

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

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DRAFT OPINION

European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)

Rapporteur: **Csaba Borboly** (RO/EPP)
President of Harghita County Council

Deadline for tabling amendments:

3 p.m. (Brussels time) **on Tuesday, 26 January 2016**. Amendments must be submitted using the online tool for tabling amendments (available through the Members' Portal at <http://cor.europa.eu/members>).

Number of signatures required: 6

Reference document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Draft 2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)

COM(2015) 429 final

Draft Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. welcomes the fact that the Commission has recognised the importance of improving the development of policies based on facts and solid evidence within the field of youth affairs, and of coordinating the European Union and Member States' resources and efforts as effectively as possible in order to achieve youth policy objectives;
2. is particularly appreciative of the Commission's approach, which deems it necessary to react as rapidly as possible – in the area of youth affairs during the period 2016-2018 – through appropriate changes to policy in response to new challenges such as the integration of young refugees or the rise in extremism among young people;
3. insists that in the future, ensuring equal opportunities, promoting social integration and improving the competitiveness of young people on the labour market, while fostering active citizenship, non-discrimination and intercultural understanding, should remain the key objectives of youth policy;
4. expresses its concern however that the Commission fails to mention the role of local and regional authorities (LRAs) in relation to youth policy, despite it being very obvious that in the majority of Member States – where there are national policies on youth matters – LRAs are, to varying degrees, the competent authorities in this area;
5. appreciates the work of Eurostat to produce and coordinate sets of data relating to a range of factors relating to youth issues;
6. calls on the Commission to systematically assess the territorial impact of youth policy at sub-national level, at least to NUTS 2 level. At the same time, within the framework of the Open Method of Coordination among EU Member States, considers necessary the development of measurable indicators, of concrete youth-related action plans involving all levels of government and of strong partnerships between youth organisations and public authorities;
7. after consulting stakeholders, considers that while the Erasmus+ programme and the Youth Guarantee are essential tools for achieving strategic objectives, the problems are far more complex and EU action in the area of youth affairs already goes beyond these two effective tools. Consequently highlights the need to make other information on the results of youth policy accessible in an appropriate format, particularly in relation to subjects such as youth unemployment, employability and social inclusion, amongst other things. This would also help determine whether it would not be appropriate to provide for specific assistance from the Structural Funds. Given the complexity and magnitude of the challenges at hand, youth policy should be mainstreamed into all EU policies. Moreover, the economic case for education and training, which was debated at the meeting of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council

of 12 December 2014¹ within the context of the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 strategy, should now be translated into concrete investments in education as part of the EU's long-term youth and growth agendas;

8. takes note of the decline in direct political activity among young people, while celebrating the active interest many young people display in the environment, social media, human rights and volunteering;
9. recommends that the Commission assess good practices in Member States and regions with regard to political literacy taught through citizenship education curricula in schools and to the lowering of the voting age and more precisely, the direct or indirect influence that these two elements have on political engagement among young people and their willingness to get involved. The Commission should then share the results of this assessment with Member States and the regions;
10. considers the role of youth organisations to be especially important, particularly those that operate in formal settings, as they contribute considerably to developing young peoples' participatory skills and to improving the quality of the decision-making process. Therefore considers support for these organisations to be important;
11. also stresses the need to identify and develop a clearer picture of non-structured communities of young people, whose numbers are steadily increasing, inter alia thanks to social media. These communities often include young people who have difficulty accessing opportunities and lack the means to enter into dialogue with the institutions;
12. acknowledges the importance of good quality socio-educational provision and the need to develop the capacity to respond to social, behavioural and technological change;
13. is concerned at the fact that socio-educational provision, which is generally the responsibility of local authorities in all the Member States, has been subject to budgetary cuts throughout Europe, while the growing percentage of young people at risk of poverty and exclusion calls for an increase in these services;
14. considers that intra-EU migratory flows as a result of the economic crisis, and the subsequent brain drain in some European regions, combined with demographic challenges, need to be addressed through a variety of EU policies, with youth being a key pillar. Furthermore, in response to the current migration crisis and within the context of the European Agenda for Migration, the CoR calls for directly accessible financial resources for local and regional authorities to allow them to fulfil their obligations where migration and integration are concerned;
15. believes that it is essential to share best practices. These include the talent management programme and the initiative to support vocational training set up by the Lublin Voivodeship

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Press Release of 3358th Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/workarea/downloadAsset.aspx?id=40802190967>

and the medium-term strategy for youth recently adopted by Harghita County, dealing with vocational training issues and traditional culture as a basis for creating favourable living conditions for young people in the county. Then there is the resoundingly successful European Youth Capital initiative and the youth mediation programme in the town of Vila Real de Santo António, together with innovative initiatives to bring several local and regional authorities together in partnerships, such as the Network of Mediterranean Youth, aimed at encouraging dialogue on issues such as mobility, policies on education and employment, gender equality and the role of young people in the institutions;

16. suggests developing a basic package that each Member State could guarantee for young people and that would focus on access to high speed internet, learning a second foreign language to the equivalent of at least B2 level within the public education system, career guidance and continuous mentoring, appropriate involvement in volunteering, promoting the right to a first job, and flexible and accessible forms of funding in order to carry out studies that offer career prospects. At the same time, calls on the European Commission to propose actions to ensure that all young people in the EU have a "minimum qualifications and skills guarantee", empowering them to access and complete a minimum level of educational attainment, accompanied by the relevant level of appropriate skills;
17. notes the need to carry out studies in the various European regions in order to have a clearer overview of the situation of young people in terms of housing and the habitability of housing. Indeed, it is particularly necessary in this field to exchange best practice and draw up action plans at local level, given that in many regions there is an oversupply of dwellings, whereas in numerous other regions, the quality of the housing stock does not provide appropriate conditions for young people, and in yet other regions, the extremely high prices exclude young people. It would therefore make sense to draw up, on the basis of the relevant data, appropriate action plans to guarantee all young people good housing conditions;
18. stresses the need to determine how to face challenges in the area of youth policy, such as the issue of matching skills with employers' needs, equal opportunities for young people who live in small communities, located in peripheral and rural areas that are facing demographic challenges, or furthermore, how to promote professional training initiatives tailored to regional specificities and specific skills and the exchange of good practices in this policy area; underlines that matching skills with employers' needs is an important factor in youth unemployment and further development of young people's career prospects; calls for further attention to be paid to this issue;
19. considers it necessary that youth policy continue to focus particularly on issues such as discrimination against young people on the basis of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability and sexual orientation, as well as developing measures that should be taken in this respect;
20. notes that young people have only limited access to the sources of funding needed to set up a business, pay for accommodation or continue their studies; for this reason considers it important for local and regional authorities to find local solutions that will, on the one hand, help to make

the region in question more competitive and, on the other, clearly strengthen equal opportunities among young people;

21. calls on the Commission and Member States to check that young people are properly informed on employment law, employment protection legislation and legislation on volunteering, and that they receive the necessary protection, when they are carrying out paid work or volunteer activities or when they undertake a traineeship or internship in their country of residence or in a Member State other than where they are habitually resident;
22. highlights that caution should be exercised with regard to the protection of young volunteers or young people active on the labour market, and calls on regions to examine the opportunities in this area for cooperation on mutual learning and the exchange of best practices;
23. believes that it would be advisable to examine how, on the one hand, new, emerging social and community values – such as environmental awareness, community engagement, support to those in need, appreciation of traditional ways of life that are closer to nature – can encourage young people's participation in society and successfully integrate them into society and, on the other, strengthen protection of the family and support for starting a family and parenting, particularly in regions that are demographically challenged;
24. believes that the isolated measures adopted by different Member States in the area of youth policy are not always sufficient and that coordination of such measures is often patchy. The Committee thus supports the proposal that greater commitment and further measures are necessary at European level to improve coordination, develop harmonisation and exploit the possibility for synergies – particularly given the fact that young people are more open to mobility and migration – and insists that the revised policy should clearly state the key role of LRAs;
25. deems it necessary to bolster the role of young people in the democratic process, to make their voices heard. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to promote dialogue among young people, building on the involvement of civil society and, in particular, of youth organisations, local authorities, informal groups and NGOs, which have always represented the section of the population most open to change and social innovation and capable of driving the renewal of society as a whole. Precisely for this reason, the Committee stresses the importance of extending structured dialogue and lends its support to the new measures put forward by the Commission in this area, in relation to enhancing opportunities to participate both for young people in general and for the organisations that represent them. Finally, points out that in order to achieve these objectives, it might be useful to provide for structured intervention, as was done for the Youth Guarantee with the YEI;
26. emphasises the importance of extending structured dialogue and lends its support to the new measures put forward by the Commission in this area, in relation to enhancing opportunities to participate both for young people in general and for the organisations that represent them;

27. believes it important to promote the inclusion of young people with disabilities and to develop genuine equal access for those young people to the opportunities provided by the Member States and the regions;
28. highlights the need to give priority, in both EU and Member State policies, to the inclusion of at-risk young people, such as NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) and to young people from migrant backgrounds, who are more likely to move into this category;
29. believes that, given the extremely serious terrorist threat that Europe is currently facing, along with the political and religious radicalisation that unfortunately is gaining ground among young people, it is a priority – in accordance with the EU Security Agenda – to boost participation and confidence in the institutions, so as to prevent violence, radicalisation and extremism and to guarantee young people the right to live in pluralist communities underpinned by democratic European values, the rule of law and fundamental rights;
30. recommends that European LRAs establish local and regional strategies that expressly address problems and opportunities that are specific to young people, taking into account EU and Member States' youth policies. The Committee proposes that they should endeavour, when drawing up such plans, to enhance mutual learning opportunities while seeking to ensure that the target group –young people – are involved as widely as possible in designing these plans and strategies, as well as in monitoring their implementation.

Brussels,

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Opinion on the <i>Implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018)</i>
Reference	Own-initiative opinion
Legal basis	Articles 165 and 166 of the TFEU
Procedural basis	Article 41 (b)(i)
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	N/A
Date of Bureau/President's decision	24 September 2015
Commission responsible	SEDEC
Rapporteur	Csaba Borboly (RO/EPP)
Analysis	12 October 2015
Discussed in commission	Scheduled for 19 November 2015
Date adopted by commission	Scheduled for 19 November 2015
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	majority
Date of adoption in plenary session	Opinion due to be adopted at the plenary session on 10 and 11 February 2016
Previous Committee opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Quality Framework for Traineeships</i>COR-2014-00111-AC • <i>Youth Employment Package</i>, CDR789-2013-AC • <i>Rethinking education</i>, CDR2392-2012-AC • <i>Erasmus for All</i>, CDR400-2011-AC • <i>Youth on the Move</i>CDR292-2010-AC
Consultation of Subsidiarity Monitoring Network	N/A