

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

South Mediterranean – European Youth Cooperation

Seminar “Youth and Citizenship”

Concept Note

Prior activities in the field of South-Mediterranean – European youth policy cooperation and programmatic references

The South-Mediterranean youth policy cooperation of the partnership between the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe in the field of youth started in 2003. The activities carried out brought together young people, youth workers, trainers, human rights educators and activists, youth researchers, governmental institutions responsible for youth policy and non-governmental youth organisations in European and South Mediterranean countries.

Among other results, the cooperation created possibilities for direct exchanges between South Mediterranean and European actors in the youth field and provided opportunities for youth policy development and capacity-building of civil society and youth organisations through training courses and policy dialogue on human rights, democracy and active citizenship, intercultural dialogue and youth participation. The cooperation aims at developing a common understanding and exchange of issues of specific concern for youth policy and youth work in Europe and the South Mediterranean region.

The process of changes in various Arab countries provides the context and drives the need for continuing and intensifying this cooperation and for responding to the expectations of the stakeholders, particularly young people. In 2012 two events, in Malta¹ and Tunisia², were organised by the EU and the Council of Europe youth partnership, in cooperation with other partners working in and with the region, such as the League of Arab States, UNFPA, Salto Resource Centre EuroMed, Aгенzija Zghazagh Malta, EuroMed Youth Platform, Anna Lindh Foundation, European Youth Forum.

Particularly the Malta seminar, which offered an occasion for reflection and needs assessment related to the so-called “Arab spring” for Arab and European youth leaders, provided fresh and critical inputs from youth activists regarding the state of youth NGOs and civil society organisations and their needs across the Arab world and in the Euro-Mediterranean region for the development and consolidation of inclusive, participatory and pluralistic democracies. The Tunis symposium discussed the unique political and social situation across the Arab world, in which political realignments have been a result of youth activism.

Both events, in Malta and Tunisia, led to concrete project proposals to foster cooperation, to empower youth NGOs and to promote the development of youth work and youth policy which are based on knowledge and participatory principles. Consequently, follow-up activities place specific emphasis on the development of civil society through strengthening the capacities and potential of youth NGOs and youth activists and hereby contributing to the promotion of democracy, participation, citizenship, freedom of expression and human rights. The Tunis symposium led to concrete project proposals: organisation of an annual Mediterranean University for Youth and Development, creation of a Euro-Arab Youth Platform, establishment of a Euro-Arab Youth Centre for Training and Development and creation of an Arab Youth Researchers Network.

¹ [Seminar “Empowerment of youth organisations and youth-led civil society initiatives in the South-Mediterranean framework”](#) Malta, 22-24 March 2012

² [Symposium “Arab spring: Youth participation for the promotion of peace, human rights and fundamental freedoms”](#) Tunisia, 27-29 August 2012

Other on-going initiatives supporting youth in the region are especially the Euromed Youth Regional Programme of the European Union which is building the capacities of youth organisations or, since the beginning of 2013, the EU funded programme "Citizens for Dialogue" implemented by the Anna Lindh Foundation. Furthermore, youth and democratic values is as well part of the EU funded regional programme implemented by the Council of Europe, focusing on youth, democracy and active citizenship.

Activities are closely linked to the EU youth strategy, the Youth in Action programme and the future programme Erasmus+. The EU Youth Strategy (2010-18) aims at providing more and equal opportunities for young people in education and in the labour market and at encouraging young people to be active citizens and participate in society. Key action "Youth and the world" fosters young people's participation in and contribution to global processes of policy-making (concerning issues such as climate change, the UN Millennium Development Goals, human rights, etc) and supports young people's cooperation with regions outside of Europe. The Youth in Action Programme contributes to the goals of the EU Youth Strategy by providing opportunities for young people to be mobile, to learn and to participate across the EU and beyond; as of 2014 the new programme generation Erasmus+ for education, training, youth and sport will provide support to individual mobility for learning, cooperation and partnerships for innovation and best practices sharing and support for public policy reform in the Member States and cooperation with third countries.

Political participation of youth

Young people are a heterogeneous group in terms of socio-economic, cultural, educational backgrounds determined by class, ethnic and social origin, urban or rural provenance. However, they all have legitimate aspirations to be listened to and to participate in decision-making about their present, their future and that of the environment they live in.

Participation can take different forms: participation in representative democracy (elections, membership in political parties...), in participatory structures (youth organisations, issue-based NGO's, political movements), but also in the community and through volunteering. It can take place in schools, universities and work places or in debates (press, social media, radio, blogs and discussion fora...). Also information gathering and learning about democracy can be understood as specific form of participation.

As the UNFPA experience shows, community participation in emergency and fragile context countries are the forms of civic engagement of particular importance when addressing for instance health related issues, varying from sanitation to child survival, clean water, and health infrastructure, and including youth reproductive health. Yet, it is often overlooked as a proven approach. Even if a participatory approach to planning community interventions has been introduced for a long time, and in spite of the failure of many programs designed without the participation of target communities, some professionals continue to question the value of community members' participating in program design, implementation, and evaluation.

Policy makers and academics have long observed a perceived lack of interest of youth in political participation. However, only when applying its very narrow and traditional definition one could conclude youth have a low interest in politics. The picture changes considerably when

its understanding is broadened from participation in elections and formal political institutions only to including the various forms of civic and voluntary engagement, including the social movements.

The events in a number of countries in the Arab region since the beginning of 2011 as well as the civic and political engagement of young Europeans, particularly in recent social movements, have confirmed a new perception of young people's capacities and aspirations: young people as a resource, as crucial, engaged actors in the processes of political changes and reforms. Young people stand up for more freedom, equality and justice; they strive for better future perspectives in education and work, economic, social and environmental development and participation in decision making.

Political environments need to take into account young people's interests and needs and to foster a stronger civic engagement of young people. Conversely, young people and civil society actors need to find appropriate ways and tools to engage and to increase the number of young people engaged as active citizens. In this respect youth policy has a key role to play in promoting political cooperation, active citizenship and participation. It is also crucial that participation is learned by young people in families, educational settings and everyday life environments.

The situation of youth: differences and commonalities

Despite the obvious differences between the Arab and European regions, both are affected by consequences of globalisation. Not only globalised economic developments and political transition processes (towards democratic societies or, vice versa, towards authoritarian and xenophobe societies) have a strong impact on the lives of young people but also cultural and sociological phenomena.

Many young people remain marginalized from social and economic opportunities, with limited access to essential resources, and this is particularly evident in the Arab / South Mediterranean region. Eighty-seven per cent of the world youth population lives in developing countries, and nearly 45 per cent of all youth globally living on less than 2 dollars a day. Youth are among the most vulnerable of all persons the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aim to reach. Whether it is poverty, hunger, lack of education, maternal mortality, unemployment, environmental degradation or HIV/AIDS, the impact on young people can be far greater than on their older counterparts. This is because many young people often lack access to information, schooling, social influence and basic rights, and are often overlooked in national development agendas. Therefore, young people's participation and inclusion in efforts to achieve all of the identified goals are crucial to ensure a successful and sustainable outcome. But also in Europe there are soaring levels of youth unemployment and millions of young who are not in employment, education nor training, subject to the economic and social exclusion, on or below the poverty line, disengaged and disillusioned, non-autonomous and unsupported, at times untrusted. And hence questioning what their societies and indeed Europe have to offer them.

In both regions, Arab and European, a new citizenship and participation culture has started, ignited by the indignation or engineered through the dialogue processes. It has reached out to many, but by far not all young people, which remains one of the common key questions: how

democratic and participatory structures can be fostered at all levels, local, regional, national and supra-national and in all spheres of young people's lives.

The rationale and purpose of the seminar

The seminar "Youth and Citizenship" will look at concrete models and experiences of youth participation in various contexts in both regions, South Mediterranean and European. It will discuss the role and the status of youth organisations, youth movements and young people engaged in formal and non-formal participation structures, being crucial actors in the development and consolidation of inclusive, participatory and pluralistic democracies.

Having in mind the disparities between and within the European as well as the Arab / South-Mediterranean contexts and taking into account the potentially strong impact of local, regional and national politics on young people (and vice versa) and the development of their democratic citizenship, this seminar will look at the specificities and conditions of active democratic citizenship and youth participation in various environments in which young people live and act: communities, schools, universities, work places, civil society and the virtual space etc. The event should contribute to a better understanding of concrete models of participation and enhance young people's agency as actors of civil society.

The seminar will be based on a meaningful dialogue between policy, practice and research. It will make reference to the discussions and results of the Malta and Tunis events and the preceding workshop on youth and social media in Hammamet, July 2013. It will also take into account the work of UNFPA in the area of civic participation in the region of Arab States, as well as the results of recent studies on youth participation by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and their youth partnership as well as other research findings.

The participants will be given opportunity to share their hands on experiences, discuss about the needs related to the issue of youth participation on local and regional level and in various contexts, and elaborate on potential answers. Proposals for concrete projects (e.g. in the field of capacity building, networking or policy making) will be developed by participants.

In addition, the meeting will discuss youth participation and engagement in the context of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) beyond 2014 and the post-2015 development agenda. Governments, UN entities, civil society organisations and youth-led organisations have called for a strategic and bottom up process in ensuring that young people's voices and actions are included in the elaboration of a post-2015 development agenda.

Objectives

- To look at the conditions and specificities of active democratic citizenship and youth participation in various environments in which young people live and act;
- To discuss the role and the status of youth organisations, youth movements and young people engaged in participation structures in both regions and effects of this participation in various contexts;

- To learn from innovative practices on all levels and discuss ways of enhancing young people's democratic citizenship involvement and fostering youth participation in community, local and regional life, including through the use of social media;
- To explore ways for strengthening young people's participation in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) beyond 2014 and post 2015 development agenda;
- To exchange on potential joint projects aimed at empowering young people to participate and cooperate between the two regions.

Organisational aspects

Organisers:

Council of Europe and European Commission in the framework of the EU-CoE youth-partnership and Arab States Regional office of UNFPA

Date and duration:

19 -21 November 2013 (3 working days):

Arrival 18 November - Departure 22 November

Venue:

Amman, Jordan

Participants – profile and selection:

The seminar will bring together thirty participants from Southern Mediterranean / Arab (15) and European (15) youth organisations and other young leaders and multipliers, as well as youth policy makers, researchers, experts and other relevant stakeholders from the Euro-Mediterranean region. The Arab participants will be selected by UNFPA and LAS; the European participants will be selected by the EU-CoE youth partnership.

Language:

The languages of the seminar will be English and Arabic. Interpretation will be available for the plenary sessions and partly for the working groups.

Budget:

The EU-CoE youth partnership and UNFPA cover travel, board and lodging costs for participants, expert fees for facilitators and rapporteurs.