

Mainstreaming of youth dimension in EU employment policy: Better governance for higher employment and enhanced participation¹

Krzysztof Nowaczek

1. Introduction

The transition period of young people to adulthood is getting longer and more complicated. In these turbulent times unemployment has been the most frequently voiced concern among European young people, mentioned by 45% of respondents (Eurobarometer 2007). Indeed, as the last Joint Employment Report on employment policies highlighted “...*many Member States have seen the labour market situation for the young stagnate. At 18.3%, youth unemployment is about twice the overall rate*” (Council 2007b). Simultaneously, in the opinion of young people, the fight against unemployment should be the Union’s top priority (52 %) followed by the reduction of poverty and social exclusion (45 %) (Eurobarometer 2005). High expectations towards Brussels-based institutions contrast, however, with the limitations of the Treaty mandate with regard to employment policies².

On the basis of the 2005 political debate on the Constitutional Treaty, one might have the impression that young people were very often preoccupied that the European Union did not provide any solutions for their job-market related worries. What is more, they perceived the EU as the transmission belt for liberalisation of the market and boosting flexibility, but leading to a greater insecurity of citizens concerning their jobs. Young people pointed to an association between the European Union and globalisation, which is believed to have a negative impact on social protection and increase in wealth disparities (Commission 2006e: 4).

Frustration caused by this issue increased even further due to the lack of participation of young people in policy formulation. On the one hand, young people (compared to other age groups) have the highest trust in the European Union. On the other hand, not only did the EU mismatch its actions with the expectations of young people but it also remained deaf to the voices raised at the bottom level. Against this background, and on the account of the call for drastic changes, some recent developments at the EU level might have opened a window of opportunity for the introduction of positive and constructive changes.

Following the 2001 White Paper for the European Youth (Commission 2001), the Council Resolution from 2002 on a new framework of European co-operation in the field of youth called for the inclusion of the youth dimension in other policies and programmes, both at the European and national levels, with special reference to employment. Such a mainstreaming of youth issues was supposed to ensure that youth priorities are taken into account when various policies are developed (Council 2002). Consensus among Member States to enhance cooperation in this field could be explained by the statement of Pierre Mairesse (Director for Youth, Sport and Relations with the Citizen within DG Education and Culture) declaring that the starting point for the EU

¹ The author wishes to acknowledge the support of Collegio Carlo Alberto from Turin, Italy, in conducting the research. Remarks introduced at the seminar on Youth Employment and the Future of Work (May 2007) and the advice from Stefano Sacchi were crucial in the completion of the final version. Any mistakes or omissions are strictly my fault.

² Within the European Union, employment policy, located under Title VIII, places emphasis on coordination. For youth issues, laws or framework laws may establish incentive measures, with the exception of the harmonisation of the laws and regulations of Member States.

youth policy was simple: “*We recognised, there won’t be an active citizenship if young people don’t have a job*”³. Despite these efforts, the social and professional integration of young people is at a worrying level. Due to the demographic challenges and the pressure of globalisation, the situation requires further involvement of EU structures for the creation of opportunities for young people.

This chapter is structured as follows: the first section introduces the institutional dimension of the location of youth employment issues on the EU agenda. Secondly, it elaborates on the ‘youth dimension’ of the Open Method of Coordination in employment policy. Those elements of the European Employment Strategy that contribute to the youth policy are introduced⁴. Finally, it is argued that the strengthening of the structured dialogue may improve the level of participation of ‘young stakeholders’ in policy-making. This in turn may lead to better employment policy formulation and ‘ownership’ of the policy agenda by youth actors.

2. European Youth Pact: Youth and employment issues on the EU agenda

In their letter of 29 October 2004, the leaders of France, Germany, Spain and Sweden urged the EU to invest in youth as it was perceived as an asset for the future. Three years after the adoption of the 2001 White Paper, the youth issues were high again on the EU political agenda. The Commission Communication on the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy incorporated the youth dimension in its evaluation widely and proposed a ‘number of measures central to unleashing the potential of young people’ (Commission 2005b). This political initiative was built on the basis of the European Employment Strategy and was supposed to be backed up by the funding from the EU (particularly the European Social Fund). Following these developments the Spring European Council adopted in 2005 the European Youth Pact, the groundbreaking document for the mainstreaming of the youth dimension in EU policies. The Pact envisaged three key areas: (1) employment, integration and social advancement; (2) education, training and mobility; and (3) reconciliation of family life and working life. Actions in the above areas are to be drawn upon the Lisbon Strategy and streamlined in the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion Strategy, and the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. The European Council called upon the European Union and Member States to envisage several lines of action. Those related to employment policies referred to:

- endeavouring to increase the employment of young people;
- monitoring policies for the sustained integration of young people into the labour market, in the context of a mutual learning programme on employment;
- inviting employers and businesses to display social responsibility in the area of vocational integration of young people; and
- encouraging young people to develop entrepreneurship and promoting the emergence of young entrepreneurs (Presidency 2005: 19-20).

Consequently, the European Youth Pact became the part of the relaunched Lisbon Strategy in March 2005. In order to ensure meeting the three horizontal objectives of the Lisbon Strategy process – (i) more and better jobs, (ii) growth and (iii) better governance - young people were promised a more prominent role in the Lisbon agenda. Renaldas Vaisbrodas, then President of the European Youth Forum strongly believed that “...*a European Pact for Youth could rejuvenate the Lisbon strategy and reinforce the effective implementation of the objectives.*” (European Youth Forum 2005). As a follow-up to the introduction of the European Youth Pact, in February 2007 the Council indicated four priorities in the further implementation of the Pact:

³ Full interview available at: www.youthweek.eu/interview-mairesse.html.

⁴ Only measures targeting youth directly and in an exclusive manner are collected. The contribution of general employment policies to the improvement of the position of young people in the labour market still needs to be acknowledged.

- young people in the transition period between school education, vocational training and employment;
- the use of local and regional strategies to implement the European Pact for Youth to foster high-quality measures aimed at better social and professional integration;
- equal opportunities for social and professional integration to young people through individually tailored measures; and an
- enhanced youth dimension of the Lisbon Strategy for the better social and professional integration of young people.

In a key message to the 2007 Spring European Council, national ministers for education, youth and culture acknowledged that “...*young people constitute a valuable resource for both the present and future of the European Union and European society at large*”. To achieve the aims of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs, incorporation of the youth dimension into national implementation of the Lisbon Strategy at all levels was considered crucial (Council 2007a: 4). Member States should use the European Pact for Youth in achieving the aim of young people’s better integration. Evaluation of the above measures and their results are required by 2008, when the first Lisbon cycle (2006-2007) will come to an end. The above contribution of the Council on the implementation of the European Pact for Youth was one of the fourteen documents submitted to the 2007 Spring European Council under the heading of ‘Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Employment’ (Presidency 2007). It might be one of the reasons why not more than half of the paragraph from the 2007 European Council conclusions was devoted to the youth dimension of the Lisbon Strategy. Nevertheless the interest of policy-makers in progressing the youth employment issue has been consolidated. Significant public space has also already been given to this topic. ‘Wording’ was essential at the beginning of the policy-making process when the agenda-setting was the most important task for the supporters of an enhanced youth dimension of various policies. Yet at this stage actions are more important than the phrasing of official documents. Even if youth is not mentioned explicitly in the declaration for the 50th anniversary of the EU⁵, it is essential to remember that in the context of the Lisbon Agenda, 2007 is a year which has been proclaimed as the ‘Year of Delivery’.

Against the above backdrop, the next section provides an overview of the framework in which youth employment policies are coordinated at the EU level. Its main aim is to measure how the youth dimension was mainstreamed into various components of the European Employment Strategy, and thus evaluate the relevance of the European Youth Pact.

3. Youth related elements in the Open Method of Coordination in employment policy.

The European Employment Strategy was launched in 1997 and subsequently institutionalised into the framework of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The OMC is seen as another aspect of an experimental and complementary form of governance. The process takes place at two levels. At the first level, the OMC contributes to a common discourse and a common language as well as a sharing of perceptions with regard to common problems and the identification of ‘the best’ solutions. At another level, the OMC leads to policy transfer and convergence of policies by identifying and ‘faming good performance’ and ‘shaming insufficient results’. The OMC can be viewed as a way to avoid the deadlock in policy-making by choosing the most suitable arena for decision-making. In some cases, it may transform interests through continuous discussion and exchange of argumentation. This, in turn, *may* lead to the development of policies compatible with the Community’s interests (Szyszczak 2006: 488-489). There are no

⁵ Declaration on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome, Available at: http://www.europa.eu/50/docs/berlin_declaration_en.pdf.

less than sixteen policy fields where a specifically tailored OMC can be detected. Youth OMC⁶ is, in relative terms, weakly institutionalised. However the level of institutionalisation of OMC in employment policies is considered as ‘very strong’ (Laffan and Shaw 2005: 16) or entirely ‘developed’ (Szyszczyk 2006: 494). It is in this latter framework that mainstreaming of youth issues into employment policies was envisaged.

Five major elements of a genuine OMC⁷, regardless of the policy field, can be identified:

- 1) Agreeing on the common objectives for the European Union;
- 2) Establishing common indicators as a means of comparing best practice and measuring progress;
- 3) Translating the EU objectives into national policies;
- 4) Publishing reports, analysing and assessing national policies; and
- 5) Establishing Community Action Programmes to promote policy cooperation and transnational exchange of learning and good practice.

The European Employment Strategy has been based on the above five elements. The sections below outline them accordingly and the table introduced at the end of the chapter summarises the key findings.

EU common objectives

Common objectives related to the European Employment Strategy were built around four priorities (‘pillars’): entrepreneurship, employability, adaptability and equal opportunities. Since the 2003 guidelines, these four pillars have been replaced by three main goals: full employment, improving quality and productivity at work, and strengthening social cohesion and inclusion. The principal goal of the pillar on employment has been to attract and retain more people in the labour market. In this respect, it is the relevant objective for young people who may face four ‘risky’ transitions: from education to first job; from unemployment to employment; from housework to regular employment; and from short-term contracts to long-term contracts. Under ‘Pillar One’ of the European guidelines related to measures promoting ‘employability’, four streams of actions were envisaged: preventing youth unemployment and long-term unemployment; shifting from passive to active policies; facilitating the transition from school to work; and promoting a partnership for training and lifelong learning. Interestingly enough, all of them (and particularly the first one) relates to tackling youth unemployment via various measures.

Starting from 1999, the Council has called for developing preventive and employability-oriented strategies, building on the early identification of individual needs. To this end, Member States must have ensured that every unemployed young person is offered a new start before reaching six months of unemployment: in the form of training; retraining; work practice; a job; or some other employability measure. Another aim identified by policy-makers was to ease the transition from school to work, particularly for those young people who leave school without the appropriate training required for entering the job market. Bearing this in mind, Member States should improve education systems to reduce the number of young people who drop out of the school system and equip youth with skills suitable for contemporary challenges. Developing skills for the new labour market in the context of lifelong learning, national policies should target youth illiteracy and give particular attention to young people with learning difficulties and with

⁶ Youth OMC was introduced by EU politicians to improve participation, information, voluntary activities of young people and knowledge of youth issues. To this end, the Council adopted in 2003 and 2004 fourteen common objectives in the above four areas (Council 2002 and 2005).

⁷ The list has been drawn up on the basis of the European Commission’s description of the OMC for social inclusion (available at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/index_en.htm) and existing literature on this form of governance (e.g. Dehousse 2002, Borrás and Jacobsson 2004, Laffan and Shaw 2005).

educational problems. In this context, Member States are requested to develop measures aimed at halving by 2010 the number of 18 to 24 year olds with only lower-secondary level education who are not in further education and training. In a more indirect manner, Member States should aim at ‘developing entrepreneurship’ by making it easier to start up and run businesses which, whenever necessary, offer young people apprenticeship training (Council 1999 and 2001). The ultimate goal of these multi-fold measures should be the effective integration of young people into the labour market.

Although these objectives have been relevant for the last ten years, they have not been fully realised because the measures actually implemented have proved insufficient to meet the challenge. As requested in 2007, after the revision of the European employment guidelines, Member States were supposed to revise their employment policies with a view to adopting even more youth-friendly instruments:

- concentrating on an inclusive labour market, adopting a ‘lifecycle’ approach, and developing an integrated approach for those with fewer opportunities;
- providing better guidance and counselling at the earliest possible stage; and
- implementing measures aimed at reconciling work and family life, such as childcare programmes or employment services (Council 2007a: 3-4).

Indicators measuring progress

The Commission proposed the introduction of a number of indicators to measure progress in implementation of the European Employment Strategy (Commission 2003). Some of them were related directly to ‘performance’ and opportunities offered to young people in the labour market. Against this benchmark, the Commission evaluated Member States’ policies and their outcomes. The first five-year period of the European Employment Strategy (1997-2002) was measured against four-fold benchmarks: (i) indicator of effort (share of young/adult unemployed becoming unemployed in month X and having started an individual action plan before reaching 6/12 months unemployment); (ii) rate of non compliance (share of young/adult becoming unemployed in month X, still unemployed in months X+6/12 and having not started an individual action plan); (iii) rate of inflow into long-term unemployment (share of young (adult) persons who are still unemployed at the end of month X+6/12 without any break); and (iv) activation rate (number of participants in training and similar measures who were previously registered unemployed related to the number of registered unemployed) (Commission 2002).

National policies translating EU objectives

Member States are required to submit to the European Commission National Reform Programmes (National Action Plans until 2004) related to the Lisbon Strategy for Jobs and Growth⁸. National governments report on their policies and measures, targeting issues identified in the previous EU guidelines. To this end, the youth dimension of employment has always constituted a significant part of national surveys, evaluated later by the European Commission in Joint Employment Reports (see below). Some Member States refer directly to goals established in the European Youth Pact and the prioritised areas (i.e., education, labour market, social inclusion and young people’s participation). Very often the list of indicators used for analysis in National Reform Programmes is divided into two subgroups related to either all people or youth. This gives a clearer picture of young people in the labour market and as a target group of policy measures.

⁸ Work on National Reform Programmes is a crucial process when advocacy coalitions (e.g. trade union, business associations or youth organisations) can ensure that their priorities are properly taken into account in the policies envisaged by governments.

Throughout the years, the Commission has justly acknowledged that the EU operational targets related to youth unemployment were taken into account in all National Action Plans. All Member States refer in their National Reports to the common objectives established at the EU level and those highlighted by the European Council. More importantly, the European Youth Pact had indeed some impact on domestic policies. The adoption of the document fostered involvement of Youth Ministries in the Lisbon process and the mainstreaming of the youth dimension in various policy fields. Not less than ten Member States referred *explicitly* to the Pact in their 2006 National Reform Programmes, leading to reaching the overall objectives of the Lisbon Agenda submitted to the European Commission (Council 2006). In most cases, Member States indicated which particular policy measures contributed to the goals envisaged in the European Youth Pact (e.g. Belgium, Cyprus, Spain, Sweden). In some cases, the Pact was perceived as a driving cause for changes in the structure of employment or education policies (e.g. Finland, France)⁹.

Publishing joint reports

On the basis of the National Action Plans, the Commission draft annual Joint Employment Reports that summarise and evaluate domestic efforts in realising the EU objectives in employment policies. Furthermore, in order to provide a better overview, the Commission publishes reports on 'Employment in Europe' with the description of European labour markets and studies on particular aspects of employment (e.g. mobility, entrepreneurship, wages, etc.)¹⁰. At this stage, EU institutions initiate their 'naming and shaming' weapon by indicating countries with the lowest performance.

As reported in 2006, at 18.5% the youth unemployment rate still remained around twice as high as the overall unemployment rate. Large disparities are evident across Member States. Eight countries have rates above 20%, especially high in Slovakia and Poland at around 30% and 37% respectively, whereas Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands have a relatively low level of around 8.5%. (Commission 2006b: 36). Contrary to the recent increase in employment of the other age groups, 15-25 year-olds have witnessed a slow decrease in the activity rate, falling from 46.5% to 45.2%. As indicated in the recent Commission report on Employment in Europe, it might be due to an increased participation in education which - in the longer term - should have a positive effect on overall employment performance (Commission 2006b: 38). As the 2006/2007 Joint Employment Report indicated (Council 2007), progress in reducing early school leaving has been slow; in 2005, 6 million young people left education prematurely. In order to reach a target of 85% of 22 year-olds in the EU having completed at least upper secondary education, Member States need to intensify their efforts in formulating and implementing appropriate policy measures.

The Joint Employment Report from February 2007 devoted special attention to youth employment. Following its adoption, the Report was forwarded to the March 2007 Spring European Council. The Report pointed out that youth unemployment is still a severe problem in many Member States and this was in spite of the implementation of measures promoting an increase in employability and the introduction of incentives for employers to hire young people. Several Member States have been still far from reaching the medium and long-term targets (giving a 'new start' for young unemployed respectively within six months by 2007 and within four months by 2010). In 2006, less than half of the Member States met the target of a new start within six months by 2007. The drafters of the Report called also for giving more attention to

⁹ National Reform Programmes from 2006 are available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/key/nrp2006_en.htm.

¹⁰ The 'Employment in Europe' reports are available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_analysis/index_en.htm.

ensuring access to upper secondary education for all young people, including migrant and minority youth (Council 2007b).

In the context of reporting on domestic policies, the most relevant added value of the European Union would be a facilitation of the exchange of best practices, not only among national governments but also between local authorities or NGOs directly involved in work with young people. The best idea would be a publication of a handbook for policy-makers and practitioners that could draw on the best means to mainstream the youth dimension in employment policies. Such a publication, as is the case with the 'Handbook on Integration (of immigrants) for policy-makers and practitioners', would be more reader-friendly than technical in nature Joint Employment Reports. Such a document should include, for example, an accessible section on best practices from EU Member States. This kind of approach will reach policy implementation, practitioner and grassroots levels in a way that the standard Communication cannot. In this respect, the relevance of the European Youth Forum (with around 100 member organisations) and the Council of Europe (with 47 member countries) should not be underestimated. Their co-operation in compiling, distributing and promoting such a publication would be of a great assistance to EU institutions.

The Youth Ministers gathered in the Council in February 2007 emphasised, however, that 'any increase in the amount of reporting currently required of Member States should be avoided'. Simultaneously they endorsed the proposal of the German, Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies to issue a regular 'European Youth Report' that would collect information on the situation of young people in Europe. Besides evidence gathered via Youth OMC, the Report would aim to include the relevant data and structured examples of good practice (Council 2007d). The Bureau of European Policy Advisors built upon this idea and stipulated that such a highly publicised annual review, prepared for each Spring European Council (always devoted to the Lisbon Agenda) could stimulate the public debate on these issues. EU leaders would consider the report and make new commitments where necessary. BEPA suggested that the first edition of the report should be devoted to the topics of youth and the welfare state (BEPA 2007: 76). Furthermore, the working document issued by the Commission in September 2007 provided an overview on the youth employment situation across the European Union, identified policies implemented in 2005 and 2006 in all Member States and compiled recommendations for 2007 (Commission 2007c). In spite of the relevance of such information for stakeholders and policy-makers, the document lacks the visibility crucial for reaching the wider audience to which reference has already been made.

EU financial incentives

Several budget lines offer significant financial contribution to policies adopted at the domestic level. The European Social Fund has been the EU's financial instrument for investing in people. As defined by the European Commission, its mission is to help prevent and fight unemployment, to make Europe's workforce and companies better equipped to face new challenges, and to prevent people from losing touch with the labour market. Some 80 billion Euros have been provided over the period 2000-2006. Young people (and particularly unemployed youth) have been one of the main target groups for projects financed by the Fund. The Equal Programme has sponsored initiatives aimed at testing new means of tackling discrimination and inequality experienced by those searching for a job or those already in occupations. The activities from across the EU contributed to reaching the previously established guidelines such as 'employment pathways for young people', 'early identification of needs, 'job search assistance, guidance and training', 'inclusive education and training policies and action to facilitate access to initial vocational training' and 'reduction in number of early school-leavers'. Some projects financed through this EU fund aimed at improving the situation of young people facing discrimination on

various grounds such as gender, ethnicity or disability. The websites devoted to the European Social Fund and Equal collect all funded initiatives in databases accessible to everybody¹¹. They serve as online handbooks which practitioners can consult to search for the most suitable initiatives. Several education-related budget lines such as Erasmus and Leonardo da Vinci within the Lifelong Learning Programme also contribute to the employment-related initiatives. Moreover, the new edition of Youth in Action 2007-2013, with its budget of 885 million Euros, has been built in the context of the Lisbon Strategy and the European Youth Pact. In this particular programme, for the period of 2008, the European Commission offered 2.4 million Euros to support non-governmental organisations active at the European level in the field of youth. PROGRESS, another EU Programme introduced in 2006, is used to, *inter alia*, support the implementation of the European Employment Strategy by developing statistics, indicators and surveys; providing studies of key issues; strengthening partnerships with relevant stakeholders through mutual learning, information and communication activities; and identifying and disseminating good practice examples.

The table below summarises the youth-related elements of Employment OMC in their institutional and policy-related contexts.

Elements of OMC	Youth dimension of Employment OMC
<i>Institutional context</i>	
Treaty basis	Article 125-130 of the Treaty establishing the European Community
Three-fold platform for an institutional coordination	Employment and Social Policy Council gathering national ministers acting on the basis of the qualified majority voting; Employment Committee working with the European Commission (Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs); consultative role of the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions.
<i>Policy content</i>	
Agreeing on common objectives for the EU	Employment guidelines related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tackling youth unemployment, easing the transition from school to work, developing skills for the new labour market in the context of lifelong learning, promoting a lifecycle approach to work through, expanding and improving investment in human capital.
Establishing common indicators	General indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> indicator of effort, rate of non compliance, rate of inflow into long-term unemployment, activation rate.
	Youth related indicators = targets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> halving by 2010 the number of 18 to 24 year olds with only lower-secondary level education who are not in further education and training, reduction in youth unemployment ratio, every young person to be offered a new start before 6th month of unemployment.
Translating the EU objectives into national policies	National Action Plans for Employment (1998 – 2004), National Reform Programmes (2005-2006)
Publishing reports analysing and assessing national	Joint Employment Reports from 1998 onwards

¹¹ Databases available at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf2000/index_en.html and http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/index_en.cfm.

policies	
<i>EU financial incentives</i>	
Establishing a Community Action Programme	European Social Fund, Equal, Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013, Youth in Action, Progress

Table 1: Summary of youth related elements in Employment OMC.

4. Structured dialogue and participation of youth stakeholders in policy formulation

The European Commission has planned to cooperate with young people on youth related issues within the so-called ‘structured dialogue’¹². In a longer term perspective, the dialogue is believed to ensure the aim of ‘better governance’. Currently, three major annual themes are at the foundation of the dialogue: social and professional integration of young people in 2007; intercultural dialogue in 2008; and further perspectives of youth policy at the European level in 2009. The results of each step of the structured dialogue are supposed to have an impact on the EU policy. Member States agreed to involve young people in a structured dialogue whenever policy initiatives related directly to them are discussed¹³.

The main youth political forum in the EU uniting a number of different perspectives has been the European Youth Forum. The EYF plays an active role and has continuous influence on decision-making processes at the European level, with member organisations having a decisive position in ensuring the effective implementation of decisions taken at the EU level. In 2006, the European Youth Forum discussed with the European Commission the access of youth organisations to the European Social Fund. It participated in the Presidencies’ meetings (organised by Austrian and Finnish EU Presidencies) following the informal Council meetings on employment and social affairs in January and July 2006. The Forum contributed to the preparation of the European Employment Week in May 2006 (European Youth Forum 2007: 23). Furthermore, the European Youth Forum produced a shadow report on the implementation of the common objectives in the areas of information and participation. It was based on the national reports prepared by National Youth Councils, in parallel to the Member States’ national reports of 2005 (European Youth Forum 2006). The Finnish Youth Network was contracted by the European Youth Forum to undertake an independent study on the evaluation of the OMC process in youth policy (Rahja and Sell 2006).

Following the adoption of the European Youth Pact, the European Youth Forum established six aims that should be taken into account by EU policy-makers¹⁴. Two of them were related directly to employment issues and concerned promotion of active youth participation in the European Employment Strategy as well as facilitation of information exchange and encouragement of the co-operation of youth organisations in this field. The European Youth Forum has also continued to assess implementation of the European Youth Pact within the Lisbon strategy. To this end the EYF established several quantitative and qualitative indicators that should be part of the European Employment Strategy. Consequently, commitments made by EU policy-makers included:

- reduction of European youth unemployment rates from 18% today to 9% before 2010;
- reduction of the average transition period between school or training and obtaining a paid job by 50%;
- high quality education, training and work experience programmes for the young unemployed;

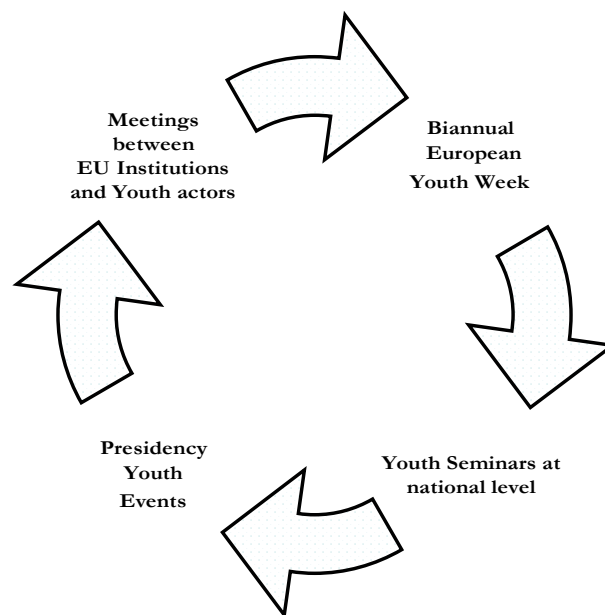
¹² The structured dialogue is defined as “...an instrument to actively involve young people in policy shaping debates and dialogue in relation to the European agenda”. More details available at: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policies/structured_en.html.

¹³ It is important to note that consultation with youth on the EU policies is not to replace social dialogue but to complement it.

¹⁴ Available at: www.youthforum.org/en/our_work/Policy_areas/employment_priorities.htm.

- improvement of education systems to prevent young people from leaving education early and to ensure that young people have the ability and skills to adapt to technological and economic change; reduction of early school leaving by 50% in the period 2006-2010; and
- the development of specific measures to support those young people who suffer multiple discriminations in the labour market, notably young women, young disabled and young migrants.

Against this background, the European Youth Forum wishes to play an active role inside the European Union's Employment Strategy and be recognized as a key stakeholder within the 'structured dialogue with youth'.



Graph 1: Structured dialogue between Youth Organisation and EU institutions (own graph on the basis of the Youthweek event website).

It is in the above framework that the European Youth Forum and other youth organisations seek to influence the EU policy-making process. One of the major channels to voice their preferences and opinions is the participation in youth events that gather together politicians, bureaucrats and practitioners from the youth sector. The first half of 2007 has seen three key events related to the contribution of young people to the EU agenda. The evaluation of their relevance for the policy input (and in consequence, policy output) brings mixed results.

The first youth summit was held in Rome¹⁵ between 24th and 25th March 2007 to coincide with the official summit of the Heads of State and Government in Berlin. It was the centrepiece of the EU's 'youth package' to celebrate the signing of the Rome Treaties 50 years ago. To this end, EU policy-makers designated youth as the key target group and signalled their will to engage in further dialogue. The Rome Youth Declaration called for improved access for youth organisations to the decision-making process concerning issues such as: the management of demographic change; the debate on flexicurity; the reform of the pensions system; and the development of European migration and integration policies. In this context, the concluding

¹⁵ More information available at: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youthweek/index_en.html.

message of the Declaration is more than telling: “Listen to what we have to say, ask us what we need and then act!” (Rome Youth Event 2007)¹⁶.

According to Jillian van Turnhout, the vice-president of the European Economic and Social Committee, the final declaration of the Rome Youth Summit was quite strong and clear but there is still a “...*long way to go regarding the follow-up and ensuring that action is taken*”¹⁷. No concrete impact of the Rome Declaration from March 2007 can be indicated. It is in spite of the pre-event institutional commitment by the Youth Committee of the European Parliament to discuss the document, an invitation from the European Economic and Social Committee to present the declaration at the plenary meeting in May and a principal commitment by Commissioners for Education and Communication Strategy. Bettina Schwarzmayer, the president of the European Youth Forum, stressed after the Rome Youth Event that the major concerns of the EYF are still the same: true and genuine youth participation that would not be based on “...*one off events but a culture of youth participation*” with a “...*clear structure from the beginning to the end of the processes*”. The dialogue should be structured in a clearer manner with stakeholders knowing their exact role and the framework within which they can contribute. Moreover, their participation should be guaranteed at not only the European level, but also the national one. To this end, the structure of the link between the European and national tiers, as well as technical details (e.g. actors, venues, deadlines, frequency of meetings, agenda) should be well defined in advance. Notwithstanding this, Bettina Schwarzmayer has only “...*vague ideas on how it could be* [structured], *but* [she still doesn’t] *think it is as concrete as we would like it to be*”¹⁸. In a similar tone, Jillian van Turnhout, the vice-president of the European Economic and Social Committee, underlined that “...*youth policy should not be just about participation of young people in events and activities*”. It is, rather, an involvement in all levels of governance that matters as it is a genuine youth contribution - and not ‘diplomacy’ - that will guarantee effects after the subsequent meetings¹⁹.

This critical voice was particularly significant in the context of the second event, Cologne Youth Event, organised by the German Presidency. According to Gislinde Boehringer, the preparation for the Presidency Youth Event in Cologne, and the event itself, were rather bad examples of structured co-operation between the authorities and youth associations. The German Federal Youth Council expressed its disappointment about the first preparatory meeting in September 2006. During the second gathering the Youth Council was presented with the final programme of the Youth Event and could not effectively comment on its content. Their late critique was not taken into account by governmental organisers. Only a few days before the event took place the Youth Council was urgently requested to delegate chairpersons for the working groups. Boehringer concluded her critical overview of the Youth Event, underlining that “...*it is always said a lot about the participation of young people, but politicians should ask themselves, whether they want the youth involved actively*” (Boehringer 2007).

¹⁶ The full text of the Rome Youth Declaration is available at: www.youth-event-germany.de/downloads/4-20-820/Youth%20Summit%20Roma.pdf.

¹⁷ Full interview available at: www.youthweek.eu/jillian-van-turnhout-interview.html.

¹⁸ Full interview available at: www.youthweek.eu/301.html.

¹⁹ Full interview available at: www.youthweek.eu/jillian-van-turnhout-interview.html.

The third key event of 2007, the third European Youth Week²⁰, took place between 3rd and 10th June 2007 with various events organised throughout Europe aimed at promoting the Youth in Action Programme and European Youth Policies as well as contributing to the structured dialogue with young people. Nearly 200 young people had a chance to make tangible contributions to the European Commission's Plan D – Democracy, Dialogue and Debate. To this end, members of the European Commission joined the youth debate and ten working groups discussed the general theme, "Social Inclusion and Diversity of Young People". One of them tackled directly the issue of 'employment and social inclusion'. The subtitle of the seminar - 'Doing it our way' - signified the determination of young participants to have a stronger say in policy-making. The final conclusions of the youth event were subsequently forwarded to the European Commission and the Council of Youth Ministers. It is still to be seen what exact impact the youth events will have on policy formulation. For the time being, one of the most evident successes of the youth organizations was the Commission's initiative to draft a 'charter on internships' (Commission 2007b), preceded by the campaign of the European Youth Forum to introduce common standards on availability and quality of internships (European Youth Forum 2007b).

5. Concluding remarks and future developments

This chapter has presented the channels through which the youth dimension is mainstreamed into EU employment policy. EU policy-makers promised more 'youth friendly' policies. To that end, the European Youth Pact and the Open Method of Coordination have, to some extent at least, been reasonably successful stories in this respect. They have brought a crucial focus on youth employment and helped Member States to reflect on this issue in a more systematic, open and harmonised manner. National governments were required to give attention to common objectives and to offer a floor for a consultative process with non-governmental actors. The OMC has stimulated a process of mutual learning on good practice. This is perceived by some scholars and commentators to be one of the biggest advantages of this new form of governance. Nevertheless, there is no common system of mainstreaming the youth dimension into the European Employment Strategy. Consequently, ensuring proper standards of good quality provision in this area is difficult. According to the European Commission's Bureau of European Policy Advisers, the coordination of youth policies at the EU level should be more "*...wide-ranging and systematic in order to favour cross-cutting issues and translate findings and actions into concrete measurable outcomes?*" (BEPA 2006: 17).

Identifying youth as a target group has been the great success of the European Union. Nearly ten years ago such activities and policies were certainly not integral to the work of the EU. The European Youth Pact has proved to be an important mechanism in terms of constructing a political consensus on youth employment and giving further impetus to related developments. As a matter of fact the European Youth Pact was a major step in the development of European youth policies and, as highlighted by the Youth Council, thus built an essential basis 'for further initiatives over the next ten years' (Council 2007c: 2). Currently neither EU nor domestic employment guidelines can neglect the special status and needs of young people. What researchers and practitioners now highlight is the necessity to translate this political motivation into more effective reforms.

²⁰ The first European Youth Week: Youth IN Action (INitiative - INtercultural dialogue – INclusion) was organised between 29 September – 5 October 2003; the second one in December 2005 with the slogan "Youth Takes the Floor". Participants of the second seminar called for a more structured involvement in policy formulation, in particular, the participation of youth organisations in social dialogue related to the European Youth Pact, frequent consultation between Ministries of Social Affairs or other Ministries and Youth Organisations, the presentation of the outcomes of the consultations to Mr/Ms Lisbon of the respective countries, promotion of the social economy through the reduction in numbers of early school-leavers, and not least, enhanced consultation of Youth Organisations with national, regional and local level authorities (Commission 2005c: 19).

What has been the role of the European Youth Pact and youth organisations in this process? On the one hand, events organised at both the European and domestic levels facilitated the mobilisation of youth networks. In terms of lobbying, the contribution of these bodies was essential. EU documents (e.g. European Youth Pact) and the Community processes opened the window of opportunity for them to upload their preferences and attach to them political relevance. On the other hand, EU policy-making machinery - although transparent enough to observe the process - has not been sufficiently opened up to allow non-governmental institutions genuine access to the decision-making venue. In particular, the Open Method of Coordination requires detailed expertise from participants to have their say at both the European and national levels – especially in highly technical matters.

Three major developments will shape the future EU youth employment policy agenda. Recent years have witnessed a greater degree of mobility of young people within the European Union. This may raise questions on ‘brain drain’ from new Member States that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. It is, of course, too early to evaluate these recent migratory movements, although the character of migration, skills of mobile youth workers and jobs undertaken suggest that some of them may return home with resources and human capital earned abroad. Nevertheless the mobility of young people has a certain impact on both sending and receiving countries. Unemployment rates among young people have declined recently among Central European states. It was, however, not mainly because of active policy measures, but rather the outflow of the unemployed (in conjunction with an improved macro-economic situation). Open borders cannot be a substitute for national employment policies. Instead, governments should focus on providing the best possible opportunities for those who stay and those who would like to return. The key role of the EU institutions has been the facilitation of workers’ mobility by encouraging young people to gain foreign work-related experience or by removing obstacles for free movement of persons. To this end, following activities related to the 2006 European Year of Workers’ Mobility, the Commission launched in autumn 2007 the pilot “Your First Job Abroad” initiative for young workers wishing to plan their first mobility experience (Commission 2007b).

The European Commission launched in Autumn 2006 a wide consultation process on modernising labour law in view of the challenges of the 21st century (Commission 2006c). It was in the context of the debate on ‘flexicurity’ that stakeholders at domestic and EU levels provided their contribution on the subject. This was prior to the adoption of the formal Communication. It was a crucial moment for intervention and, for that reason, the European Youth Forum submitted their views. The EYF’s position took account of a number of issues, concerns and views expressed by young people: the balance between flexibility and security; the availability and quality of internships across the EU; working conditions; wages; and the reconciliation of professional, private and family life (European Youth Forum 2007b). Nevertheless, the recent Communication on flexicurity (Commission 2007a) did not incorporate key elements that needed to be considered: notably, an acknowledgment that young people are over-represented among labour market outsiders and face problems of entry into employment. On the occasion of the publication of the Communication, the European Expert Group on Flexicurity underlined that more effort is needed to meet the target for every young person who has left school or university and become unemployed to be offered a job, apprenticeship, training or other employability measure within 100 days. It was also recognised that there was a need for youth to be provided with better information on job opportunities, especially through media that are popular amongst the young (e.g. internet, job fairs, job clubs). Moreover, they required assistance in securing easy, cheap and open access to training in entrepreneurship skills within the education system (European Expert Group on Flexicurity 2007).

The poor employment situation of young ethnic minorities and migrants has been another urgent problem neglected so far by policy-makers. In consequence, democratic welfare states have failed to promote the integration of unemployed young immigrants (see for instance Malmberg-Heimonen 2006). An analysis of the events in France in Autumn 2005 would suggest that ‘assimilation’ is no solution for socio-economic challenges. It would appear that lack of proper employment opportunities started the chain reaction that eventually led to riots on the streets. In ageing Europe the number of newcomers from outside of the European Union, as well as second and third generation migrants, is constantly growing. In order to tackle problems of young migrants in the labour market, national governments require coordination of departments responsible for youth, employment and migrant policies. The administrative constraints explain why the EU initiatives targeting the position of young immigrants in the labour market are so scarce. Cooperation is required of the three key Directorates General: Employment and Social Affairs; Education and Culture; and Justice, Freedom and Security. It is not only cooperation between different DGs that is required, though, but also the synergy of three grand EU projects related to the Lisbon Agenda; the creation of an Area of Justice, Freedom and Security; and, not least, bringing the EU closer to young citizens. On account of the above, it is with regret that one must note the limited interest of youth organisations lobbying for proper EU policies targeting the problem of unemployed young immigrants. None of the youth associations replied to the crucial 2005 Green Paper on ‘an EU approach to managing economic migration’. It was only recently in the context of the assessment of the implementation of the European Youth Pact that the European Youth Forum called for specific measures supporting young migrants facing multiple discrimination in the labour market. For the harmonised functioning of European societies, it is important to focus on this aspect of youth and migrant policies. Youth NGOs could ensure that solutions envisaged at the EU level could be both youth and migrant friendly.

Further European integration will never be possible without the involvement and the support of the younger generations. In this context, the European Commission’s goal has been “...to create a climate of youth-friendly policies or youth-friendly Europe”²¹. As stipulated in the 2007 Work Programme, “...the Commission will continue to try to better involve citizens in the policy process at all levels, particularly young people and women. The challenge is to improve the citizens’ image of the EU, knowledge about the EU, and interest in the EU” (Commission 2006a: 10). In a similar tone, the Commission defined in 2007 a strong partnership between the EU and young people as a “...commitment by the EU and Member States to develop better opportunities for young people and a commitment by young people themselves to play an active part” (Commission 2007b: 2). Drawing upon these declarations, one could infer that not only youth organisations need the youth-friendly involvement of the Commission, but it is also the Commission and the EU as such that need the contribution of youth, which will in turn help build a positive and open-minded image of Europe. For policy-makers, listening to young people should be more important than just talking. On the other side, young people are looking forward to not only participation in meetings but also a structured and continuous involvement in policy-making.

References: literature and official documents

- BEPA (2006) “Investing in Youth: from childhood to adulthood”, Marcel Canoy, Graça Carvalho, Christer Hammarlund, Agnès Hubert, Frédéric Lerais, Anna Melich, 11 October 2006, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy_advisers/publications/docs/investing_in_youth_11_october_2006_final_en.pdf.
- BEPA (2007) “Investing in youth: an empowerment strategy”, Leanda Barrington-Leach, Marcel Canoy, Agnès Hubert, Frédéric Lerais, April 2007, available at:

²¹ Interview with Jan Figel, Commissioner for Education and Culture available at: www.youthweek.eu/youth-summit-in-rome.html.

- http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy_advisers/publications/docs/Investing_in_Youth_25_April_fin.pdf.
- Boehringer, Gislinde (2007) 'Passive involvement is not required', available at: www.youthweek.eu/passive-involvement.html.
- Borrás, Susana and Kerstin Jacobsson (2004) 'The open method of co-ordination and new governance patterns in the EU', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 185-208.
- Cologne Youth Event (2007) 'Equal Opportunity and Social Participation for all Children and Youth', Cologne, 13-16 April 2007, Conclusions of the Working Groups and Action Plan, available at: www.youth-event-germany.de/downloads/4-20-824/action_plan.pdf.
- Commission (2001) 'White Paper on a new impetus for European youth', COM (2001) 681, 21 November 2001.
- Commission (2002) Impact Evaluation of the European Employment Strategy: Technical Analysis supporting COM (2002) 416 final of 17.7.2002 (Taking Stock of the Five years in EES), available at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/publications/2002/cev102006_en.pdf.
- Commission (2003) 'Communication on the future of the European Employment Strategy. A strategy for full employment and better jobs for all', COM(2003) 6, 14 January 2003.
- Commission (2005a) 'Communication on European policies concerning youth. Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe - implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship', COM(2005) 206, 30 May 2005.
- Commission (2005b) 'Communication to the spring European Council on Working together for growth and jobs. A new start for the Lisbon strategy', COM (2005) 24, 02 February 2005.
- Commission (2005c) European Youth Week 2005, "Youth takes the Floor" Conclusions, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youthweek/doc/conclusions_2005_en.pdf.
- Commission (2006a) 'Commission Legislative and Work Programme 2007', COM(2006) 629, 24 October 2006.
- Commission (2006b) 'Employment in Europe 2006', available at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_analysis/employ_2006_en.htm.
- Commission (2006c) 'Green Paper on Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century', COM (2006) 708, 22 November 2006.
- Commission (2006d) 'Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the Employment Policies of the Member States', COM (2006) 815, 12 December 2006.
- Commission (2006e) 'Communication on the Period of Reflection and Plan D', COM (2006) 212, 10 May 2006.
- Commission (2007a) 'Communication Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity: More and better jobs through flexibility and security', COM (2007) 359, 27 June 2007.
- Commission (2007b) 'Communication on Promoting youth people's participation in education, employment and society', COM (2007) 498, 5 September 2007.
- Commission (2007c) 'Staff Working Document on youth employment in the EU', COM (2007) 1093, 5 September 2007.
- Council (1999) 'Resolution on the 1999 Employment Guidelines', OJ C 069, 12/03/1999, 22 February 1999.
- Council (2001) 'Decision on Guidelines for Member States' employment policies for the year 2001', 2001/63/EC, 19 January 2001.
- Council (2002) 'Resolution regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field', OJ C 168, 27 June 2002.
- Council (2003) 'Resolution on common objectives for participation by and information for young people', OJ C 295, 05 December 2003.
- Council (2004) 'Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States', 2004/740/EC, 4 October 2004.

- Council (2005) 'Council addressing the concerns of young people in Europe - implementing the European Pact for Youth and promoting active citizenship, OJ C 292, 24 November 2005.
- Council (2006) 'Conclusions on the implementation of the European Pact for Youth', 2006/C 70/01, 22 March 2006.
- Council (2007a) 'Contribution of the Council (in the field of youth policy) to the Spring European Council on the implementation of the European Pact for Youth. Key messages to the Spring European Council', 5841/07, 5 February 2007.
- Council (2007b) 'Joint Employment Report 2006/2007', 6706/07, 23 February 2007.
- Council (2007c) 'Reflection paper on the future perspectives for European youth policy. Exchange of views', 6055/07, 6 February 2007.
- Council (2007d) 'Conclusions on future perspectives for European cooperation in the field of youth policy', 8771/07, 27 April 2007.
- Dehousse, Renaud (2002) 'The Open Method of Coordination: A New Policy Paradigm?', Paper presented at the First Pan-European Conference on European Union Politics, "*The Politics of European Integration: Academic Acquis and Future Challenges*", Bordeaux, 26-28 September 2002.
- Eurobarometer (2005) 'Youth takes the floor'. Background note based on relevant findings from Eurobarometer. December 2005, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/notes/back_note_en.pdf.
- Eurobarometer (2007) 'European Social Reality', February 2007, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_273_en.pdf.
- European Expert Group on Flexicurity (2007) 'Flexicurity Pathways. Turning hurdles into stepping stones', available at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/pdf/flexi_pathways_en.pdf
- European Youth Forum (2005) Press Release, Young People in the Lisbon Strategy, 25 January 2005.
- European Youth Forum (2006) 'Shadow report on the implementation of the two first priorities of the Open Method of Coordination in the youth field, Information and Participation', available at: www.youthforum.org/Downloads/Press_publications/reports/0401-06Shadowreport.pdf.
- European Youth Forum (2007a) Annual Report 2006, available at: www.youthforum.org/Downloads/Press_publications/ar/AR2006en.pdf
- European Youth Forum (2007b) 'Bureau contribution to the Green Paper. Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century adopted in March 2007', available at: www.youthforum.org/Downloads/policy_docs/social_conditions/0155-07_Contribution_Green_Paper_Labour_Law.pdf.
- Laffan, Brigid and Colin Shaw (2005) 'Classifying and Mapping OMC in different policy areas', New Modes of Governance Papers.
- Malmberg-Heimonen, Ira (2006) 'Out of Unemployment? A Comparative Analysis of the Risks and Opportunities Longer-term Unemployed Immigrant Youth Face when Entering the Labour Market', *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 5, pp. 575-592.
- Presidency (2005) Brussels European Council, 22 and 23 March 2005, Presidency Conclusions concerning the mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy, 7619/1/05, 23 March 2005.
- Presidency (2007) Brussels European Council, 8/9 March 2007, Presidency Conclusions, 7224/1/07, 2 May 2007.
- Rahja, Nina and Anna Sell (2006) 'Evaluation study of Open Method of Coordination in the youth field. Evaluation study of the information access, actors' roles and openness in the process implementation', the Finnish Youth Research Society, available at: www.jugendpolitikineuropa.de/static/common/jp_download.php/465/Evaluation%20FIN.pdf.

- Rome Youth Event (2007) Rome Youth Event Declaration, Rome 27 March 2007, available at: www.youth-event-germany.de/downloads/4-20-820/Youth%20Summit%20Roma.pdf.
- Szyszczyk, Erika (2006) 'Experimental Governance: The Open Method of Coordination', *European Law Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 486-502.
- Youth Event (2004) 'Declaration on the outcomes of the Youth Event hosted by the Dutch Presidency of the European Union and the Dutch National Youth Council', Rotterdam, the Netherlands 27-28 November 2004, available at: <http://www.youthpolicy.nl/Youthpolicy/docs/pdf/declaration.pdf>.