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COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering**

**A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities**

**Analysis of national reports from the Member States of the European Union concerning  
the implementation of the common objectives for a greater understanding and  
knowledge of youth**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

On 15 November 2004, the Council adopted common objectives for greater understanding and knowledge of youth<sup>1</sup>. In this Resolution the Member States committed themselves to report on national contributions to the implementation of these common objectives by the end of 2008.

These national reports allow the Commission to evaluate the progress made by the Member States. The Commission has prepared this synthesis report, which is one of the documents complementing the Commission Communication "Youth: Investing and Empowering."

At the request of the Member States, the Commission proposed a common structure for the national reports, which was endorsed by all parties, but the reports differ from one country to another. Due to the differences between the various contributions, a detailed comparative approach was not possible.

This report describes the state of implementation of the four common objectives concerning greater understanding and knowledge of young people, and presents a selection of good practices. The report finishes by drawing conclusions on progress on and further development of EU initiatives in the field. Sometimes references to individual Member States are made in the text: these references are to be understood as examples, not as an attempt to rank or compare progress. They may not include all Member States having similar practices.

At the time of closing this document 24 Member States have sent in their reports. Countries from the European Economic Area could contribute on a voluntary basis. Iceland decided to take part in this exercise.

### 1.1. Background

One of the aims of the White Paper "A new Impetus for European Youth"<sup>2</sup> was to improve public awareness of young people's concerns. It recognises the central importance of knowledge about and understanding of youth and the realities of young people for informed policy making.

The Council Resolution of 2004 recognised that a knowledge-based approach to policy making is particularly valuable in the youth field, where the situation of the younger generation in Europe is evolving rapidly, and it identified the following general aims: facilitating the compilation of studies on youth matters and the networking of research structures, considering what further work might be necessary to support current priorities and agreeing on relevant topics for the future as well as on common objectives.

## 2. COMMON OBJECTIVES

### 2.1. **Objective 1: Identify - including at local and regional level - existing knowledge in priority areas of the youth field and implement measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it**

#### Action lines

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth, 13997/04 of 15 November 2004

<sup>2</sup> COM(2001) 681 final of 21 November 2001

Seven action lines were agreed for the implementation of this objective, four of which address the national, regional and local levels and three the European level.

Those referring to the national, regional and local levels concern the identification and organisation of existing knowledge in the youth field for participation, information and voluntary activities; the augmentation and regular update of knowledge on such themes, (also taking into consideration practical knowledge), the facilitation of access to knowledge on such themes and information on the corresponding actors, as well as activities to ensure the user-friendliness of relevant information.

The European level action lines encourage making the best use of available and relevant instruments – such as current and future programmes in the youth field, Eurobarometer, Eurostat and the current and future framework research programmes, the dissemination of information collected to interested actors, and making the best use of any instrument being developed by the Commission in co-operation with the Council of Europe.

#### Measures taken by Member States

##### ***National strategy and policy on youth related information and knowledge***

There is a significant variety among the Member States in relation to the presence or absence of a legal basis, specific strategies, policies and systems to encourage activities and structures working for better understanding and knowledge of young people. Few countries have robust policies and structures in place. One has even explicit support of data obtainment written into its Constitution. Two have recently introduced new legal acts consolidating the statutory basis of youth policy, and thus creating a more systematic approach to youth policy including data collection and knowledge provision. Where such robust policies and structures exist, results are better in terms of increased cooperation between those who provide knowledge and data. They also allow for a better focus on priority areas. A stronger cross-sectoral approach can also be noted.

The fact that research on young people falls under the remit of a number of areas is also a challenge, alongside with different approaches applied by different governmental bodies and institutions. This makes it difficult to identify the full range of research outputs.

It appears that while data and research on youth are available in all countries, coordination and a systematic collection are lacking in most. In addition there often persist also difficulties between the different levels (local, regional, national).

##### ***Institutional ownership and structures in the field of youth research and data collection, updating, systematisation and dissemination***

The national reports present a significant variety among the Member States in relation to the set of institutions engaged in knowledge generation on youth related issues. Only in few cases there is evidence of a central co-ordination.

A group of countries have one single body in charge of youth research, such as specifically appointed specialised academic or other bodies that are responsible for undertaking and coordinating youth research and data collection, sometimes in cooperation with other stakeholders.

In other countries there is a central coordination with a significant part of youth research and data being produced by universities, specialist research bodies and networks, government agencies, national statistics offices, advisory councils etc. One country established an observatory on young people. Sometimes the coordination body's remit includes the

collection, compilation and processing of data and information on young people, as well as analyses and publication of data, communication of results and support of decision making.

There are also countries where various governmental institutions, NGOs and research organisations are engaged in producing youth related research and data collection. A few countries are rather at the beginning of the process, with a regular data collection and reporting on youth just starting.

***Existing knowledge in priority areas of youth policy (including local and regional): participation, information and voluntary activities***

The information available in the national reports does not allow getting a comprehensive picture of the existing knowledge on the EU priorities of participation, information and voluntary activities of young people. A general observation is that existing knowledge in the Member States does not necessarily seem to be organised by priority areas, as proposed by the common objectives and action lines.

Ad hoc reporting, mainly as a contribution to EU-wide studies and a few national studies, seems to be typical for a number of countries.

***Specific Member State actions and measures on information organisation and access to knowledge***

The range of actions and measures used by the Member States includes the development of national registers, data bases, information systems, on line portals accompanied by interactive and networking tools, information and counselling, technical assistance to the national Eurodesk offices, inventories of available research, developing online reference points and special reports that also include lists of relevant institutions and websites as well as available EU tools, such as the European Youth Portal.

National registers and databases are developed to organise and make available knowledge about existing volunteering and youth organisations, with others providing online networking possibilities and information about researchers working on youth issues. Web-based information systems assembling research, statistical and up-to-date information about youth, including interactive tools, are being developed in some countries.

There are examples where the inter-ministerial young people's portal was created as a direct result of the adoption of the common EU objectives on youth policy. New Member States report about the recent opening of new online portals with information on events, youth policy matters, projects, data bases of youth organisations and youth affair coordinators and interactive tools. One country is developing a frame of reference on youth research, building an inventory of existing research, facilitating access to existing materials and developing new research topics.

**Measures at European level**

The Commission aimed at making the best use of available and relevant instruments. Several Eurobarometers on youth were launched, the most recent one in 2007<sup>3</sup>. It gave a good overview of young people's interests, views and behaviours in a series of areas relevant to them. Cooperation with Eurostat proved to be fruitful throughout the years, and in particular when preparing the first European Youth Report, that is also an annex to the Communication "Youth: Investing and Empowering".

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<sup>3</sup> "Looking Behind the Figures: The main results of the Eurobarometer 2007 survey on youth", Office of Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, 2007, ISBN 978-92-79-05540-9

In cooperation with the Council of Europe the Commission created the European Knowledge Centre (EKCYP) to:

- transfer knowledge from research to policy and practice;
- provide country information on youth policy and monitor youth policy;
- follow up on the implementation of the common objectives under the OMC;
- enhance exchange between researchers, policy makers and practitioners.

Its information derives from national correspondents who provide data and information on their countries based on questionnaires. EKCYP is financially supported by the Youth in Action Programme.

EKCYP was launched in June 2005 under Luxembourg's EU Presidency. It was presented to the Youth Ministers at a conference in Budapest in September 2005. Following its launch, EKCYP entered into a pilot phase that was followed by a number of improvements. Nevertheless, EKCYP does not yet respond to all expectations. The main problems are incomplete or not-up-to date country information; need for a more comprehensive overview of youth research; lack of comparative research and a quite varying degree of availability of correspondents from different Member States. Significant progress has been made in 2008.

### Conclusions

Member States have taken a variety of different approaches to identifying, augmenting, updating and providing access to information on youth. Policy and institutional frameworks and structures are in place or are being developed in many countries, and a significant amount of valuable research on youth exists. Reporting systems show wide variations – from regular national reports to ad hoc activities focused around EU reporting cycles. The EU reporting requirement acted as a stimulus encouraging countries to engage in youth research and to develop and organise existing knowledge around the agreed priorities.

However, in many countries work remains to be done to achieve synergies across the various policy areas of relevance to youth. It would also be important to promote, stimulate and facilitate wider co-ordination and deeper co-operation between research actors and to strengthen research networks.

Significant challenges also remain in terms of achieving a common European understanding of descriptors and definitions, which would allow trans-national comparative analysis.

## Good practice examples

**Finland** has made significant progress in terms of achieving closer cooperation between the formerly unconnected domains of children, family and youth policy research and development. The stress on horizontal youth policy in the Youth Pact in particular stimulates increasing research cooperation between youth and other social policies. Youth research is coordinated by the Youth Research Society. The Youth Research Network, the Advisory Council for Youth Affairs, the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES) and Statistics Finland cooperate in producing youth data and research.

In **France** the National Institute of Young People and Education (INJEP) promotes research in the field of young people and education, produces regular reviews containing quantitative and qualitative information. INJEP also hosts the National Observatory on Young People (ONJ), which was created in 2008 and has a remit to collect, compile and process data and information on young people, analyse and publish data, communicate results and support decision making.

In Flanders in **Belgium** JOP (Youth Research Platform) plays a central role. Its aim is to develop a frame of reference for youth research in Flanders, prepare an inventory of existing research, facilitate access to existing materials, and develop new research areas.

**Sweden** is in the process of developing an increasingly cross-sectoral youth policy and youth research approach. Aspects of youth policy are broadly mainstreamed across the full range of national policies, and the collection, analysis and dissemination of knowledge on the living conditions of young people is fundamental to national policies on youth. Approximately fifteen government agencies provide data on 80 quality of life indicators for young people in their annual reports. These reports are sent to the National Board for Youth Affairs, which carries out annual in-depth thematic analyses of one or more priority areas.

In the **Netherlands**, “Youth Monitor”, introduced in 2007, is the main source of statistical information. An initiative of the Ministry for Youth and Families, in collaboration with other ministries and Dutch municipalities, “Youth Monitor” provides information on the situation of children and young people concerning important policy areas such as health, diversity, justice, lifestyles, education and employment. “Youth Monitor” applies seven indicators that give a general overview of the state of youth, while the total set of 60 indicators provides a comprehensive picture.

Forum 21 is an information and communications project implemented jointly between **France, Germany** and the **UK**. It has published two reviews: a European review on the politics of children and young people and a European review of research on children and young people.

**Luxembourg** has started developing indicators in the youth field that relate to concrete issues such as the situation of youth on the labour market, violence or drug use. In the field of non-formal learning, the validation of the voluntary service has led to considerations about indicators to make competences acquired through non-formal learning measurable.

**Poland** has launched a series of research either exclusively on youth or focusing also on youth, such as a survey on career pathways and participation in culture and it is planning another one on health.

**2.2. Objective 2: In a second stage identify - including at local and regional level - existing knowledge in further priority areas of interest to the youth field and implement measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it**

Clarification

Concerning this objective the focus is on the content of the research, which relates to other priorities in the youth field than the ones covered by the first common objective, namely on areas such as autonomy, non-formal learning, discrimination, education and training, employment, entrepreneurship, creativity, transition from education to employment, social inclusion and health.

Action lines

Seven action lines were agreed for the implementation of this objective, four of which address the national, regional and local levels and three at the European level.

Those referring to the national, regional and local levels concern the identification and organisation of existing knowledge in the youth field for further priority areas of interest such as autonomy, non-formal learning, discrimination, education and training, employment, entrepreneurship, creativity, transition from education to employment, social inclusion and health; the augmentation and regular update of knowledge on such themes, (also taking into consideration practical knowledge), the facilitation of access to knowledge on such themes and information on the corresponding actors, as well as activities to ensure the user-friendliness of relevant information.

The European level action lines encourage making the best use of available and relevant instruments – such as current and future programmes in the youth field, Eurobarometer, Eurostat and the current and future framework research programmes, the dissemination of information collected to interested actors, and making the best use of any instrument being developed by the Commission in co-operation with the Council of Europe.

Measures taken by Member States

In terms of the information provided in the national reports, there is a lack of specific information regarding existing knowledge on priorities targeted by this objective. Where these priority areas are mentioned, they cover a wide range of topics relating to young people, such as values, student rights, employment, transition between school and the labour market, social integration, social inclusion, training, education, service for young people, marginalised youth, recreation and leisure, family life, peers and relationships, young Roma, health and lifestyles of young people. Other research topics include inter-generational relationships, evaluation of the politics of engagement of young people, independence of young people, the situation of adolescents and pre- adolescents in society, and the European awareness of young people.

Structures and processes that facilitate knowledge mainstreaming in policy making processes exist in some countries. An example for such a structure is a body consolidating knowledge about youth that is also in charge of providing support to youth policy-making at municipal level, which eventually led to the development of a youth service system. Knowledge about youth is also disseminated via conferences and seminars. Some countries report that youth organisations are involved in these and are consequently consulted in decision-making.

Measures at European level

The Commission incited that scientific evidence on issues such as employment, health and life-styles be taken on board of EKCYP. The collection of data is finalised; they are currently

being interpreted and will be uploaded into EKCYP at the latest by the end of the year. Other topics already covered by EKCYP, apart from above-mentioned and apart from the OMC priorities, are non-formal learning and antidiscrimination.

The Youth in Action Programme funded a study on the existing national practices regarding the access of young people to culture. Another “Thematic study on policy measures concerning disadvantaged youth” deals with issues, which relate very specifically to one of the strands of the European Youth Pact. The Commission produced a synthesis of the research activities in the youth field, carried out under the 6th and 7th Research Framework Programmes<sup>4</sup>.

### Conclusions

Member States routinely collect, compile and make available a range of statistical data which include information about young people – for example health, employment and education. The extent to which this data is used to conduct research on youth in the further priority areas is not clear from the reports.

Cooperation in the youth field goes beyond these issues and as youth policy advances, the need for scientific evidence evolves. It is therefore important that research on new priorities is launched and existing and new research is regularly uploaded into EKCYP so that all Member States, European institutions, researchers and civil society can easily find and access the existing knowledge.

### **Good practice examples**

In **Ireland** there were a number of publicly supported research initiatives and publications which have enhanced understanding of diverse aspects of young people’s lives and lifestyles, including the priority and ‘further priority’ areas. The latter include the first full-length academic text book on young people in Ireland<sup>5</sup>. It provides a synthesis of existing research into young people in Ireland along with a commentary and analysis, and places the Irish findings in a comparative European and international context.

In **Slovenia** the Youth Office invited several researchers, youth organisations and young people to discuss the issue of qualitative spending of leisure time activities. As a follow-up, a publication with contributions from different stakeholders was published. The Youth Office is also planning a comprehensive research project on youth.

### **2.3. Objective 3: Ensure quality, comparability and relevance of knowledge in the youth field by using appropriate methods and tools**

#### Action lines

Five action lines were agreed for the implementation of this objective, two of which address the national, regional and local levels and three the European level.

Those referring to the national, regional and local levels concern: the development of appropriate tools and methods to reinforce understanding and knowledge of young people and facilitate the exploitation of results as well as the promotion of education and training of youth researchers and experts as well as of any other actors developing knowledge in the youth field.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ec.europa.eu/research>

<sup>5</sup> Lalor, de Róiste and Devlin, 2007

The European level action lines concern cooperation to identify and define common concepts and minimum core content in order to reinforce a common understanding of the defined priority themes; co-operation to determine quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods to exploit and compare results on commonly identified themes; and cooperation to better identify indicators to evaluate the impact of current and future programmes in the youth field.

#### Measures taken by Member States

##### *Methods and tools to ensure quality, comparability and relevance of knowledge*

#### Quality

Only a few Member States have fairly structured processes for quality assurance in place. One country reports about an external review commission that monitors the progress and quality of youth research. Another Member State has an orientation committee in place that carries out a pre-quality check in order to ensure the quality and cohesion with its youth and families research programme. Statistical offices regularly check the quality of their data.

Some countries make specific reference to evaluation methods. They report evaluating the quality and quantity of research. Where indicators are used they focus on qualitative and statistical indicators. Member States report applying indicators on issues such as child well-being, socio-demographic developments, education outcomes, health, social and emotional behaviour, etc.

Another means of striving for better quality is to ensure that youth research is in the hands of professional researchers, that they engage in continuing professional development and that young researchers are supported and helped in their development. Support of young researchers once they have obtained their doctor's degree is one means to interest young people in research and make them consider this as their life pathway. There exist also measures in the Member States to strive for a higher educational level of those working with youth. Other measures aim at improved mobility and exchanges of students and researchers.

#### Comparability

Advances in information technology have helped making in particular data, such as statistics, but also research findings more accessible and user-friendly but also easier to compare. They also allow for an easier cooperation and exchange between those who develop statistics.

Countries also report that a means to gain a greater understanding and knowledge and thus the chance to put their own research into a European context, is to participate in European statistics, longitudinal studies, sample surveys and youth opinion polls.

At national level the measures to ensure the relevance of youth research vary. One recurrent approach is the establishment of committees, platforms or expert groups that take stock, analyse, synthesise, publish and support exchange, which helps raising the visibility and enlarge the outreach of youth research.

#### Measures at European level

At EU level EKCYP provides tools and networks for cooperation to identify and define common concepts and minimum core content in order to reinforce a common understanding of the defined priority themes. These goals are also supported by the Commission and Member State peer learning activities on participation, information and health.

The active participation of researchers in European networks such as the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP) is qualified as being beneficial for contributing to the European database and development of youth policy, but also to put the own research into relation to research activities of other Member States.

In order to ensure cooperation to better identify indicators to evaluate the impact of current and future programmes in the youth field, a Memorandum of Understanding between Eurostat and DG EAC was signed in 2006.

### Conclusions

A range of methods and tools is being applied to youth research across Europe, and the results are disseminated in a variety of ways. Some progress has been made in individual Member States on developing indicators to monitor and evaluate research. Measures are in place to support and develop research capacity on youth issues.

The impression persists that systematic approaches are rather rare. The situation of youth research appears to be tight in many countries, and there are still not enough young researchers.

At EU level more comparative research and descriptors would be needed.

### **Good Practice examples**

In its process of developing and drafting a national youth strategy **Hungary** makes sure to include quality indicators.

**Austria** aims at securing the quality of statistical data through a series of measures, such as the introduction and application of international standards and scientific validation, the promotion of mobility of researchers, and financial support for research.

In **Germany** the Youth Welfare Association (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Jugendhilfe*, AGJ) provides an institutionalised and broad exchange network for youth researchers and youth policy makers.

**Latvia** has a system of indicators which was created to evaluate local youth policy and to facilitate its implementation. Municipalities can use the indicators to evaluate the local situation with respect to youth work, identify fields where developments can be made and ensure implementation of targeted youth policy. The indicators include both qualitative and quantitative data.

The German-speaking community, and in particular the *Jugendbüro* (Youth Office), of **Belgium** attributes importance to the use of international comparative studies, such as the Pisa study, exchanges with youth research experts from other regions in Belgium as well as from other countries.

In the **Czech Republic** quantitative and qualitative surveys on various topics of relevance to young people are used to monitor the situation of young people. The results of these surveys are published and made public, which helps achieving a higher visibility of youth research.

In **Lithuania** the Department of Youth Affairs has promoted youth research among young people by implying them directly into research projects. It financed projects and initiatives for youth and youth organisations by launching a call for proposals on “Participation of Youth in the Creation of Knowledge Society”. This resulted in a number of pilot projects in several regions and municipalities, where the situation of youth was analysed and comprehensive knowledge gathered. This pilot project encouraged other municipalities to carry out similar analyses on their own initiative. It thus contributed to making youth research known to a larger public and in particular to those concerned by it.

**Malta** plans to launch a major youth research project this year in which it will invest a significant amount of funding and whose aim is to facilitate the collection, analysis and

dissemination of information about youth on the Maltese islands. The results will be collected and analysed and political and practical action will be taken accordingly.

In the **Slovak Republic** an expert group focusing on youth research was established in 2007 under the supervision of the National Youth Institute (IUVENTA) and the Slovak Agency for Youth Research. This expert group monitors and evaluates surveys among young people, provides methodological help and individual consultations, publishes research outcomes but also information about theoretical and methodological issues and procedures and standardised research techniques for different areas of young people's lives. In this way it has helped to raise awareness, visibility and relevance of youth research and has improved its quality.

#### **2.4. Objective 4: Facilitate and promote exchange, dialogue and networks to ensure visibility of knowledge in the youth field and anticipate future needs**

##### Action lines

Four action lines were agreed for the implementation of this objective, three of which address the national, regional and local level, and one the European level.

Those referring to the national, regional and local levels concern: the development of national networks between policy makers, researchers, young people and their organisations; discussing future needs, trends within these networks and identifying new priorities and methods; and promoting cross-sectoral cooperation, exchanges and dialogue between different sectors and knowledge areas (through conferences, seminars and events).

The European level action line concerns coordination of the national networks through the setting up by the Commission in cooperation with the Council of Europe, of a European Union Network of Youth Knowledge.

##### Measures taken by Member States

The situation concerning networks between policy makers, researchers, young people and their organisation differs from one country to another. At best networks of all relevant youth stakeholders exist. Sometimes specific organisations are set up, such as youth institutes, a youth curator, a consultative commission, a council for youth affairs or for youth policy coordination or a research group. There are also countries that have neither formal nor permanent networks but which organise regular meetings with stakeholders, seminars or consultations.

The work of networks, structures or consulting bodies, where they exist, is extensive and comprises advising the government on policy development, developing research and procedures in the youth field, dialogue, mutual exchange and information but also training and project-based work.

When it comes to cross-sectoral cooperation, it takes at best place in the framework of cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary networks of policy-makers, researchers and civil society. Some of the countries that do not have fully-fledged cooperation structures in place ad hoc dialogue, exchange and cooperation on youth issues take place across different policy and research fields.

It is interesting to note that scientific cooperation between different countries seems to be well developed, as countries refer to trans-national or interregional interdisciplinary networks, such as between Scandinavian countries. The European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) is mentioned as positive example for providing European-wide information and knowledge about youth and to provide a useful exchange network.

##### Measures at European level

The Commission has created the European Network of Youth Knowledge (EUNYK), the network of policy makers, young people and researchers to help with the implementation of the common objectives. This network gathers in Brussels at least once a year. It advises the Commission on youth policy issues and contributed to the reflections on the future of youth policy. Member States reported that EUNYK has inspired the setting up of research structures at national level.

In July 2006 the Finnish Presidency organised, in cooperation with researchers and young people, a youth event in Hyvinkää that was co-funded by the YOUTH programme. This event enabled tripartite discussions between policymakers, researchers and young people.

### Conclusions

In general Member States acknowledge the EU's driving force in the matter and the common objectives' impetus for the development of national networks.

The national reports reveal a diverse range of networks, from formally established ones to ad hoc groups. Member States recognise the necessity of youth research, yet it would need to be organised in a more systematic way in most countries.

At EU level EUNYK was created, but needs more support from Member States.

### **Good Practice**

In **Spain** INJUVE, a public institute under the Ministry for Equality brings together different administrative departments and actors in the youth field with the aim of promoting activities in favour of young people. It also aims at facilitating international exchange and access to knowledge and experiences in the youth field. It has also created a prize for researchers who focus their doctoral thesis on youth

In **Bulgaria** the State Agency for youth and sports developed “Compass”, a national network, which provides the opportunity for online exchange of information between actors in the youth field at national and regional level. This networking facility was used when a national debate entitled “Structured Dialogue and Young People in Bulgaria” was held. A result of the discussions and suggestions made was the drafting of a Youth Declaration.

**Greece** has established a network focusing on youth entrepreneurship. This Observatory for Youth Entrepreneurship and Youth Entrepreneurship Structures brings together the relevant actors in this particular field, aiming at encouraging young people to become young entrepreneurs. It promotes information and gives guidance on youth entrepreneurial and employment issues. Apart from that it also offers training.

**Portugal** has created a web portal in the youth field that aims at setting up a virtual youth community and at strengthening links, also at international level. It contains a wealth of information about the youth field.

In **Estonia** the Ministry of Education and Research is developing a network of youth researchers. Its main partner is the Youth Research Institute. There are also a number of research groups established that conduct research projects, which deal with knowledge creation in the youth field; these are financed from both the Estonian science financing schemes and the international financing schemes.

**Italy** is, through ISFOL - *Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori* (Institute for the development of professional training of workers) actively engaged in international research and information networks, such as “ReferNet”, a structured, decentralised, networking system of collection, documentation and dissemination of research and information. “ReferNet” contributes to developing a common approach to research

through exchanges and with the aim of transparency, synergies and dissemination of national and European vocational education and training research through a specific database. It involves raising awareness and disseminating results of the activities of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop).

**Iceland** reports that a major turning point for youth research was the establishment of an Institute of Educational Studies which conducted a landmark nationwide survey among youth aged 14 to 20 years. With the more general youth surveys being later handed over to the Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis, a non-profit research centre specialising in youth research and special research for policymakers, and its association to the School of Health and Education at Reykjavik University, Iceland has good experiences with the creation of research structures that explicitly allow for a focus on youth research.

## **2.5. Consultation of young people**

There is very little evidence that Member States have consulted young people when their reports on the implementation of the common objectives on better knowledge and greater understanding were prepared. Only few Member States refer to such consultations and most of those which do give information about how young people are consulted in general in their countries.

## **2.6. Difficulties/Suggestions**

### Difficulties

Changes of administrative structures at all levels and reorganisations are sometimes perceived as a reason for the lack of ability to build continuous and permanent structures in the knowledge of the youth field.

A lack of cross-sectoral cooperation on youth issues and consequently also on youth research is mentioned by a number of countries. Reasons mentioned are a lack of coordination between different departments, lack of cooperation between relevant institutions but also between different research fields and researchers themselves. Member States express themselves in favour of a better integration of youth activities, including better knowledge across policy areas. There is also the wish for improved cooperation between youth policy, youth research and youth work.

Other difficulties that Member States report are a lack of reliable and comparable data. There is also regret of a lack of studies, surveys and opinion polls aimed at young people. The balance between qualitative and quantitative research is addressed. Some find national evaluation for the identification of new youth research areas insufficient and regret the lack of central steering and coordination of contents of youth research. Another weakness highlighted is the lack of a young generation of researchers, which is particularly problematic given that "youth" is the subject matter in question.

### Suggestions

Reliable and comparable data concerning young people are one major demand of Member States. Another demand was that for the elaboration of a European youth report – a proposal that the Commission has anticipated by presenting the first European Youth Report as another annex to the current Communication "Youth: Investing and Empowering", to which this report is also an annex.

EU Research should be reinforced. Cooperation with the Commission's Directorate-General for Research has led to different youth specific projects under the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Research Framework Programme, and DG Research has recently finalised a Policy Review "European Research on Youth", which distils some common recurring themes which are of interest to policymakers Under the 7<sup>th</sup> Research Framework Programme the programme on research for socio-economic sciences and humanities including youth has launched in 2008 a cluster of 5 research projects on "Youth and social exclusion", testifying to the importance the EC attaches to this domain. Further projects in "Democratic ownership and participation" are ongoing and proposals on "Education and Training" have been invited In order to further reinforce the EU's Research efforts, priorities, such as youth and entrepreneurship, youth and health, youth and culture, economic value of volunteering, trends in political participation, education and employment,poverty could feature in the research working programme 2010-2013. The Youth in Action Programme could support studies relevant for the EU strategy for young people.

Another proposal of the Member States targets a strong and sustainable infrastructure for youth research; some call it an observatory for youth research. From this point of view EKCYP is a good starting point for the collection of data. Based on structures like Eurydice and in cooperation with the Council of Europe a better exploitation of those data will be considered by the European Commission.

A strengthened cooperation between policy, practice and research at national and European level is proposed, with a stronger implication of civil society and young people. There is also strong desire to develop better tools for sharing research results between the Member States, to create more opportunities for meetings and exchanges between researchers and for more joint working between researchers from Member States. Apart from that the promotion of regional cooperation networks is proposed.

### **3. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE OF EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY-MAKING**

Evidence-based policy making is appropriate, it even is a necessity, but in order for policy to actually make use of scientific evidence the latter must be timely and respond swiftly to concrete needs as they occur. Policymakers must have the tools to be able to rapidly respond to societal challenges. In order to identify and anticipate them, it is primordial to bring all actors together on a regular basis.

Member States evaluate the common objectives for better knowledge and a greater understanding as a useful incentive towards stepping up evidence-based policy making in the youth field. The common objectives appear to have supported countries with an already well developed research approach and network to focus their efforts and to reinforce their cross-border cooperation within the EU. In countries with a relatively new or less developed youth research they incited action and helped orientate their efforts.

While progress has been made since the adoption of the common objectives in 2004 and lots of good practices exist, much is still to be done in this field. As a first measure it is proposed to confirm the common objectives and to identify action lines on which the focus would be in the coming years.

The major challenge seems to be a coordinated approach to youth research that brings all the actors in the field – policy makers, researcher, civil society, youth workers, young people, business and private sponsors, and any other relevant actors – together in a joint effort to identify, streamline and focus youth research. Another issue is the identification of topics for

youth research. Of course, there will always be specific national research needs, but there should also joint content priorities be set. In this context it is proposed to focus scientific work in the youth field on the new topics proposed in the Communication "Youth: Investing and Empowering".

The creation of networks that encompass all relevant actors in the youth field and in other policy fields of relevance for youth is an inevitable pathway towards better bringing together needs for scientific evidence and actual research projects.

It appears to be important that a cross-sectoral and, in the best case, a cross-border approach is chosen. Cooperation between researchers from different disciplines and countries needs to be encouraged. The involvement of young researchers as well as their development should be reinforced and future career perspectives should be made much more attractive.

Once the research has been carried out, it is important to make it known to the largest possible public across the EU. To this end all actors should develop the habit of putting new research on the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYP). Only in this way it can live up to its convocation of becoming a real centre of European youth policy knowledge.

Research costs money. Member States report about financial and human resource difficulties when it comes to youth research. New ways of thinking are encouraged; new sponsors, such as foundations, charities and even from industry need to be found, cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary and cross-border cooperation might help share costs and knowledge. New ways and means of communication and new technologies need to be used more.

The need for descriptors/indicators in the youth policy field has been underlined by Member States in their reports. While Member States are encouraged to develop national indicators, the Commission will set up a group of interested Member States, researchers and stakeholders to elaborate indicators. This group will take the work of the peer learning group on participation and information further, but will not exclude elaborating indicators also for other priorities.

EKCYP has helped facilitate access to scientific research in the youth field but it has not yet achieved fully its objectives. It is proposed to not create new structures. Correspondents must be able to dedicate time to update and upload information regularly. A strong commitment from all Member States towards EKCYP is necessary to concentrate on the core tasks, which are to:

- Complete country information
- Enlarge youth policy information
- Provide more and comparative research
- Improve availability of correspondents.

As Member States expressly approve of the EUNYK network, it is proposed to reinforce it. Apart from the annual meetings it is proposed to also call meetings on specific topics, as occasions arise and according to new developments.

It is proposed to launch a pilot project with Eurydice<sup>6</sup> The pilot project could consist of the production of an overview of existing major evidence on important issues of youth policy, such as participation, information, voluntary activities, health, etc.

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<sup>6</sup> An EU institutional network for gathering, monitoring, processing and circulating reliable and readily comparable information on education systems and policies

Concluding, it can be stated that a paradigm shift is needed from collecting better knowledge to actively promoting the outreach of the specialised scientific evidence in the youth field to other policy areas.