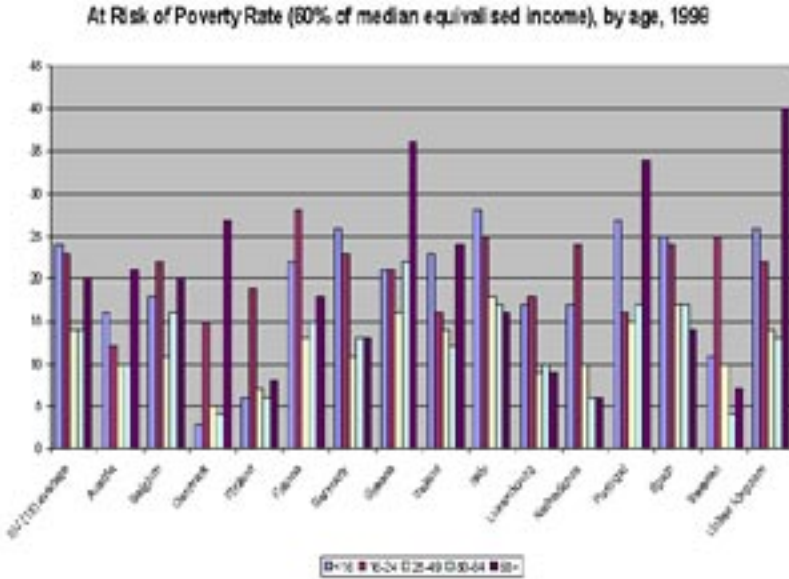
An examination of the 'at risk of poverty' rates according to age group, reveals that those under the age of 25 or those over the age of 65 are the most vulnerable to poverty, with a high rate existing among the 16-24 age-group. The European Social Statistics Second report on 'Income, poverty and social exclusion' notes that 'in 1997 children and young people as well as persons of retirement age had poverty risks which were approximately 25 percent higher than the average'.¹³³ Based on the European Union average, young people were more at risk of poverty than any other single age-group. The graph below show the poverty risks for the key age-groups in the Member States.

Poverty Risk according to age-group 1997 in the European Union



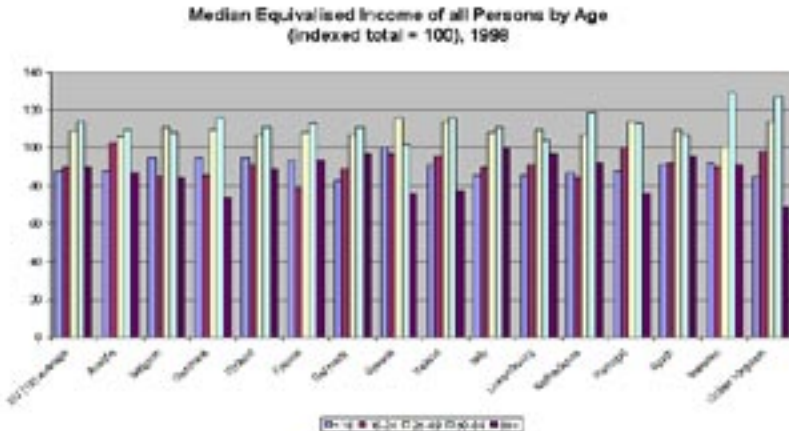
Source: Eurostat

The high risk levels of poverty among young people are closely linked to unemployment and low incomes. While people in other age-groups may suffer poverty temporarily, this is less often the case for the young and the elderly. For example, 7% of the EU population as a whole could be defined as poor for the three-year period 1994-96 (i.e. they experienced persistent poverty), while 32% of the population experienced a low income at least once in this three-year period. However, it is interesting to note that those aged less than twenty-five had the highest rates of persistent poverty, at 9%. Thus young people are among the most likely to suffer from income poverty, and their poverty is the most likely to be of a long-term nature. The graph below shows the proportion of each age-group 'at risk of poverty' rates for five age-groups in the European Union in 1998.



Source: Eurostat

It can also be seen from this graph that the poverty rates among young people vary from country to country, but in some countries young people are the most likely of any age-group to experience poverty. Income statistics also show similar results. The graph below shows the median equivalised income for five different age-groups and it can be seen that, on average, young people’s median incomes in the EU were 90% of the national medians in 1998 (this represents a decrease of 2% since 1994).



While, as already mentioned, poverty is a key element of social exclusion, it is not the only one. Having said this though, evidence indicates that people on low incomes face cumulated problems almost three times as often as the rest of the population. Young people's poverty is closely linked to high rates of unemployment among this age group (see chapter 3 for figures on youth unemployment). Due to the higher levels of unemployment among the 15-24 age-group, young people are more at risk of social exclusion than the adult population as a whole. Moreover, the income of those in employment tends to be lower, with a large proportion of young people constituting the 'working poor'. Limited access to social protection restricts the amount of income that is formally redistributed to young people, although considerable informal transfers of income occur within family networks, with young people receiving financial and in-kind support from their relatives. However, low incomes among young people have been partly responsible for the increase in the age at which independent households are established. As chapter 2 shows, young people are also spending longer in education and the provision of financial support to students has either not grown in real terms or has been cut in many countries. Thus young people are more likely to remain at home with low incomes or accumulate debt than they did in the past.

The degree to which young people suffer from social exclusion varies. While we can assume that a large proportion of young people may experience social exclusion at some point between the ages of 15 and 24, the severity and length of that experience may differ considerably. Young people who suffer from social exclusion for a number of reasons, for example those that live in a deprived urban area, those who are disabled, those who are from an ethnic minority background and are those who are unemployed are particularly likely to experience a longer period of social exclusion. For other young people, a period of social exclusion may be more temporary and relate to a short period of unemployment.

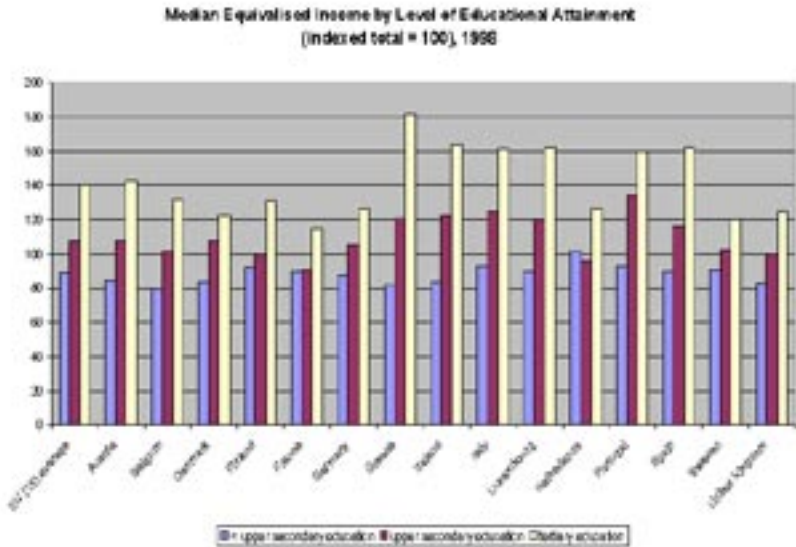
The costs of social exclusion are high, not just for the individual but also for society as a whole. Social exclusion among young people is a key cause of disaffection among this group. In some cases it may lead to depression, stress or mental illness. More generally, low levels of self-esteem resulting from social exclusion can have a long-term impact on young people's ability to participate not only in education, training or employment but in society in general. Socially excluded young people are more likely to experience health problems and it should be noted that the second highest cause of death among young men aged 15-30 is suicide.¹³⁴ In extreme cases, social exclusion is linked to deviant behaviour and criminality. In many countries, social exclusion of young people is reinforced by the stigmatisation of school drop-outs or the young unemployed. Negative attitudes towards young people prevent employers from recruiting them.

As we have seen, young people are one of the sections of the population most likely to experience social exclusion. For many socially excluded young

people the problem is not a new one as they have grown up in a family which has experienced social exclusion or live in an area or community which is characterised by high levels of social exclusion. Young people experience discrimination due to their ethnic origin, religion, or their sexual orientation.

The evidence indicates that there are certain points in the life course where individuals are more vulnerable to social exclusion, notably during childhood, youth and old age. For young people, this risk is particularly strong due to the transition from education to employment and from dependence to independence. This is a period of vulnerability for young people until they gain a firm foothold in employment and can depend on an adequate income. But youth is also often a period of disaffection. Young people can feel alienated by society, by education systems and by the conditions in which they live.

Social policy analysts have often pointed at the problem of education systems in failing to secure the continuing participation of larger numbers of young people in education. As education is generally recognised as crucial to the future of an individual, poor education can have a major impact on social exclusion. The graph below show how income is linked to educational level, with those without a full upper secondary education having 89% of the median income at the EU level. Thus those with lower levels of education are more likely to be vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. The risk for those who are functionally illiterate is even higher as this makes finding employment even harder.



Source: Eurostat

Among young people there are certain groups who are more likely to experience poverty and social exclusion than others. These include young women, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds and the young disabled. The reasons for their higher risk are linked to discrimination, lower educational achievement for some and lower earning capacity. A small but particular group of young people who are more likely to experience poverty and social exclusion are young mothers, especially those who are single parents. In countries such as the UK with high teenage pregnancy rates, the risk of social exclusion is high for young mothers.

Thus the picture of poverty and social exclusion is a varied one for young people from all over the European Union. Whilst there are differences in the level and experience of poverty and social exclusion according to country, it is nevertheless clear that young people are particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion and that this is linked to a number of key factors. Firstly, there has been an increased financial dependency on others during this period due to reductions in social security payments and changes in eligibility criteria for social protection in the last 10-15 years. Secondly, young people are also staying longer in education even though financial support for those in tertiary education in the form of grants and scholarships has been reduced in many countries and young people are more dependent on family support networks. Thirdly and finally, young people are at least twice as likely to be unemployed as any other adults and are more likely to be among the working poor. Poverty and social exclusion are often regarded as a temporary phase for young people and therefore policy measures to alleviate poverty and social exclusion are more likely to be focused on children or the elderly. However, it is clear that a significant number of young people experience it and that it can have very negative effects both in the short and long-term.

THE EUROPEAN UNION SOCIAL INCLUSION PROCESS

Since the Lisbon European Council of March 2000, where the commitment was made to 'sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and social cohesion', social inclusion has been high on the political agenda of the European Union. In Lisbon, the Heads of State and Government backed the introduction of an 'open method of coordination' in the field of Social Inclusion in order to 'make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty'. The Social Inclusion Process was set into motion by the approval of 'Objectives in the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion' at the Nice European Council in December 2000. The initiation of the Social Inclusion Process in 2001 represented a new focus on the social situation of the European Union's population. The Lisbon European Council concluded that 'the number of people living below the poverty line and in social exclusion is unacceptable' and made the specific commitment to halving child poverty by 2010.

At the end of 2000, a Council Resolution was adopted on the social inclusion

of young people.¹³⁵ This Resolution calls for a focus on young people by inviting the Commission and the Member States to make ‘the improvement of the socio-economic situation of young people and their social inclusion, as well as preventing and tackling their exclusion, a priority common to all relevant European Union policies’. The Irish Presidency also adopted a Council Resolution on the Social Integration of Young People in May 2004. This Resolution recognises the particular risks faced by young people in relation to social exclusion, and calls for the Member States to take ‘into account the specific needs of the young people in the implementation of objectives concerning the fight against poverty and social exclusion’. It highlights the needs of socially excluded young people in relation to school systems, the transition to work, the need for guidance and support, the provision of ‘second-chance’ opportunities and helping young people to participate in activities that lead to their personal and social development.

¹³⁵ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the governments of the Member States, Meeting within the Council, of 14 December 2000 on the Social Inclusion of Young People (2000/C 374/04).

There is a legal basis for tackling poverty and social exclusion in the Treaty. Article 2 of the Treaty Establishing the European Community commits the European Union to the objectives of promoting economic and social progress and of strengthening economic and social cohesion. This is extended by article 136, which specifically commits to the ‘combating of exclusion’. The Lisbon European Council also proposed to modernise ‘the European social model, investing in people and combating social exclusion’.

At Lisbon, it was agreed that ‘policies for combating social exclusion should be based on an open method of coordination combining national action plans and a Commission initiative for co-operation in this field to be presented by June 2000’. It also called for the development of ‘priority actions addressed to specific target groups (for example minority groups, children, the elderly and the disabled)’.

The conclusions of the Nice European Council in December 2000 approved the objectives proposed by the Commission and forwarded by the Employment and Social Affairs Council. These identified four objectives for the coordination of social inclusion policies by the Member States:

1. To facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services
2. To prevent the risks of exclusion
3. To help the most vulnerable
4. To mobilise all relevant bodies

Following the agreement of these objectives, the initiation of the Social Inclusion open method of coordination was launched very quickly, with the first national action plans (NAPsinc) submitted by the Member States in June 2001. The Social Inclusion Process differs from the Luxembourg Process of the European Employment Strategy in that it takes place on a two-yearly basis. Thus the first NAPsinc were submitted in 2001 and the second ones two years later in 2003. Another area which differed and which is of relevance to civil

society organisations was the commitment to consult as many concerned stakeholders as possible in the preparation of the NAPsinc, and when the Commission did a tour of capitals in 2001 to present the new Process, the Member States were encouraged to involve as many organisations as possible and not just the social partners and regional and local administrations. Thus, civil society organisations have had a greater input into the Social Inclusion Process than the Luxembourg Process from the beginning, both at the national and the European level. Also in 2001, a Community action programme for the period 2002-2006 was adopted to encourage co-ordination in the fight against social exclusion.

In the context of the run-up to the enlargement of the European Union, the Social Inclusion Process, like the Luxembourg Process, has also sought to involve the accession countries. Existing data and studies show that there are considerable problems of social exclusion in the new Member States. This is linked to lower per capita income, high unemployment levels in many countries, restricted or limited social protection systems and severe problems in some regional and urban areas. Some sections of the population, notably the elderly, children, the disabled and those from ethnic minority backgrounds are particularly at risk. In 2002, the accession countries agreed to a bilateral co-operation process which involved the drafting of Joint Inclusion Memoranda (JIMs) in order to identify the key problems relating to social exclusion in each country. The JIMs were finalised and signed jointly by the European Commission and each accession country in December 2003. Each of the Memoranda outlines the principal policy challenged in relation to tackling poverty and social exclusion and presents the measures already taken by the country concerned in preparation for accession and full participation in the next period of the Social Inclusion Process from mid-2004 onwards with the submission in 2005 of NAPsinc.

The first NAPsinc were submitted in 2001 shortly after the initiation of the Social Inclusion Strategy. Revised Objectives in the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion for the second round of national action plans were endorsed by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council in November 2002, with the NAPs submitted in July 2003.¹³⁶ The Objectives do not focus on specific age-groups except for children, which reflects the Lisbon commitment to halve child poverty by 2010.¹³⁷ Thus it is difficult to analyse the NAPsinc from the specific perspective of young people as the general character of the guidelines and lack of requirement to monitor young people as an age-group at particular risk of social exclusion means that there is no systematic collection of statistical or qualitative data on them. The analysis below presents some of the measures presented in the NAPsinc for young people.

In Austria, there are educational measures focused on young people with impairments, efforts to reduce the gap in educational attainment between German speakers and non-native speakers, and policies to improve the educational participation rates of girls. Interestingly, Austria also plans

136 Fight against poverty and social exclusion: common objectives for the second round of National Action Plans. Council of the European Union. SOC 508.

137 Objective 3a commits to moving 'towards the elimination of social exclusion among children and give them every opportunity for social integration.

to draw up a 'NAP for children and young people' in accordance with the commitment in made at the United Nations World Children's Summit'. This will include children and young people themselves in the development of policy. The Austrian NAPinc also refers to the open method of coordination in the youth field and the commitment to a horizontal consideration of the child and youth dimension.

The Belgian NAPinc presents measures to develop education for socially excluded young people. It also presents an example of best practice from Flanders, where efforts have been made to promote the participation of groups of young people in a programme lasting from 2002-2004. This includes educational grants for young people from socially excluded backgrounds. In Wallonia a regular monthly meeting is held between professionals who support the young socially excluded and representatives from ATD Fourth World. Together, these two groups are developing ways to improve the application of measures for socially excluded young people.

In Denmark, disadvantaged children and young people are a target group in the NAP in terms of efforts to fight the 'intergenerational transmission of poverty'. In 2002 a number of 'method-development projects' were initiated for children and young people with special needs. There are also a range of measures being introduced in Denmark directed at immigrants and refugees in order to integrate them into Danish society and ensure that they learn Danish they have access to education. Related to this is a specific objective to ensure that children and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds do better in the education system. A survey has been launched of the young mentally ill in order to establish the deficiencies in the provision of care to this group. There are special services targeting the young homeless and measures focused at preventing alcohol and drug misuse among the young. The campaign 'We need all young people' was launched to help inform young immigrants about educational opportunities, the employment market and Danish society in the period 2003-2006.

The Finnish NAPinc notes that there has been an increase in poverty rates among young people since 1995. Specific mention is made of a five-year youth participation project launched in 2002 to develop new ways of learning among young people and the integration of young immigrants is part of this project. An analysis is also under way through the development of indicators to measure local authority spending on children's and young people's affairs.

In France the TRACE programme (pathways to jobs) is particularly focused at disadvantaged young people who experience difficulty in finding employment. As part of the 'Open School' programme, it keeps schools open during holidays and provided for the participation of 65,000 young people in schools in cultural and knowledge improvement activities. Holiday opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have been extended with a number of different programmes (800,000 young people

in 2002). Local task forces for youth have been reinforced with a view to providing support to immigrants, with local education provided for all young immigrants aged 16-18 in order to help them integrate into French schools or access vocational training. Additionally, financial support is provided to disadvantaged families to help them with the education of their children.

In Germany a working group on 'Poverty and Health' within the Federal Ministry for Health and Social Security is considering the subject of 'Children and Young People in Socially Disadvantaged Districts', with a view to developing measures in this field. A programme entitled 'Development and Opportunities for Young People in Socially Deprived Areas' is a Federal Government Programme aiming to bring together measures at the local level in the fields of youth welfare, schools, and the administration of employment, urban planning, social, health and cultural policy in order to present a more cohesive package in the socially disadvantaged areas for young people. There are also a number of other measures directed at immigrants and ethnic minorities which are of relevance to young people.

The Greek NAPinc identifies ten national targets which include children mothers and the elderly, but not young people. Nevertheless objectives to increase access to employment for the most vulnerable groups, improve access to housing, extend special needs education and tackle ill-health are also of relevance for young people. The only specific reference to young people in the NAPinc is on 'Juvenile Delinquents', where actions are being introduced to prevent criminal behaviour, contain criminal behaviour and support post-custodial care.

Young people in Ireland are less likely to suffer poverty or social exclusion than young people in many other Member States on the basis of the statistics presented earlier in the chapter. This is, in part, related to relatively high employment levels among this age-group, including those who have not completed secondary school or university. The commitments in the Irish NAPinc are very closely linked to the Lisbon objectives. Thus for young people, there is the reiteration of the commitment to improve retention rates among school pupils and address the problem of early school leaving. In addition to general measures such as improved transport access and improved equality between the sexes, there is a recognition that immigration affects the 15-24 age group most and that comprehensive integration measures are needed particularly for this group. In addition, a Youth Homelessness strategy was launched in 2002 to tackle youth homelessness on a national basis and 'to reduce and if possible eliminate youth homelessness through preventative strategies'. In addition, a Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund was allocated funding to attract 'at risk' young people in disadvantaged areas into recreational facilities and activities in order to divert them away from the dangers of substance abuse.

In Italy many of the measures mentioned in the NAPinc refer to employment market measures, as unemployment is a key cause of poverty among young

people in Italy. Measures seek to encourage the integration of young people in society, improve education, provide new vocational opportunities, the promotion of social activities in schools, greater integration of the disabled into schools and the promotion of voluntary activities among the young. Much of this is supported by the 1997 Law 'Provisions for the promotion of rights and opportunities for childhood and adolescence'. Mention is also made of the activities supported at the national level under the YOUTH Programme.

In Luxembourg there is a specific objective to reinforce the fight for social inclusion for young people below the age of 25. This approach is based on improving the school system and the transition to employment and actions in favour of young people in difficult situations. The proposals to improve education are closely linked to the Lisbon conclusions and a reform of the apprenticeship system is also foreseen. New measures will include providing more second chances in education, reforming secondary education and providing more support to young people. In order to support young people at risk, socio-educational establishments will be set up, an investigation will be carried out into the situation of young people who are not in education or training and who are not covered by social protection and support will be given to building housing for young people.

The Netherlands seeks to adopt a linked approach through its Operatie Jong (Operation Youth) programme to the 0-23 age-group with a focus on integrated measures including learning disadvantage, premature school-leaving, youth unemployment and the affordability of education. Many of the measures mentioned in the NAPinc are also included in the Employment NAP, such as those related to education and objectives to reduce youth unemployment. In relation to young people, particular emphasis is placed on reducing early school-leaving rates and promoting higher educational achievement among ethnic minorities. A new scheme involves the registration of all young people who leave school early in order to try and reduce the statistics of those not in education, employment or training.

Portugal makes a commitment to promote measures to eliminate poverty and social exclusion among children and young people. As it has the lowest educational achievement of any of the Member States in the European Union, the Portuguese NAPinc foresees the development of specific measures to ensure that all children and young people can have access to education or training within three months. There is a considerable emphasis on improving educational standards with a view to retaining young people in education for longer. Like many of the other NAPsinc there are special measures for young immigrants in order to integrate them successfully. There is also a proposal to set up more clubs for young people and holiday opportunities for the young socially excluded. On specific proposal aimed to integrate 5,000 young people in voluntary programmes in 2003.

In the Spanish NAPinc has a list of seven measures directed at improving the

situation of young people in a situation of social exclusion or at risk of social exclusion. In the context of high youth unemployment, Spain directs much attention to the improvement of the employability of young people and their position in the labour market. Similarly it is trying to eradicate illiteracy, improve the general quality of education and educational achievement, promote smoother transitions between education and employment and improve training opportunities for young people at risk of social exclusion. Also included is the promotion of the role of NGOs in tackling youth social exclusion, health, housing and leisure measures.

Sweden has appointed a special investigator to study the 3% of young people who are estimated to be not in education, employment or training and who do not receive social protection benefits. Other than that, the NAPinc is mainly concerned with measures relating to the improvement of educational attainment, lowering early school leaving rates, developing measures for children and young people with special needs and improving housing accessibility in terms of prices. Given that approximately 20% of the Swedish population is now from an ethnic minority, there is also a strong emphasis on integrating this section of the population and making sure that they do not suffer from discrimination. Thus there are plans to improve measures to combat racism and xenophobia.

The United Kingdom highlights the poorer educational attainment of some ethnic minority pupils as a problem that needs to be tackled and is introducing a range of measures in schools to support this. There are also measures for vulnerable and homeless young people and those that sleep rough. One particular problem in the UK is that of teenage pregnancy and in England a Teenage Pregnancy Unit has been established to tackle this problem. A support service called Connexions provide advice, guidance and access to personal development programmes for 13-19 year olds in England and a key objective is to improve the participation rate of 16-18 year olds in education and training. This is also supplemented by the New Deal for young people in employment.

The country-by-country analysis of the measures presented in the national action plans shows the vast range of measures that exist in the Member States to tackle problems linked to young people and social exclusion. Many of these are closely related to the main goals in terms of employment and education in the Lisbon strategy. The focus on young people varies from country to country, with only a few Member States highlighting young people as a particular target group in the fight against social exclusion, despite the statistics presented earlier in this chapter which indicate that young people are at high risk of social exclusion and poverty.

EXAMPLE OF BEST PRACTICE

In conclusion, it is clear that a greater focus on young people is needed in the Social Inclusion strategy in order to tackle the very real problems

faced by young people. In this context, the Council Resolution on the social integration of young people stressed the need to ‘give a high priority to young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the further implementation of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on poverty and social exclusion ... and that key actors including young people and their youth organisations are actively involved in consultations regarding the development of the OMC and in the development, implementation and monitoring of National action Plans on Social Exclusion’.

YOUTH ORGANISATIONS AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Youth organisations from all over Europe work with and involve socially excluded young people. Some examples of projects run by young people and youth organisations for socially excluded young people were presented at the ‘Get In!’ Hearing organised by the European Youth Forum at the European Economic and Social Committee in 2000. One of the most active of the Youth Forum’s member organisations in the field of social exclusion is the youth branch of the International ATD Fourth World Movement. The testimony below is from a young woman called Bea Roberts who initially received support from ATD Fourth World and then went on to become involved in the organisation itself. It is a marvellous example of how non-governmental agencies can help the socially excluded and involve them as active citizens promoting change in society.

My name is Bea Roberts, I am 24 and I live on a housing estate in north London, England.¹³⁸ I grew up in a single parent family with two younger brothers, one of whom had educational and behavioural difficulties. We lived in poverty and faced its effects on a daily basis. We were raised on state benefits and never had enough money to make ends meet. That meant that my mother often had to choose between paying bills and buying food and clothing, which often left her with lots of debts. My brothers and I could never go on school trips or attend after school clubs as these weren’t free and my mum couldn’t afford it. All of our school clothes and shoes were second hand and we were often bullied and teased because of how we looked. My mother found it very hard to cope and in the end suffered a nervous breakdown. Because of this my brother was taken into care and not returned till he was 18. A concerned neighbour put us in contact with ATD Fourth World.

ATD Fourth World is an anti-poverty NGO with a human rights ethos and provides support to families, young people and individuals living in poverty and facing social exclusion. It provides a much needed support network and carries out projects and events so people of different backgrounds can come together and learn about the problems faced by those in very difficult and often drastic situations. As an organisation we want to better understand the hopes, dreams and aspirations of people living in poverty, and use this understanding to challenge perceptions of poverty and to bring about change.

138 Bea Roberts and ATD Fourth World are thanked for providing this testimony, which is an edited version of the original.

CONCLUSION

This report has gathered together statistics, research and policy documents in order to consider some of the major developments in terms of youth policy in Europe and in terms of education, social exclusion and employment in the European Union Member States. It allows a comparative analysis between countries and shows how many important recent developments there have been in youth policy and in policy areas that have a profound impact on young people. However, it also highlights where there needs to be a greater focus on young people.

From the analysis of the situation of young people in the Member States we have seen that young people have very different experiences according to where they are born, educated, grow-up and look for a job. There are often huge variations in educational achievement, youth unemployment and employment rates and levels of poverty among the young both between and within the Member States. Moreover, there are further divisions within the category of young people according to such factors as gender, ethnic origin and health. The picture which emerges is one of disparity rather than cohesion. It is also a picture of need. The need to have more of a specific focus on youth and improve opportunities from the beginning, the need to make sure that there is equality in opportunity and the need to make sure that young people have the chance to make the best of their lives. These needs must feed into the development of genuinely knowledge-based policies for young people.

In terms of the European Union's education and training, employment and social inclusion policies, this report shows how the use of the Open Method of Coordination as a policy mechanism has had mixed results in coordinating Member State policies to achieve the ambitious goals of the Lisbon strategy, some of which are very relevant to young people. While there have been positive developments in some countries, the question frequently arises as to the extent to which countries who fail to implement the objectives can be either encouraged or obliged to do so? And how policies with broad objectives can respond to the particular needs of certain groups, such as those of young people? The European Youth Forum has consistently argued for the involvement of young people and their organisations in all aspects of the policy process, ranging from development through implementation to evaluation. The involvement of civil society organisations as partners both at the national and the European Union level could be one way of making the OMC more successful. As far as young people are concerned, the strengthening of the youth aspect of policies such as education and training, employment and social inclusion would help to effectively address and resolve the specific problems faced by young people and thereby promote greater social cohesion.

For youth organisations, it is important that they continue to receive the funding and support that allows them to involve as many young people as possible in their organisations and work. A strong civil society plays a vital role in improving the lives of individuals. As this report has hopefully shown, youth organisations have a huge contribution to make both at the grass-roots level in terms of the project they work on and the activities that they organise and in terms of contributing innovative ideas to policy development. This can only be done with a proper recognition of their work, the resources to continue it and their formal involvement as equal partners in decision-making structures.

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Credits

