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and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



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'Youth Policy Responses to the Contemporary Challenges Faced by Young People'

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Themes



Introduction

This document presents the six themes, clustered in three pillars, which have been identified by the members of the Steering Group of the Symposium 'Youth Policy Responses to the Contemporary Challenges Faced by Young People', Prague 12-14 June 2016, on the basis of the content of the applications received for the event.

Per each theme, this document includes a clarification on the areas covered, some of the challenges that young people face regarding areas covered, as well as examples of current or potential policy responses to these challenges.

IDENTITY AND AUTONOMY

1. Belonging

This theme covers aspects related both to young people's identity (identity formation, belonging to a group, non-discrimination), as well as issues relation to young people's place in society (social cohesion, young people's place in it, social dislocation, isolation and marginalisation, wellbeing). Belonging generates two distinct concepts. The first is belonging as an emotion – personal, intimate, the feeling of being 'at-home', meaning a place of familiarity, comfort, security and attachment.¹ Factors that contribute to this feeling include one's own history; their personal and social ties associated with a place; cultural factors including language, traditions and habits; economic factors and the ability to have a safe and stable material condition; and security.² All factors contribute to a life that is meaningful and worth living, and the absence of this belonging is loneliness, isolation, alienation, and displacement.

To be able to feel at home is not just a personal matter, but a social one – "if one feels rejected or not welcomed by the people who live in that place, his/her sense of belonging would inevitably be spoiled".³ Therefore the second concept of belonging is the politics of belonging. This is the process of defining the boundaries of communities, of the conditions for being part of a community and the benefits associated with it, and defining the differences between 'us' and 'them'.⁴ The absence of this belonging is therefore exclusion, or not being part of a community.

Challenges faced by young people relating to belonging include the integration of young people from migrant backgrounds, and their ability to feel at home in the place that they live in Europe, as well as for the society around them to view them as full members of the community. Rising right-wing populist movements and nationalist policies that define citizenship and belonging on ethnic or racial lines exclude large segments of minority populations. Other challenges faced by young people relate to economic insecurity and rising unemployment, which impact on a young person's ability to achieve a safe and stable material condition, thereby comprising their ability to feel invested in a community. Radical or extremist groups, as well as more localised criminal and social groups and 'gangs', may be attractive to excluded young people but pose a threat to social cohesion.

¹ Antonsich, M., 2010, "In search of belonging: an analytical framework", *Geography Compass* 4(6), p. 644-659.

² Ibid.

³ Jayaweera, H. and Choudhury, T., 2008, *Immigration, faith and cohesion. Immigration and inclusion*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in Antonsich, M., 2010.

⁴ Yurval-Davis, N., 2006, "Belonging and the politics of belonging", *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40:3, p. 197-214.

Some policy responses to these challenges could include addressing the root causes of isolation and alienation, including economic factors or traditional cultural practices that may not be welcoming to new members of a diverse society. Other responses could include integration programmes that focus on sensitising host communities to newcomers in addition to programmes targeted at the newcomers themselves, and other initiatives aimed at promoting pluralism and tolerance.

2. Agency and empowerment

This theme covers projects that support young people to affirm themselves and to have the tools to claim their rights in society. In the broadest sense, empowerment is when individuals, families, organisations and communities gain control and mastery – that is, have agency – over their lives.⁵ This is produced when those who are powerless becoming aware of the power dynamics that shape their circumstances (what Freire calls ‘critical consciousness’) and develop the skills, confidence and capacity over their lives, improving equity and quality of life.⁶ Empowerment is also about bringing people who are outside the social, economic and political systems, and bringing them in to decision-making processes.⁷

The theme looks at this process through specific examples, from issues such as independent and autonomous housing, access to rights, and support programmes for the empowerment of minorities. The practices linked with this are a project from Italy on supporting young people’s agency through access to housing and another project from Scotland on young people’s empowerment, as a means to prevent homelessness.

Challenges faced by young people relating to agency and empowerment are those practices, beliefs and values that are disempowering for young people. This includes attitudes such as ageism, or discrimination against young people because of their age, and can extend out to the violation of young people’s rights in areas including education, participation, employment and social protection, health, freedom of expression and information, freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief.⁸

Some policy responses to these challenges could include rights-based approaches to youth policy, including developing a legally binding document that compiles all youth rights in the form of a convention or charter, to ensure that youth rights are clear and understandable for duty-bearers, and young people themselves.⁹

SOLIDARITY AND DEMOCRACY

3. Participation and expression

⁵ Jennings et. al, 2006, “Towards a Critical Social Theory of Youth Empowerment”, *Journal of Community Practice* 14:1-2, p. 31-55.

⁶ Rowlands, J., 1995, “Empowerment Examined”, *Development in Practice*, Vol. 5 No. 2 (May 1995), p. 101-107.

⁷ Council of Europe and European Union, 2017, “Empowerment”, *Glossary on youth*, accessed on 30 May 2017 from <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/glossary/#empowerment>

⁸ European Youth Forum, 2012, *Policy paper on youth rights*, adopted by the European Youth Forum General Assembly, Maribor, Slovenia 22-25 November 2012.

⁹ Ibid.

This theme looks at the rights, means, support, opportunities and spaces young people have for making their voice heard and having an influence on issues that concern them. This applies to all areas of a young person's life, from the family, school, local communities, public services, and wider government policy.¹⁰ Therefore participation is not only about political participation, meaning when a young person, acting as a citizen, engages in the public realm to affect change in a policy, law, or politics and society more generally.¹¹ It is also about a young person's right to participate in judicial or administrative proceedings that affect them, such as adoption or divorce proceedings in the case of minors¹², or playing a part in the projects and programmes that are designed for them, such as participating in the planning of a programme targeted at young people, or providing feedback in the monitoring and evaluation of a youth programme.¹³ Therefore participation applies to young people both as individuals and as a group, in decisions affecting their individual lives, as well as those that affect them as young people generally.¹⁴

Participation is first and foremost a right, enshrined in international human rights instruments¹⁵ as well as the Treaty of the European Union¹⁶. It is a state's obligation as duty-bearer to ensure that young people can take part in all matters that affect them. Beyond being a right, participation has additional benefits, such as providing information and insights from young people to design better policies and programmes, contributing to a culture of respect and peace where decision-making is undertaken through negotiation rather than conflict, building accountability and promoting transparency, and promoting positive youth development, as young people gain skills, knowledge, competencies and confidence through their participation.¹⁷

Freedom of expression is a precondition for participation. It relates to the right to hold and express opinions without fear of retribution or interference from the state. It relates to other civic rights including the right to privacy and information, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and freedom of assembly, which are also necessary for the right to participation.¹⁸ Expression also relates to a young person's taking part in recreational activities, cultural life, and the arts, where young people develop the ability to express themselves, and for young people from minority groups, encompasses the right to their own culture, religion, and language.¹⁹

This theme explores the idea of youth expression and the granting or securing of 'space': public spaces where young people can express themselves, spaces for assembly and association and also spaces for creativity and artistic expression. The indicative practices here are programme for youth creativity or

¹⁰ United Nations, 2009, *General Comment No. 12: The Right of the Child to Be Heard*, CRC/C/GC/12, 2009

¹¹ Anderson, B. et al, 2016, "Formal, Non-formal and informal possibilities of young people's participation in European cities", *Partispace: Spaces and Styles of Participation*, WP2 – National Contexts Comparative Report.

¹² The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child articulates the right of children under 18 to express their views, with explicit relevance for judicial and administrative proceedings, however also lays the basis for youth participation as a fundamental right. United Nations, 2015, *UN Treaty Collection: Convention of the Rights of the Child*, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?mtdsg_no=IV-11&chap-ter=4&lang=en

¹³ Landsdown, G. and O'Kane, C., 2014, "Booklet 3: How to measure the scope, quality and outcomes of children's participation", *A Toolkit for monitoring and evaluating children's participation*.

¹⁴ Landsdown, G., 2017, *UNICEF Conceptual framework for monitoring outcomes of adolescent participation*, April 2017 draft for consultation.

¹⁵ United Nations, 2015.

¹⁶ European Union, Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union, 26 October 2012, C 326/13, eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

¹⁷ Landsdown, G. and O'Kane, C., 2014.

¹⁸ Ibid. The other civic rights as they pertain to young people are also enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

¹⁹ Child Rights International Network (CRIN), 2017, "Article 13: Freedom of Expression", *Rights*, accessed on 15 May 2017.

support to youth participation at different levels, mostly in relation to spaces for democratic participation and freedom of assembly.

Challenges faced by young people relating to participation and expression include the tension between the declining rates of youth participation in formal participation structures (ex. voting, political party and union membership), and the wave of social uprisings since 2009 led by youth that demonstrate their willingness to confront powerful regimes and institutions.²⁰ Such tension may be due to disillusionment with formal processes to lead to meaningful change, and young people seeking alternative routes of participation and expression. Other challenges include restrictions on meaningful participation and a closing of civil society space, in the context of states clamping down on democratic freedoms and citizens' right to free expression and assembly.

Some policy responses to these challenges could relate to creating more meaningful opportunities for participation with young people, such as reforming political processes to include more direct democracy (ex. referendum, crowdsourcing legislation), lowering the voting age, and greater power for formal youth participation structures, such as youth councils. However, the question of opening more channels for direct participation sits uncomfortably beside the potential for engagement with radical, violent or extreme movements, particularly in light of rising right-wing populist movements.

4. Volunteering

This theme looks at volunteering, as a means of civic engagement for and by young people. Volunteering is freely given, unpaid work, and can be based “on a wish to give something to other for free or minimal extrinsic reward”.²¹ Young people may be motivated by a “will to share, a desire to help others, to be useful, to defend a cause, to give meaning to their life, even to test a vocation or training”.²² Volunteering can build competencies useful in education and employment, such as skills, knowledge, social networks, and a sense of self-efficacy.²³ While volunteering can take place in civic or community associations, caring for elderly relatives, younger siblings, or others in the community is also a common yet overlooked form of voluntary work routinely done by young people.²⁴

Volunteering can also be seen as a pathway to further participation in democratic life, as it demonstrates a sense of community and solidarity between a young person and the society around them.²⁵ However the excessive focus placed on volunteering in youth policies, for example, particularly in civic, charitable or other non-political activities, can be seen as a de-politicisation of participation and an erosion of democratic practice. Volunteering may be a palatable way for governments to engage

²⁰ See Farrow, A., 2016, “Children, young people and participation”, *Youth Policy Working Paper 3*, Berlin: Youth Policy Press; Forbrig, J., 2005, Introduction: democratic politics, legitimacy, and youth participation, in *Revisiting youth political participation*, Council of Europe; Sukarieh, M. and Tannock, S., 2015, *Youth Rising? The politics of youth in the global economy*, Routledge.

²¹ London School of Economics (LSE) Enterprise, 2013, *Youth Participation in Democratic Life*, EACEA 2010/03. London: LSE Enterprise Limited.

²² Anderson, B. et al, 2016.

²³ London School of Economics (LSE) Enterprise, 2013.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Anderson, B. et al, 2016.

young people in society that doesn't involve a transference of power, or a challenge to stability or the status quo.²⁶

This theme also covers the relevance and value of voluntary service types of intervention, particularly in two respects: for young people as citizens, and for young people's competences, particularly in relation to the job market. This theme may also cover the relevance of international programmes, through which young people can have learning mobility opportunities. The practices considered here are exchange / voluntary service programmes.

Challenges faced by young people relating to volunteering include improving access to and capacity to undertake volunteering opportunities, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities. For example, young people facing economic obstacles may lack the time and resources to volunteer, having to choose paid work instead, or taking on other unrecognised unpaid work in their family or community, such as caretaking of elderly relatives or younger siblings. Such young people are further disadvantaged by not being able to accrue the benefits of volunteering such as skill development and network building. Other challenges include the lack of visibility and recognition of volunteering-related competencies and experience in the labour market. Indeed, evidence of volunteering leading to enhanced employment prospects remains weak, both for entry-to-work and wage progression.²⁷

Some policy responses to these challenges include national volunteering schemes that ensure the participation of all groups of young people in volunteering, for example, allocating time within the educational curriculum for those students who may wish to volunteer, as opposed to relegating it to only extra-curricular time. Formal recognition of skills and experiences of volunteering, such as through the Youth Pass, could also contribute to increasing the visibility of volunteering to employers and enhance employment prospects for youth who volunteer.

ACTIVITY AND OCCUPATION

5. Learning and training

This theme looks into aspects such as the role of formal and non-formal education as means for supporting young people's personal and professional development. Formal education covers learning in state-regulated schools, training institutions, colleges and universities, with a clearly defined curriculum and rules for certification. It is compulsory up to a certain level, and there is often strict accreditation and professional criteria for its teachers.²⁸ By contrast, the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy describes non-formal learning as,

...purposive but voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. These environments and situations may be intermittent or transitory, and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers) or by volunteers (such as youth leaders). The activities and courses are planned, but

²⁶ Widmaier, B., 2014, "Active citizenship 3.0/2020 - Youth participation and social capital after post-democracy", Perspectives on Youth 2020 - what do YOU see?, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

²⁷ Paine, A.E., McKay, S. and Moro, D., 2013, "Does volunteering improve employability? Evidence from the British Household Panel Survey", *Third Sector Research Centre*, Working Paper 100.

²⁸ du Bois-Reymond, M., 2003, *Study in the links between formal and non-formal education*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects. They usually address specific target groups, but rarely document or assess learning outcomes or achievements in conventionally visible ways.²⁹

Once associated with youth work in the “soft sector” of personal development and leisure activities, non-formal education is now more closely tied to vocational training with the aim of preparing young people for the labour market, particularly in those countries with rising youth unemployment. This turn can be seen as a reaction to the lack of vocational qualifications provided in the formal education system, and the inability of labour markets to absorb all young people.³⁰

The link of formal and non-formal learning (along with informal learning, defined as learning that occurs in everyday life and is not necessarily intentional) is brought into focus through the EU’s concept of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is “all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence” and is intended to accompany a successful transition to a knowledge-based economy and society. The aim of education and training is to promote active citizenship and promote employability.³¹

Challenges faced by young people relating to learning and training include the risk of early school leaving by young people in formal education, as well as obstacles to accessing non-formal education opportunities. In both instances, young people with fewer opportunities are disadvantaged, having higher rates of formal school leaving, and also falling through the cracks of non-formal education programmes, which tend to reach those who are more advantaged. Additional obstacles faced by young people include the ability of vocational education and training (VET) programmes to keep pace with fast technological progress, specialisation of skills that limit transferability, the poor reputation of VET programmes in some countries, and the strong focus on manual work at the expense of learning about society, culture and civic life.

Some policy responses to these challenges include integration of aspects of non-formal education into formal education, for example, including person-directed counselling, individual advice and tailored measures, into formal education curriculum.³² Policy responses relating to VET programmes includes increasing the quality of training as well as of trainers, teachers, and other professionals, as well as ensuring courses are more relevant to the labour market.³³

6. Working and creating

This theme explores the relation between young people and their participation in the labour market, either from the point of view of having access to job, having the competences needed and also as having the conditions to become creators/entrepreneurs. While youth unemployment in the EU has decreased from its historic high of 23% in February 2013, to less than 19% in August 2016, it is still double the

²⁹ Council of Europe and European Union Youth Partnership, 2017, *Non-formal learning/education*, accessed 15 May 2017 from <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/non-formal-learning>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ European Commission, 2000, “A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning”, *Commission Staff Working Paper*, SEC(2000) 1832.

³² du Bois-Reymond, M., 2003.

³³ Commitment to enhanced European cooperation on VET affirmed in the Copenhagen Declaration (2002), the Bruges Communiqué (2010) and the Riga Conclusions (2015).

overall employment rate in the EU, and in several countries, youth unemployment is over 40%.³⁴ Unemployment has far-reaching consequences for young people beyond economic, including loss of confidence, undermined trust and expectations, and greater risk of social exclusion and disengagement from society.³⁵ Causes of youth unemployment in the EU are difficult to isolate, and likely to involve a multiplicity of factors including lack of jobs, lack of skills, a skill mismatch between those gained by youth, and those needed by the labour market.³⁶ Skill mismatch can include both under-qualification and over-qualification, the latter of which is particularly relevant for Europe, where in 2014, 25.2% of highly qualified young employees (24-35 years) were overqualified for their jobs.³⁷ Young people also make up a great proportion of the precarious work force that is characterised by job insecurity, low wages, and lack of social benefits.

Attention will be given to the relationships between initiative and creativity, and enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Challenges facing young people relating to working and creating include the delay of conventional transitions to adulthood that accompany financial independence from parents, such as the ability to live on one's own, get married, and start a family. Young people also may choose to take on unpaid internships, which is increasingly favoured by companies, in an attempt to get ahead in a competitive workforce or to make up for a lack of practical skills not gained in formal education. However unpaid internships further entrench inequalities among young people, with those who are better off being able to engage in unpaid work, and are of questionable professional value.³⁸

While there are varying economic theories on how to structurally address youth unemployment, other policy responses to some of the associated challenges could include greater restrictions on precarious work, including the banning of unpaid internships, as well as providing additional social support to unemployed youth. Investments in alternative forms of employment, such as start-up grants and seed investment for youth entrepreneurship, could also be addressed.

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³⁴ European Commission, 2017, "Youth unemployment", *Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion*, accessed 15 May 2017, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1036>

³⁵ Schroeder, K., 2014, *Inclusion A to Z: A compass to international inclusion projects*, Brussels: SALTO-YOUTH Inclusion Resource Centre.

³⁶ Şenyuva, Ö., 2014, "Employment", *EU-CoE youth partnership policy sheet*, Brussels: Youth Partnership.

³⁷ Cedefop, 2015, *Skills, qualification and jobs in the EU: The making of a perfect match? Evidence from Cedefop's European skills and jobs survey*. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

³⁸ Weissman, J., 2013 June 19, "Do Unpaid Internships Lead to Jobs? Not for College Students", *The Atlantic*, accessed 29 May 2017 from <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/06/do-unpaid-internships-lead-to-jobs-not-for-college-students/276959/>