



Youth Forum European Youth Policy

**Adopted by the Executive Committee
3-5 April 1998, Vilnius, Lithuania**

This resolution aims at defining the Youth Forum's key mission on achieving the development of a European youth policy.

The Youth Policy is a cross-sector, integrated policy aimed at young people, with young people and starting from the needs of young people. Its aim is to improve and develop the living conditions and participation of young people, encompassing the whole range of social, cultural and political issues affecting them and other groups in society.

The Youth Policy is by definition a horizontal policy where coherent and co-ordinated efforts across different policy and administration sectors are ensured through integrated actions. At all levels, youth policy co-ordinates measures to serve the interests of youth and integrates young people to shape social, economic, political and cultural life. Young people are at the heart of youth policy, not as clients, but as actors and contributors to this dynamic process.

Rights and responsibilities of young people

Young people have rights and responsibilities just as any other group in society. Young people must have the same rights as other citizens, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic background, colour, language, religion, political or other belief, national or social origin, belonging to a national or ethnic minority, physical or mental disabilities. Any discrimination or oppression is to be rejected, while the struggle for equal rights and for active policies of equal opportunities and the development of mutual understanding is to continue and must become an integral part of the Youth Policy. The diversity of young people is to be supported.

All young people must be offered access to a decent income, political rights, information, the labour market, decent housing, health, proper educational opportunities, a non-polluted environment, freedom of movement and leisure. Blatant social injustices and violations of basic human rights are manifested through denial of these rights.

The society in which young people have to establish themselves is not one that they have had an opportunity to create. It is a society that is at the same time an inheritance and on loan from future generations. Any resources that are used to enable young people to develop their

abilities, to participate and to contribute to society are an investment and must be seen as such, allowing young people to take their full responsibilities towards society. Co-operation between generations has to be promoted in order to meet the challenge of equality through decreasing gaps in society.

The key aim of a European youth policy is therefore to protect and exercise the rights of young people and to promote their empowerment. The European Union and the Council of Europe as well as national, regional and local authorities must commit themselves politically to implement such policies. A high degree of social protection should be provided. Each Member State should have a Minister responsible for Youth Policy in order to establish and co-ordinate a cross-sectoral and transparent youth policy.

Key aims of Youth Policy

The fight against social exclusion has to be a top priority for youth policy at every level in Europe. Marginalisation from society and increasing poverty amongst young people exclude them from democratic participation and even further from the process of European construction. Young people who are excluded from society start to live beyond its reach and ignore the society that ignored them. Crucial for our aims with youth policy is that it should enable all young people to, through their decisions and choices, allow the full responsibility of both personal development and the development to society.

An adequate and stable income, possibilities to live on their own, decent housing and employment should therefore be a guaranteed right for every young person. In order to ensure this, the need for adequate life-long learning leading to educational qualifications must be provided to all young people. Education should be based, among others, on the principles of accessibility, diversity, freedom of choice and participation. The high quality of education is essential. Education should not become a disguise for youth unemployment, but it should be meaningful to the young person in question and directed by their needs. At the same time, it should be able to provide youth with the basics of the inheritance of the global human culture. It should be recognised that the role of

education is not only to prepare young people for the labour market but first of all to further people's personal development.

Realistic partnerships must be sought between education and the labour market. The Youth Policy must facilitate the entry to and exits from the learning route, with mutual recognition of study periods abroad, to enable young people to switch more easily from education to employment and vice versa. The Youth Policy should also facilitate the creation of an All-European learning area, where young people would have the opportunity to obtain the skills required in the global labour markets. This learning would integrate and combine those educational opportunities made by both formal education and training and the non-formal education.

An active policy, which actually guarantees equal opportunities by overcoming financial, social, cultural, gender and other barriers, such as disability, must be designed. One of the key challenges for education today is the access to information highways. The educational system must seek to provide equal opportunities both in access to information and cultural resources in order to avoid further development of gaps in society. If major groups of citizens are excluded from these paths of information, it will have major consequences for European societies. Participation in decision-making structures at all levels of education is an important aspect of the learning process and a relevant way of strengthening civil society. These principles are to be supported in the Youth Policy.

In the present situation of high unemployment, the role of social security becomes even more essential. Social benefits for young people have to be at the same level as for other citizens and promote active participation in society. The current demographic trends lead us to believe that young people today will not be able to enjoy the same opportunities as older generations are enjoying now in terms of social benefits. Young people therefore have a special stake in decisions taken today in the field of social policy. This is what pushes us to call for reforms in order to preserve social security and a welfare state in the future.

A European Youth Policy should promote voluntary international mobility and intercultural learning. The European institutions and the national governments of the Member States should abolish the barriers

for youth mobility and provide adequate resources for youth and student mobility.

Youth Policy also plays a role in other policy areas such as in development issues. In this respect we should mention the promotion of specific youth-targeted development co-operation policies to be implemented by the European institutions and the Member States, as well as foreign policies where young people and their organisations can contribute through their networks

The Youth Policy should be based not only on political objectives but also on the needs of young people. Therefore it is useful to provide adequate resources to youth research, the findings of which should be translated into political demands.

The European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations have to recognise and implement these principles in all their policies and programmes and facilitate the implementation of this Youth Policy through legislation and actions in the Member States.

Participation of young people in the society

Any policy aimed at young people must be characterised by the fundamental principle of youth participation. The involvement of young people must start as early as the planning phase, moving on to the decision-making process and finally ending by the implementation and evaluation of results as an essential guarantee of success for any youth policy. Young victims of social exclusion and extreme poverty and their possibility to participate is a priority in all levels of youth policy. Young people are the key actors of youth policy. Representatives of young people should be involved in the decision-making that affects them, as equal partners.

Voting rights and the right to stand for election at all levels must be provided to all young people from the age of 18 . No different age limits on the right to stand for election and the right to vote in elections can be tolerated. The participation of young people in elections must be encouraged through education, but also the political actors must adapt their political agendas to include issues of particular interest to young people.

Youth and community organisations are the basis of any stable democracy, as are responsible and progressive actions undertaken by non-governmental organisations. This tradition can be enriched by those networks, local groups and other activities, which involve and encourage young people to participate on a voluntary basis. Both democracy and associative life need more encouragement to find new ways of ensuring dynamic participation in democracy, involvement and the ownership of citizens.

Non-governmental organisations provide a safeguard for democracy, solidarity and human rights through their complex networks and democratic decision-making procedures. They also serve as the vanguard in improving society. Reducing society to pure individualism and the exercise of consumer choice should not and can not replace the role of youth organisations. Youth NGOs should be adequately funded and given the necessary political space at all levels. Youth organisations also play a major role in fostering youth co-operation throughout Europe and the world and in that way develop democratic security and dialogue.

The European institutions and national governments must actively facilitate youth information policies to provide young people with as accurate information as possible on the issues affecting them as well as the possibilities for participation. The governments and institutions have to invest in a "two way democracy" by consulting and involving young people when providing information about the decisions taken.

Participation and ownership can be promoted through involvement and partnership - whether in relation to youth organisations, European institutions or in schools. Only real influence leads to real responsibility.

The European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations must involve the representatives of young people to various working structures and decision-making bodies regarding the issues affecting young people (i.e. Ministerial meetings). The Member States are expected to do the same with resourcing actions aimed at strengthening democracy and actively involving young people from local to national level in the political, social and cultural processes.

Achieving a coherent, global, well-functioning and participative youth policy, with a European dimension facilitating the efforts of all partners at all levels is essential, from local and regional authorities to the national governments, the European Union and the Council of Europe, the United Nations and the youth organisations, in co-operation and in partnership.

The European Youth Forum - National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations - has a major role to play in this process.