



European Economic and Social Committee

SOC/289
Promoting young people's
full participation in
education, employment and
society

Brussels, 17 January 2008

OPINION

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on the

**Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European
Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions**

Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society

COM(2007) 498 final

On 5 September 2007, the Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on

Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society
COM(2007) 498 final.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 19 December 2007. The rapporteur was Mr Trantina.

At its 441st plenary session, held on 16 and 17 January 2008 (meeting of 17 January 2008), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 137 votes to none, with 3 abstentions.

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1. **Summary of recommendations**

- 1.1 The EESC agrees with the need to prepare a truly European transversal youth strategy and is ready to contribute to this process with its means such as direct contact with grass root organisations and sensibilisation of EU institutions of problems and solutions on grass root level.
- 1.2 The EESC believes that the process of building a successful and sustainable transversal child and youth strategy should be facilitated through a permanent structure within the Commission (coordinating the work of various DGs involved) or an interinstitutional group and should be based on setting up of a monitoring mechanism with clear targets and deadlines.
- 1.3 The EESC believes that the first step to increasing employment in the EU – before doing the utmost to mobilise older workers – is to get young people into work on a massive scale, since this would have a far longer impact, both sociological (independence, social, birth-rates, family, etc.) and economic, in terms of growth, social financing, consumption, savings and investment (building, etc.). It urges Member States and European institutions to take the necessary steps to reduce youth unemployment in Europe, mainly through quicker and more efficient implementation of the European Youth Pact and Member States' Lisbon Strategy national reform programmes.

- 1.4 The EESC urges that the situation of young people in rural areas and poor urban areas be given greater consideration. The EESC calls on Member States to rise to the challenge of eradicating child poverty and asks for measures to be added in order to improve participation of young people with disabilities in society on equal terms.
- 1.5 The EESC recommends that the Commission continues to work on the recognition of voluntary youth work through engagement with employers' organisations, workers' organisations, representatives of the formal education system and appropriate NGOs.
- 1.6 The EESC repeats its main points on the subject of voluntary activities of young people, mainly that:
- the Commission should announce a Year of Volunteers, and publish a White Paper on voluntary activity and active citizenship in Europe;
 - the Commission and Member States should raise the awareness on the contribution of youth work to the development of young people and the skills, values and attitudes gained through active involvement in youth organisations and youth work activities.
- 1.7 The Committee advises against ways of getting young people into employment that are undependable and offer no prospects: it is time to stop advocating casual employment and ever more uncertain working hours and contracts, since there has been ample proof of their effect on an increasing number of young people from a range of social backgrounds. Casual employment offered as a stop-gap solution between completing initial education and entering working life postpones career progression and the assumption of responsibility in social and family life – a fact demonstrated, regrettably, by the studies and observations of Eurofound, the ILO and the European Employment Observatory.
- 1.8 The EESC supports the development of structured dialogue between decision-makers and young people. Such dialogue should contribute to the development of the European transversal youth strategy, suggested by the Commission in its Communication. The EESC welcomes the proposal of the Commission to draft an EU report on youth every three years and recommends that involvement of youth civil society, in particular the national youth councils, should be ensured in the development of such a report.
- 1.9 The EESC supports the development of a strong partnership between the EU and young people in the form of a declaration to be signed between the European Institutions and their partner on the part of young people – the European Youth Forum.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The EESC has been dealing with the issue of youth for more than ten years already. Most recent opinions are still relevant and could be repeated here, at least in part¹.
- 2.2 On 5 September 2007, the European Commission adopted its Communication Promoting young people's full participation in education, employment and society, jointly prepared by DG Education and Culture and DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Other DGs were involved in its drafting as well. The Communication deals with topics such as youth education, employment, health and citizenship, trying to address them in a cross-sectoral way. It is accompanied by two Commission Staff working papers – one on voluntary activities, second on youth employment.
- 2.3 The Communication reacts to some of the interesting findings of the report Investing in Youth: an empowerment strategy, published in April 2007 by the Bureau of European Policy Advisors (BEPA).
- 2.4 In general, the EESC welcomes the approach taken by the European Commission with regard to both the process and content of this Communication. It notes with pleasure that several DGs were involved in its drafting.
- 2.5 However, the EESC is concerned about the implementation of the plans to create this transversal youth strategy. The Commission does not recommend a process on how to reach this goal. According to the initial reaction of the Council, none of the Member States have any plans in this direction so far.

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EESC Opinion of 26.10.2005 on the Communication on European policies concerning youth – Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship, rapporteur Ms van Turnhout (OJ C28 of 3.2.2006)

EESC Opinion of 13.12.2006 on voluntary activity: its role in European society and its impact, rapporteur Ms Koller (OJ C 325 of 30.12.2006)

EESC Opinion of 6.7.2006 on Communication from the Commission Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme: Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning, rapporteur Ms Jerneck (OJ C 309 of 16.12.2006)

EESC Opinion of 12.7.2007 on Employment of priority categories (Lisbon Strategy), rapporteur Mr Greif (OJ C 256 of 27.10.2007)

EESC Opinion of 14.9.2006 on Making European citizenship visible and effective, rapporteur Mr Vever (OJ C 318 of 23.12.2006)

EESC Opinion of 10.3.2005 on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council creating the Youth in Action programme for the period 2007-2013, rapporteur Mr Rodriguez-Garcia Caro (OJ C234 of 22.9.2005)

EESC Opinion of 30.5.2007 on Communication from the Commission – An EU strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm, rapporteurs Ms van Turnhout, Mr Janson (OJ C 175 of 27.7.2007)

EESC Opinion on the Communication from the Commission - Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity: More and better jobs through flexibility and security , – COM(2007) 359 final, rapporteurs Mr Janson, Mr Ardhe – SOC/283, on going

3. **Better and more education for all young people**

- 3.1 This chapter deals almost exclusively with formal education, but the success of the lifelong learning process also depends on non-formal education which helps to provide the necessary skills and competences by complementing the work of school systems. Therefore, they should be given appropriate consideration.
- 3.2 In general, the EESC agrees with the proposals concerning the improvements in the quality of education, as they are in line with current strategies and documents.
- 3.3 The EESC also agrees that a youth-specific element within Europass, complementary to Youthpass, should be developed, as Youthpass only focuses on activities done by young people in the framework of the Youth in Action Programme. The scope of youth activities which need to be recognised is, however, much broader.
- 3.4 The EESC recommends that the Commission continues to work on the recognition of voluntary youth work through engagement with employers' organisations, workers' organisations, representatives of the formal education system and appropriate NGOs.
- 3.5 Young people dropping out of school should have the opportunity to participate in non-formal training programmes which would equip them for adult life and successful participation in the labour market either as employees or entrepreneurs.

4. **Youth and employment: a challenge for Europe**

- 4.1 The EESC stresses that youth unemployment in Europe is a threat to the future of Europe and urges Member States and European institutions to take the necessary steps to improve the situation. Those steps should above all be based on quicker and more efficient implementation of the European Youth Pact, where large backlogs exist in many Member States. Today the European Youth Pact remains more a declaration than a real working plan.
- 4.2 In a previous opinion² the EESC requested that the following targets be considered for inclusion in Member States' Lisbon Strategy national reform programmes:
- set targets for each Member State to reduce the number of young people unemployed by a minimum of 50% in the period 2006-2010 (currently 17.4% in the European Union for under 25s); this is above the general unemployment rate in most countries and in most EU Member States is at least twice as high as for the general population;

² EESC Opinion of 26.10.2005 on the Communication on European policies concerning youth – Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – Implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship, rapporteur Ms van Turnhout (OJ C28 of 3.2.2006)

- change the target for a reduction in the maximum period of seeking employment/training places after which young people are offered a new start from six to four months;
- develop social protection systems that enable young people to be in a position to make choices to determine their own future;
- reduce early school leaving by 50% in the period 2006-2010 and promote work experience in companies.

- 4.3 The EESC has recently adopted an exploratory opinion on flexicurity³, which could provide a good basis for future work on the subject. It notes, among other things, that "young people in many Member States face an uncertain labour market with high unemployment, fixed term contracts, insufficient social security coverage and work below their qualification level".
- 4.4 For many young people in Europe and throughout the world, the social uncertainty that has so far been an intrinsic and defining element of young adulthood is increasing. They are no strangers to insecure employment and material hardship, as the most recent ILO reports make clear. Today's older generations should also ask themselves what future they are leaving for those that follow.
- 4.5 The EESC has already called for the fostering of young entrepreneurship by providing financial and technical support and by minimising the bureaucracy involved in taking over, transferring and establishing an enterprise. Therefore the EESC is interested in the proposed pilot project to promote the mobility of young entrepreneurs.
- 4.6 Concerning the Commission's initiative on internships, the EESC agrees that a kind of European quality framework for internships should be introduced and offered to companies to commit themselves to its principles of clear contracts with young people. Today, in many cases, young people doing internships are misused as a cheap labour force instead of learning and preparing for future jobs.
- 4.7 In line with the Commission's proposal which encourages Member States to use national policies and EU funds for supporting young people's transition from education to employment, the EESC calls on Member States to reduce the administrative burden connected with applying for funding from EU funds, as they lower the chances of voluntary-based youth NGOs attaining this type of funding. Pre-financing of the NGO's projects would also help to improve the chances of their projects.

³ EESC Opinion on Flexicurity (collective bargaining and the role of social dialogue), – COM(2007) 359 final, rapporteurs Mr Janson, Mr Ardhe – SOC/283, on going

5. Using the full potential of all

- 5.1 The EESC urges that the situation of young people in rural areas and poor urban areas be given greater consideration. In many rural and poor urban areas, young people do not have access to high quality education, training, mobility, health services, leisure facilities, employment opportunities or have the chance to participate in civil society.
- 5.2 The EESC calls on Member States to rise to the challenge of eradicating poverty among children and young people, which has a severe impact on them across a range of issues such as health, education and even a child's future "life chances" of ever breaking out of the poverty trap.
- 5.3 The Communication does not discuss the fundamental link between the availability and quality of day care for children and subsequent performance in school and at work. In line with the objectives of the Lisbon strategy, the EESC recommends emphasising the importance of day care for children, as preparation for school and independent life, and as an excellent means of promoting social integration and compensating for difficulties.
- 5.4 The EESC asks for measures to be added in order to improve participation of children and young people with special needs, disadvantages or disabilities in society on equal terms: equal participation in the activities of the Youth Programme; equal access to information on youth policy and youth projects and awareness-raising measures.
- 5.5 The EESC generally agrees with the analysis of the European Commission regarding gender issues. However, the EESC regrets that no new suggestions are made in the Communication to fight against gender stereotypes.
- 5.6 The EESC has already asked the Commission for actions focusing on the health of children and young people, and particularly on balanced lifestyles:
- the EESC called for a collective involvement of young people in the EU platform on Health, Diet and Physical Activity;
 - the EESC is concerned at the increase in harmful and hazardous drinking among young adults and children in many Member States over the last ten years, in particular episodic heavy drinking known as "binge drinking";
 - the EESC has also called for action on the commercial practice of producing cans of alcohol combined with soft drinks to encourage young people to consume alcohol regularly;
 - the EESC calls for stronger action to counter all forms of violence against children and young people, together with improved information and training on prevention and management.

5.7 In the spirit of recent Committee opinions on solidarity between the generations⁴, solidarity with young adults needs to be brought into horizontal transversal policies, but in a spirit of cooperation and solidarity with other age groups in civil society: children, adults and senior citizens.

5.8 Therefore the EESC welcomes the adoption by the Commission of a new Health Strategy.

6. **Active young citizens**

6.1 The EESC has been supporting the active participation of young people through its opinions as well as through offering its facilities for the European Youth Week 2007.

6.2 In a previous opinion, the EESC stressed the importance of the active participation and autonomy of young people in society at large. Therefore, the EESC recommended that:

- young people are placed at the centre of the framework and are encouraged to actively participate in the development of policies and given space to express their views using all necessary means;
- the Member States and institutions must provide the necessary resources, supports and mechanisms to facilitate young people at all levels to engage in decisions and actions that impact on their lives. Only real influence will lead to real responsibility;
- the Commission and Member States should develop and implement their policies in partnership with young people and youth organisations and continue to involve them in all steps;
- young people and youth organisations and social partners *must* be consulted on the development of measures for this initiative with the national Lisbon reform programmes and on following up implementation.

6.3 The EESC would appreciate if the part of the Communication, dealing with voluntary activities of young people (point 5.2), could be much stronger and less general. The EESC regrets that none of the EESC recommendations stipulated in its exploratory opinion⁵ was included in the Communication.

⁴ EESC Own-initiative Opinion of 16.12.2004 on Relations between the generations, rapporteur: Mr Bloch-Lainé (OJ C 157 of 28.6.2005)

EESC Opinion on Promoting solidarity between the generations, rapporteur: Mr Jahier (CESE 1711/2007 – SOC/277). Adopted at the plenary session of 12-13 December 2007

⁵ EESC Opinion of 13.12.2006 on voluntary activity: its role in European society and its impact, co-rapporteurs: Ms Koller and Ms Eulenburg (OJ C 325 of 30.12.2006)

6.4 The EESC therefore repeats its main points on the subject:

- a European-level charter establishing the role of voluntary organisations, including their rights and duties should be adopted;
- the Commission should announce a Year of Volunteers, and publish a White Paper on voluntary activity and active citizenship in Europe;
- the Member States should draw up a legal framework which would guarantee the right to carry out voluntary activity independently of an individual's legal or social status and made provision for insurance and the reimbursement of expenses;
- the Commission and Member States should raise the awareness on the contribution of youth work to the development of young people and the skills, values and attitudes gained through active involvement in youth organisations and youth work activities;
- the EU should put particular emphasis on the recognition of competences acquired through voluntary activities.

6.5 The EESC supports the development of a strong partnership between the EU and young people in the form of a declaration expected to be signed later this year between the European Institutions and their partner organisation on the part of young people – the European Youth Forum. It notes with satisfaction that the European Youth Forum "is keen to reflect on appropriate means and tools with the partners, to ensure that the opinions, in particular, of young people with fewer opportunities, can also be heard and taken into account as part of this process"⁶.

6.6 Furthermore the EESC supports the development of structured dialogue between decision-makers and young people. Such dialogue should contribute to the development of the European transversal youth strategy, suggested by the Commission in its Communication. To this end, the EESC suggests that a dialogue meeting gathering all relevant Directorates-General of the Commission, representatives of the Council and European Parliament and youth civil society should be convened in order to lay down a joint roadmap on how to address youth issues in cross-sectoral manner. The EESC considers that such joint roadmap would be concrete step in answering the calls made by young people and youth civil society on the occasion of the Rome Youth Summit, March 2007.

6.7 Structured dialogue with young people should also make good use of existing means, namely youth events of EU Presidencies and European youth weeks. However, these events should be used for discussions on the progress of the European transversal youth strategy and their written results should be linked to this progress. No new declarations need to be written, there should be no reinventing of the wheel over and over again.

6.8 The EESC welcomes the proposal of the Commission to draft an EU report on youth every three years. Such a report should be linked to the transversal youth strategy and its objectives,

⁶ YFJ reaction to the European Commission Communication – 7.4.2007

with well defined indicators of success or failure. The involvement of youth civil society, in particular the national youth councils, should be ensured in the development of such a report.

Brussels, 17 January 2008.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Dimitris Dimitriadis

Patrick Venturini

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N.B.: Appendix overleaf.

APPENDIX
to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee

The following amendments, which received at least a quarter of the votes cast, were rejected in the course of the debate (Rule 54(3) of the Rules of Procedure):

Point 6.3

Amend as follows:

"The EESC would appreciate if the part of the Communication, dealing with voluntary activities of young people (point 5.2), could be much stronger and less general. It points out that voluntary work is not the same as charity work and that voluntary work can be paid⁷. The EESC regrets that none of the EESC recommendations stipulated in its exploratory opinion was included in the Communication."

Voting

For:	17
Against	30
Abstentions	15

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EESC Opinion of 13.12.2006 on voluntary activity: its role in European society and its impact, rapporteur Ms Koller, co-rapporteur Ms zu Eulenburg (OJ C 325 of 30.12.2006)