



Policy Paper on Equality and Diversity

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*“I am who I am because you, the absolutely other, are.
Martin Buber”*

Convinced of the benefits of the diversity of people in European societies, the European Youth Forum calls in this paper for the development of an ambitious political agenda to celebrate diversity in Europe. Only an engaged commitment from European policy makers and in fact all Europeans at all levels can indeed help Europe get rid of persisting high levels of discrimination.

Through this Policy Paper, the European Youth Forum is proposing a method to embrace diversity in Europe. As the main representative body of young people in Europe, the European Youth Forum urges its institutional partners at all levels to recognise youth organisations as key players in the development of diverse yet equal European societies.

I. Embracing the European diversity

Europe is by nature a diverse continent, whose history has led diverse populations to live together. This existing diversity in Europe should be built upon. Political action is needed to achieve a European “common house”, in which all European people voluntarily decide to live together. The European Youth Forum believes that diversity should be valued in Europe, and that to ‘celebrate’ it a sense of belonging to a shared set of values should be promoted, as well as respect for the identities of others.

Diversity refers to the existence of many peoples contributing their unique experiences to humanity’s culture. In that, the promotion of diversity should not be limited to the European Continent but rather encompass and associate political action and initiatives at the global level. More should be done at the global level to encourage deeper dialogue and understanding between cultures and religions. The European Youth Forum believes that “Respect for Human diversity” should be proclaimed as a universal value.

Only a precise definition of what is meant when using the word “diversity” will allow the development of appropriate and effective political action. The European Youth Forum favours a definition that divides the concept of diversity into three strands¹. First, diversity is made of changeable criteria such as the education attainment level and the social status; the second strand refers to non-changeable criteria such as gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation; lastly the concept of diversity includes organisational elements such as the place of residence and the position in a given hierarchical scale.

Diversity also contains a duality - as it is a state but it also results from movement and exchange. The interaction of diverse identities in turn allows new common identities to develop that will themselves remain in constant evolution due to their contact and interaction with others. Cultural exchange must be encouraged as it has always generated social progress, in terms of intercultural learning and exchange of experiences, ideas and values. Improved interactions between cultures create more understanding and appreciation, which prevents phobia and fear. We believe that immediate action is needed to combat the progression of populist discourses recently observed in Europe. Indeed, populism nourishes peoples’ fears and, in the context of globalisation, Europeans are encouraged to see the outside as a threat to their own well-being. In order to get rid of this dangerous climate, the status quo cannot be an option as it would reduce policy initiatives to the lowest common denominator. In the

¹ Verena Bruchhagen and Iris Koall, „ Managing diversity: Ansätze und zumutungen zum Umgang mit Vielfalt in der Organisation“ 2004.

current European context, policy makers must be brave enough and engage into ambitious programmes to promote openness where protectionism seems to prevail today.

Today in Europe, we must identify and examine positive ways through which we can celebrate our diversity. The European Youth Forum is convinced that the promotion of diversity will bring important benefits to the cohesion of European societies as it would bring benefits to all European individuals who constitute them. Learning more about others is an enriching experience that usually leads someone to greater sensitivity towards and understanding of otherness. Someone can only respect others by respecting themselves in the first place. Since diversity means flexibility, dynamism and imagination, the European Youth Forum strongly believes that promoting diversity will actually generate socio-economic vitality. Europeans must seize the opportunity to move beyond simple coexistence. Prejudices must be left behind, while incentives can be used to stimulate interest and mutual respect in society at large. This will lead to a more cohesive Europe and a brighter and more energetic cultural mosaic.

Race, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, disability, among others² are all ways in which diversity is expressed. Tools must be developed to encourage people to engage these “sources of diversity” as constituencies of their own identity. On a macro level, inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue programmes should be expanded and receive wider funding, while on the micro-level, local initiatives must be encouraged with a view to promoting respect between individuals. Youth organisations are particularly effective in this area due to their ability to promote active citizenship. For this reason, it is essential to support and provide youth organisations with the necessary means to fully extrapolate their potential as shapers of society³.

The European Youth Forum wants to make clear that promoting diversity is not the sole responsibility of policy makers but rather requires the involvement of all stakeholders. Indeed, what is at stake is a broader change of mentalities in Europe and this may only happen if policy makers and civil society work hand in hand to that end. On the one hand, the mission for policy makers is to develop new laws that give incentives for people to respect otherness, to prevent discrimination and to enforce Human Rights when discrimination takes place. In this, the European Youth Forum urges the European Union to ensure real implementation and further develop the European legal framework to fight against discrimination as developed in 2000⁴. On the other hand, because civil society organisations have privileged access to peoples’ lives and therefore can have an impact on the definition of identities, it should be supported by policy makers in its work. In this regard, youth organisations are crucial actors in the promotion of diversity as working with youth for diversity and respect ensures a longstanding evolution in society at large. The European Youth Forum and its Member Organisations are ready to embark on common action to promote diversity effectively in Europe. This policy paper includes a methodology founded on dialogue and using both non formal and formal education as tools that can contribute to important necessary changes in Europe.

² Article 13 of the Treaty establishing the European Community states that “Without prejudice to the other provisions of this treaty and within the limits conferred by it upon the community, the Council acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation”.

³ The “All different - all equal” Council of Europe Campaign will run from June 2006 to September 2007. It is a unique opportunity to actively involve youth as “ambassadors” for diversity and equality and ultimately for change.

⁴ Council directive 2000/43/EC “implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin” and Council directive 2000/78/EC “establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation”

The proposals included in this document must, in order to be effective, be translated into concrete actions. Besides support and recognition from policy makers, this calls for important internal work in the youth field so as to ensure that youth work is accessible to all and that diversity is observed internally⁵. The European Youth Forum therefore commits itself to set a benchmark for the long term implementation of this policy paper.

II. Current situation assessment - Discrimination persists.

Although the European Youth Forum would like to see diversity embraced, the reality in Europe permits the sources of diversity to be abused as points of prejudice. Discrimination manifests itself as prejudice put into practice. Discrimination is born out of a lack of awareness and a lack of willingness to explore and understand others, often resulting in marginalisation.

European policy makers have a responsibility to translate difference into diversity so as to halt the continued perpetuation of fear among European citizens. This is a critical step to break the cycle of discrimination and prejudice. For example, despite having been refuted by science, the concept of “race” continues to permeate the dialogue emanating from European Governments and institutions on Equality and Diversity.

As the European Youth Forum, we are very much concerned with the discrimination faced by young people in different aspects of their lives. Age discrimination, founded on an inaccurate perception of young people within European society, often results in young people having their competences colored by their age, thus removing opportunities from those who earn them.

In addition, disability, sexual orientation and religious belief (among other grounds) can intertwine with age, gender and “race” so as to render many young people victims to multiple discrimination. Young women, young disabled, young migrants, are all facing extra challenges in life because they are victims of multiple discrimination. The European Union and the Council of Europe should work together on the definition of multiple discrimination as it is urgent to provide victims of multiple discrimination with the appropriate legal protection so that their Human Rights are indeed respected. In addition, because multiple discrimination is particularly damaging, psychological assistance should be offered to victims when it materialises.

European Youth Forum Member Organisations have witnessed persistent discrimination based on gender which can also be further qualified by gender identity. Discrimination against women is not a minority issue. With women representing more than 50% of the population, it is imperative that we do not ground the gender debate in a minority arena, although the European Youth Forum acknowledges that the complexities of gender are beyond the traditional men-women dynamic. It is critical that all people are offered equal opportunities regardless of their gender identity. In that, the European Union should continue and further develop its leading role in the promotion of gender equality. Because gender discrimination as it still manifests today is intolerable, the European Youth Forum calls for the implementation of the adopted roadmap for gender equality. Only concrete actions and commitments can ensure that gender equality really becomes an intrinsic element of the European model of society.

⁵ See also the YFJ Policy Paper on Social Inclusion in Youth Participation (0070-06)

Our main goal in Europe should be to construct inclusive societies and inclusive economies⁶, in which opportunities are shared evenly and wealth is distributed in an equitable way among people. This approach for change can only be successful if policy makers engage themselves to build an inclusive Europe that adapts to its evolving reality as much as its reality adapts to it. The European Youth Forum believes that inclusion is more adapted as a concept to express the needs Europe faces if it wants truly to embrace its diversity. Integration indeed refers to a one-way process in which the individual, whatever his/her origin and background needs to adhere to the social norms at play in the country he/she lives in. We call for the development of inclusion, a two-way process in which the individual adapts to the collective values as much as the collectivity takes into account its diverse social fabric.

III. Methodology - the Role of education.

In order for Europe to capitalize on its diversity and to seize the opportunity to prevent the forming of further prejudice, work must begin at an early age. Education is a vital component in developing an individual's outlook on the world and those around them. Unfortunately, today's practice of education does not match these expectations from young people. Education systems, beginning at kindergarten, are not fulfilling their duty to help children develop an open minded personality. Their aim is, on the contrary, limited to providing knowledge in a very restricted technical way. We believe that education should not be limited to filling economic needs of labour but is rather about equipping people for positive participation in society. In this regard, life long learning is a method of engaging with the individual in a process of dialogue with their community. Education should be envisaged as a method of reaching, involving the individual in a process of evolution.

This paper will examine a methodology through which both formal and non formal educational methods can be used to accomplish these goals. The European Youth Forum is convinced that youth organisations are key players to improve the contribution education makes to young peoples' personal development.

Formal education systems and youth organisations, who are the main providers of education, are both actors shaping the educational development of young people. Building on that common purpose, the European Youth Forum strongly believes that closer links should be created between these to form a complementary set of actors.

Youth organisations are unique as based on a peer-to-peer system. Unlike the formal education system, each young people can be a learner or a teacher depending on the setting. This peer to peer model provides an opportunity for individuals to simultaneously develop openness for diversity while at the same time passing this crucial experience on to others. Youth organisations develop and use tools and methods which facilitate dialogue, whose core elements are intercultural understanding and respect of others. This does not mean ignorance of difference but learning about the others' diversity and accepting them as equal. Non formal education greatly contributes to the development of what are called soft skills, based on the personal development and attitudes, whereas the primary aim of the education system is to provide hard skills based on knowledge. Therefore, non formal education should be seen and used as a complementary system to the formal one.

More particularly, because they are key players in developing intercultural learning, youth organisations can indeed contribute a lot to promote diversity and fight against

⁶ "The business case for diversity, good practices in the workplace", report from the European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, September 2005.

discrimination in Europe. For instance, youth organisations can feed into formal education systems by introducing new learning tools and participating in the selection of education subjects that are the most relevant to educate active citizens. The European Youth Forum strongly believes that Human Rights Education should be allocated a substantial space within formal education curricula.

In addition, issues such as classroom cultural composition and staff sensitivity are critical in ensuring that a diverse message is being both sent and received along an open pathway. The European Youth Forum stresses the need for a representative learning environment, thereby guaranteeing cultural diversity among both staff and students. Pedagogical tools such as textbooks, audiovisual materials and fieldtrips must be tailored to the students' need to learn both inside and outside the classroom, thus encompassing the demands of both formal and non formal education. In order to be effective, learning environments must – as a priority – be made accessible to everyone. Moreover, teachers need to be trained to counteract the reproduction of social and economic inequalities.

Teachers must be encouraged to act not only as channels of knowledge but also to play an important role as European citizens interacting on a daily basis with European youth. Thus, there is a strong interest in both students and teachers sharing their personal experiences and expressing their own diversity as individual members of society at large.

In addition, the mission to educate people is also a responsibility for politicians and media. Because there is an increasing apathy in Europe, people tend to take things for granted, similarly democracy. People should on the contrary be encouraged to vote and this can only happen if they have the feeling that their vote matters.

Dialogue, as a method, offers the opportunity to highlight and celebrate similarities rather than focusing on difference. By referring to dialogue, we recognise that diversity is also built on the interaction of languages, which are the semaphores of culture and cultural diversity. Therefore, it is important that (financial) support for language education -that is, education in official as well as in minority languages- is granted, as is the right to speak your mother tongue.

Inter-religious dialogue and inter-cultural dialogue have been proven to be critical pathways establishing long term openness, understanding and respect between individuals of various backgrounds. This dialogue is particularly important among youth organisations as success in this age group foreshadows sustainable change in both attitudes and mentalities. It is important to note that the European Youth Forum has committed itself through the creation of a faith based Expert Group gathering religious youth organisations to be a proven facilitator in this process.

Intergenerational encounters that bring together individuals and their histories are an important channel through which young people can measure and appreciate the progress that has been made on such fundamental issues such as the status of women, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and the rights of the disabled. History provides an efficient method through which both young and old can exchange lessons and experience in a way that demonstrates that all can contribute regardless of age.

Dialogue, as a method, is particularly relevant and necessary between women and men because it provides a platform where all contributors can stand shoulder to shoulder in protest against stereotypes and acquired gender roles.

IV Implementation

Change cannot be achieved unless attitude accompanies method in the fight for progress. The call to embrace Europe's diversity begins at the home of every European citizen and continues as individuals move through the instructive stages of their lives. However, we know that real progress will only become visible when both young and old come together and jointly recognise that the need for respect, appreciation, and understanding for all never ceases. Thus, our plan reflects a definition of education that encompasses not only a system through which all young people pass but above all a spirit which must transcend every barrier, both physical and non-physical, across Europe.

A look at the core curriculum of education could easily give the impression that there have been very few women alive throughout history. What better example than this to underscore our call for a pedagogical approach that places as much emphasis on what is being taught as much as the tools which are being taught?

True change will only find its way to the individual level if all actors are committed to it. The transformation of individual attitudes is the basis for change in society. The celebration of diversity will only lead to social changes if policy makers and youth workers include people facing discrimination in their daily work and decision making. The process to embrace diversity can be given true meaning only when the sources of diversity stand shoulder to shoulder with policy makers at all levels. In order to achieve sustainable progress, structures need to be set up to allow increased levels of participation and improve social inclusion.

IN LIGHT OF THE ABOVE MENTIONED THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM CALLS ON:

- **All its Institutional and Civil Society partners**
 - **To recognise youth organisations as key players in the promotion of Equality and Diversity in Europe.**
 - **To promote dialogue as a tool for embracing diversity in Europe and worldwide.** Examples of good practice such as the European Youth Forum Expert Group on Inter-Religious Dialogue should be encouraged and promoted by institutions at all levels. In addition, research activities would usefully accompany the further development of the concept of "dialogue". Only this will help expanding the use of dialogue as a tool for diversity. All sources of diversity present in Europe should be encouraged to initiate dialogue activities.
- **The European Union**
 - **To promote the development of a horizontal anti-discrimination directive to protect against all forms of discrimination in goods and services, and also to extend the legislation beyond the employment directive, to ensure, for example, that the policy is also effective in protecting young people from discrimination in classrooms. Thus we want this directive to reach out all people potentially affected by discrimination.**
 - **To develop its work on the promotion of inclusive societies in Europe through further elaboration of the concept of "inclusion" by progressively replacing current policies aimed at "integrating" people from different backgrounds in the mainstream of the European society.**

- To promote a transversal approach to equality and diversity in Europe, notably through the mainstreaming of diversity into the work of all relevant European Union institutions. Furthermore, the European Commission should employ all relevant programmes in the promotion of diversity as a core European value.
 - To develop its work on gender equality notably by making the mainstreaming of gender issues in other policy areas a reality. In 2006, the launching of the European Union Gender Institute and the adoption of the “Gender Equality roadmap for 2006-2010” is an important momentum for the European Union to establish ambitious targets and objectives in the field of gender equality.
 - To ensure real implementation of its policies in the field of equality and diversity.
 - To promote the European Youth Forum’s priorities in the field of Equality and Diversity during the 2007 European Year for Equal Opportunities for all.
 - To integrate a youth perspective to the 2008 European Year of intercultural Dialogue.
 - To define an ambitious agenda on crucial issues such as the promotion of gender equality, the fight against age discrimination as well as multiple discrimination.
- **The Council of Europe**
 - To take a leading role and spread its values for the promotion of Equality and Diversity in Europe.
 - To ensure real implementation of the “priorities of the youth sector 2006-2008” as adopted in the Budapest Ministerial Conference in 2005.
 - To promote Non Formal Education as a tool for the promotion of diversity, in particular through the development targets in the field of Human Rights Education.
 - To ensure substantial funding and content to the “All Different - All Equal” Campaign, in order to fulfill the high expectations that European youth have put in it
- **The European Union and the Council of Europe**
 - To address the Equality and Diversity themes in the Framework Partnership Agreement and translate them into concrete opportunities for youth organisations and young people in Europe.
- **The United Nations**
 - To ensure that the values of Equality and Diversity are taken into account and voiced around the world.
 - To engage all the relevant bodies of the United Nations System in the work for Equality and Diversity. In particular, the European Youth Forum asks the General Assembly and the department for Youth at the United Nations to consider the promotion of equality and diversity in the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth, especially after the celebration of its tenth anniversary in 2005.
- **Global Partners**
 - To promote equality and diversity issues in the cooperation between regional and global partners, mainly within the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations (ICMYO) and the Global Coordination Cooperation Co-Ordination Committee (GCCC).