



Policy Paper on Youth Employment

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“Because we are worth it...”

Executive summary

The lack of employment and precarious working conditions affects the life of each and every individual and young people are especially vulnerable in this regard. Young people face difficulties in entering the labour market and/or are often faced with precarious working conditions. This situation prevents them from achieving their full potential in life, does not allow them to integrate fully in society and to enjoy, to the full extent, their basic human rights.

While the European Youth Forum (YFJ) recognises that policy instruments have been designed to improve the labour market integration of young people, up to now, the situation of youth in employment has not in fact improved.

In its current efforts to promote cross-sector youth policy, the YFJ considers employment as a crucial component of youth policy. Thus, the paper looks at a set of key issues concerning youth employment and within these themes, there is a clear list of actions to which the YFJ will be committing itself and calls on institutions to commit. Additionally, the YFJ calls for the involvement of youth organisations in all stages of youth employment policy making.

The paper firstly outlines the global and European challenges as far as youth employment is concerned. It then tackles the skills that can provide a smooth transition between education and the labour market, calling upon the EU Member States as well as non-EU countries to commit themselves to developing and implementing ambitious Life Long Learning strategies as well as recognising the competence acquired through both formal and non-formal education as well as through vocational training.

The paper also explores the possibilities to encourage employment from an earlier stage and how entrepreneurship and mobility are key factors for employability of young people. The YFJ believes that students should gain practical work experience, providing that it is possible to balance study and work life and supports the existence of internships if they are part of education curricula and allow for the professional development of young people. Moreover, the YFJ calls for the simplification of procedures that foster entrepreneurship among young people and for the integration of entrepreneurship in school curricula from an early stage. As far as mobility is concerned, the YFJ calls for mutual recognition for mobility at work.

The paper continues with an overview of what is decent work of young people and how flexicurity fits into this concept, calling for minimum standards to ensure balance between security and flexibility. Lastly, the paper calls for the fight against discrimination and disadvantage at work.

Introduction

Building upon the expertise of its members on employment issues, this important policy document is a first in the history of the European Youth Forum (YFJ) regarding the topic of employment. While the European Youth Forum took a

proactive role in the United Nations Youth Employment Network¹, and in the European Employment Strategy - notably through producing a series of position papers² and contributions³ with respect to different consultations launched by the Commission - it is yet to adopt a policy paper on employment. It is therefore high time that the European Youth Forum adopts a policy position on this topic, as youth unemployment is, without doubt, one of the main challenges faced by young people today, and one which needs to be politically enhanced.

In its current efforts to promote cross-sector youth policy⁴, the European Youth Forum considers employment as a crucial component of youth policy. At the political level, more clarity is needed on who takes the responsibility for implementing youth policy at both European and national levels. Leadership and accountability are indeed key to improving the cooperation between relevant actors and therefore to achieving greater outcomes at the grassroots level.

Background information: Youth employment is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century

In recent decades, global and European policy makers have been very slow in recognising youth unemployment and underemployment as a priority challenge requiring decisive policy responses. From the 1990s onwards however, youth employment began to be seen as a genuine problem with severe consequences upon wider society and upon its future capacity to progress. Policy instruments were designed at the end of the 1990s to improve the labour market integration of young people, but up to now, the situation of youth in employment has not in fact improved.

A. Global challenges

Intimately linked to the agenda of the Millennium Development Goals, the creation of more employment opportunities for young people and the eradication of child labour⁵ are among the safer routes to reducing significantly poverty and hunger worldwide before 2015. The Youth Employment Network⁶ did not unfortunately help to improve the situation of young people in the labour market due to insufficient resources and political will. Likewise, whereas the various ILO programmes⁷ dealing with youth employment are making a significant contribution to building a shared, global understanding of this common challenge, and are promoting decent work for young people, these programmes will never manage to achieve significant outcomes without ambitious national youth employment strategies.

¹ See the YFJ position paper on the United Nations' Youth Employment Initiative (0070-02)

² See the European Employment Strategy and young people (0092-99) and the YFJ position paper on the revised European Employment Strategy (0516-03)

³ See the YFJ contribution to the Green Paper on labour law (0155-07) and the YFJ contribution to the revision of the Lisbon Integrated Guidelines for "Growth and Jobs" 2005-2008 (0505-07)

⁴ See the YFJ policy approach to youth policy "Meeting young people's needs" (0590-06)

⁵ Although child labour is prohibited, notably by the ILO convention C182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which entered into force on November 19th 2000, there are, according to UNICEF, 218 million children aged 5-17 engaged in unlawful child labour worldwide.

⁶ An initiative of former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan which was supported by the World Bank and the International Labour Organisation (ILO)

⁷ See the ILO's Youth Employment Programme - <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yett/index.htm> - and its two main tools, the ILO's Know About Business Entrepreneurship Education Programme and the School to Work transition survey

Key figures on youth (15-24 years old) employment worldwide in 2005⁸:

- 85 million young people are unemployed worldwide
- Global youth unemployment amounted to 13.5% compared to 6.5% for the overall global unemployment rate and 4.5% for the adult unemployment rate
- The ratio of the youth-to-adult unemployment rate is 3
- Unemployed youth make up 43.7% of the world's total unemployed
- There are an estimated 125 million young working poor, meaning more than 20% of employed youth live in a household where there is less than US\$1 a day available per head
- One out of every three young people in the world is either seeking but unable to find work, has given up their job search entirely, or is working but still living below the US\$2 a day poverty line
- Halving the world's youth unemployment rate would add between an estimated 2.2 and 3.5 US\$ trillion to the 2003 value of global GDP, or between 4.4% and 7%

While an urgent concern at the global level, youth employment is not only an issue for developing countries: in recent decades, both developed countries and countries in transition have seen their labour markets incapable of integrating newcomers. Appropriate answers to such common challenges are yet to be found, but one example of new forms of response is the creation of 'green' jobs, in view of the increasing concerns of climate change and sustainable development.

The ILO decent work agenda is crucial to creating more and better jobs at the global level and at the same time to being able to respond to global and European challenges: the European Youth Forum therefore strongly encourages the European Commission to intensify its cooperation with the International Labour Organisation in this field⁹.

B. European challenges

At the European Union (EU) level, the biggest challenge is to significantly increase participation rates in employment so as to limit, as much as possible, the effects of an ageing population, and overcome the negative economic consequences of a declining European labour force from 2010 onwards.

The Lisbon strategy¹⁰ sets out objectives in this regard, such as the reduction of early school leaving to 10% before 2010. The actions, thus far, of EU Member States, have in most cases been largely ineffective, with only very limited progress having been achieved. The European Youth Forum is convinced that a cross-sector youth policy, which embraces and responds to all challenges facing young people in

⁸ Source: ILO Global youth employment trends 2006

⁹ See the Commission Communication "Promoting decent work for all - the EU contribution to the implementation of the decent work agenda in the world" COM(2006)249

¹⁰ In order to respond to European Union employment challenges, the Luxembourg process, which led to the European Employment Strategy, was started in 1997 - in 2000, it was merged with the Lisbon Strategy, and maintained within it when the Lisbon strategy was refocused on "growth and jobs" in 2005.

contemporary Europe is needed. To that end, the European Union needs to adopt a strategic approach to the implementation of the European Youth Pact, which requires designing better instruments to monitor and follow-up national and regional policies, in full cooperation with young people and their organisations.

Key figures on youth (15-24 years old) employment in the EU-27 in 2006¹¹:

- 4.6 million young people aged between 15-24 are unemployed: this figure is slightly down from about 5 million in 2000. Among 25 to 29 year olds, around 2.8 million are without a job, down from 3.1 million in 2000
- In total, with about 7.4 million unemployed young people in the EU, young people aged 15-29 represent 38.5% of the total unemployed
- The youth unemployment rate amounts to 17.5%
- 30.1% of all young unemployed aged 15-24 are long-term unemployed. This is 10% higher for the age range 25-29 - amounting to 40.6%
- High numbers of young people are “not in employment, education or training” (NEET) but current statistics are unable to capture them
- The EU-27 employment rate stands on average at around 36% but it varies enormously between Member States, ranging from around or less than 25% - Bulgaria, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland, Romania - to over 60% in the Netherlands and Denmark
- Young people very often enjoy less favourable conditions than adults in terms of wages, contracts and job quality. Evidence shows that it is crucial for young people to find stable employment around the age of 30, otherwise they bear a high risk to continue to move between unstable jobs for years, if not for most of their working lives
- There is a significant gender gap in youth employment in the EU with the employment rate of young women in 2006 being 5.9% lower than that of their male peers

South East Europe (SEE) and Eastern Europe are strongly affected by youth unemployment, with unemployment rates 2.5 times higher than the average in the European Union¹²(which amounted to 17.5% in 2006)¹³. The lack of implementation or enforcement of labour law, the non-existence or extreme weakness of trade unions, widespread corruption, non-transparent recruitment procedures and illicit work are serious concerns leading young people to become disillusioned and to feel a greater sense of vulnerability. Democracy and the rule of law in these regions are a prerequisite to a significant improvement in the situation of young people in the labour market. International organisations are taking a proactive role to improve youth employment in the SEE and Eastern European regions, notably through the United Nations Development Programme or prospects for EU accession. Efforts are

¹¹ Source: Commission staff working document on “Youth employment in the EU” accompanying the Commission communication “Towards the full participation of youth in education, employment and society” COM(2007) 498 final

¹² Source: International Labour Review, Volume 144, Number 2, 2005, pp.161-187

¹³ Source: Eurostat, LFS spring results

also being made to develop self-employment and entrepreneurship - notably through the creation of 'business incubators'. However, more needs to be done to limit the "brain drain" effect, which is currently being observed as a result of a lack of employment opportunities for young people in those regions. In fact, the "brain drain" effect is not only a problem within Europe but also concerns young qualified Europeans who, faced with the malfunctioning of domestic labour markets and the lack of adequate working opportunities, opt to work outside Europe. The European Neighbourhood Policy¹⁴ should be used to improve youth employment in Eastern Europe, while the European Union's Stabilisation and Association Process with the Western Balkans needs to be mobilised to ensure better employment opportunities and conditions for young people in South Eastern Europe.

Additionally, it is the responsibility of the EU to tackle the issue of migration from outside Europe, providing legal migrants with the same equality of opportunity as EU citizens and with the basic conditions to foster integration and access to decent work, in accordance with EU law.

With regards to easing the access of highly-skilled workers to European labour markets, the European Commission announced the creation of a "blue card"¹⁵, in October 2007. The "blue card" is a permit system, similar to the American green card system, which would only be valid for two years (with the possibility of renewal). Blue Card holders would be treated equally in relation to national workers, limited only in their access to educational grants, housing, and social assistance. The "blue card" aims at attracting highly skilled workers by allowing them to follow fast track procedures and eventually increase mobility within the EU. For young professionals under the age of 30, additional support measures (in order to attract even more young talent to Europe) are envisaged. European Social NGOs have welcomed the initiative towards a more holistic approach to migration but the YFJ has highlighted the danger of categorising migrants.¹⁶

C. Promoting youth participation in employment policy-making

Youth participation is the cornerstone of youth policy development. Access to quality employment is now one of the very first priorities for young people and therefore the European Youth Forum aims to build upon the expertise and experiences of its members to participate in and improve European policy-making on youth employment issues. The role of youth organisations in this context is to monitor policy implementation, to share their knowledge, and to put pressure on policy makers at all levels in order to ensure that policies do indeed deliver outcomes for young people.

The role of youth organisations in discussions on employment is complementary to that of trade unions¹⁷ and employers' organisations, for example. The European Youth Forum believes that closer cooperation and partnership agreements are

¹⁴ The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was developed in 2004, with the objective of avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and instead strengthening the prosperity, stability and security of all concerned. The EU offers its neighbours a privileged relationship, building upon a mutual commitment to common values (democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development). The European Neighbourhood Policy applies to the EU's immediate neighbours by land or sea - Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

¹⁵ See "Proposal for a Council Directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment" [COM\(2007\) 637 final](#)

¹⁶ See 1069-07 YFJ Policy Paper on Migration

¹⁷ See the YFJ contribution to the Green Paper on Labour Law (0155-07)

needed between youth organisations, trade unions and employers' organisations at all levels. While engaging in common actions, youth organisations, trade unions and employers' organisations, as well as higher education institutions, can indeed help to improve individual transitions between education and work, notably through establishing efficient guidance mechanisms from an early stage; through the development of tools enabling the recognition of competencies; or through jointly promoting youth entrepreneurship.

I. Building, developing and updating skills

A. Life Long Learning

Learning in all forms should be made accessible for all. In a Life Long Learning perspective, it is essential to develop multiple entry and exit educational paths, and to ensure the recognition of all forms of learning achievements. In today's Europe, equal access to education is far from being achieved. Recognising the implications upon the rest of an individual's life, early support and intervention strategies are urgently needed to provide all young people with equal opportunities in education.

B. Formal education

Initial training and education are of paramount importance as they constitute the first experiences of formalised learning and thus shape young people's future opportunities in life as well as attitudes to learning. All forms of education should be free of charge. Free access to education is not only an education free from tuition fees, but from all costs related to education.

High levels of early school leaving provide evidence of the failure of education systems to include all young people; the school must be prepared to welcome and support all school students, regardless of their background. Statistics show that nearly one out of six young people do not finish secondary education. Early school and university leavers are highly susceptible to social exclusion and marginalisation. Additionally, education systems often fail to equip young people with the skills adequate for the labour market. Although EU objectives in the fight against early school leaving were set in 2002, the absence of significant progress against them clearly shows the lack of political will and the reluctance of European policy makers to invest the resources needed for genuine strategies. The European Youth Forum therefore calls on the European Union Member States to analyse more deeply the grounds for early school leaving and to promote the development of individual educational pathways aimed at ensuring that all young people at least complete upper secondary level education. European States not belonging to the European Union also need to develop national strategies on early school leaving. Lastly, to prevent early school leaving, the focus of educational policies should be on the learner and on the recognition of his or her 'real competences', including those acquired through Non-Formal Education and through professional experience, e.g. apprenticeships.

Before entering higher education, young people need to be fully aware of what to expect from a given educational programme, and of the professional opportunities offered by pursuing different types of educational careers. Orientation tools, and better interaction between educational providers and the professional sector, are needed to ensure that young people make informed choices when deciding upon further education and their specific specialisation. Trade unions should play a

specific role in sharing information with young people, related to labour market integration, as well as to the rights of young people; youth organisations should in turn, also make a valuable contribution, by ensuring that existing guidance mechanisms indeed reach out to young people.

Vocational training is an important and valuable tool in shaping young people's future, it should be held equally in regard to other higher education provision. By emphasising the skills and knowledge required for a specific job function, vocational training is of immense relevance when it comes to preparing an individual for work. It can, nowadays, take the form of a short course, practical training, apprenticeship or even part or full-time study at school, college or university. Where vocational training includes apprenticeships or on-the-job training minimum work and wage standards should apply. Vocational training, moreover, not only provides people with training for employment, but can also train people to understand social and working relations, which can have a transforming function. In this sense, vocational training can mean both training for work and training for citizenship.

For instance, the development of modular and credit systems could help early school leavers to re-enter formal education after a period away from study; and the development of European and of national Qualification Frameworks could be a decisive step forward to facilitate pathways between different educational schemes and pillars - higher education, vocational education and non-formal education - should all qualification frameworks always guarantee transparency.

C. Non-formal education

Through their active participation in youth organisations, young people learn to be committed, to show initiative and to take responsibility. They learn how to show respect for others by acquiring competencies such as communication and interpersonal interaction, conflict resolution, leadership, management, planning, teamworking skills, and problem-solving skills. More than ever before, it is essential for everyone to learn and build competencies, in both life long and life wide contexts. The competencies that young people garner from Non-Formal Education should be recognised by employers and the labour market in general.

The European Union has a crucial role to play in fostering and encouraging the exchange of good practice between different national systems, with the aim of allowing the recognition of these competencies to be realised. EU Member States as well as non EU countries need to commit themselves to developing and implementing ambitious Life Long Learning strategies, taking full consideration of the past and current work of the stakeholders on Life Long Learning.

II. Access and re-access to work

A. *For an environment conducive to work*

In the context of an ageing population and the expected decrease in the EU working age population from 2010 onwards¹⁸, the Lisbon strategy aims at optimising

¹⁸ See the European Commission communication "The demographic future of Europe - from challenge to opportunity" COM(2006) 571 final - 12.10.2006

participation rates in the labour market, especially for women and older workers¹⁹. The European Youth Forum strongly believes that this policy approach is the right one, provided that it does not mean that people are forced into precarious work. Indeed, increasing employment rates heavily relies on policy makers' capacity to provide quality child care services; adequate transport infrastructures and services; accessible and affordable private housing; and high quality health services.

Public employment services and assistance with job seeking should, in addition, be adapted to respond better to the needs of the job-seeker. These services should be equally accessible in rural areas and for people with disabilities. With regards to programmes targeting young people, the European Youth Forum calls for an independent assessment of the one-stop-shop model²⁰, as established in the United Kingdom through the *Job Centre Plus*.

Young people with fewer opportunities often feel socially alienated. The fact that many of the not-for-profit social service providers put in place to support these young people, are often very bureaucratic, inflexible, badly integrated and under political pressure to achieve statistical results, can mean that the individual needs of young people in difficult situations are failed by these very providers. Public employment services are poorly equipped to give the personal and collective mentoring, reassurance and encouragement that young people with fewer opportunities greatly need. These services would be much more useful at targeting social inclusion if young people and their organisations were involved in developing the services, which aim to respond to their needs. The "active inclusion" strategy, which aims to meet the needs of the people furthest from the labour market, should foresee specific measures to respond to the needs of young people with fewer opportunities.

Immigration will be increasingly necessary to compensate for the decline in the working-age population. The European Youth Forum reaffirms the priority that the European Union and its Member States have given to including²¹ migrants in employment. Particular emphasis should duly be given to younger migrants, as part of cohesion strategies, as their successful integration has a strong impact on a society's longer-term capacity to integrate newcomers and to include new cultures within a common fabric.

B. Encouraging youth employment from an earlier stage

In order to bring an end to the mismatch between the outputs of educational systems and the qualifications needed in the labour market, the European Youth Forum believes that new policies are needed to offer all young people access to relevant professional experience before graduation. In addition, advisory bodies to the boards of higher education institutions, comprising representatives of employers' organisations, trade unions and students' and youth organisations, should be established in order to ensure that these institutions respond both to the needs of the society and to the expectations of young people. The European Youth Forum also believes that students should gain practical work experience, providing

¹⁹ The Lisbon strategy aims to increase general employment rates to 70%, women's employment rates to 60% and older workers' employment rates to 50% before 2010.

²⁰ The one-stop-shop model is a new way of considering the provision of services aimed at improving the quality of service provision from a user perspective. It moves the focus from the constraints of the service provider to the needs of the user, and aims to gather all relevant services in the same place.

²¹ The YFJ prefers using "inclusion" rather than "integration": While "integration" only puts responsibility on the individual to adapt to a social norm, "inclusion" both encompasses this individual responsibility and the need for a society to adapt its social norms to the evolving composition of its population and promote equal opportunities for all.

that it is possible to balance study and work life. The European Youth Forum further calls for universal financial support for students.

The European Youth Forum acknowledges that when a part of education curricula, internships are a positive tool to facilitate the access of young people to employment. But the learning dimension of internships has been rapidly reducing, with many interns working on issues that do not allow them to progress in their professional development. Additionally, in recent decades, the reality has been that employers are increasingly recruiting graduates as interns without offering them any protection under labour legislation and often without any or very limited financial compensation. The motivation for offering such positions is regrettably often limited to a desire to reduce staff costs, rather than to offer an educational dimension to interns. Internships that last for several years are simply no internships but jobs that should benefit from the full rights and protections and salaries in the same way as any other employment. Therefore, the European Youth Forum supports the Generation P initiative and is ready to play its full role to assist the European Commission in developing a European Quality Charter on Internships.

C. Fostering entrepreneurship

Young people should be in a position to consider self-employment or entrepreneurship: this needs to be encouraged by simplifying procedures; by providing financial and other start up support to young entrepreneurs; by removing barriers to employment creation through entrepreneurship; and by ensuring that there are public services and facilities in place to provide training and/or advice and support such as establishing business networks for starting and developing a business. In addition, entrepreneurship education²² should be further developed in close cooperation with youth organisations.

The integration of entrepreneurship education, at an early stage, in school curricula is a great example of how youth organisations and schools could cooperate more.

Lastly, access rules to social security systems for entrepreneurs and the self-employed should be better defined.

D. Towards mutual recognition for mobility at work

Free movement is a core value of the European Union. But achieving free movement implies implementing ambitious policies to eliminate the obstacles to mobility, which exist today in Europe. The lack of mutual recognition of degrees and professions, which often leads to the impossibility of exercising one's profession in another European country, or the disadvantages in transferring pension rights between national social security systems, are just two examples of the persisting obstacles to mobility within the EU. The European Youth Forum therefore urges European States, including non-EU countries, to make further progress towards the mutual recognition of degrees and the better compatibility of national social security systems. Lastly, the European Youth Forum asks the European Union to promote the mobility of young workers and calls for the development of a transparent, fair and inclusive system preventing discrimination, exclusion and/or individual harassment of work permit applicants.

²² See the Commission communication "Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning" COM (2006) 33 final 13.02.2006

The European Youth Forum strongly believes that the emergence of a genuine European labour market, in which people have the opportunity to work where they want, has huge economic potential. Should it really want to achieve the greater mobility of workers, the European Union needs to reach more young people and promote a cultural change building upon the 'ERASMUS generations'. Through its Member Organisations, the European Youth Forum can reach out to many young people. As a promoter of mobility, the YFJ therefore wants to become more involved in the EU's actions and programmes to promote young workers' mobility, especially regarding the "your first job abroad" initiative and through the European Job Mobility Portal, EURES.

Supporting the removal of barriers to mobility, it must also be clear that mobility should not be a recurrent prerequisite. Young people's mobility has effects on their civil participation.

III. Decent Work for young people

A. The meaning of decent work

According to the International Labour Organisation²³, decent work 'sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.'

The European Youth Forum fully supports this comprehensive approach to decent work; it strongly believes in the added value of defining decent work at the international level, and encourages the European Union and the International Labour Organisation to intensify their cooperation for the promotion of decent work inside and outside the European Union.

B. Health and Safety at work

Through the collection of data on health and safety at work, the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work was able to discern that across Europe, young workers are at least 50% more likely to be injured in the work place than their more experienced counterparts²⁴. As young people often lack experience, employers need to pay special attention to young workers by providing them with the necessary training, supervision and safeguards and by giving them work that is appropriate for them.

The European Youth Forum is ready to bring its full support to the future actions²⁵ of the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work, to raise young people's awareness of the risks present in their working environment.

²³ See <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/decent.htm>

²⁴ See http://osha.europa.eu/priority_groups/young_people

²⁵ In 2006, the European Agency on Health and Safety at Work organised the "Safe Start" campaign to make young people and employers more aware of risk and to identify ways to reduce young people's likelihood to get injured at work notably through education and training and other preventative measures.

C. Flexicurity and youth²⁶

In the framework of the Lisbon strategy, the European Union engaged in the definition of a policy approach aimed at promoting employment opportunities in Europe, while at the same time safeguarding high levels of security for Europeans active in the labour market.

The four main components of flexicurity²⁷ aim to achieve a balance, responding to the needs of national labour markets, which, though very diverse in nature, are confronted with common challenges. At the macro level, flexicurity aims to combine economic competitiveness with adequate levels of social protection for employees and employers in Europe. At the micro level, it should secure stability for employees inside and outside the labour market, through the combination of social protection and active labour market policies effectively supporting transitions into and between jobs, while combining this with flexible contractual arrangements.

Moving from a system of job protection to labour market protection has strong implications on the role of labour legislation, which was, until now, the main instrument to protect employees from the risk of unemployment. In addition, the development of social protection systems required by the flexicurity model poses serious issues. But overall, implementing a flexicurity approach represents a profound cultural change for many European countries, that does not call for less protection but differentiated protection so as to ensure that flexicurity offers new opportunities to both employers and employees and does not translate into precarious work.

Going further however, flexicurity also reflects a vision of future social security systems, setting itself the aim of promoting higher participation rates in employment for those furthest from the labour market. Therefore, youth organisations should be involved in the discussion on flexicurity together with social partners, and European policy makers should seek the support of European citizens through engaging in an open dialogue with civil society - particularly when it comes to the national transposition of the common principles.

The European Youth Forum calls on European Union Member States to involve young people and their organisations when designing, implementing and monitoring their national strategies on flexicurity - making sure that employees and employers, especially the young, will improve their condition in the labour market; furthermore, it calls on the European Commission to establish minimum standards or settings, in order to ensure a balance between security and flexibility.

IV. Fighting against discrimination and disadvantage at work

A. Discrimination and disadvantage: Distinctive and common elements

Discrimination is a form of oppression. The basis to fight against discrimination is the adoption of legislation (i.e. on harassment; hate crimes) and even though the adoption of legislation is the basis for prohibiting discrimination, further action is

²⁶ See the Commission Communication "towards common principles on flexicurity: More and better jobs through flexibility and security" COM(2007) 359

²⁷ The four components of flexicurity are 1) Flexible and reliable contractual arrangements; 2) Comprehensive Life Long Learning strategies; 3) Effective labour market policies; 4) Modern social security systems. For more information see the Commission Communication "Towards common principles on flexicurity: More and better jobs through flexibility and security" 27.06.07

needed. Direct and indirect discrimination still exists, and preventing discrimination and changing attitudes requires long-term awareness raising activities: civil society has a strong role to play in this respect, but also in empowering the victims of discrimination to report cases.

‘Disadvantage’ refers to a lack of opportunities, which results from difficult access to goods and services - either for economic, geographic or other reasons. Promoting social inclusion means finding ways to restore and ensure continuous access to decent living conditions, including employment opportunities.

Discrimination and disadvantage are two very different concepts but they overlap significantly - as discrimination can lead to disadvantage, and disadvantaged people are often victims of discrimination. In addition, both discrimination and disadvantage are very important obstacles to the realisation of equal opportunities in and outside the labour market.

In its current policy work on discrimination and social inclusion, the European Union tends to divide effort too greatly between “discrimination” and “disadvantage”. The European Youth Forum therefore urges the European Union and its Member States always to draw correlations between policies aimed at promoting social inclusion and those aimed at combating discrimination - as both aim at social justice and cohesion. In this particular regard, the European Youth Forum appreciates the comprehensive nature of the Council of Europe revised European Social Charter and it therefore encourages the European Union and the Council of Europe to increase their work together on social cohesion issues.

B. Youth, discrimination and disadvantage in the labour market

In recent decades, national governments have tended to develop new employment legislation specifically targeting youth, which deviate from universal labour laws. Being aware that such legislation sometimes constitutes a clear case of legal discrimination, the European Youth Forum firmly condemns this tendency. For instance, the European Youth Forum questions the lawfulness of inferior national minimum wages for young employees, as is the case today in the United Kingdom.

The European Youth Forum urges the European Commission, as the guardian of the treaties, to review current national youth employment legislation and verify their compatibility with the employment equality directive 2000/78, which forbade age discrimination in the labour market.

Besides legal discrimination, young people are also discriminated against in the labour market on the basis of their individual characteristics - real or perceived - including gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, disability or religious beliefs. Together with other European NGOs active in the field of equality, the European Youth Forum is strongly committed to the fight against discrimination in all relevant spheres of social life.

Additionally, young people are at a disadvantage when their social status prevents them from seizing the opportunities present in the labour market. Common examples are: young people with no other choice but to leave school early in order to earn money and support their families; young people who fail in higher education because they need to work full time to pay high tuition fees; young people who cannot afford to pay for quality higher education, despite their capacity; or youth facing other disadvantages rooted in their inherited social

status. While, the European Union committed itself to achieving equal opportunities for all in Europe, these examples and many others are all unacceptable. The European Youth Forum therefore calls for the revision of social protection systems to make them respond better to the real needs of young people²⁸ and enable youth autonomy²⁹ to be achieved at an earlier time in life than this is the case today.

Many young people are also forced into illicit work - a trend which is even more apparent in South East Europe and Eastern Europe. Illicit work is often the fruit of a lack of monitoring of labour legislation and leads to serious social disadvantage. The rule of law should be ensured by any means in the European Union as well as outside the European Union. To that end, the new European Union Neighbourhood Policy and the accession negotiations with South Eastern European countries are key levers to fight against and eradicate illicit work and persistently high levels of corruption. In the European Union, illicit work affects ethnic and social minorities more than other groups. The European Youth Forum therefore asks the European Commission to integrate the fight against illicit work into the “active inclusion” strategy currently being shaped at the European level, as one of its missions.

Lastly, the European Youth Forum is deeply concerned about the devastating human and psychological consequences that the trafficking of human beings has on its victims. The European Youth Forum fully supports the human rights centred approach that the European Union is taking in its fight against trafficking of human beings³⁰, in the framework of the The Hague Programme on strengthening freedom, security and justice in the European Union. The fight against trafficking of human beings is clearly an area in which cooperation between the European Union and its neighbouring European countries, especially in Eastern Europe and South East Europe, is imperative. All the instruments, which are available at the European Union level³¹ need to be mobilised in order to prevent and put an end to this humiliating practice. The YFJ also firmly underlines the fact that trafficking does not disappear due to rigid and unjust visa regulations. Trafficking is a an organised criminal activity which must be fought from a human rights perspective and with genuine political measures, not with a strengthening of visa regulations that mainly harm *bone fide* travellers.

C. Achieving gender equality at work³²

Even though the European Union has been a pioneer in the promotion of gender equality, particularly in the adoption of legislative acts concerning the world of work³³, the majority of the Member States have not managed to ensure concrete equal opportunities for women and men.

For instance, though enacted in 1957, the principle of equal pay between genders is still very far from being observed in practice: fifty years on, the average gender pay gap in the EU still amounts to 15% and is even increasing in some Member

²⁸ See the YFJ contribution to the BEPA consultation paper on Europe's social reality - September 2007 - 0615-07

²⁹ See the YFJ policy paper on Youth Autonomy - April 2004 - 0052-04

³⁰ See the Commission communication “Fighting trafficking in human beings - an integrated approach and proposals for an action plan” - 18.10.2005 COM(2005)514 final

³¹ Including the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Stabilisation and Association Process with the Western Balkans

³² See the YFJ Policy Paper on Achieving Equality between Women and Men - November 2007 - 0685-07

³³ See Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation

States. This is unacceptable as it undermines public trust in legislation, which is purportedly the expression of the peoples' sovereignty. Even in countries where the participation rates of women in the labour market are high, women are often trapped in low-paid sectors, as well as in precarious work conditions or part-time work - with little opportunity for career development. More efforts and specifically targeted programs are needed to ensure that legislation is respected and women's access to higher paid sectors is ensured.

Reconciling professional and private life is particularly difficult for women as on average, they bear an unequally higher share of domestic and family responsibilities. The European Youth Forum supports legislation aiming at ensuring an equal division of parental leave between parents. Access to childcare has to be guaranteed for all. Women need to be better represented in decision-making positions as politicians, entrepreneurs, as employers and managers, and as trade unionists.

Traditionally, gender patterns in employment do not often only result in lower incomes for female employees, but they can also increase the risk of social exclusion. Young women from ethnic, migrant and other minority backgrounds are also more vulnerable to poverty and unemployment. The European Youth Forum therefore calls for the rapid implementation of the European Pact for Gender Equality and of the European Union Roadmap for Gender Equality.

V. A methodology for youth participation in employment policy-making at all levels

The European Youth Forum calls for the involvement of youth organisations at all stages of youth employment policy making, from data collection to the monitoring of policies.

In the first instance, the European Union and other relevant international institutions and their Member States need to invest more resources to obtain a clearer picture of the situation of youth in the labour market. As highlighted in the 2006 ILO report "Global Employment Trends for Youth", *"for further expansion of the youth employment knowledge-base, the need is not one of developing new indicators, but rather finding a way to make use of the indicators that already exist. The challenge, however, is that, as of now, many of the labour market indicators cannot be applied to youth because most countries do not provide the data disaggregated by age"*.

In the Youth Employment Guidelines - developed by the youth NGOs represented in the Youth Consultative Group of the Youth Employment Network - organisations with a global outreach advise national governments and other stakeholders on how to work with youth organisations to ensure employment and decent work for all. The European Youth Forum is strongly committed to continuing cooperation with this important actor in the field of Youth Employment and encourages all governments to adopt national youth employment programs and strategies, with the participation of youth.

Data should be disaggregated by gender, citizenship and age using a common definition of youth, to enable easier and more reliable comparison between States. The better knowledge of youth employment realities is crucial, as it will enable better policy-making in this domain.

From the global to the local level, in order to choose between different policy options, set priorities, and shape policies which respond to the needs of young

people, the European Youth Forum calls for the involvement of young people and their organisations.

At the global level, the European Youth Forum calls for an urgent re-launch of the High-Level Panel of the Youth Employment Network³⁴, together with the Youth Consultative Group, to mobilise genuine political will and empower the Youth Employment Network, which has clearly shown its potential and usefulness, but has not yet been given the means needed to deliver real outcomes for young people.

At the European Union level, the National Youth Councils and the European Youth Forum are putting a lot of effort into achieving the best possible outcomes from the European Youth Pact³⁵, a cross-sector policy initiative, which was inscribed in the Lisbon strategy, and aims to achieve the better integration of young people in employment and in society; to adapt education to the needs of a knowledge-based economy; and to better respond to the vulnerable situation of youth in the current demographic context - notably through the development of reconciliation policies encouraging greater youth autonomy as well as enabling young people to realise their life projects more easily. The European Youth Forum invites the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament to reaffirm the concrete role of the European Youth Forum as a key stakeholder to be consulted about the implementation and monitoring of the European Youth Pact.

At the national level, National Youth Councils are willing to contribute and should be involved not only in the yearly Lisbon process leading to the adoption of the Lisbon National Reform Programmes, but also in the development and follow up of the national flexicurity strategies from 2008 onwards.

At the local and regional levels, local and regional authorities should be given the means to develop actions tailored to the needs of young people; this in order to maintain a coherent approach at the European level, while adapting policy responses tailored to the needs of young people at the local level. The structural funds, including the European Social Fund (ESF), are crucial financial instruments of the European Union. The European Youth Forum therefore welcomed the recent decision of European Union Member States to invest more of the funds available through the structural funds - notably through the ESF - to finance projects aimed at increasing youth autonomy in Europe³⁶. The YFJ also emphasises the fact that youth organisations should always be considered as relevant partners in the implementation of such projects, if such projects are to have a genuine impact on young people's lives.

The European Youth Forum strongly believes that youth organisations should not only be involved in shaping policies, but also be constantly involved in their implementation and monitoring.

Lastly, with consideration that dialogue and understanding are key drivers of social progress, the European Youth Forum encourages its Member Organisations to

³⁴ The High-Level Panel of the Youth Employment Network is made up of representatives of United Nations governments

³⁵ See the YFJ position paper on the European Youth Pact - April 2005 - 0280-05; the YFJ note on the European Youth Pact - April 2007 - 0324-07; and the YFJ contribution to the revision of the Lisbon integrated Guidelines for "Growth and Jobs" 2005-2008 - September 2007 - 0505-07

³⁶ The EU Council resolution "creating equal opportunities for young people - full participation in society" adopted in May 2007, asks the Member States to "utilise the resources of the European Structural Funds, particularly the European Social Fund, to shape and provide measures in line with the European Pact for Youth, so as to further implement the Pact, especially at local and regional level"

develop partnerships with other relevant stakeholders in the labour market - such as public authorities at all levels, the social partners, and international donor agencies specialised in development cooperation - as they are often active promoters of youth employment in South East Europe and Eastern Europe.

Conclusion: For a Fundamental Rights approach to employment

In the last decades, young people have been deeply affected by the increasing segmentation of the labour market and the parallel development of new atypical forms of employment. Young people with fewer opportunities, often marginalised and therefore lacking access to qualifications, face particular challenges that deserve specific responses from policy makers.

A Fundamental Rights approach to employment is needed in order to offer all employees the same rights in the labour market. Improving the labour market integration of young people shall be conceived as a collective responsibility, which requires the equal involvement of actors such as public authorities, the social partners and youth organisations. At the national level, the role of National Youth Councils³⁷ is crucial, notably in view of the implementation of the European Youth Pact and of the re-launch of the Youth Employment Network.

³⁷ National Youth Councils are the national co-ordinating bodies of non-governmental youth organisations. Open to all, National Youth Councils include most of the main democratic youth movements and organisations on the national level in that State.