



Initial contribution of the European Youth
Forum to the European Commission's

White Paper: Youth Policy

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Background of this document

At the meeting of the Council of Ministers responsible for Youth on 23 November 1999, Commissioner Viviane Reding announced her plan to produce a White Paper on Youth Policy. Following this announcement, the European Commission initiated a broad consultation process that will lead to the elaboration of the White Paper by the beginning of the Belgian Presidency (second half of 2001).

The consultation process is based on four, respectively five pillars. Firstly and most importantly, a consultation of young people aged 15-25 themselves, both on the level of the fifteen Member States and on Community level in form of a European youth meeting to be held in Paris on 5-7 October 2000. Secondly, a consultation of "youth policy-makers" in governments and administration in the Member States (national, regional and local level). Thirdly, through involvement and consultation of "experts", in particular youth researchers. Following the recommendation of the European Youth Forum, the Commission also agreed to a proper consultation process of civil society, meaning of youth organisations and other NGOs in the youth field. In parallel to these four pillars, the Directorate General for Education and Culture has also started consulting other Directorate Generals within the European Commission in order to secure the eventual adoption of White Paper on the level of the College of Commissioners.

The contribution produced by the European Youth Forum shall bring to the fore the ideas and demands of young people in youth organisations. Given that the consultation process of young people has not been completed and that not all of the results from the national youth consultations are available, this draft may be revised to ensure that it reflects the views expressed by young people in the national and European consultations.

Table of Content

1	INTRODUCTION.....	4
2.	YOUNG PEOPLE IN EUROPE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY	6
2.1.	DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS	6
2.2.	THE EXPANSION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION	6
2.3.	EDUCATION.....	6
2.4.	A CHANGING LABOUR MARKET	8
2.5.	LIFELONG LEARNING	8
2.6.	MOBILITY	9
2.7.	YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT	9
2.8.	SOCIAL EXCLUSION	9
2.9.	SOCIAL PROTECTION.....	10
2.10.	GENDER EQUALITY.....	11
2.11.	DISCRIMINATION.....	11
2.12.	PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE	11
3.	A TEN-YEAR PLAN FOR YOUTH	12
3.1.	EDUCATION.....	12
3.2.	LIFELONG LEARNING	13
3.3.	MOBILITY	14
3.4.	EMPLOYMENT	14
3.5.	SOCIAL PROTECTION.....	15
3.6.	EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DISCRIMINATION	15
3.7.	SOCIAL EXCLUSION.....	16
3.8.	PARTICIPATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY	16
3.9.	BUILDING EUROPE FROM THE BOTTOM UP - A LOCAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE	17
3.10.	A EUROPEAN YOUTH POLICY IN A GLOBALISING WORLD	18
3.11.	SUPPORT MEASURES FOR A EUROPEAN YOUTH POLICY	19
4.	IMPLEMENTING THE TEN –YEAR PLAN.....	19
5.	THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM’S DEMANDS.....	20

“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth.”

Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations
At the 1st World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth
Lisbon (Portugal), 8-12 August 1998

1 Introduction

The full and active participation of young people in society is fundamental to both the renewal and functioning of democracy. The development of a youth policy in the European Union provides the opportunity to involve young people at all levels in the construction of the European project. Not only can a youth policy address some of the key problems that young people in the European Union face, but it can inspire and involve young people as active citizens. The participation of young people is vital to our democracy and for a sustainable development of our societies.

The European Youth Forum therefore welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to launch a White Paper on Youth Policy, and calls upon the Commission to set ambitious aims in the White Paper for implementation both at Community and Member State level.

The European Youth Forum congratulates the Commission for the timeliness of its proposal in the context of the commitments that have been made to young people over the recent years. Commitments, both by the Heads of State and Government and the institutions of the European Union, to improving the position of young people in Europe and promoting their ability to participate actively in European society.¹ The White Paper on Youth Policy must honour these commitments and translate them into an ambitious, participatory and effective youth policy strategy in the European Union.

In the preparation of the Lisbon European Council, the Portuguese Presidency stressed that: “Europe’s population, and young people in particular, must have access to basic skills, such as being able to learn and resolve problems, develop scientific culture and technical skills, use information technologies, speak foreign languages, develop a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and be active, free and responsible citizens.”²

¹ Notably: Resolution on a youth policy for Europe adopted by the European Parliament on 12 October 1998 (A4-0100/99); Resolution of Council of Ministers for Youth meeting within the Council of 8 February 1999 (OJ 1999 C42/01); Contribution to the Presidency Report on the European Employment Pact - Memorandum of the German Presidency 'Youth and Europe - Our Future'; Vienna European Council, Conclusions of the Presidency, point 46 (11 December 1998).

² Document from the Presidency 'Employment, Economic Reforms and Social Cohesion - towards a Europe based on innovation and knowledge', Council of the European Union, 12 January 2000.

At the Lisbon European Council itself, the Heads of State and Government of the European Union committed to making Europe a 'dynamic and competitive area, based on innovation and knowledge, able to boost economic growth levels with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' by 2010.³ The realisation of the vision for employment, economic reform and social cohesion outlined in Lisbon will require major progress in the economic and employment sectors.⁴ The new knowledge economy will depend on a larger, better-educated and more highly trained workforce. Thus, the generation of young people making the transition from formal education to the labour market in the next ten years will be crucial to achieving this move towards the knowledge-based economy.

In light of Commissioner Reding's intention to issue a White Paper on Youth Policy, this contribution outlines the problems facing young people in the European Union and beyond at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Youth Forum proposes a ten-year plan for the development of a youth policy embodying the objectives of the Lisbon Summit and fully involving young people and advocates the establishment of a structure which could effectively ensure the implementation of that plan, and lists the key demands of the Youth Forum for a Youth Policy in the European Union.

A White Paper on Youth Policy must take recent developments in the European Union, particularly the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council, both as a starting point and as the key to promoting a cross-sectoral youth policy. Youth policy is by definition horizontal because of the large number of policy areas that affect young people. The European Youth Forum believes that youth policy should be developed in accordance with young people and their needs, aiming to improve their situation by addressing the whole range of social, cultural and political issues affecting them through integrated action and policy co-ordination⁵. At all levels, youth policy should co-ordinate measures to serve the interests of young people and involve them in shaping social, economic, political and cultural life. It is vital that young people are at the heart of youth policy, contributing to it as actors in a dynamic process. Youth Policy should not stop at mainstreaming issues relating to young people in employment, social integration, social protection and other policy areas, but must be reinforced by programmes and actions at the European and other levels to develop participatory youth work and services, which represent a key to active citizenship and promoting democratic participation in the European Union.

³ The Heads of State and Government of the European Union committed to an ambitious social and economic agenda at the European Council. The details can be found in the Presidency conclusions, Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000.

⁴ The conclusions of the Lisbon European Council commit to aiming for sustained annual growth of 3%, combined with the development of innovation and knowledge and the expansion of the service sector will provide the conditions for increasing employment levels to 70% for men and 60% for women.

⁵ 'Youth Forum European Youth Policy', adopted by the European Youth Forum Executive Committee in Vilnius, Lithuania, 3-5 April 1998 (D98-176).

2. Young people in Europe at the beginning of the 21st century

2.1. Demographic trends

Young people constitute an ever-diminishing proportion of the population of the European Union due to declining birth rates. This demographic trend is set to become even more pronounced over the next decade and the generation imbalance will be exacerbated by the growing number of people over 65. For instance, the decline in the population is already entailing a concentration of services and facilities in certain areas, thus forcing young people to leave rural areas and to migrate to cities. This will have a significant impact on social security costs, with those in employment largely responsible for supporting the financial burden of pension costs. It is estimated that there will be 13 million fewer young people aged between 15-29 in 2015, than there were in 1995⁶. Young people will thus become an even more vital resource for the renewal and innovation of European societies and economies in the early twenty-first century. Their full and democratic participation in society will be crucial.

Young people are also becoming autonomous at a later age, mostly because of the increasing time spent in education but also due to the high cost of living in many countries, the need to finance studying, the lack of social protection and problems in entering the labour market. Thus, many young people are still not financially independent in their mid-twenties. This has both social and economic implications. Young people cannot fully take on their rights or responsibilities, nor can they be financially self-sufficient.

2.2. The Expansion of the European Union

The early twenty-first century will also see the expansion of the European Union with the accession of the candidate countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Through the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, these countries will introduce legislation relating to a huge number of issues relevant to young people. It is vital that civil society organisations (especially youth organisations) in these countries should be aware of the implications of their entry into the European Union and have a full and proper understanding of the impact that membership will have in key policy areas affecting them. The consultation of young people should be encouraged and resources devoted to allowing their participation in decision-making at all levels in these countries.

2.3. Education

Education, whether formal, informal or non-formal is a way of key importance for society to respond pro-actively to change.⁷ A recent study on non-formal education

⁶ Communication from the Commission 'Towards a Europe for All Ages', COM (1999)221 final, p.7.

⁷ 'Non-formal education is organised educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended to serve an identifiable learning clientele with identifiable learning objectives', in: 'National Youth Policies', a working document produced by the Chief Executive Officers of World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations, World Young Women's Christian Association, World Organisation of the Scout Movement, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, International Federation of

stated that 'if we want education to be effective in the new millennium, education must become more open and use a wider range of resources than those that are currently employed in the existing infrastructures'.⁸ In many countries formal education needs to be developed so that it prepares young people more successfully for the needs of modern society and the labour market. Similarly, non-formal education needs to be sufficiently resourced to allow young people to participate and acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding that is often lacking under the formal education system.

Formal education constitutes an important part of the lives of young people and in the last fifteen years young people have been staying longer in education.⁹ In most countries there is a clear correlation between educational achievement and successful integration into the employment market. The prospects of those with low educational attainment are more limited, while those who leave education later fare better in the employment market.¹⁰ In 1997, the unemployment rate for young people who had only completed compulsory education was 14%, for those who had finished upper secondary education it was 10%, and it was 6% for those with a tertiary education qualification.¹¹ A further increase in the level of education for everyone must be combined with an improvement in the quality of that education and the degree to which it is geared to the needs of the modern employment market. Particular attention must be paid to ensuring that improvements in education encompass all young people and do not lead to a divide between those who leave school early or have a poor level of education and those who have completed their education successfully. Education institutions need to be held accountable for creating safe and inclusive environments where all young people can fully participate and grow. To this end, ongoing professional development should be provided for educators and youth workers in the principles of intercultural learning and citizenship education.

Non-formal education in youth organisations and other civil society organisations plays a valuable - if under-recognised - role in the personal development and education of young people. Through their participation in youth organisations, young people learn many skills while at the same time making a valuable contribution to society. Non-formal education in youth organisations supports the overall development of individuals, their communities and ultimately society. The official recognition of non-formal education and its development through further resources will provide further opportunities to young people and encourage participation in society.

the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Award Association, Geneva/London 1999, p.6.

⁸ 'Building Bridges for learning: the recognition and value of non-formal education in youth activity', Pasi Sahlberg, European Youth Forum, 1999.

⁹ In OECD countries, a fifteen-year-old could expect to stay in education for a further 6 years in 1998. This figure had risen by over one and a half years since 1985. 'Education at a Glance', OECD, 2000.

¹⁰ Italy and Spain are an exception as they have high graduate unemployment levels in the 25-29 age group.

¹¹ 'The Social Situation in the European Union 2000', Eurostat, 2000, p. 14.

2.4. A Changing Labour Market

Rapid and continuing structural change in the European employment market has led to a mismatch between the demand and supply for skills, resulting in what is commonly termed the 'skills gap'. Although there has been a significant improvement in general levels of educational achievement, there is still a notable problem of young people dropping out of education, or leaving education early. In some Member States, poor levels of literacy and numeracy impede employers in recruiting staff to certain posts. There is a strong risk that the increasingly web-based society may lead to the development of a new group of excluded: those that do not have access to the skills and technology needed in this society. Information Technology is still very much an urban phenomenon and IT Training and facilities are not available for all youth, especially those in rural areas. Throughout Europe, the growth of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector has outstripped the supply of appropriately trained employees¹². Globalisation and the success of the internal market has created an increasing demand for mobile employees and employees with language skills. Furthermore, with the rapid technological developments in many sectors, the labour force needs to be able to adapt to new demands through lifelong learning.

The Lisbon European Council agreed to reduce the number of 18-24 year-olds 'with only lower-secondary level education who are not in further education and training' by half by 2010, and also to improve access to the Internet and training in the ICT sector. However, it is clear that further measures could be introduced at the Member State level to ensure that the generations of the future are equipped with the skills that they need. For example, efforts need to be made to increase the number of people completing secondary education, to make sure that young people are equipped with the skills required by the labour market, and make the practice of lifelong learning an integral part of active participation in the labour market.

2.5. Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning has been broadly defined by the European Commission and the Member States as 'all purposeful learning activity, whether formal or informal, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence'¹³. For young people, initial vocational education and training is the most relevant form of lifelong learning. However, this rarely emphasises the need to update the knowledge accumulated and the skills acquired, as its primary aim is to promote first-entry into employment. Non-formal education is seldom recognised officially and the development of skills, knowledge and self-confidence through participation in youth organisations is not sufficiently valued.¹⁴

¹² It was estimated that half a million jobs were vacant in this sector in 1998 and the figure expected to reach 1.6 million by 2002. European Commission Communication 'Strategy for Jobs in the Information Society', European Commission, 2000, p.7.

¹³ European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture working paper 'Implementing Lifelong Learning for Active citizenship in a Europe of Knowledge'. Paper presented at Lisbon Launch Conference, March 2000.

¹⁴ European Youth Forum Policy 'Non-formal education: a priority for the youth movement', (EDUCOM D97-669).

2.6. Mobility

Mobility among young people in Europe through their participation in educational exchange programmes, work experience programmes or in voluntary work is still very limited.¹⁵ The lack of opportunities, resources, co-ordination and information, combined with the limited formal recognition of the skills and qualifications gained while abroad act to restrict participation.¹⁶ However, the mobility of young people, whether in groups or as individuals, makes a vital contribution to intercultural understanding. The opportunity to live, study or work in another country encourages young people to reflect on their own cultural background and appreciate the cultural diversity of Europe. Intercultural skills will become increasingly important in the economies and multicultural societies of the European Union, as well as in the context of globalisation. Language skills and the capacity to interact and co-operate with people from different cultures will be more and more valuable and young people need the opportunity to develop these in the twenty-first century.¹⁷

2.7. Youth Unemployment

Although youth unemployment has declined in the last two decades, it has remained high in comparison to the levels among other age-groups. Currently, the unemployment rate among the 15-24¹⁸ age group in the European Union is almost double the rate for those aged 25-65, making approximately five million young people unemployed. This hides significant variations between countries, within countries and between young men and women. Youth unemployment has been particularly high in Spain, Italy, France Greece and Finland, and young female unemployment levels are a severe problem in Greece, Italy and Spain. Existing evidence also indicates that employment rates among ethnic minorities and the disabled are lower than the average. It is estimated that 45% of young people become unemployed at least once, and that 20% are unemployed two or three times.¹⁹

2.8. Social Exclusion

Unemployment is one of the key causes of social exclusion. Social exclusion is frequently multi-dimensional, with a number of factors combining to effectively exclude an individual from participating in society, including low levels of skills and education, low income, limited access to social security benefits, poor housing, high crime environments, substance abuse, bad health and family breakdown, living in deprived urban environments or certain rural areas, especially those in Southern as

¹⁵ Mobility is most successful among university students, but the figures in many countries are low. Participation in tertiary education in a country other than the one of origin ranges from 1.28% in Spain to 13.6% in Ireland. 'Education at a Glance 2000', OECD, p.186.

¹⁶ See European Commission Green Paper 'Education, Training, Research: the obstacles to trans-national mobility' COM (1996) 462 final, and for more information on the obstacles to voluntary work abroad, see 'Moving in Europe' published by the Structure for Operational Support in 1999.

¹⁷ 'Note on the Mobility of Young People In view to the initiative to adopt and EU Action Plan on Mobility taken by the French Council Presidency 2000', European Youth Forum, August 2000.

¹⁸ In labour market statistics the young are defined as the age group from 15-24. The European Youth Forum defines youth as those aged 15-35.

¹⁹ 'Implementing the European Employment Strategy,' European Commission 1999, p.19.

well as Central and Eastern Europe. Although European Community policy has aimed to promote social cohesion between the Member States of the European Union, there is still a divide between the more wealthy countries and the poorer countries in the Union. Similarly, there are many poor areas within Member States. A substantial number of young people in some countries have been among the poor or socially excluded from birth due to family circumstances. The fight against social exclusion has to address the problems that socially excluded households face and try to prevent poverty and social exclusion among children. The transition from childhood and education to adulthood and employment is a very vulnerable period for young people. Those who drop out of school and do not succeed in finding employment often have limited access to social protection. Moreover, employment does not automatically end social exclusion as young people constitute a significant number of the 'working poor' due to their low levels of income.

2.9. Social Protection

Young people experienced a restriction in their entitlement to social protection at the end of the twentieth century.²⁰ In some countries young people are not entitled to unemployment benefit unless they have worked previously, and the provision of social security benefits is often linked to taking a training course or proving that they are involved in a genuine job search. As a result of this, and the fact that more young people are staying longer in education, the age at which young people leave the parental home has become higher. The rising cost of housing has been another factor in making independent living more difficult for young people and they are becoming autonomous at a later age. This has had a further impact by increasing the average age at which young people establish their own households and have children. The concept of youth has been effectively extended to cover a longer period in an individual's life-course, a fact which is further exacerbated by difficulties in finding secure employment and limited social protection.

The support structures for young people are not sufficient to counterbalance the problems resulting from social exclusion and from the multifarious risks in contemporary society. It is estimated that around 10% of young people in some countries are in 'status zero', that is they are not in education, training, employment or entitled to unemployment benefit.²¹ Early school leavers and the homeless do not receive sufficient support²². The social and economic costs of failing to deal with these problems - as well as problems such as delinquency and drug addiction - at an initial stage augment over the life-course, supporting the argument that such problems should be addressed at as early as possible through a preventive approach. The development of more preventative measures would limit the social costs resulting from these problems.

²⁰ 'Taking Steps - Young People and Social Protection in the European Union', David Green, report published by the European Youth Forum 1998.

²¹ For example In Belgium, Greece, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. 'Education at a Glance', OECD, 2000, p.287.

²² The problem of youth homelessness is examined in detail in 'Youth Homelessness in the European Union', FEANTSA 1998.

2.10. Gender Equality

In many areas it is clear that there is not real gender equality between young women and men in the European Union.²³ As indicated above, in the majority of Member States a higher percentage of young men are in employment than young women. As social security benefits have become increasingly linked to previous employment, this means that young women are disadvantaged in their access to social security benefits. There has been a steady improvement in the number of young women completing secondary education and in the levels of education achieved by young women in tertiary education, however there are still certain areas of study and professions which are dominated by men. Vertical and horizontal segregation in education and the labour market needs to be addressed to prevent young women suffering from structural discrimination and being discouraged from pursuing certain career choices. Women earn considerably less than men over the life course, partly as a result of the fact that equal pay is not always given for equal work. It is clear that all statistics and indicators concerning young people should take gender into account as a factor in order to understand the extent of discrimination. This will allow the mainstreaming of gender in relation to young people to be more successful.

2.11. Discrimination

Discrimination 'based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation'²⁴ is also strongly in evidence in relation to young people, especially in the fields of education and employment. Unemployment statistics indicate that young people in general experience discrimination in the labour market, a fact that is commonly attributed to their age and lack of experience. Young women, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and the young disabled are even more vulnerable to discrimination among employers. Due to the lack of existing data, more research on young people and discrimination needs to be carried out in order to assist in the development of policies and programmes to address discrimination and prevent early exclusion continuing throughout the life-course.

2.12. Participation of Young People

A number of surveys of young people in the Member States of the European Union have shown the various and often multiple problems faced by young people in their lives, and the issues of particular concern in each country. These surveys have indicated that while youth participation in elections has been consistently low throughout the Member States and even lower in the European Parliament elections in 2000, young people feel strongly about many issues. It is therefore important that young people are consulted at every level and their concerns should be tackled in order to redress this process of alienation and disillusionment with mainstream political parties. Young people can be motivated by involving them in decision-making from the local to the European level, and by bringing decision-making closer to them. Young people organised from the local level strive to integrate a European dimension

²³ For the European Youth Forum's policy on Gender Equality see 'Gender Equality, Women's Policy' European Youth Forum 1997

²⁴ Article 13 of the 'Consolidated Version of the Treaty Establishing the European Community'.

in their work, though more often than not, the inaccessible information and funding procedures hamper their level of activism. Young people and youth organisations are calling on European policy-makers to overcome unnecessary hierarchies that exist between local, regional, national and European level to ensure a local and regional perspective in European policy-making in the youth field. Many young people in Europe are members of democratic youth organisations. Some of these organisations have successfully convinced their governments of the value of consulting young people through youth organisations. The full recognition of youth organisations - including a legal basis for their activities and the recognition of voluntary work - can contribute to youth participation at all levels in society.

3. A ten-year plan for youth

The development of a youth policy in the European Union will require a reconsideration of the current Treaty provisions. The Treaty will probably need to be revised in order to provide a legal basis for the youth policy and define the method for implementing the policy at the various levels involved. In this respect new methods for co-operation, particularly at the Member State level, are needed in order to implement successfully a comprehensive youth policy. It is proposed that an initial timetable should be established in order to provide a deadline for the implementation of the new youth policy. The Lisbon European Council set an agenda with concrete goals to be achieved by 2010. To complement the Lisbon objectives, the European Youth Forum proposes that a co-ordinated youth policy should be pursued through the mainstreaming of youth in education and lifelong learning, employment, social protection, social exclusion, equal opportunities and anti-discrimination policies at the European level in the next ten years. Also as part of the policy, Member States should be encouraged to co-ordinate their policies in key areas - such as education - through the establishment of High Level Working Groups. The Community and Member State policies should then be supported by measures to promote youth organisations, associative life, active citizenship and mobility among young people. A ten-year plan would thus provide the framework for ensuring that youth policy in the European Union becomes a reality as soon as possible.

As a horizontal policy, youth policy covers a number of areas. The European Union has varying degrees of competence in these areas and some of them have existing policies relating to young people. It is proposed that key objectives should be agreed in designated policy areas under the 'ten-year plan' for young people which would dovetail with the objectives of the Lisbon summit. The following areas should be included in the ten-year plan:

3.1. Education

There has been an increasing focus on education at the Member State level under the Luxembourg process, with guidelines 7 and 8 aimed at 'easing the transition from school to work'.²⁵ Furthermore, the Lisbon summit requested that the Education

²⁵ In the Employment Guidelines for 2000, Guideline 7 concerns the improvement of school systems in order to reducing the number of young people 'dropping out', while Guideline 8 promotes the provision of the skills needed for the modern labour market.

Council should 'undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems ... with a view to contributing to the Luxembourg and Cardiff processes'.²⁶ Education should have the overall aim to enable the self-development of the individual as an active citizen and to promote his/her integration in society by facilitating a successful entrance into the labour market. As mentioned above, Lisbon also included the objective to improve the number of young people in further education and training. These steps should be developed with a set of broader objectives in regard to both the quality of education and educators, and free access of young people to high quality education has to be guaranteed. Participation of students and secondary school students in decision-making at all levels of education has to be ensured as part of every individual learning process. Education opportunities must be available for everyone, also in rural and peripheral areas. Efforts must be made to ensure that there is no need for 'second-chance education'. Ongoing professional development should be provided to ensure a high quality of education. For example, Member States could commit to increasing the number of young people completing upper secondary education to the level of the average of the best three Member States in the European Union. Similarly, measures to prevent discrimination in education, to make it more flexible by developing new pedagogical approaches that enable young people to make their own choices and support their full integration in society and to reduce the number of young people dropping out should be introduced. All forms of education (informal, non-formal and formal) must be recognised as complementary and contributing to the full development of a young person as an active and full participant in society. Youth organisations should be properly resourced by institutions and others so they can continue to offer and expand non-formal education programmes.

3.2 Lifelong Learning

Access to lifelong learning should be possible from an early age, and participation in full-time education should not preclude or restrict access to it. Establishing a pattern of participation in lifelong learning at a young age can contribute to it becoming an integral part of an individual's life. Participation in youth organisations, for example, not only allows young people to develop skills of relevance to the labour market, but also encourages active participation in society and reinforces the values of citizenship and democracy. Official support and recognition of non-formal education should be given under lifelong learning programmes. Lifelong learning, including that provided by non-formal education, should be expanded so that young people can continually update their knowledge and skills in order to adapt to the fast-changing employment market. Lifelong learning cannot be seen as purely the responsibility of the public sector, the private sector must be encouraged to develop training programmes for its employees and the role played by civil society organisations given more formal recognition.

²⁶Presidency Conclusions, Lisbon European Council, p.9.

3.3. Mobility

The Lisbon Summit conclusions called for the development of a means of 'fostering the mobility of students, teachers and training and research staff' by using existing programmes and removing obstacles such as the lack of recognition of qualifications and periods of study and training.²⁷ As mobility is a reality for only a small proportion of young people in Europe this needs to be extended to include school children, volunteers, young trainees and young workers. The mobility of young people must be promoted by developing programmes promoting mobility both at the Community level and through bi-lateral and multilateral exchanges. Furthermore, the obstacles to mobility need to be removed and greater co-ordination and improved management of opportunities developed. The mutual recognition of qualifications must also be improved in order to promote the formal value of participation in mobility programmes.²⁸ All European young people must be given the opportunity, resources and guidance necessary to spend up to a year in an educational environment in a different country. The opportunities must be accessible and promoted before the age of 18, in order to let the achieved cultural understanding and framework of reference become an asset in the future education of the participants and their educational institutions.

3.4. Employment

The Luxembourg process already aims to tackle youth unemployment, primarily by promoting employability under Guideline 1.²⁹ This should be complemented by an agreement to reduce unemployment levels to the average of the best three performing Member States. Furthermore, young people should be consulted consistently at the Member State level on employability measures. It is vital that young people should be given some choice in their careers and not steered into training courses and employment as a means of reducing employment figures. Training and employment schemes must be of a high quality to ensure the permanent integration of young people into the labour market.³⁰ Start up schemes and support measures should be promoted to encourage and help young people to create or take over a business. The extension of the European Employment Strategy to the local and regional level must be effected so that it is successful in developing policy consistent with the aims of the Strategy but also with specific local needs.³¹ The European Employment Strategy, operating at the European, Member State, regional and local

²⁷ *ibid*, p.9.

²⁸ The Memorandum of the German Presidency 'Youth and Europe - Our Future' suggested that Member States should increase support for educational exchanges and cross-border training both bilaterally and multilaterally. It also called for the breaking down the barriers to the mutual recognition of qualifications and for the promotion of language skills.

²⁹ Guideline I of the Employment Guidelines for 2000 aims to ensure that 'every young person is offered a new start before reaching six months of unemployment, in the form of training, retraining, work practice, a job or other employability measure with a view to effective integration into the labour market'.

³⁰ See the European Youth Forum Policy on 'The European Employment Strategy and Young People', adopted by the European Youth Forum Executive Committee in Potsdam, March 1999.

³¹ 'Acting Locally for Employment - A Local Dimension for the European Employment Strategy', COM (2000) 196 final.

level, has the potential to play a key role in improving employment levels and young people must remain a key focus of all measures relating to employment policy.

3.5. Social Protection

The Lisbon European Council concluded that social protection systems 'need to be adapted as part of an active welfare state to ensure that work pays, to secure their long-term sustainability in the face of an ageing population, to promote social inclusion and gender equality, and to provide quality health services.' Subsequently, the Commission's 'Social Policy Agenda' proposed a number of actions to achieve this aim.³² In the development of policy at the European level on social protection it is vital to ensure that adequate social protection is available for young people, and this should not be dependent on their family status or their previous work experience. The issue of social protection is particularly relevant for young people because their access to social welfare is more restricted than it is for people who have already participated in the labour market. Moreover, as unemployment among young people is particularly high, this makes them more vulnerable and can lead to social exclusion.

Any changes in social protection provision should give adequate support to young people in the transition from education to employment, as young people are particularly vulnerable during this period. Particular attention should also be paid to avoiding the phenomena of invisible young people, those who are not in training, employment or education and who do not receive unemployment benefit and social protection in general.

3.6. Equal Opportunities and Discrimination

Young people frequently suffer from discrimination on the basis of their age. Many more suffer therefore from multiple discrimination on the basis of their age *and* other causes of discrimination defined under article 13 of the TEC.³³ The European Commission's 'Social Policy Agenda' sets the objective of promoting the 'full participation of women in economic, scientific, social, political and civic life as a key component of democracy' and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into 'all relevant policies'.³⁴ This widespread implementation of this is vital to promoting equality between women and men. Moreover, ensuring the full participation of women in society from an early age is crucial to achieving this aim. Young women must be given the space to be actively involved in all decision-making processes in order to ensure that their perspectives and views are taken into account.³⁵ Similarly, measures should be taken to reduce discrimination against young people. Statistics should be collected and assessed to determine the degree of discrimination against such groups as ethnic minorities or the disabled in education, employment and other areas. Programmes to combat discrimination among young people should be initiated at the Member State level, in part supported by the European Social Fund and the

³² Communication 'Social Policy Agenda', COM (2000) 379 final, p.20

³³ Article 13 of the Consolidated Treaty Establishing the European Community.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.21

³⁵ See the European Youth Forum Policy 'Young Women's Participation', agreed in Portugal, April 2000 (5Equality 0342-2k).

EQUAL Community Initiative. The implementation of the latter should be evaluated in terms of their success in combating discrimination against young people. The fight against discrimination must prevent people from experiencing discrimination from the earliest age. By giving young people equal and fair opportunities, an important step is taken in reducing and preventing discrimination later in the life course and ensuring that young people do not enter a lifetime of discrimination and social exclusion.

3.7. Social Exclusion

The Lisbon conclusions introduced the open method of co-ordination in the field of social exclusion. In establishing this process, the indicators used, the targets agreed, the monitoring and evaluation carried out, must take account of the multiple forms of discrimination suffered by many young people. It is clear that young people are particularly at risk of becoming social excluded at the time of the transition from education to employment. This must be recognised not only in the guidelines developed as part of the open method of co-ordination to combat social exclusion, but also in a quantitative commitment to reducing poverty among young people. The Member States must be encouraged to formally recognise and support youth initiatives to combat social exclusion at the local level. Policies to promote social cohesion within the European Union must be continued and developed to take account of the accession countries as they join the European Union. Likewise, Member States must be encouraged to continue to promote social cohesion within their countries with the support of Structural Funds.

3.8. Participation and Civil Society

Any policy aimed at young people must be characterised by the fundamental principle of youth participation; a principle that has been repeatedly reiterated at both the European and international level.³⁶ The benefits of promoting, encouraging and supporting young people's participation are evident from existing practice in the Member States of the European Union. Through participation, issues of concern and the often multiple problems faced by young people come to the fore and can be addressed pro-actively by decision-makers and administrative bodies, as well as by young people themselves. A European youth policy should seek to involve young people at all stages in the decision-making process in order both to benefit from their first-hand experience and to motivate them as active and responsible citizens.

Non-governmental organisations and their activities are a fundamental part of democratic society and are important in supporting human rights. It is vital therefore that these organisations and activities are supported through proper funding. Non-governmental organisations provide a safeguard for democracy, solidarity and human rights through their complex networks, their membership and their democratic

³⁶ Declaration of the United Nations on the International year of youth 1985, 'Peace, Participation, Development'; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; European Charter on Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe, 1992; Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe 'On Young People and Participation', 1997; Resolution of Council and Ministers for Youth meeting within the Council on 8th February 1999 (OJ 1999 C42/01).

decision-making procedures. They also promote change and renewal in society, and represent the interests of minorities and those suffering discrimination. Youth non-governmental organisations need secure funding and should be consulted or involved in policy-making at all levels. It is important that young people are encouraged and given the opportunity to engage in a broad and diverse range of structures, organisations and issues. Participation and ownership can be promoted through involvement and partnership, resulting in active citizenship. Improving the level of young people's participation in civil society will motivate and encourage them to be active citizens.

Advisory, consultative or representative structures of young people and their organisations should be a key element of any youth policy. At the Community level, the European Youth Forum fulfils this role, however this should be given statutory recognition by all the institutions of the European Union. The continuing support of the work of the Youth Forum through the appropriate budgetary allocations is vital to the representation and participation of young people at the European level. The Member States and the Community, acting at the relevant level in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, must support and recognise the establishment of representative national youth platforms such as National Youth Councils, both in the Member States and in the accession countries. Asymmetric policy principles should be implemented taking into account the different realities between regions in Europe. National and European youth structures should be consulted on policies and programmes relating to them, including for example, the YOUTH Community Action Programme and the European Social Funds. International Non-Governmental play an important role in the development of youth work and policies at all levels, and an increase in the funding available to these organisations will support the continuing development of their work.³⁷

3.9. Building Europe from the bottom up - A local and regional perspective

Across Europe young people want to be active citizens and to take an active role in the life of their community and be part of building Europe. Youth organisations, networks and initiatives empower young people to participate, and youth participation among other things is a means to bring about social integration. However youth policy instruments often do not exist at local or regional level to promote participation of young people and their youth organisations in the development of local policies and programmes that can have a positive affect on the lives of young people. The development of independent and democratic local youth councils/platforms run and governed by young people as a collective voice within a community to take decisions with decision-makers should be nurtured and supported

³⁷ "The European Youth Forum demands that youth organisations and networks are granted recognition and support by the European Union. The European Parliament should reserve 5 million Euro for the budget lines that directly serve young people in their efforts to build a common European society (A3029 and A3023). This support is needed to promote the articulation of youth opinion in Europe and to effectively voice the concerns of young people towards European decision-makers." Extract from the demands of the European Youth Forum at the occasion of the European Parliament Elections June 1999, adopted by the Executive Committee in Potsdam (Germany) 26-28 March 1999 (Executive D99-0150final)

by local authorities. Dialogue between young people and local authorities should be on the basis on equality and decisions taken on the basis of co-management. Comprehensive national youth legislation, with a local and regional dimension should be put in place and support for developing associative life at local level should be ensured. Municipal and regional authorities across the European Union should endorse and act upon the guidelines laid-down in the European Charter on the participation of young people in municipal and regional life.

Young people at the local and regional level want to be in contact and co-operate with their counterparts in other European countries but the lack of clear, understandable and accessible information from other levels continues to be a barrier to such co-operation. The current procedures for accessing EU funding prohibit many local youth groups from developing European co-operation projects, as do unnecessary hierarchies that exist between local, regional, national and European level. Ways and means to provide more user-friendly information should be developed.

3.10. A European Youth Policy in a Globalising World

With the accession of the candidate countries in the early twenty-first century, membership of the European Union will expand. Civil society organisations in these countries have been growing in strength during the political transition, but they lack the tradition and support for participative democracy that has existed in western Europe. In some of these countries civil society organisations operate without proper legal status, and volunteerism is not formally recognised. Youth organisations have been developing despite a lack of financial resources and support. It is important that young people should have greater opportunities to participate in democratic structures. They should also have the chance to learn about the implications of their country's membership of the European Union. Young people and youth organisations should therefore be considered in the relevant strand of the Phare programme and in the preparatory measures for accession. In order to reach a real and sustainable participation of young people on a European level, the EU Youth Policy should also invite youth of the pre-accession countries to be involved at all stages of decision-making processes. NGOs and youth organisations should be strongly supported in their activities to reach a full and proper understanding of the impact of accession on young people. Being aware of the fact that young people of the candidate countries have a crucial role in terms of the accession itself, particular attention should be paid to them in the forms of extra programmes and funding.

A cross-sectoral youth policy includes international co-operation. This must incorporate three elements. Firstly, the principles relating to youth participation embodied in a European Youth Policy must also be applied consistently in relevant European Union policies in the rest of the world. Support to democracy or civil society organisations should include support for young people and youth organisations. With young people making up a large proportion of the population of European countries and often the majority of the population in developing countries, it is vital that their interests are considered. Secondly, the existing Youth programme should be extended so that there are opportunities for young people from countries

outside the European Union, particularly from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP), to participate in activities and exchanges with youth organisations in the European Union, especially as this will stimulate political dialogue. This must include the opportunity for young people from other countries to travel to the European Union. In an ever globalising world, economic and environmental issues and their relationship to European and developing countries cannot be ignored. Based on the already existing agreements of the EU with third partners in Latin America, we ask for an enlargement of the working areas, including in these agreements youth policy matters and Youth programmes. Young people throughout the world need to develop their understanding of these issues so that they can participate fully in decision-making in these areas, which are of vital relevance to the future. By encouraging the dialogue between citizens and institutions, they will be able to achieve improvements in the areas of environment protection and sustainability. This will also contribute to an understanding of the problems faced in developing countries and the need for collective action to relieve these problems. These three elements will allow the European Union to contribute to the development of a global youth policy, making young people responsible for the future of their community and ensuring they understand their place in relation to countries both near and far from them.³⁸

3.11 Support measures for a European Youth Policy

A cross-sectoral youth policy needs the support of programmes to boost civil society participation among young people. There are a number of existing programmes implemented by the European Union, including the Youth Programmes, in addition to those in the Member States in the areas mentioned above. These should take the objectives of the European Youth Policy into account and be developed into support measures for it. Furthermore, in the context of the enlargement of the European these support measures should seek to provide fuller support to youth organisations in the accession countries and non-European partnerships. The further extension of the Youth Programmes to allow fuller global participation would support interdependence and global solidarity. The initiation of a European Youth Policy should be accompanied by a youth information policy, which would provide young people at the local level with information on how it will benefit them and the possibilities for participation.

4. Implementing the Ten –Year Plan

A structure needs to be established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the European Youth Policy. The European Youth Forum proposes that a Youth Observatory should be created. This Observatory would include policy experts, practitioners and representatives of young people. Its role would be threefold. Firstly, it would evaluate progress in the European Youth Policy and produce an annual report, which could be presented to the Spring European Council. Secondly, it would analyse statistics on youth in key areas such as employment, education, social

³⁸ The Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes promotes the development of youth policies in individual countries and at the global level.

exclusion, social protection and mobility, and develop indicators to promote an understanding of how discrimination affects young people. Thirdly, it would co-ordinate a number of 'high-level' working groups, which would facilitate the peer-group, review of policies and make proposals for the further development and co-ordination of youth policy. These working groups would include representatives of national ministries and young people from civil society organisations.

5. The European Youth Forum's Demands

Young people should be involved in decision-making at every level. In terms of particular demands, the European Youth Forum has identified the following key areas:

1. Treaty reference to young people for legal basis.
2. Youth issues must be discussed by a Council of Youth Ministers, with a regular review of progress on youth policy.
3. Commitment to support of youth organisations as a vital part of civil society and in developing youth participation
4. Commitment to increasing the number of young people completing secondary education
5. Commitment to reducing discrimination in education and the early school leaving rate
6. Recognition of non-formal education
7. The extension of access to lifelong learning from an early age
8. Increasing mobility, recognition of qualifications, and mobility programmes in the field of education, voluntary service, training and employment in order to promote intercultural learning and develop skills.
9. Commitment to a quantitative reduction in youth unemployment
10. Commitment to the provision of adequate social protection for young people
11. Commitment to combating social exclusion and acknowledgement of the particular problems faced in the transition from education to employment.
12. Commitment to combating the multiple discrimination experienced by many young people in accordance with the definition of article 13 of the TEC, and to promoting tolerance.
13. Commitment to strengthen and promote the role of youth in international co-operation and development and aid policy.

14. The establishment of a Youth Observatory to monitor the mainstreaming of youth policy and evaluate the achievements in accordance with the demands listed above.