



## Youth programmes and policies in the EU

*Whilst commonly understood, "youth" is a difficult concept to define from a policy-making perspective. Nevertheless in the eyes of national governments and European leaders, youth policy has grown increasingly important in recent years.*

*At EU level, despite competence resting with Member States, significant strides have been made, particularly in the past ten years, towards a fully functioning EU youth policy based on a multi-faceted approach. In addition, the inclusion of "Youth on the Move" as one of seven flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy is indicative of the wider importance now attached to the success of young people.*

*The Council of Europe has provided funding for youth projects since the early 1970s, benefiting over 300 000 young people. In recent years it has also developed a close partnership with the EU, providing stronger and more coherent cooperation.*

*Within the Member States themselves, wide differences exist both in policy priorities and the structures in which they are carried out. Nevertheless the important role of both local government authorities and youth organisations is a consistent theme.*

### In this briefing:

- Context
- EU youth policy
- Council of Europe action
- In the Member States
- Main references

### Context

Youth is a difficult concept to define. It has been described as the period between "dependant childhood" and "independent adulthood"; however that period can differ significantly from one country or one society to another. Rather than any universal norm, it is based on national and historical traditions.

Furthermore, the parameters on which it is judged have changed in recent years. In the relatively recent past many young people had finished school at the age of 15 and were looking for a job. Today, many in their mid-20s are still in full-time education. Furthermore, the average age of first marriage (or first cohabitation) and the birth of a first child have also increased.

These lifestyle changes have forced a re-evaluation of "youth" for political purposes. Whilst in the past the end of youth was often seen as related to fixed events such as voting age or school leaving, some argue that it now relates more closely to the age when young people become financially self-sufficient. In terms of policy-making, "youth" is now most usually defined as beginning at 15, but can extend well into young adulthood.

Two particular approaches have also been noted: those which view youth as a resource and those which consider them as a problem. It is argued that where policies focus mostly on 'minors' there is a strong emphasis on the prevention of problems, whereas where a more adult view is taken it is their potential value to society that is more prominent.



Image Copyright Kurhan 2011.  
Used under licence from Shutterstock.com

In the latter respect, the European Union (EU) and its respective national governments have recognised the value of youth, particularly in economic terms. Within the EU there are an estimated 75 million people aged between 15 and 25, around 15% of the total population. Considerable resources have been used to develop effective policies at supranational, national, regional and local level for this key demographic.

## EU youth policy

Over the past fifty years the EU has made significant strides in the field of youth policy despite having only a coordinating role, supporting and supplementing the Member States (MS) in the exercise of their competence. With the exception of two directives, EU policy has been based entirely on non-legally binding measures; it has adopted a multi-faceted approach.<sup>1</sup>

### Programmes before policy

Although the Maastricht Treaty introduced 'youth' into the EU legal order in the limited context of education,<sup>2</sup> EU action was primarily focused on implementing specific programmes such as the Youth for Europe programme, established in 1988.

The impetus for the development of a true EU youth policy, however, seems to have related to a changing EU approach to employment<sup>3</sup> and the recognition of youth's role in this respect. This resulted in a 50% increase in

### Youth in Action

*Youth in Action* is the EU's youth [programme](#), designed specifically to support the different elements of EU youth policy. It covers the period 2007-2013 with a budget of 885 million EUR. It is focused particularly on young people with fewer opportunities to travel abroad and to benefit from non-formal learning. With some exceptions, it is aimed at those aged between 15 and 28 and, apart from Actions 2 and 3, is limited to EU 27, EFTA, candidate countries and Switzerland.

The [programme](#) is composed of five actions which themselves support a number of sub-projects:

Action 1 - *Youth for Europe* - to support youth exchanges and to promote "active citizenship" through projects and initiatives.

Action 2 - *European Voluntary Service* - to support young people's participation in voluntary activities both in and outside the EU.

Action 3 - *Youth in the World* - to support projects, including exchanges, with partner countries and to help develop cooperation in the field of youth with these countries.

Action 4 - *Youth support systems* - to support bodies active at EU level in the youth field particularly youth NGOs.

Action 5 - *Support for European cooperation in the youth field* - to organise structured dialogue between actors in the youth field.

policy activism in the youth field between 2000 and 2010.

The Commission's 2001 White Paper "[A new impetus for European youth](#)", set out four priorities advancing youth policy beyond mere exchanges, and placing emphasis on participation. It also proposed to take the youth dimension more into account in the development of other relevant policies. The Council consequently adopted a [framework for cooperation in the field of youth](#).

### Open Method of Coordination

The four priorities set out in the White Paper marked the first use of the [Open Method of Coordination](#) (OMC), a key instrument of the [Lisbon Strategy](#), in EU youth policy. The OMC allows MS to cooperate with each other in the

fulfilment of the White Paper objectives, with the Commission acting in a coordinating and monitoring role. Consultation, both with young people and with youth organisations, is part of the process.

Reacting to the EU's New Social Agenda in 2008, the Commission adopted a new [Communication](#) on "Youth - Investing and Empowering", providing a highly detailed analysis of the current situation. It invited the MS and the Commission to cooperate through a renewed OMC in the period 2010-18. It proposed a cross-sectoral approach, invited MS to engage in [Structured Dialogue](#) and

encouraged a more research and evidence-based youth policy.

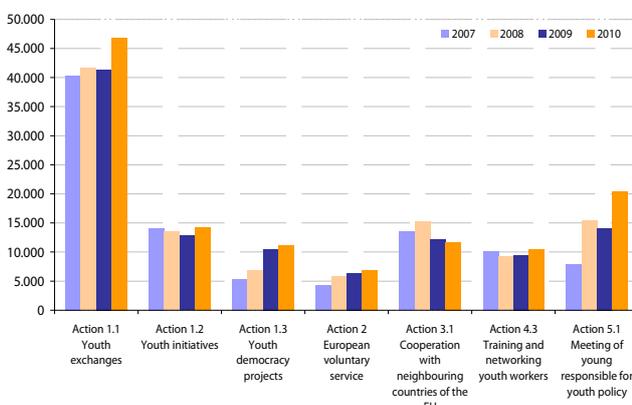
### Broader EU youth policy

For practical reasons, EU youth policy and programmes have been narrowly defined in this briefing. In reality, many other EU programmes are targeted at youth even if they are not specified as such or are not limited to a specific age group. The Youth in Action programme is therefore designed to complement programmes such as [Culture, Progress, Media, Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, Competitiveness and Innovation](#) and [Lifelong Learning](#).

Perhaps the EU's most successful youth programme in terms of both participants and profile is Erasmus, a sub-programme of Lifelong Learning. According to [official figures](#), in 2009 it enabled 168 000 young people to study abroad. This is significantly more participants than for the entire Youth in Action programme in one year.

In 2009, the Council adopted a [new framework for cooperation on youth policy](#) with two main objectives: create more opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market and make access to them more equal; promote active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of young people. These objectives are to be achieved through eight fields of action.

**Figure 1 - Numbers of individual participants in the Youth in Action programme**



Data source: DG Education and Culture 2011.

### Youth as part of a wider EU agenda

The [European Youth Pact](#) (EYP), adopted by the Council in 2005, represented an attempt to provide greater coherence to EU Youth policy. In its three lines of action<sup>4</sup>, EYP attempted to integrate into the Lisbon Strategy the elements of OMC in youth policy along with the specific youth issues which are integral to other areas using OMC, in particular employment, education and social inclusion.

Youth issues are also integrated into [Europe 2020](#), the successor to the Lisbon Strategy. ["Youth on the move"](#) is one of seven flagship initiatives; it aims to enhance job prospects by improving student and trainee mobility, as well as the quality and attractiveness of education and training in Europe. The initiative, aimed at those aged 15 to 35, includes 28 key actions.

### Council of Europe action

The Council of Europe's (CoE) youth policy is formulated through a system of [co-management](#) between youth organisations and government officials; it is responsible for providing the guidelines, programmes and legal instruments for the creation of effective policies at local, national and European level.

As part of the CoE's overall youth strategy [Agenda 2020](#), a yearly programme is established with specific projects and priorities. These are pursued through a number of education and training activities including study sessions, intercultural language courses and research, publications and advice on youth policy development.

### Funding

The [European Youth Foundation](#), established by the CoE in 1972, provides financial support for these activities. With an annual budget of around €3 million, it has benefited over 300 000 young people between the age of 15 and 30. In 2007, it supported around 300 projects involving 15 000 people.

### EU - Council of Europe youth partnership

Since 1998, the EU and CoE have undertaken progressively stronger and more coherent cooperation agreements in the youth field.

**Wider cooperation**

Established through the Council of Europe at the initiative of the Portuguese government, the [North-South Centre](#)<sup>5</sup> *inter alia* promotes human rights, democracy and the rule of law through intercultural dialogue, particularly between the youth of Europe and neighbouring regions. In this context its [objective](#) is to provide training and "capacity building" for young people and youth organisations and to facilitate youth policy action in development policies.

The youth partnership is designed to provide added value to both their own policies and programmes and their [institutional partners](#), to foster cooperation, complementarity and synergies.

The current agreement covers the period July 2010 to December 2013 and focuses on cooperation in [four fields of action](#).

**In the Member States**

Although different concepts of youth exist, certain distinctions have been made. In MS with long-standing youth policies, such as Sweden and Finland, it is considered a static concept. On the other hand in those MS in which it is a relatively modern concept, such as Denmark and the United Kingdom, it is more dynamic.

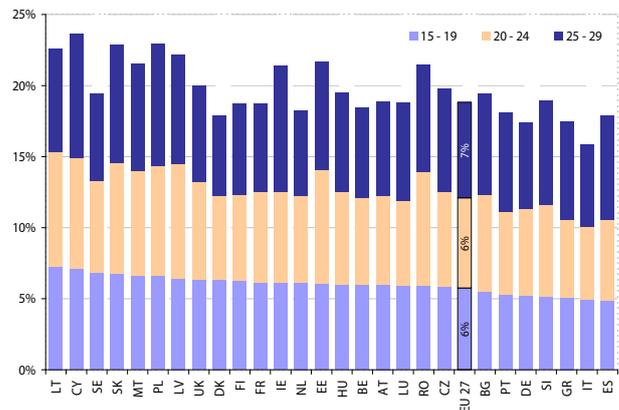
It is generally accepted that an explicit policy is required for youth and that it must be cross-cutting. Youth policy in MS is focused across a number of government ministries and agencies, reflecting political needs and structure rather than the content and focus of the policies. In most MS it is, however, centred in ministries for family, health and equal opportunities, or in ministries for education.

Coordination takes place via a range of mechanisms. In some cases it is via government agencies, others by inter-ministerial committee, whilst advisory bodies are also used.

Youth policy in MS is also multi-layered. Policy-

making and responsibility for youth programmes is shared between actors at national, regional and local level. The extent of this sharing is largely dependent on constitutional traditions.

**Figure 2 - Distribution of young people in the EU (15-29) as share of total population**



Data source: [Eurostat](#) 2011.

**Germany**

Youth policy is set in the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. In addition to being responsible for major issues such as youth welfare and protection it is also responsible for the main programmes of the Government's youth policy and for interfacing with other policy areas and with the respective Government ministries.

However in keeping with the country's federal structure, responsibility also lies with the Länder and municipal authorities. At the Länder level, the Conference of Youth and Family Ministers, comprising the ministers and senators responsible for youth affairs, develops institutions and programmes as well as supporting regional and local youth offices.

Federal child and youth policy has three main objectives: improving the integration of young people in society and work, strengthening civil society and enhancing the legal protection of children and young people.

The centrepiece of this policy is the federal Child and Youth Plan. A large number of goals and programmes are designed to support understanding and tolerance both in Germany and in Europe, to improve dialogue between

generations and help the integration of foreigners. The Plan is complemented by additional national action plans such as "For a child friendly Germany" which ran from 2005-10 and by specific strategies on issues such as integration.

A budget of €283 million was allocated to youth policies in 2011, with just over half of this assigned to the Child and Youth Plan.

### Portugal

Portuguese youth policy is based in the Ministry for Youth and Sport. That policy has been based around three bodies: *Movijovem*, which promotes mobility through the management of youth hostels and the youth card; the Foundation for the Dissemination of Information Technologies (FDTI) and the Portuguese Youth Institute (PYI). The PYI supports Government youth policy and, inter alia, promotes and supports young people through youth associations, contributes to the financial funding of youth programmes and establishes programmes, mechanisms and other forms of support designed to address youth needs.

On 29 July 2011, however, the Government announced a complete restructuring of this system, with the intention of increasing the efficiency of services and reducing costs. The plans would see the merging of the Institutes of Sport and Youth into one body along with the abolition of the FDTI and the dissolution of *Movijovem*.

Portugal has two autonomous regions, each with competences in the youth field. In addition the PYI has created five regional departments. At the municipal level, local authorities are increasingly creating strategies to support youth projects and programmes. In this respect, the PYI has again played an important role through the establishment of '[Information Shops](#)': public spaces which promote youth information and activities and provide practical assistance.

Youth NGOs, whether based in Portugal or abroad, can be eligible to benefit from youth association support programmes run by the

PYI. These programmes, which include the Student Support Programme and Infrastructure Support Programme are aimed at young people between the ages of 12-30. Other thematic youth programmes have also been established, focusing on areas such as volunteering, encouragement programmes for creative youth and training programmes such as the Youth Parliament.

Expenditures on youth through the Portuguese Youth Institute have been estimated at around €30 million per year.<sup>6</sup>

### Finland

The Finnish Youth Act, which entered into force in 2006, contains the foundations and objectives of the country's youth policy. That policy is set out in a new development programme adopted every four years by the Government.

Youth policy is the responsibility of the youth department of the Ministry of Education and Culture, with assistance from two expert bodies. However, as Finland is one of the most decentralised countries in the EU, responsibility also lies with regional and local authorities. Almost half of municipalities have their own policy programmes for youth and children.

Along with the Finnish youth cooperation *Allianssi*, whose members include the majority of national youth organisations, youth NGOs play an important role in Finnish youth policy. To support them, each year the Ministry grants subsidies to around 100 such organisations worth in the region of €12 million.

Finnish youth policy is closely linked to policy at EU level. The current development programme, which runs from 2007-2011 is adapted from the European Youth Pact.<sup>7</sup> It is designed to make Finland a friendlier place for young people by improving cross-sectional youth policy action. In keeping with the policy's "life-cycle" approach, the stipulated age limit of below 29 in practice means that the programme also applies to young children.

In the 2010 national budget, €65.3 million was allocated to youth work in 2011.

## United Kingdom

National youth policy in the UK is devolved to departments for education in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Department for Children, Schools and Families however remains responsible for both English policy and for representing UK policy within the EU and more widely.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the role played by other relevant ministries, the main government departments in each nation are assisted by a Children's Commissioner, responsible for those aged 0-18. In England, this role involves merely promoting children's interests and views, whereas elsewhere the mandate extends to safeguarding and promoting their rights.

Voluntary sector organisations provide a large amount of youth work in the UK with many larger ones receiving grants from the government. In this respect, the Children, Young People and Families Grant Programme was introduced in 2005, bringing together five separate programmes.

In England, the Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF) and Youth Capital Fund (YCF) provide over €300 million in funding possibilities for youth (13-19 years old) activities. Although the grants are paid to local authorities, it is the young people themselves who decide where the money is spent.

In addition to YOF/YCF, significant government investment has been made in several other programmes. These include "myplace" (over €300 million over three years) designed to provide world class youth facilities and "Positive actions for young people" (€310 million over three years) aimed at 8-19 year olds at risk of social exclusion.

## Main references

[Assessing practices for using indicators in fields related to youth](#), Ecorys, Final report for the European Commission, DG Education and Culture.

[P Copeland and B ter Haar, EU youth policy: A waterfall of softness, Paper prepared for the twelfth biennial EUSA conference in Boston on 3-5 March 2011.](#)

## Disclaimer and Copyright

This briefing is a summary of published information and does not necessarily represent the views of the author or the European Parliament. The document is exclusively addressed to the Members and staff of the European Parliament for their parliamentary work. Links to information sources within this document may be inaccessible from locations outside the European Parliament network. © European Union, 2011. All rights reserved.



<http://www.library.ep.ec>

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Under the Lisbon Treaty youth policy falls under the Ordinary Legislative Procedure. Article 165-166 TFEU, in particular encourage young people to participate in democratic life in Europe. In addition, the Charter of Fundamental Rights contains two provisions specifically addressing the rights and protection of young people: Article 24 (rights of children) and Article 32 (protection of young people at work).
- <sup>2</sup> Article 50 of the Treaty of Rome 1957 did, however, make reference to the exchange of "young workers".
- <sup>3</sup> This can be seen in documents such as the 1994 White Paper on Growth Competitiveness and Employment, which placed attention on unemployment and increasing employment rather than workers and the protection of their rights. In addition the Treaty of Amsterdam 1997 inserted a new title on 'Employment' in the Treaty, and employment became 'a matter of concern' (Article 127 TEC).
- <sup>4</sup> The European Youth Pact proposed three lines of action: employment, integration and social advancement; education, training and mobility; and reconciliation of working life and family life.
- <sup>5</sup> It is formally titled the "European centre for global interdependence and solidarity".
- <sup>6</sup> Figure based on information from February 2008.
- <sup>7</sup> The new development programme 2012-2015 is expected to be based on the renewed framework for EU cooperation in the youth field.
- <sup>8</sup> Regional authorities with competence for youth issues exist only in England but the duty to provide youth service is universal in local authorities across the UK.