



2020: Enable young people to build a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe

European Youth Forum contribution to Europe 2020 – A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth

Introduction

The European Youth Forum (YFJ) recognises the potential of Europe 2020 to succeed, and has followed its development with keen interest, giving inputs and proposals throughout different stages. It remains convinced that for the process to bring lasting growth, Europe 2020 should be more than a mere economic strategy. It should be an inclusive strategy that encompasses all areas of life and that leads to real and sustainable growth in welfare.

The European Youth Forum is pleased to see that youth has been given a fair share of attention in the Europe 2020 strategy, particularly through the Youth on the Move Flagship Initiative, as well as in its other parts. Nevertheless, several serious shortcomings remain, which will need to be addressed, and with the present position the European Youth Forum expresses its stance on some of the most important features that concern young Europeans.

It is to be noted that the Lisbon Strategy was accompanied in 2005 by the European Youth Pact¹, which was a cross-sector policy instrument aiming to ensure that a set of policies and measures concerning the needs of young people would be a fully integrated part of the Lisbon Strategy. Ever since the post-Lisbon agenda was launched, the European Youth Forum has advocated for an updated and renewed European Youth Pact, with a clear governance structure leading to concrete results. In this sense the present document assesses Europe 2020 and the Integrated Guidelines along the elements of the European Youth Pact and proposes several steps to ensure that the needs of young people in the growth agenda are not put aside.

Before tackling those specific elements, the YFJ would nevertheless like to stress two general concerns, which merit consideration:

a) in principle the YFJ welcomes that the three priorities of the strategy correlate with the three pillars of sustainable development. It is encouraging that the EU acknowledges the need to achieve a sustainable future but it is no less crucial to integrate the response to this challenge in all different aspects of the

¹ The European Youth Pact constitutes Annex I of Presidency Conclusions of the European Council, Brussels, 22-23 March 2005 (7619/05).

strategy, and mainstream the sustainability part throughout it. Moreover, the EU would show ambition and commitment by pledging to reduce emissions from 1990 levels by 30%, instead of the current 20%. Although a sustainable future concerns everyone, the success or failure in achieving it, especially through combating climate change, will have an even greater impact for young people. It is them and the generations to come that will have to deal with the mistakes made today;

b) in order to attain inclusive growth, Europe 2020 should strongly refer to the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights and the principles laid down in articles 21 and 23, respectively, on non-discrimination and equality between women and men, as essential steps toward social cohesion.

Education, Training and Mobility

The YFJ has tackled several concrete aspects related to education as part of Europe 2020 in its position on the Youth on the Move Flagship Initiative.² As part of the European Youth Pact, education, training and mobility should also feature prominently throughout Europe 2020's implementation. Below are some major concerns that YFJ would like to raise in this regard.

Quality of education is paramount to the European knowledge society and to the growth that Europe 2020 strives for. This quality goes beyond employability and all education policy making should include the aim, set by the European Parliament of 'the reform of education towards a learning-centred holistic education system which prepares young people for being happy, active global citizens who are ready to enter the labour market'.³

Concretely, the Education and Training 2010 work programme has shown that benchmarks drive policy reform and that they make EU policy-making understandable. The inclusion of the already agreed Education and Training 2020 benchmarks into Europe 2020 is, in the view of the YFJ, key to ensure a strong link between the two processes and a clear sign that the European Union and the Member States have a strong commitment to education.

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. Furthermore, young people need to have real access to sufficient opportunities both through enlarging EU or national programmes, and by removing barriers that prevent people from being mobile.⁴

² See 0362-10_YFJ_reaction_to_proposal_YOTM_final.

³ European Parliament Report on 'Key competences for a changing world: implementation of the education and training 2010 work programme'.

⁴ Further proposals are developed in the YFJ reaction on the Green Paper on Learning

Inevitably, learning increasingly takes place in a life wide context and youth organisations are important providers of non-formal education. To ensure the best use of these competences for society and the economy, the providers non-formal education should be supported and efficient systems of recognition of learning outcomes must be set up. The YFJ sees this area as one with considerable potential for improvement, which, unless addressed properly, will be a missed opportunity for European growth.

Finally, expecting more outcome from education cannot go together with lowering investments. If Europe is serious about its future wealth and cohesion, Member States 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.

Employment, integration and social advancement

The European Youth Forum welcomes the high attention attributed to the integration of young people in the labour market both in the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Employment Guidelines. However, the YFJ believes that a concrete target of lowering unemployment for young people is still missing. Although in the 75% employment target the age group 20-64 does include youth, the agreed benchmark should not only be a general one, but should be guaranteed for every age cohort. Member States thus need to commit to a specific youth employment target to address the transition from education to employment, which under current circumstances takes too long for most and presents a serious waste of talent, creativity and time.

Although often presented as a top priority, Europe 2020 fails to address youth entrepreneurship. YFJ believes that boosting entrepreneurship among young people should be done through an education system that encourages creativity, self-confidence, critical thought and participation. To enable motivated youth to put their entrepreneurial ideas into practice, however, other additional measures to raise the rate of young entrepreneurs are needed, which include reduced administrative obstacles, access to microcredits and business incubators.

It also needs to be mentioned that 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, the European Youth Forum calls for a European Quality Framework on Internships setting basic quality requirements for internships and apprenticeships or similar work experience. To lead by example in spreading the quality culture, YFJ proposes a sub-action in the expected Youth on the Move programme, which

will address this crucial question.⁵

Finally, the YFJ urges Member States to give priority under national social inclusion policy to improving the situation of the most vulnerable young people, particularly those in poverty. Only through socially responsible governance, whereby people are not seen solely as potential creators of added value but also as fully-fledged members of the society, will Europe in 2020 have a chance of being inclusive in a smart, an, most importantly, sustainable way.

Reconciliation of working life and family life

The European Youth Forum notices with concern that when it comes to genuine reconciliation between working and family life, Europe 2020 does not give sufficient emphasis to enabling it.

To begin with, the gender perspective is not effectively mainstreamed throughout Europe 2020's elements. While specific gender issues, for instance the gender pay gap and the gender employment gap, are tackled in the Integrated Guidelines, the draft strategy does not comprehensively embrace the different challenges faced by men and women in the fields of employment and education. For instance, gender segregation in the field of education is not taken into account as one of the major causes of segregation in the field of employment and thus of the gender pay gap. This could undermine the design and the effective implementation of policies at both the national and the European levels aimed at addressing the inequalities faced by young women in the field of education and employment, and in particular the impact of gender stereotypes and other gender biases.

In particular, reconciliation of working life and family life was one of the cornerstones of the European Youth Pact, which acknowledged that equality between young women and men in the field of employment is intertwined with the need to ensure an equal share of family responsibilities. Until ambitious policies and mechanisms are put in place, aimed at favouring the reconciliation of working and family life - such as paternity leave, non-transferable parental leave and pre-school child care facilities - precarious and part-time employment of young women will not be effectively tackled.

It is regrettable that reconciliation measures are mentioned only for the national level and do not stress the need to further develop European policies and legislation in this field. In particular, while European legislation on parental leave has been recently adopted and European standards on maternity leave are currently being revised, provisions on paternity leave are still lacking at the EU level. Furthermore, Europe 2020 fails to make the link to the Barcelona targets on child-care and includes only a loose reference to the need to ensure access to childcare facilities.

⁵ See 0362-10_YFJ_reaction_to_proposal_YOTM_final.

Governance

The European Youth Forum considers that a strong governance of the strategy is needed to ensure its implementation. Therefore it calls on the Member States to strongly commit to ambitious and measurable, yet attainable targets at both European and national levels and to work towards their realisation.

To be successful, implementation needs to be connected to existing EU mechanisms, not decoupled from them, and needs to involve all relevant stakeholders at different levels. In this sense youth specific elements of Europe 2020 should be linked to the existing policy processes in the youth field, such as the EU Youth Strategy, and reflect the cross-sectorial and participative reality of youth policy. For example, the Youth on the Move Flagship Initiative 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 and the national level.

More than a political statement, Europe 2020 will only be useful if it proposes real concrete measures that will have a positive impact for the young people concerned. In order to assess its impact and progress, Europe 2020 should be associated with a monitoring system within which the youth strand will be an important element. All relevant stakeholders should be involved in regular and transparent reporting on the implementation of the National Reform Programmes.

Conclusion

That youth features in Europe 2020 as such, should be a sign of strong commitment by Member States to work towards improving the situation of young people. What young people expect now is that governments live up to their commitments and translate them into concrete and measurable actions, which will be implemented together with relevant stakeholders – and youth organisations.

To sum it up, the European Youth Forum asks for:

- quality in formal education, with strong investment and clear benchmarks, and supported by quality mobility programmes, accessible to all young people; recognition and support to non-formal education;
- a clear benchmark on employment for every age cohort rather than the 20-64 average, support to youth entrepreneurship, a European Quality Framework on Internships, and special attention to the most vulnerable young people;
- clear measures to allow effective reconciliation between working and private life, and a mainstreaming of gender equality throughout the strategy and its implementation;
- the mainstreaming of a sustainable approach throughout the strategy and its implementation;

- a strong reference to the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights and the principles laid down in articles 21 and 23;
- governance through ambitious and measurable, yet attainable targets at all levels, and inclusion of relevant existing processes and stakeholders, such as Structured Dialogue on Youth and youth organisations themselves, in the implementation and monitoring.

Young people's expectations from the European Youth Pact in 2005 were high but were not met; and the lack of evidence about its realisation was a worrying development. Now, young people expect even more from Europe 2020. They are willing to contribute to a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – but as a prerequisite they need a strong commitment of the Member States towards education, jobs and reconciliation. Europe 2020 can build a new pact with young people, leading to a viable economically, ecologically and socially strong future. The European Youth Forum expects nothing less.