



European Youth Forum input to the Youth on the Move Flagship Initiative

Introduction

The European Youth Forum (YFJ) warmly welcomes the high level of political attention given to youth in the new Europe 2020 proposal, because it is clear that investing in youth has become a dire necessity. The current economic situation in Europe has highlighted that young people are a particularly vulnerable group in the society, and that there is an imperative need for measures to be taken to equip them with the skills necessary to face current and future challenges in society.

The clearest way to address the needs of young people in Europe today is to ensure a strong Initiative within Europe 2020. The proposed Youth on the Move Flagship Initiative can serve this purpose and become an initiative that will respond to what young people require. To ensure this and to reflect the diversity of the needs of young people in Europe the Youth on the Move Flagship Initiative should be co-developed in partnership with young people and Member States. The latter is important to ensure ownership and implementation. With the present contribution the European Youth Forum outlines its vision on how to develop the initiative in a useful and youth-friendly manner.

1. The aim of the Youth on the Move Flagship Initiative

The aim of the proposed initiative, should be to improve the socio-economic situation of young people in Europe, equip them with necessary skills and competencies for life to be more competitive and confident, to ensure that they can fully contribute to society. For a European Social Model to survive Europe needs both highly skilled individuals, and a re-distribution of work towards the young. In order to secure this, the initiative aims to raise the overall quality of all levels of education and training in the EU, combining both equity and excellence by, *inter alia*, promoting youth mobility (students, pupils, trainees, volunteers) and active citizenship. Consequently, by a strong investment and commitment to their employment and further acquisition of competences, it also aims at improving the employment situation of young people. Moreover, in order to be a strong initiative based on meaningful participation, it needs to be steered in cooperation with young people and youth organisations and clearly aligned with the Education and Training 2020 and European Framework on Youth.

2. YFJ proposal on the policy lines

The European Youth Forum supports the European Student Union in its vision on **Higher Education**, which welcomes the focus on mobility but remains concerned with the repetitive emphasis on the modernisation agenda of higher education. Private investment in education and cooperation between educational institutions and businesses is of great added value provided that the principle of public governance of education is safeguarded. Such an agenda should not seek to turn universities into pools for the generation of revenue, but should instead equip them with tools needed to develop the current and future generations of the EU as active and responsible citizens.

Modern **Life long and life wide learning systems** are key for the development of Europe's society and economy. This requires not only a better understanding of the complementarity of different educational fields, but also an increased investment in education, in particular public education. Further to this, it is important to note that the investments need not only be higher but also allocated in a smarter way, targeting effectiveness and equity above all.

YFJ agrees with the importance of developing **transnational learning mobility** for youth and fully supports the aim of making this possible for all young people by 2020. However, mobility will only benefit the learner and the society if the mobility experience and programme are of high quality, and contribute to one's learning, employability, social and personal development. YFJ therefore suggests to ensure that all mobility programmes, both European and national, comply with the European Quality Charter on Mobility. Further proposals are developed in the YFJ reaction on the Green Paper on Learning Mobility of Young People.¹

The European Youth Forum suggests to split policy proposal '*Extending opportunities for learning and social integration to all young people and developing a framework to reduce youth unemployment*' into two parts, as it now tackles two distinct fields. Extending opportunities for learning and social integration of all young people to ensure their social inclusion can be implemented through extending and broadening formal and non-formal education opportunities for young people. Encouraging entrepreneurship among young people should be done through an education system that encourages creativity, self-confidence, critical thought and participation. Other measures needed are reduced bureaucracy, access to microcredits and business incubators.

Moreover, learning increasingly takes place in a life wide context, hence systems of recognition of learning outcomes must be set up. In this context, certificates and diplomas of formal education systems do not give the full picture of people's real competences. Focusing on real competences means valuing people's entire range of skills, whether acquired in formal, non-formal or informal ways. Recognition of such competences rests on the basic principle that the individual can build upon and use skills and competences acquired through non-formal education schemes, in the formal education system and in employment situations.

The last objective is crucial not only to the Flagship Initiative but to the European Social Model.

¹ 0773-09 YFJ Reaction to the Green Paper on Learning Mobility of Young People

The **framework to reduce youth unemployment** should be ambitious in order to prevent a lost generation, avoid jobless recovery and the collapse of intergenerational solidarity. The framework should address the transition from education to work and the quality of jobs. The EU and the Member states should take the following measures:

a) There is a need to achieve educational change, and at the same time undertake a structural labour market reform together with social partners. The youth unemployment crisis is namely caused in part by formal education systems failing to equip young people with the necessary competences, and in part by employers not hiring sufficient young workers on quality contracts.

b) The labour market reform should aim to balance the currently strong demands for high levels of youth employment flexibility with equally high levels of security. This requires concrete measures to overcome the problem and to support those suffering from it. "Youth guarantees" should therefore be implemented in all Member States. Those guarantees ensure that if unemployed for a certain time, young people are either offered a job or further education.

c) Inclusive and targeted labour market policies need to be put in place, that will secure the respectful inclusion and meaningful occupation of young people. To address the low amount of jobs available for young workers, the public sector should prioritise hiring young people, while the private sector should be activated through tax incentives for hiring young employees within a stable contract. This could in part be financed through the European Social Fund.

If both youth guarantees and increasing number of jobs still leave young people in unemployment, they need to receive sufficient income support to overcome this unemployment period.

d) Internships and apprenticeships have become reality for many young people, through which they complement their formal education and make the transition from education to work. To ensure that their investment in their preparation for the labour market is successful, a set of commonly agreed minimum principles for internships is needed, and a European Quality Charter on Internships would be an indispensable such tool. It should outline certain minimum standards for length, nature of tasks, remuneration and social guarantees of these work placements. To lead by example in spreading the quality culture, YFJ proposes a sub-action in the new Youth on the Move, which will address this crucial question.

3. Needs at the national level

At the national level, Member States will need

- to ensure higher and better investment in education and training systems at all levels (pre-school to adult education) and in all three fields (formal, non-formal and informal), aiming at better effectiveness and equity, above all;
- to improve educational outcomes, addressing each segment (pre-school, primary, secondary, vocational, tertiary, non-formal education and adult education) within an integrated approach, encompassing key competences and aiming at reducing early

- school leaving;
- to enhance the openness and relevance of education systems by building national qualification frameworks and ensuring that all young people have education that meets the threefold aim of education of personal fulfillment, labour market needs and active citizenship.
- to improve young people's entry into the labour market through integrated action covering tax incentives, prioritised public sector hiring, guidance, counselling, recognition of all competences and quality apprenticeships.

4. Governance

The European Youth Forum believes that Youth on the Move should be steered by the highest political level of EU institutions and European youth. Therefore the Youth on the Move Flagship Initiative should be governed by a yearly meeting of the Commissioners responsible for Youth, Education, Employment, and if needed, other areas. On the implementation level it should be run and monitored within the frame of the already existing Structured Dialogue on Youth which would make the clear link between the European level and the national level. On the latter all Member States should establish national coordination bodies that would bring together young people, youth organisations, decision makers and other stakeholders. Such a body would agree on the goals set, and evaluate the progress in their own country and report back to the European level.

5. Youth in Action and the Youth on the Move Programme

The YFJ believes that Youth in Action is a crucial investment in new skills by new providers, supporting non-formal education, which gives young people learning opportunities that are not found in formal education. The participative nature and the focus of the Youth in Action programme should be kept and Youth in Action 2.0 should never become just a mobility programme. Youth in Action 2.0 therefore can only be included within the Youth on the Move if it is:

- a distinct programme, which
- is linked to the Framework on Youth, the Structured Dialogue and Education and Training 2020,
- aims to increase citizenship, participation of young people and diversity
- by providing unique learning opportunities through mobility and non-formal education through a structural participation of young people and the organisations that represent them in the running and decision making of the programme, and
- is committed to building a European youth civil society by supporting European youth organisations.

In this context it can be added that the Lifelong Learning Programme is an important tool, which supports the personal development, active citizenship and intercultural learning of EU citizens. Its elements should contribute to the enhancement of skills foreseen in the Youth on the Move initiative and should serve as an implementing measure. It should not be disregarded on the account that its outcomes do not lead to immediate employability or quick 'competitiveness' of

individuals. It can bring added value but its different elements should be accessible to the widest range of learners, and its governance should benefit from the knowledge of relevant and legitimate stakeholders, among which there are several youth organisations with long-lasting experience.

Conclusion

Youth on the Move can become a crucial instrument to tackle a youth unemployment crisis that is threatening the European Social Model. It affects millions of young Europeans and constitutes a loss of competences for the European economy that, unless properly tackled, will lead to an even greater crisis in the time to come.

Youth on the Move will however only be useful if it proposes real concrete measures that will have an effect for the young concerned. As the best way to guarantee that is to involve young people and youth organisations, the European Youth Forum is willing to take up the responsibility of ensuring their participation, and calls on the European Union to reflect its ambition in a concrete initiative.