

Beyond Barriers policy seminar 28.-29.09.2015

Speaking notes for Mary Ann Hennessey, Head of CoE Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Specific (youth) policy context

- The situation and social inclusion of **diverse** youth groups in vulnerable situations has been for several years among the key areas of concern for the Council of Europe
- For the Council of Europe, social cohesion is firmly based on human rights (as codified in the European Convention on Human Rights, the New Strategy and Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion and the Revised European Social Charter), as well as on acceptance of shared responsibility for the welfare of all members of society, especially those who are at risk of poverty or exclusion.
- In line with this, the youth policy of the Council of Europe aims at “providing young people with equal opportunities and experience which enable them to develop knowledge, skills and competencies to play a full part in all aspects of society”, as stated in the ‘Agenda 2020’, which guides Council of Europe youth policy since 2008.
- The Council of Europe’s work on inclusion of young people in vulnerable situations found its most recent expression in the adoption of the **Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on the access of young people of disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights** and the proposed **CoE Action Plan on Inclusive Societies (2016 – 2019)**.
- At the same time, social inclusion of youth, with particular attention to the most vulnerable is a priority of the current Council of Europe Chairmanship of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- South East Europe is one of the European regions affected by the economic crisis and recession; youth unemployment rates exceed 50% in some of observed countries, which means that at least more than half of young people in these countries are under a risk of social exclusion.
- Young citizens of these countries, faced with unstable prospects more and more often make a decision to leave the country in a search of better education and employment opportunities. It leaves the countries without valuable human resources and potential for recovery.
- Discrimination is a source for exclusion of vulnerable groups of young people (e.g. young Roma, young disabled persons, young refugees and internally displaced persons) all over Europe and hate speech (off line and on line) contributes to spread negative stereotypes which as a consequence often produce discrimination

- Recent Council of Europe activities related to young people in the region include Youth policy advisory missions to Albania (2010) and Serbia (2014), the No Hate Speech campaign (with National campaigns being implemented in nearly all countries of the region - here in Bosnia Herzegovina, in Albania, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia) and the Quality Label for Youth Centres (certified centres in BiH, Serbia and Slovenia) to only name some examples.
- As regards the EU - Council of Europe partnership in the field of youth it started regional co-operation activities in South East Europe (SEE) in 2007. Since then several workshops on youth policy development were organised: in Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Albania and Croatia (on the role of youth information and counselling in young people's social inclusion and access to rights). The last event showed the strong need, expressed by its participants, to continue discussion on social inclusion and the role of youth policy in the region.
- Whereas youth policy strategies are in place in most of the countries in the region, their effective and sustainable implementation does determinate the level of policy impact. Therefore this seminar brings together a variety of actors relating to policy, research and practice to exchange how an effective and sustainable implementation of youth policy can contribute to the social inclusion of young people in vulnerable situations. I wish you fruitful discussions and an interesting seminar!