

# European Youth Policy – Perspectives and Opportunities for Child and Youth Welfare

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This article tries to picture European youth policy and its capacity of opening up new perspectives for child and youth welfare. The circumstances of children and adolescents in Europe are changing rapidly. A young person's life is being influenced by social, economical and demographical developments. In 2005, a [Green Paper of the European Commission](#) stated an unequal demographic change with implications for the whole society: Until 2030, the EU will be lacking about 20.8 million employable citizens, and there will be 18 million children and adolescents less than today. Since less young people will have to make much bigger contributions to society, they will be in need of getting more assistance and lobbying – this is especially true for the disadvantaged among them. Child and youth welfare faces increasing requirements concerning education and vocational training, questions according to identity and the acquirement of intercultural competencies. Current European problems such as child poverty and exclusion of young people are to be solved in a European way. Since the European Union has no legislative competencies in the field of youth policy, a political cooperation of European countries is needed. This cooperation has to embark on a cross-sectional strategy – the interests of children and adolescents have to be represented in all political fields affecting the circumstances of young people in Europe.

## **European Youth Policy – Political Cooperation in the EU**

The cooperation in the field of youth policy has been developed since the 1990's on a very small legal basis. The [Treaty of Amsterdam](#) (1997 in addition to the [Maastricht Treaty of 1992](#)) and the [Nice Treaty](#) (2001) describe the European Community's task in this field only as enhancing the exchange of young people and their tutors. However, [European action programmes](#) (1988 Youth for Europe, since 1996 European Voluntary Service, 2000 Youth, 2007 Youth in Action) have expanded their activities beyond mere exchange programmes. In addition to the action programmes, the European Commission described a new framework for European youth policy with the [White Paper "A new impetus for European youth"](#) in 2001. The nations' jurisdiction notwithstanding the Commission tried to reflect the concerns and expectations of young people and demanded on the EU member states for a better cooperation in the field of youth policy. In 2002 the Council of the European Union (the responsible ministers of the member states) approved with a resolution. In order to explain the aims and impacts of this White Paper, two elements are important: To begin with the consideration of young people's needs was reevaluated as an interdisciplinary issue for the Commission itself. The youth ministers were asked for supporting this approach in their countries. Five subjects were specified: *education – lifelong learning – mobility, employment, social inclusion, fight against racism and xenophobia, autonomy*. The second important element of the White Paper is the implementation of the so-called Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The OMC allows European cooperation in fields of policy that are actually up to the member states themselves. Applying the OMC, the European Community can act beyond its legislative competencies, which it does in social policy mainly. The OMC's instruments are guidelines and recommendations, sometimes assisted by action plans of the member states. With the OMC, the Commission aims at securing minimum standards, at allowing learning from each other, and at the nationally adapted achievement of common aims. Part of the OMC is the regular evaluation of progress reports of the member states and the publication of an activity report synthesis. This procedure aims at adopting new objectives based on experiences. The White Paper on Youth identified four youth-specific topics that are

being covered by the Open Method of Coordination in different stages: “Participation”, “Information”, “Voluntary activities” and “Better understanding of youth”.

In 2004, an interim report claimed more involvement of young people themselves, but also of youth groups and organisations. The youth ministers demand a „structured dialogue with young people” which is planned in accordance with the current and the following EU presidencies. Germany is holding the presidency until June 2007, Portugal and Slovenia will follow. These three member states cooperate in a “team presidency” which is supposed to ease the agenda setting and the implementation of policies. The results of local, regional and national youth events shall have an impact on centrally managed youth events of each presidency with young participants from all member states. The outcomes of these events are expected to take effects on the next presidency’s agenda. The central youth event under German presidency is going to be themed “Equal Opportunities and Social Participation for all Children and Youth” and will take place in April 2007 in Cologne, Germany. The outcomes are supposed to be discussed with the Directors-General for Youth.

### **The Lisbon Strategy and the European Youth Pact**

In March 2000, the heads of states and governments of the EU agreed in Lisbon on developing the European Union into the “[most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economic area in the world until 2010](#)”. The Lisbon strategy wanted to boost productivity and the speed of innovation – the standards were seen in the U.S.A. and in Japan. In order to achieve these aims, the EU was supposed to take measures in almost all fields of political activity. The key concepts were economic growth through innovation, knowledge-based society, social cohesion, ecological awareness, Open Method of Coordination. In 2004, the interim report lead-managed by the former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Wim Kok, left no doubt about the unattainability of the aims of Lisbon. The report demanded more and better coordinated endeavours and reforms.

With a jointly signed letter from October 2004, the then acting heads of states and governments of France, Spain, Sweden and Germany proposed a European Youth Pact which was supposed to strengthen the importance of youth within the Lisbon strategy. This Pact should help to fight youth unemployment and to support social and vocational integration. The European Youth Pact should improve cross-sectional strategies concerning vocational training, research, education, entrepreneurship, mobility, culture. Besides, the pact was supposed to affect the population development by means of improving life-work balance. In short this initiative wanted to prove the social and vocational integration of young people using cross-sectional strategies for education, vocational training, employment, social integration, mobility and life-work balance.

In March 2005 the Council of the European Union adopted the European Youth Pact as part of a renewed and slimmed Lisbon strategy. The new strategy is supposed to be implemented by means of national reform programmes on the basis of [common guidelines concerning growth and jobs](#). These reform programmes shall also include the requirements of the European Youth Pact. Guideline 18 (to promote a lifecycle approach to work) is especially appropriate. In this respect member states are supposed to take measures to reduce youth unemployment, to fight child poverty, to decrease school dropouts, to improve day care.

In November 2005 the youth ministers adopted a resolution which created a political frame for all the described avenues of approaching a European youth policy: the European Youth Pact, the White Paper “A new impetus for European youth”, the Open Method of Coordination in the field of youth, the structured dialogue with young people, the active citizenship of young people. In March 2006 the Council of the EU agreed on concrete aims of implementation, for instance on the reduction of the school dropout rate to 10% until 2010.

### **EU-Presidencies’ Key Aspects in Youth Policy**

The German EU-presidency is expected to have a great impact on European developments in

the field of youth policy. The German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth has decided in favour of the following key aspects of activity: fresh impetus toward the implementation of the European Youth Pact, discussions about perspectives of European youth policy, a resolution of the Council of Europe “Equal Opportunities and Social Integration for all Children and Youth”. In February 2007, the first council meeting (Youth) under German presidency produced key messages concerning the implementation of the European Youth Pact, which were presented to the European Council in March 2007: The implementation shall focus on the local and regional area, on transitions from education to employment, on the creation of individually tailored measures for young people, and on a better visibility of the “youth dimension” within the Lisbon strategy. The council also started a discussion about the perspectives of European youth policy and about good instruments for the implementation of a cross-sectional approach. Germany, Portugal and Slovenia agreed on a common key aspect for their presidencies: “Social participation and vocational integration of young people”. Germany is focussing on cross-sectional strategies for the integration of disadvantaged young people especially on the local level. Portugal will be engaged with the integrative potential of voluntary activities. Besides, Portugal will campaign among young people for self-employment and entrepreneurship. Slovenia wants to concentrate on equal opportunities within an open and multicultural society. The team presidency suggests to add some more topics for European youth policy: wellbeing of children, health and education through sports, growing up in economically underdeveloped regions, entering employment (apprenticeship, entrepreneurship, social protection), mobility and life-work balance, citizenship and youth culture, multicultural societies, demography and relations between generations. In the meantime the European Youth Pact and the structured dialogue with young people seem to be considered much more important instruments for European youth policy than the implementation of the Open Method of Coordination.

### **Opportunities and Chances for Child and Youth Welfare**

Recent developments in European youth policy offer various opportunities for child and youth welfare – provided that there is a link between local work and “Europe”. In addition to the political initiative taken by the German EU-presidency, the European Youth Pact will continue to provoke discussions about an extended use of European Structural Funds within the new funding period 2007-2013. The European Youth Pact backs what has been demanded by child and youth welfare for a long time: cross-sectional and integrated approaches, joint activities. After having discussed questions of applying, initiating, coordination and communication, governmental as well as non-governmental organisations could use the political appreciation of the European top level. Within the European debate about growth, employment and global competition, child and youth welfare will have to point out the interests of young people who have to be respected as more than human capital.

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