



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council conclusions on maximising the potential of youth policy in addressing the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy

*3239th EDUCATION, YOUTH, CULTURE and SPORT Council meeting
Brussels, 16-17 May 2013*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council:

RECALLING THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND TO THIS ISSUE AS SET OUT IN THE ANNEX AND IN PARTICULAR

1. CONSIDER THAT:

1. The Europe 2020 Strategy and its flagship initiatives emphasise the importance of the design and delivery of policies that equip all young people with the skills and competences they need to play their part in the knowledge-based economy and society and recognises the role of youth policy in this regard. The overall goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy and Member States' respective targets to increase youth employment, reduce early school leaving and increase participation in tertiary education have a particular relevance to youth and to those young people most at risk of marginalisation. Youth policy involves measures to aid young people's inclusion in educational, developmental, cultural and associational activities, possibilities to gain experience and practical learning opportunities which enhance the life, learning and employment skills of young people.
2. The renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field (2010-2018)¹, stresses the importance of a dual approach that involves both (a) specific youth policy initiatives and (b) mainstreaming initiatives to integrate a youth perspective into relevant policy fields. It offers a set of instruments to pursue activities in eight fields of action and emphasises a cross-sectoral policy approach in response to young people's needs and aspirations.

¹ OJ C 311, 19.12.2009, pp. 1-11.

3. The 2012 Joint EU Youth Report² calls for stronger links and more cohesion between the renewed framework and the Europe 2020 Strategy.
4. The impact of the economic downturn on young people presents challenges for youth policy, for a range of related policy areas which are designed to meet the needs of all young people and in particular, for wider public policy objectives – most notably those to do with the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The challenges³ include unemployment, an increasing risk of exclusion and the potential for the well-being of young people to be adversely affected.
5. Many young people are actively engaging, developing and progressing in groups, communities and wider society; and are both offering and deriving great benefit in terms of their personal and social development, skills, experiences and expertise. However, young people are experiencing elongated ‘transitions’ between dependence and independence, and less certain trajectories in terms of their occupational engagement and progression.
6. The capacity and ability of young people for creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship and adaptability – which are recognised as invaluable in stimulating a renewed and sustainable return to economic and social wellbeing in Member States and to bring about a more inclusive society – needs to be recognised and resourced.
7. Knowledge of youth and how it impacts on youth policy and youth-related policies is important and should be based on sufficient research.
8. A refined emphasis on the positive and distinct contribution and added value that youth policy can make to the Europe 2020 Strategy, most notably in relation to goals in the areas of education and training, employment and social inclusion, is necessary.

2. TAKE NOTE THAT

9. Several policy initiatives (as outlined in the Annex of this document) have been introduced to advance the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy and to address the challenges arising from the impact of the crisis for people throughout the EU. Many of these have particular relevance to young people. Policy initiatives in employment, education and training that target young people promote the adoption of a ‘joined up’ approach in which youth policy should have a key part to play. The role of Ministers responsible for youth and the integration of the youth perspective in a broad range of policy fields should be supported, specifically within the European Semester.

² OJ C 394, 20.12.2012, pp. 5-15.

³ The unemployment rate of young people aged 15 to 24 rose sharply from 15 % in February 2008 to 23.6 % in January 2013. The NEET cohort (young people not in education, employment or training) comprised 7.5m young people between ages 15 and 25 years) in January 2012.

3. ARE OF THE VIEW THAT

10. Cross-sectoral and inter-institutional coordination at national and EU level is central to the implementation of an effective youth policy and in addressing the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy for young people.
11. Youth Policy provides a youth-centred and holistic policy response for young people which offer both vertical and horizontal reach. Youth policy holds both a distinctive and complementary role, in coordination with other policy fields, in stimulating a range of positive responses for young people. The role and remit of youth policy would, however, benefit from greater definition in how it informs and interacts with related policy domains. This would strengthen the impact of youth policy, both on its own terms and as a contributor to the Europe 2020 Strategy, particularly in relation to employment and social inclusion, and would therefore enhance the visibility of youth policy in this context.
12. In particular, youth policy measures, as expressed, for example through youth work and non-formal and informal learning, have a distinct relevance in terms of young people's preparedness, participation and progression in education and training, and employment as well as in the areas of health and social inclusion. Such measures can actively assist the EU Youth Employment Package, in particular the effective implementation of the Youth Guarantee and would benefit from the support of the Youth Employment Initiative and other relevant European funds.
13. The youth sector has particular expertise in engaging and empowering young people, and in particular those young people with fewer opportunities that may not be reached by education and training and employment policies.

4. UNDERLINE THE FOLLOWING PRIORITIES TO MAXIMISE THE POTENTIAL OF YOUTH POLICY IN ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY

14. Measures to enhance cross-sectoral and inter-institutional cooperation to improve coordination of youth and youth related policy areas, most particularly in education and training and employment, are a priority to provide a comprehensive and integrated policy response to the social and economic challenges young people currently face, and to reach out to young people with fewer opportunities, notably young people who are marginalised and not in employment, education or training (NEET), so as to promote a more inclusive society and contribute to the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy.
 15. The role of young people themselves in shaping the design of policies that affect them should be enhanced, especially in regard to their options, access and progression in education and training, and employment, in order to achieve greater social inclusion. Young people's participation in policy formulation is central to the ways in which youth policy is implemented in line with the Renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth field (2010-2018). Youth policy stakeholders have specific expertise in facilitating the active participation of young people in policy development.
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16. The role of the proposed new EU programme on education and training, youth and sport and in particular its youth chapter, as well as other EU Programmes and Funds, will be important in providing Europe's young people with opportunities for learning and mobility, acquiring new skills and experiences, and for engaging in volunteering and cultural exchanges. The independent and intrinsic value of youth policy as well as the added-value of youth policy should be recognised for the way it supports outcomes for young people in education and training, employment and social inclusion. The next generation of European Structural and investment Funds will be instrumental in investing in young people and their skills, and improving their employability and access to the labour market.

5. INVITE MEMBER STATES, WITH DUE REGARD TO THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS

17. Ensure, where appropriate, that priority tasks undertaken under the Renewed Framework for European cooperation in the Youth Field (2010-2018) support and complement the Goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy.
18. Promote the active involvement of youth ministries in national policy-making relating to the Europe 2020 Strategy, in particular in the formulation and, where appropriate, coordination of annual National Reform Programmes (NRPs).
19. Promote, in this context and based on national provisions for dialogue with young people, the better use of existing mechanisms or the development of new ones to capture young people's views to inform and shape youth policy and youth-related policies.
20. Consider how youth policy can contribute to the formulation of measures under the Youth Employment Package including, as appropriate, the implementation of the Council Recommendations on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning and on Establishing a Youth Guarantee.

6. INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE SPHERES OF COMPETENCE AND WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY AND WHILE RESPECTING MEMBER STATES RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUTH POLICY, TO

21. Promote the contribution of youth policy measures, as part of wider education and training, employment and social inclusion policy strategies, to the achievement of the Goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy.
 22. Ensure greater coordination and synergy between work undertaken under the Renewed Framework and work being done in the education and training and employment fields, to strengthen young people's participation in education and training, their progression into employment and their inclusion in society. In particular, emphasise the inclusion of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET).
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23. Develop, within the framework of the Renewed Framework for European cooperation in the Youth field 2010-2018, a medium-term work plan to guide the youth policy and youth related policy work in response to current youth and youth related themes and trends and which will highlight relevant areas for coordination and collaboration with education and training and employment policies with a view to ensuring youth policy input into the European Semester.
 24. Institute the practice whereby Member States representatives responsible for youth policy meeting within the Council and/or its preparatory bodies may discuss and exchange views on the important policy-focused steps within the European Semester, the Annual Growth Survey and the Country Specific Recommendations on Member States' policies, with a view to providing relevant and timely input to the Employment Committee in its multilateral surveillance work on Country Specific Recommendations.
 25. Ensure that the instruments outlined in the EU Youth Strategy and the Joint EU Youth Report (2012), such as the Structured Dialogue process, evidence-based policies and cross-sectoral cooperation are developed to maximum effect with a view to channelling to the Europe 2020 Strategy policy debate all available evidence regarding how the crisis is impacting on young people; and ensuring that the voice of young people can be heard within this debate.
 26. Highlight how youth policy measures, as expressed, for example through youth work and non-formal and informal learning, are a means for young people, in particular for those with fewer opportunities, to empower themselves in order to become active citizens and fully participate in civil society and to develop their learning and employment skills.
 27. Specifically highlight how such measures assist young people to develop their competences and transversal skills which assist them in accessing education and training and occupational opportunities which can enhance their autonomy and progression, as well as assist in developing their personal and social skills and acquiring employment and entrepreneurial skills.
 28. Promote accessibility among all relevant stakeholders and encourage take up of European programmes such as:
 - the European programme for education, training, youth and sport, which supports mobility, exchange and skills enhancement and opportunities for engaging in volunteering and cultural exchanges; and
 - other European programmes and funds which inter alia aim to reach out to all young people, including those with fewer opportunities and, notably, those who are not in education, employment or training;and thereby contribute to the skills development and employability of young people.
 29. Promote full and optimal use, where applicable, of the Youth Employment Initiative to implement the Council Recommendation establishing the Youth Guarantee.
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7. INVITE THE COMMISSION TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:
30. Consider actions to ensure that a youth policy perspective is central to education and training, employment and social inclusion policies, to incorporate a distinct ‘youth policy’ dimension to policies to implement the Europe 2020 Strategy, in particular with regard to youth work and the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning.
 31. Promote awareness of all EU funding programmes and associated best practice examples which develop young people’s 21st Century skills by placing clearer emphasis on how such programmes stimulate skills-based, experiential and entrepreneurial learning which enhance and empower young people’s participation in society, in education and training, in employment, and in particular, for young people with fewer opportunities.
 32. In the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field (2012-2018), continue its intentions to assess the Structured Dialogue process to ensure that the scope, scale and content of the process are reflective of and responsive to the current needs of young people and which, in turn, usefully informs the development of youth policy.
 33. Consider drafting a concept paper based on findings from the EU Youth Report and on-going work in the areas of peer-learning and on that basis, hold a peer-learning seminar involving the key policy areas of Youth, Education and Training and Employment, and relevant stakeholders, to examine the optimum manner in which a collaborative policy response to the current challenges facing young people could be progressed. Such an initiative could outline recommendations which could be considered by the respective policy areas and relevant councils for further action.
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POLITICAL BACKGROUND

1. The Conclusions of the European Council of 13/14 December 2012⁴ and of 7/8 February 2013⁵, which stressed that highest priority should be given to promoting youth employment and launched a new Youth Employment Initiative.
2. The Statement of the members of the European Council of 30 January 2012 "Towards growth-friendly consolidation and job-friendly growth", which invited Member States to stimulate employment, especially for young people, by developing and implementing comprehensive initiatives on employment, education and training and skills.
3. The Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee, under the 'Youth Employment Package'⁶, which is part of a coordinated policy approach to address unemployment, early school leaving and poverty and social exclusion among young people.
4. The Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning⁷, stresses opportunities and mechanisms that enable knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning to play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified.
5. The Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the "Education and Training 2020" strategic framework⁸, which sets out steps to mobilise the "ET2020" process in support of the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives on growth and jobs, and identifies a number of priority areas for European cooperation in education and training for the period 2012-2014.
6. The Council Conclusions on 'Investing in education and training - a response to *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes* and the 2013 Annual Growth Survey on Rethinking Education'⁹.
7. The Council Recommendation on Policies to reduce early school leaving¹⁰ which emphasises the need for comprehensive cross sectoral policies to strengthen links between education and training systems and employment.

⁴ EUCO 205/12.

⁵ EUCO 3/13.

⁶ 17944/12.

⁷ OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, pp. 1-5.

⁸ OJ C 70, 8.3.2012, pp. 9-18.

⁹ OJ C 64, 5.3.2013, pp. 5-8.

¹⁰ OJ C 191, 1.7.2011, pp. 1-6.

P R E S S

8. The Commission's Communication on a "Youth Opportunities Initiative" of 20 December 2011¹¹, calling upon Member States to take more action to tackle the high youth unemployment rates, including better use of European Social Funds and more possibilities for mobility."
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¹¹ 5166/12.