



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 30.4.2004
COM(2004) 336 final

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth. Proposed common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth, in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European co-operation in the youth field

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Follow-up to the White Paper on Youth

General background

The present Communication follows on from the White Paper on Youth¹, approved by the Commission on 21 November 2001, and the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 setting a new framework for co-operation in the youth field². In this Resolution, the Council called for an open method of co-ordination to be applied to four priorities i.e. participation by young people, information of young people, voluntary activities among young people and a greater understanding and knowledge of youth. Pursuant to this mandate, the Commission first proposed common objectives for participation by and information of young people³, which were adopted by the Council in its Resolution of 25 November 2003⁴.

In the present communication, the Commission proposes common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of the youth field. This proposal for common objectives is based on the Member States' answers to questions⁵ about their own situation and their expectations at European level. It reflects the consensus resulting from the analysis of these answers.

The European Youth Forum was consulted during the preparation of the proposed common objectives as well as a group of researchers in the field. The Member States and acceding countries were also asked to consult young people, researchers and other relevant stakeholders in the field.

The Commission's analysis of the Member States' and acceding countries' replies to the questionnaire can be found in a Commission staff working paper⁶. This working paper highlights the different challenges - at national as well as at European level - identified by the Member States and acceding countries in order to improve their understanding and knowledge of youth. Concrete examples of good practice are given for the different described challenges.

¹ Commission White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth" (COM (2001) 681 final)
² Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, Meeting within the Council of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field (2002/C 168/02)
³ Communication from the Commission to the Council, Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth. Proposed common objectives for the participation and information of young people, in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European co-operation in the youth field, COM(2003)184 final, of 11 April 2003
⁴ Council Resolution of 25 November 2003 on common objectives for participation by and information for young people (2003/C 295/04)
⁵ The questionnaire was drawn up in consultation with the Member States and acceding countries as well as with the European Youth Forum and a group of researchers. It was sent to the Member States, the acceding countries and to three candidate countries namely Bulgaria, Rumania and Turkey. The latter could answer on a voluntary basis.
⁶ "Analysis of Member States' and Acceding Countries' replies to the Commission questionnaire on a greater understanding and knowledge of youth"

In parallel to this exercise on “a greater understanding and knowledge of youth”, the same procedure is being carried out for the “voluntary activities among young people” priority.

A better understanding and knowledge of youth in the White Paper process

One of the aims of the White Paper "A new impetus for European Youth" is to improve public awareness of young people's concerns. It identifies a "Greater understanding and knowledge of youth" and of the realities which concern young people at European level, as one of four priority themes for European co-operation in the field of youth policy.

In the White Paper, the European Commission proposes

- "taking stock of, and networking, existing structures, studies and research on youth which are in progress within the European Union" (including the work and initiatives of other international bodies);
- "focusing discussion on the right approach at European level";
- "drawing up a study and research programme" (based on work in Member States and utilising the 6th European Research Framework Programme);
- "provision of the requisite statistical resources, making optimum use of resources already available under the European Statistical System".

On the basis of the White Paper on youth, the Council identified in its Resolution regarding the framework of European co-operation in the youth field, the following general objectives for a "Greater understanding and knowledge of youth”:

- "to facilitate the compilation of studies on youth matters at national and European level including by research structures and youth associations,
- to facilitate the networking of research structures ; to contribute to the creation of study and research tools (e.g. indicators),
- to consider, in the light of existing studies, what further work, if necessary, might be needed to support current priorities, youth autonomy issues and other relevant topics for the future".

1.2. Knowledge based youth policies

The sustainability of policies is reliant on their ability to respond to the realities they wish to address. Only in this way will policies be adhered to, improve the lives of citizens and create greater confidence in the results and in the institutions that deliver them.

In order to meet the needs and expectations of citizens, EU and national policies are to be based on the best available knowledge and understanding of such needs and expectations.

A knowledge based approach to policy making is particularly relevant and useful when dealing with rapidly evolving realities, such as the situation of younger generations in Europe.

It is all the more essential at a stage where Member States have adopted common objectives on themes such as participation and information of young people and are designing implementation policies. Such a knowledge approach will also become indispensable for further priorities identified within the White Paper on Youth on which Member States have already started to debate as well as for themes Member States will identify as priorities in the future. In that sense, developing a better knowledge and understanding of youth supports the new co-operation framework on thematic priorities set up as a follow up of the White Paper on youth.

2. COMMON OBJECTIVES FOR A GREATER UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWLEDGE OF YOUTH

Having regard to Member States' and acceding countries' replies to its questionnaire, and taking into account the above considerations, the Commission proposes the following common overall goal for a better knowledge and understanding of youth:

For timely, efficient and sustainable policy making, it is essential to develop a coherent, relevant and qualitative knowledge area in the youth field in Europe and anticipate future needs, through exchange, dialogue and networks.

This overall goal should be achieved through the implementation of the following common objectives:

- (1) Identify existing knowledge in priority areas of the youth field (namely, participation, information and voluntary activities) and implement measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it.*
- (2) In a second stage, identify existing knowledge in further priority areas of interest to the youth field and implement measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it.*
- (3) Ensure quality, comparability and relevance of knowledge in the youth field by using appropriate methods and tools*
- (4) Facilitate and promote exchange, dialogue and networks to ensure visibility of knowledge in the youth field and anticipate future needs*

2.1. Objective 1 - Identify existing knowledge in priority areas of the youth field (namely, participation, information and voluntary activities) and implement measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it.

All Member States have developed a certain knowledge of young people be it through studies or field work. Such knowledge is however rather scattered, untimely and often outdated when needed. It is furthermore not always easily accessible to all interested actors in the field.

Member States generally call for the development of a coherent area of knowledge in the youth field to fight dispersion and waste of resources, ensure availability of

updated information, fill gaps and avoid overlaps. Such a knowledge area should not only be based on studies and statistical data but should also encompass practical knowledge of NGO's, youth organisations and young people themselves.

They however recognise that it is not workable at this stage to try to cover all potential knowledge areas in the youth field. Stress should therefore first be laid on a core set of priority themes considered as directly relevant for sustainable policy making in the youth field.

In their answers given to the questionnaire on a greater knowledge and understanding of youth, Member States have identified a first set of themes specific to the youth field on which they have already done substantial work within the framework of the open method of co-ordination i.e. **participation (at local level and to the political process), information, voluntary activities**.

In order to achieve Objective 1, the following lines of action are proposed:

At national level:

- Identify and organise existent knowledge in the youth field around a core set of common themes namely, participation, information and voluntary activities;
- Undertake further studies, collect statistical data and gather practical knowledge of NGO's, youth organisations and young people themselves on the identified themes in order to fill gaps and constantly update knowledge on such identified themes;
- Facilitate, at national as well as at European level, access to knowledge on the identified themes and information on the corresponding actors through paper and/or IT compilation and dissemination, and ensure user-friendliness of relevant information;

At European level:

- Exploit the youth programme for supplementing the work undertaken by the Member States in implementing the present objective and make the best use of any other relevant instruments available at European level - such as Eurobarometer surveys, Eurostat and the current and future research framework programmes - or being developed by the Commission in co-operation with its partners in the field – such as a tool for compiling relevant knowledge in the youth field and making it accessible.

2.2. Objective 2 - In a second stage, identify existing knowledge in further priority areas of interest to the youth field and implement measures to supplement, update and facilitate access to it.

In their answers to the questionnaire, Member States have identified a second set of themes of direct interest to the youth field - i.e. **autonomy, non-formal learning, fight against discrimination, education & training, employment, transition from education to employment, social inclusion, and health** - which are well in line with the political priorities highlighted in the White Paper and encompassed in the new co-operation framework set up in the youth field.

Since a better knowledge and understanding of young people ought to lead to sustainable youth policies, geared to young peoples' expectations, the above list of themes should remain flexible and open to be adapted to evolving trends and needs in the youth field.

The necessity of clarifying and adapting the above themes can best be discussed by the relevant stakeholders in the youth field - i.e. researchers/experts, policy makers, young people and youth workers/organisations – meeting at European level.

In order to achieve Objective 2, the following lines of action are proposed:

At national level:

- Identify and organise existent knowledge in the youth field around a core set of common themes that will comprise autonomy, non-formal learning, fight against discrimination, education & training, employment, transition from education to employment, social inclusion, and health – subject to clarification and adaptation by the relevant stakeholders in the youth field meeting at European level;
- Undertake further studies, collect statistical data and gather practical knowledge of NGO's, youth organisations and young people themselves on the identified themes in order to fill gaps and constantly update knowledge on such identified themes;
- Facilitate, at national as well as at European level, access to knowledge on the identified themes and information on the corresponding actors through paper and/or IT compilation and dissemination, and ensure user-friendliness of relevant information;

At European level:

- Exploit the youth programme for supplementing the work undertaken by the Member States in implementing the present objective and make the best use of any other relevant instruments available at European level - such as Eurobarometer surveys, Eurostat and the current and future research framework programmes - or being developed by the Commission in co-operation with its partners in the field – such as a tool for compiling relevant knowledge in the youth field and making it accessible.

2.3. Objective 3 - Ensure quality, comparability and relevance of knowledge in the youth field by using appropriate methods and tools.

To be relevant, it is essential that knowledge relating to young people is of high quality, comparable, and geared to the expectations and needs of all actors in the youth field.

A number of quantitative and qualitative tools and methods have been developed at all levels so far, including the local and regional level. It is now necessary to identify and further develop those best suited to themes relevant to the youth field and to use them in an adequate way.

In order to achieve Objective 3, the following lines of action are proposed:

At national level:

- Implement and further develop appropriate tools and methods to reinforce understanding and knowledge of young people in all relevant themes and facilitate exploitation of results;
- Promote education and training of researchers and experts – especially the young - working in the youth field, as well as of any other actors developing knowledge in the youth field e.g. by facilitating the exchange of experience and practice, by supporting their mobility and by improving their skills, making the best use of existing EU Programmes⁷;

At European level:

- Co-operate to identify and define common concepts and a minimum core content on which to concentrate in order to reinforce a common understanding of the identified priority themes;
- Co-operate to determine quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods to exploit and compare results on commonly identified themes, based on existing information sources;
- Co-operate to better identify the indicators, which shall enable to evaluate the impact of the current and future Youth programmes through a follow up of their concrete results.

2.4. Objective 4 - Facilitate and promote exchange, dialogue and networks to ensure visibility of knowledge in the youth field and anticipate future needs

For a greater understanding and knowledge of young people, Member States have called for better exchanges and structured dialogue between policy makers, national youth research bodies, researchers, organisations of/or working with young people and young people themselves.

Such exchanges and dialogue are indeed essential not only to fulfil the first three objectives but also to pinpoint changes in trends and values, anticipate future needs and identify new priority themes.

Member States generally do not ask for developing new structures, but wish to build on existing networks and relationships, using and managing them more efficiently.

In order to achieve Objective 4, the following lines of action are proposed:

At national level:

- Encourage and develop exchanges, structured dialogue and national networks between policy makers, researchers, young people and their organisations as well as any other actors in the youth field;

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such as the Marie Curie Actions of the 6th Framework Programme

- Within the framework of the above described networks, discuss future needs, trends and identify new priority themes that must be explored for efficient, timely and sustainable policy making and youth work as well as further relevant tools and methods that should be developed in that respect;
- Promote cross-sectoral co-operation, exchanges and dialogue between researchers/research bodies and policy makers in different knowledge areas through conferences, seminars and events focussed on themes of common interest;

At European level

- Co-ordinate the above-described national networks through the setting up by the Commission, in cooperation with its partners in the field, of a European Union Network of Youth Knowledge integrating representatives of all actors in the field in order to discuss methods and future themes as well as to exchange good practices.

3. IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING MECHANISMS

Implementing and monitoring the common objectives is a major element of the open method of coordination set up in the Resolution regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field. This principle was already applied to the priorities participation and information of young people for which the Council adopted a Resolution on common objectives on 25 November 2003.

In this latter Resolution, the Council invited the Member States to specify implementing and follow-up measures in the light of their particular circumstances and national priorities. It also invited them to submit reports on the national contributions as to the implementation of the common objectives.

For the common objectives on a greater understanding and knowledge of youth, the Commission similarly proposes:

- that Member States agree to achieve all the common objectives approved and, after consulting young people and their associations, researchers, as well as other relevant stakeholders in the field via the channels they consider appropriate, :
 - a) Inform the Commission of the concrete achievements resulting from the implementation of the first common objective at the occasion of their reporting to the Commission for the priorities on participation and information by the end of 2005, and at the occasion of their reporting to the Commission for the priority on voluntary activities by the end of 2006.

Within the above reports, Member States shall also inform the Commission of the steps taken in order to fulfil the third and fourth common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth.

- b) Inform the Commission of the concrete achievements resulting from the implementation of the second common objective by the end of 2008.

Within the above report, Member States shall also inform the Commission of the further steps taken in order to fulfil the third and fourth common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth.

- that the Commission shall use the above information for drawing up a progress report for the Council. On the basis of the Commission's proposals, the Council will confirm, adapt or amend the common objectives for this priority.

The present proposal for common objectives will be sent to the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions.