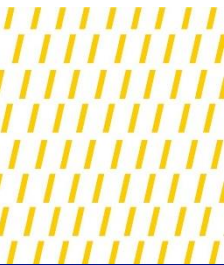


SPAIN2023
DGS YOUTH MEETING



DGs YOUTH MEETING
(4th and 5th October 2023, Alicante)

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1.- CONCEPT NOTE TO DEBATES AND SUMMARY OF THE DEBATES

1.1.- INTRODUCTION

Date: the 4th and the 5th of October 2023. The 3rd we will organize a previous dinner.

Place: Alicante.

Description: The Directors-General for Youth Meeting (DGYM) brings together every six months the Directors-General for Youth in the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU, with the aim of sharing the main initiatives that have been carried out in the 27 Member States and by the European Commission in this field.

Agenda: The event started on October 3rd with the check-in of participants and a reception dinner. The working sessions started on the morning of October 4th with a joint session with the Youth Delegates who attended the European Youth Conference (EUYC). Regarding the commitment of the Spanish government with youth participation, the Directors General Youth Meeting will be set up after the European Union Youth Conference to host this joint session of both in the morning of October 4th.

The joint session will bring together the Youth Delegates and the Directors-Generals with the aim of enabling the channeling of youth demands to policy makers and to share debates, concerns and common projects.

The Directors-General Youth Meeting specific working sessions was held on the afternoon of the 4th and the morning of the 5th, concluding with lunch on the 5th.

Delegations: delegations from 27 Member States + European Commission + Council Secretariat + Youth Forum + OECD + EESC

It should be noted that it is customary for the delegation to consist of two persons: the Director General and the Deputy Director.

Number of participants: about 70 people.

1.2.- PLENARY SESSION I: Joint session of Directors-Generals with the Youth Delegates of the European Union Youth Conference

Format:

This session will have two parts, an initial informal joint meeting (two hours) where the attendees will be divided into small interactive discussion groups of DGs and Youth Delegates; and a second plenary session where the conclusions of the previous panel dialogues will be presented and where consensus will be sought on two or three lines of work to be developed during the next Cycle of Dialogue.

Objective:

The Government of Spain is convinced that we must not only count on youth, but that youth must play a fundamental role in setting priorities and agenda. For this reason, it has decided to set the meeting of the DGs for Youth back-to-back with the Youth Conference, scheduling a joint session to define the objectives to be developed for the coming months. The Spanish Presidency introduces the novelty that this joint session not only implies a passive role of the DGs, who listen to the recommendations worked on by the Youth Delegates during the previous two days, but work as equals during the development of the day to set joint objectives and projects.

Questions:

- What are the objectives to be jointly developed during this 10^o Cycle of Dialogue?
- What do young people expect from policy makers in the coming months?

1.3.- PLENARY SESSION II: Embedding the youth perspective in policymaking through mainstreaming, youth impact assessment, youth test, youth check or other: way forward

Format:

There will be an initial intervention by our Director General, David Veloso (5 min), an initial intervention by the European Commission (5 min), an intervention by OECD (10 min), an intervention by the EESC (10 min), a round of interventions by the Youth Forum and Member States (maximum 3 min per intervention) and a closing by the European Commission (3 min).

Objectives:

It is clear that embedding a youth perspective in policy-making is a positive outcome of the European Year of Youth. The work is now progressing on how to take this forward at national and European levels. Mainstreaming can be seen in different ways, as shown how current practices differ, ranging from youth impact assessment, youth test, youth check or other concepts. It is useful to discuss these practices and what works well so far.

It is essential to define the scope of what we mean by mainstreaming and various types of youth tests and the way they are implemented. Youth Test, a regulatory technique that is already being implemented in countries such as Germany, Austria, France, Latvia or the Flemish part of Belgium. Is the Youth Test a legal check on the impact that regulations will have on youth? Could the Youth Test imply an analysis of the impact on youth of the European budgets? Does the Youth Test imply that the position of youth organizations is always taken into account in any regulatory development?

The outcomes of this session of the DG Youth meeting will feed into the discussions of the Council Conclusions and in future discussions on this topic at European and national level.

Questions:

- Does the Youth Test or a similar impact assessment instrument exist in your country, and is there a willingness to implement it? What is the experience so far?
- From your point of view, how would you value the introduction of the Youth Test at the European level, within the regulatory procedure?
- What are the minimum requirements and red lines for the discussion/implementation of this instrument in your country?

1.4.- PLENARY SESSION III: EU Youth Strategy and EU Youth Programmes: fostering synergies to support common goals, in the context of interim evaluations

Format:

There will be an initial intervention by our Director General, David Veloso (5 min), an initial intervention by the European Commission (5 min), a round of interventions by the Member States (maximum 3 min per intervention) and a closing by the European Commission (3 min). We will also provide some examples of Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps Programs.

Objectives:

The EU Youth Strategy is the European framework for cooperation on youth policies during the period 2019-2027, based on the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018. Such cooperation aims to boost young people's participation in democratic life, support social and civic engagement and seek to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to participate in society.

The EU Youth Strategy is structured around and focuses on three core areas (engaging, connecting and empowering) and is characterized by a coordinated and cross-sectoral implementation. Between 2017 and 2018, the EU Youth Dialogue process involving young people from across Europe led to the establishment of eleven European youth goals, which are integral part of the EU Youth Strategy. The goals define cross-cutting areas that affect the lives of young people and indicate the challenges that exist.

The Commission is carrying out an interim evaluation by end 2023 of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 as foreseen in the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018. The Communication on the European Year of Youth and the Interim evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy, both to be finalized by end 2023 will inform the preparation of the next youth strategy work plan for 2025-2027.

In parallel, the Commission is carrying out mid-term evaluations of the European Solidarity Corps Erasmus+ programmes that need to be finalized by 31 December 2024. The results of



these evaluations will be used to improve, where possible, the implementation of the current programmes running until 2027 and feed into the impact assessments for the possible successor programmes. Member States are required to submit to the European Commission, by 31 May 2024, a report on the implementation and the impact of the programme in their respective territories.

These documents mentioned above will steer the future directions of both the next EU Youth Strategy and EU Youth Programmes.

Questions:

- How can we further accelerate the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy within the Member States?
- What objectives of the current work plan could be improved in next work plan 2025-2027?
- How can we further align the EU Youth Strategy with the Programmes?



2.- PRESENTATION OF THE CYCLE AND CONFERENCE OUTCOMES TO THE DGS¹

Mr. Ondřej Bárta, a freelance youth researcher and consultant, and one of the two youth researchers supporting the EUYD10, summarised the outcomes of the working group deliberations. He outlined outcomes separately for the domain of barriers and for the domain of necessary changes.

In the domain of barriers, he pointed out the following:

- Missing connections (among generations, geographically, or in terms of perceptions, etc.)
- Lack of resources (financially, in terms of housing, skills, or information, etc.).
- Lack of recognition (in terms of gained competences, but also in terms of recognising youth field professionals, etc.).
- Access obstacles (to education, infrastructure, information, etc.).
- Lack of initiatives to tackle exclusion and inequality (on the EU, national, and other levels)
- Lack of diversity (in school classrooms, etc.).
- Digital divide (access to hardware and software, lack of competences to work digitally, etc.).

In the domain of necessary changes, Mr. Bárta outlined the following:

- Youth policy mainstreaming.
- Inclusion of youth in all stages of policymaking (design, implementation, evaluation).
- Ensuring youth policy is evidence-based, co-managed by youth, and cross-sectoral.
- Universal income as a tool to battle exclusion in the widest sense.
- Generally better funding across different domains (health care, public transport, etc.).
- Setting up outreach structures featuring youth and youth field stakeholders as experts.
- Comprehensive education including non-formal learning, and capacity building.
- Battling mis- and disinformation and tackling of the digital divide.
- Improving of access (e.g., mental health care).
- Transparency of the social media algorithms.
- EU-wide standards for public transportation.

¹Extracted from the EUYC report: Bárta O., Moxon D. (2023). EUYD10 EU Youth Conference in Alicante, Spain. Final Conference Report: Consultation on Inclusion. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8422504

3.- SESSION I: DIALOGUE SESSION WITH DGS AND CONFERENCE DELEGATES TO DISCUSS THE CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

After introducing the working group outcomes, the World Café methodology was used to facilitate deliberations between the EUYC Alicante delegates and Director Generals for Youth from various EU Member States (DGs). The methodology was introduced in plenary, and it was implemented in a comfortable outdoor environment at a terrace featuring refreshments. DGs were asked to stay at different standing tables, and EUYC Alicante delegates joined them to engage in conversations on various topics concerning inclusion. In order to keep the conversations as smooth as possible, flipcharts were used to capture the interesting ideas stemming from these debates, and harvesters were also asked to take notes of quotes which illustrated the debates well.

Lack of information for young people has been debated with social media as one of the potential solutions to this issue, with an overall need to better focus on youth as an audience, and youth in rural areas in particular. Local and innovative ways of communicating important information were also discussed, including intergenerational dialogue, awareness raising campaigns, and ongoing consultations. It was also highlighted that information is key to any participation: *“Some young people do not have knowledge about the opportunities.”*

Accountability of policymakers has also been debated, with an emphasis on more dialogue with concrete outcomes, and on strengthening the roles of youth representative structures to become advisory bodies at the level of ministries, as well as on sustainability being mainstreamed in policymaking generally. As one participant put it: *“Ministry delegates should share with us what they plan to do with our recommendations.”* Policymakers were also encouraged to stop youth washing and ageism and to increase transparency of the policymaking processes, especially with respect to how youth voices are included. EUYD has been debated as well, with participants concluding that better links across the EUYD Cycles are needed, as is a clear plan on how EUYD links to the development of the future EU Youth Strategies, and how it connects to policy design in various areas at the EU level. The need for effective implementation of outcomes of each Cycle of the EUYD has been underlined, and it has also been mentioned that processes similar to the EUYD should be set up in national, regional, and local contexts to facilitate policymaking at these levels as well. As one participant stated: *“All of these projects are useless if people from rural areas, minorities... if the people who suffer the exclusion and the consequences are not involved in creating them or participating in their implementation.”* Furthermore, the importance of the EU Youth Test and of lowering the voting age to 16 have been mentioned in the debates as well.

In terms of outreach, it was emphasised that national youth councils have the potential to reach young people from different walks of life, but they need to have appropriate support, including funding. The national youth councils should also strive for as much diversity as

possible within their own ranks. It was also debated that prejudices, different opportunities, and social discrimination all need to be taken into account, and that concrete steps can be taken to remove some of the barriers: banning unpaid internships, for example. Different culture of an individual, feelings of not belonging somewhere, or various strengths of passports can all prevent young people from attending various events, including the participatory activities and consultations. It was also noted that youth delegates can and should become young leaders in their communities, and creating a networking platform for youth delegates to share their experience and enable peer learning as well as teaming up for various initiatives would be very welcome. One of the participants noted: *“We should not discover this on our own, I would appreciate professionals teaching youth how to participate!”* Visibility of various initiatives was also explored to be one of the key factors, with various digital tools having the potential to establish connections between youth and different initiatives. As one participant noted: *“I come from a minority and we fought for participation, but it is not our task to fight, it is the task of the structure to include everyone.”*

Language barriers, such as lack of English skills, can also create barriers in inclusion, especially when it comes to youth participation, with several other barriers being debated as well: transportation (good practice example from Hungary where monthly passes are rather cheap); housing; misinformation; intersectionality; or invisible illness. As one of the participants noted, all barriers should be exposed: *“Establish a culture to feel free to talk about your fears.”*

4.- CLOSING OF THE CONFERENCE

Mr. David Veloso, the Director General of the Institute for Youth of Spain, thanked all EUYC Alicante participants and stressed that outcomes of the working groups have been highly inspirational and stimulating. He reassured the EUYC Alicante participants that social inequalities and social justice in young people are the key priorities of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, and that the work towards inclusion of vulnerable young people continues. Mr. Veloso acknowledged both hidden and visible barriers to young people and shared that two policy documents which were drafted by the Spanish Presidency are debated in Brussels at the moment: one focusing on mental health, and another on youth mainstreaming. He also underlined the newly established housing policy as a good policy example from Spain which demonstrates the cross-sectorality and mainstreaming of current youth policymaking. Mr. Veloso also emphasised that young people are not only a cornerstone of each EU Member State, but also of the EU itself, and that it is not possible to build strong EU without its young people.

Finally, he thanked all European and Spanish youth as well as all stakeholders who helped the EUYC Alicante to become a success.

Mr. Ignacio Álvarez, State Secretary for Social Rights of Spain, delivered a video message to acknowledge the high level of uncertainty put onto young people by recent events and highlight the key challenges young people face: access to decent and affordable housing, stable and quality employment, quality education, political participation, and the fight against climate crisis.

He stressed the need to take on demands and needs of young people by governments on the national and European level, and the need for young people to play a role in elaborating of key policies. Mr. Álvarez also stressed the upcoming Council Conclusions on mental health.

Ms. Sophia Hanna Eriksson Waterschoot, the Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+ of the European Commission, congratulated the Spanish Presidency for its hospitality, highlighted and praised the dedication of the EUYC Alicante participants in working towards the outcomes of the Conference, and appreciated that the participants had been very concrete in terms of sharing both the needs and possible solutions to tackle these needs. She stressed the importance of the cooperation of the Trio of Presidency Countries for ensuring continuation and success of future EUYD activities and thanked the European Youth Forum for their close involvement in the dialogue. Ms. Eriksson underlined the crucial moment of upcoming elections to the European Parliament in connection to democratic participation of young people, and urged all EUYC Alicante participants to vote, and to empower their peers



to vote as well. She also encouraged participants to reach out to candidates who stand in the European Parliament elections, asking them about their views of youth policy and inclusion and to raise their awareness of the topic. Ms. Eriksson also stressed that change takes time, and often via small steps. She also encouraged EU Member States' representatives at the EUYC to take note of as many ideas as possible, as many of the suggestions concern national policy-making. She also stressed the role of instruments to encourage participation: the EUYD with improved inclusion, the EU Youth Coordinator, the Inclusion and Diversity strategy of the EU youth programmes, and invited young people to take part in the ongoing public consultations on the mid-term evaluations of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. She recalled that youth mainstreaming was top on the agenda of the 2022 European Year of Youth and the Commission is open to look into possibilities for strengthening the EUYD for this purpose.



5.- SESSION II: embedding the youth perspective in policymaking through mainstreaming, youth impact assessment, youth test, youth check or other: way forward

5.1.- OPENING

Mr. David Lafuente introduced the meeting and thanked the Commission (COM), State Secretaries, Directors-General (DG) and Ministerial Representatives for their presence in Alicante. "The fact that so many decision-makers are here is a sign that we are not just here for the photo, we are demonstrating a real commitment to youth", he said.

The first session started with a statement by the Spanish Director General, **Mr. David Veloso**:

"Dear EU Youth Delegations, Commission and guests of honour. As you know, we are gathered here to discuss a topic of great importance for European Youth: Youth mainstreaming and its implementation in the Youth Test or Youth Check initiative.

According to the European Parliament's 2021 report, 70% of young people feel that they don't have much, or any, say over decisions, laws and policies affecting the EU².

The same report is important because it disproves some of the mantras held about the depoliticisation of young people: despite the fact that Europe is indeed one of the regions with the lowest youth political participation, young people do take interest in politics.

For example, the report states that almost nine out of ten young people in the EU discuss politics when they go out with friends and a quarter of young people are engaged in direct forms of political participation and social activism.

The future of the European project depends on the strength of the link between European values and the values of young people. For this, the EU must be aligned with the demands and problems of young people and with their forms of participation and relationship with politics, which have undoubtedly changed in recent years.

It is a strategic and urgent matter to take measures to bring the European institutions closer to their young citizens. Given the novelty of the Youth Test as a youth mainstreaming initiative, this may be one of the solutions to start closing the current existing gap.

As you know, the Youth Test is already well established in the debate on EU initiatives. The Conference on the Future of Europe concluded in 2022 (which promoted participatory dialogue with citizens across the Union) directly proposed improving the effectiveness of existing youth participation mechanisms and developing new ones. It stated among its outcomes that these new mechanisms could include a "Youth Assessment" of legislation, accompanied by an impact assessment and a consultation mechanism involving youth

² European Parliament, Directorate-General for Communication, European Parliament youth survey – Report, European Parliament, 2021, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6ea3a3ab-27e3-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1>

representatives.

Mainstreaming youth in policies as an extension of the Strategy's objective "inclusive societies" is indeed the goal that has been worked on in the European Youth Conference and one of the four key objectives of the European Year of Youth 2022. However, we still need this to be translated into something that will have a real impact on European legislation.

It is true that we cannot fall into simplifications either. The urgent need to harmonise the EU's political direction and its legislation with the sensitivity and specific problems of young people clashes with the mistrust they already have, which leads them not to make use of existing participatory tools such as the "Have your say" portal.

These are all reasonable doubts that arise whenever innovative democratic measures that strengthen the representativeness of vulnerable groups are considered, despite the fact that many of these young people are not organised and do not feel represented. The debate is open, but it cannot prevent us from acting in the face of a much greater danger, which is the erosion of young people's commitment to the social contract that shaped the EU.

So I am pleased to launch with you this very interesting debate to try to shed light on how to involve our youth right at the heart of EU politics, respecting our treaties, but acting against the estrangement of our young people and the gap that exists right now between their demands, their problems and our solutions".

5.2.- INSPIRATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

5.2.1.- Sophia Eriksson, Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+ of the Commission

The Director of the Commission believes that we are at an important and relevant moment to have the conversation that this session opens. In addition to the upcoming European elections, where we hope young people will take part in big numbers, we are in an important evaluation phase: there are three interim and mid-term evaluations in progress: (1) of the EU Youth Strategy, (2) of the Erasmus+ Programmes and (3) of the European Solidarity Corps. It is a good time to "think ahead" and start talking about "how do we see the future", and "how these policy tools and programmes can support in an efficient way", she argued.

The 2022 European Year of Youth "was a great push forward for more youth mainstreaming", said Ms Eriksson. The idea of youth mainstreaming is not new, but we now need to build on the momentum that the Year created and see how we can make mainstreaming more effective and relevant for all policy areas where young people have a stake. Before designing what we need to do concretely, there is a need however for evidence gathering. We also need a clearer and common definition of what youth mainstreaming is. It can build on existing practices in some Member States. Therefore, the DG Youth meeting is a good occasion to discuss this common understanding and examine examples of how it is working in countries



that have such measures. It is important that youth mainstreaming takes place both at EU and national levels.

According to Ms Eriksson, the discussion needs to set a framework and "from the Commission side we can illustrate our instruments standing on two 'legs'":

- 1) Deepen the youth policies and initiatives we already have for this purpose, such as the EU Youth Dialogue instrument. We can try to optimise our youth policy consultative mechanisms and the timing for this is excellent – we are now just at the point of assessing their effectiveness under the EU Youth Strategy interim evaluation. There are mechanisms that are not being fully used reflecting the demands of youth. To this end, the outcomes and issues addressed at the EU Youth Conference and DG Youth meeting are key because "are we consulting youth in the most inclusive way?" and "what is the follow-up given?", the DG asked.
- 2) A second 'leg', goes beyond the youth policy setting, and which involves different 'Better Regulation' tools, usually present both at EU and Member State level in different ways. These represent general working methods of the Commission or a Member State, therefore going far beyond the youth policy sphere and into general affairs of an administration.

In this debate we are opening today, we should try to calibrate these two 'legs' and structure our discussions accordingly, said Eriksson.

The Commission has established an internal Commission Youth Network, animated by the EU Youth Coordinator. This network has had some positive outcomes like the new comprehensive strategy of mental health; "the network was mobilised and is the result is a whole chapter for youth", she says. The Commission will table in December a Communication on the 2022 European Year of Youth. Later on the mid-term evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy will be published. We are at a crucial moment to discuss the lessons learnt of our youth policy instruments and take stock of the legacy of the European Year of Youth. I am very much looking forward to this debate, concluded the Director.

5.2.2.- Ollín Pérez-Raynaud, OECD (minutes and summary of her slides):

Youth mainstreaming is an approach to policy-making that systematically takes into account young people's needs and concerns. It helps governments make better decisions to achieve more inclusive outcomes for young people, including as they relate to lawmaking, policymaking and public spending. A commitment to youth mainstreaming is one of the most effective ways that governments can support to promote intergenerational justice.

Young people have been strongly affected by major crises over the past decades, including the 2007-2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Although governments responded

by increasing support for young people, long-term risks remain, including the widening of generational inequalities and negative impacts on young people's trust in government, satisfaction with democracy and social cohesion. Indeed, OECD findings show, for instance, that only 37% of people aged 18 to 29 across the OECD (on average) report trusting their government, compared to 46% for those aged 50 and above (2022). It is also young people who are less satisfied with the EU's administrative services, she points out.

Governments across the OECD have put in place measures to mainstream the diverse perspectives of young people in policymaking to deliver more inclusive and responsive policy outcomes. Understood as the systematic consideration of young people's needs in all relevant public policy and service areas, governments can promote youth mainstreaming through a variety of approaches and governance tools. These include the establishment of (national and subnational) integrated youth strategies, inter-institutional and multi-level coordination mechanisms, collection and use of age-disaggregated evidence across all relevant areas, and by embedding opportunities for meaningful youth participation throughout the policy cycle. OECD evidence as well as the OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People³ further points to the potential of public management tools to mainstream young people's views and needs in government action, including through regulatory impact assessments (RIA) anticipating the impact of new legislation on young people or so-called "youth checks / tests". "You need not only political commitment but also sufficient resources for youth check strategies to have traction and impact," says Ollin.

Three OECD countries and a number of regions including Flanders in Belgium have established ex-ante youth checks whereas eight OECD countries look at youth outcomes through their standard RIA procedures⁴. The OECD has conducted a preliminary analysis of existing practices and has facilitated peer-to-peer exchanges among the youth policy and better regulation communities to share good practices and lessons learned.⁵ This analysis shows that wide variance exists on methodological approaches regarding the set-up of existing youth checks at national level across countries. Further, adopting a whole-of-government approach and embedding youth checks throughout the regulatory policy cycle enables monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure policies can deliver for young people.

Addressing common challenges: OECD Recommendation of the Council on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People

³OECD resource: <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0474>

⁴ OECD (2020), *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?* <https://doi.org/10.1787/c3e5cb8a-en>.

⁵ OECD organised the session on Mainstreaming on 5 September with 11 OECD countries and the Commission.



RECOMMENDS that Adherents reinforce administrative and technical capacities to deliver youth-responsive services and address age-based inequalities through close collaboration across all levels of government. To this effect, Adherents should:

- 1) Improve the collection, use and sharing of data and evidence disaggregated by age, sex and all other relevant characteristics to track inequalities among young people from diverse backgrounds and across age groups, and inform decision-making.
- 2) Promote an integrated approach to youth policy making, service delivery and youth-responsive policy outcomes across all relevant sectors.
- 3) Embed an intergenerational perspective into rule making, public budgeting, public procurement, infrastructure decision-making and delivery taking the long term ecological, economic and social dimensions of policies into account to ensure inclusive policy outcomes across age groups and avoid compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The way forward

The OECD invites member countries to submit good practices to inform the OECD Youth Policy toolkit by 1 November 2023.

The OECD also stands ready to support countries in the areas of:

- Comparative data collection and identification of good practices (“what works and what does not”).
- Comparative analysis of strengths and gaps in governance arrangements for mainstreaming youth policy across all relevant sectors.
- Practical implementation support.

5.2.3.- Nicoletta Merlo, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC):

Political participation is the basis of every functioning democracy. Young people have the right to participate in the framing of youth policies and, more generally, of all policies because even policies not directly targeting young people or not considered to be part of the traditional youth policy field can still have a strong impact on young people's lives and perspectives. Therefore, it is crucial to empower them to affect their future.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) appreciates the continuous improvements to the EU Youth Dialogue and considers that it is fundamental to strengthen it and involve bodies representing young people meaningfully throughout the policymaking process, from policy definition to implementation, evaluation, and follow-up, taking an intersectional approach.

Youth mainstreaming and empowerment must be the long-lasting legacy of the European Year of Youth, and tools like the "Youth Test" or the "Youth Check" are certainly essential to achieve this goal and to assess the generational impact of public policies.

At national level, we consider it necessary that all Member States' laws, legally binding acts, policies, strategies, programmes, measures, and public investments be subject to a Youth Test consultation, impact assessment, policy design and proposals for mitigation measures. Several countries are already taking steps in this direction at national but also regional level, such as the city of Parma, in the Italian region of Emilia Romagna, where the Youth Test has recently started to be used⁶.

At EU level, and in relation to the ongoing and future EU Youth agenda, EESC believes that it should draw upon the main challenges, issues and obstacles young Europeans are facing, and it should also determine how the EU can help young people to overcome them and empower the generational measures (the ones directly designed to mitigate the actual intergenerational unfairness and foster the intergenerational justice) and label the potentially generational measures (those that, although dealing with cross-sectoral issues, have a positive impact on youth by potentially affecting mainly young beneficiaries and reducing the generational divide).

For some years now, the EESC is trying to do its part with regard to youth involvement and empowerment: we've been working on how to better integrate the voice of young people in our work and in the EU decision-making process in a structured and meaningful way and our President integrated youth engagement into his manifesto, making it a priority for the current mid-term (2023-2025) and making the EESC the first EU institution committed to implement the EU Youth Test⁷.

⁶ <https://www.comune.parma.it/it/novita/notizie/youth-check>

⁷ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/towards-structured-youth-engagement-climate-and-sustainability-eu-decision-making-process-own-initiative-opinion>



Young people have the right to participate in decisions and policy makers have the obligation to empower them so that they have the possibility to design their future, Merlo points out. Not only in the consultation part, but in all phases by means of public consultations, youth representative advisors with the capacity and legitimacy to participate in political meetings and with direct listening channels, Merlo concludes.

In concrete, we agreed to establish an ad hoc group on youth engagement at the EESC (EESC Youth Group), which will aim to:

- Develop a methodology for the implementation of the EU Youth Test in the EESC's work (opinions, missions, events, sub-groups, etc.).
- Develop the proposal for a permanent participatory mechanism within the EESC to ensure that young people have the possibility to contribute to the work of the Committee and that there is space for dialogue between EESC members and external youth organisations.
- Strengthen the cooperation with external organisations, namely the other EU institutions, national youth councils and youth organisations from EU Member States and from candidate countries, e.g. offering the possibility to organise events in the EESC premises through the existing partnership programme.

In parallel to the development of the methodology, in order to learn from the practice and as preparatory steps towards the wider implementation of the EU Youth Test in the opinion-making process, we decided to:

- select pilot opinions to open for direct consultation, where young people will be directly involved by proposing youth representatives as advisors and by inviting youth representatives to participate in our study group meetings;
- map youth organisations active on the topic of the opinion as a basis for a wider mapping of youth organisations active in the different fields;
- have a meeting with the youth organisations before the end of the year to have a better understanding of their priorities and capacities.

5.3.- ROUND OF INTERVENTIONS

1º Nicholas Kujala. Board Member European Youth Forum (EYF) (reacting to the inspirational communications):

The Youth Test was a suggestion that came out from the EU Youth Dialogue. Young people represent 25% of the European population but have virtually no presence in public consultations, even though they will inherit its consequences. Young people have many interests but they do not express them in the public policy-making process.

The Youth Test as an impact assessment tool to ensure that young people are considered during the policy making process within the EU. EU Youth Test was conceived to assess the impact that any new proposal may have on young people in the EU and to determine the necessary mitigating measures to avoid any negative impact, he argues.

The Youth Forum proposal is based on three pillars:

- Impact assesment by every comisi3n DG.
- Consultation with Youth experts.
- Mitigation measures to address the adversities faced by youth groups.

Nicholas believes that the Youth Test should address every policy including those that are not traditionally seen as youth policies. He advocated that the Council Conclusions should include the Youth Test proposal and its three pillars and thanked the Presidency for including it in the initial draft.

2º Jana Borkamp. Director General for Youth. Germany

"There are many challenges that hit young people today", the DG points out, such as the climate crisis, covid and its consequences, inflation, social inequalities. Therefore, today's political decisions have a big impact on young people's future.

In her speech she wants to contribute to the debate with Germany's experience in youth mainstreaming. Germany has had the Youth Check instrument since 2017. They have already examined well over 800 legislative proposals for youth-relevant issues and published more than 170 youth-checks. "We have an external scientific body, the Competence Centre of Youth-Check making the youth assessments for all the policies and therefore gives a neutral scientific position", says the DG. In Germany, young people are understood as those between 12 and 27 years of age.

The DG says it believes that the Spanish Presidency's proposal in the Council "just comes in the right time".

3º Thibaut de Saint Pol. Youth Director. France

In France, the Youth Impact Assessment its part of the general impact assesment regulatory procedure based on a law of 2009 completed in 2016. Therefore, for several years "it is Mandatory in France to take into account the situation and impact of young people through legislative tests prepared by the government" says the DG. These measures have received "Strongly support of youth french organisations". Their model is inspired by the Canadian model.

The age range for these measures in France is 16 to 28 years.

Implementation of youth impacts assessment in France has a Triple objective.

- 1) Taking into account the situation of youth in the drafts of the regulatory texts.
- 2) Analysing the impact of laws on youth, with a special focus on access to rights and services for young people.
- 3) Integrating a prospective dimension.

France has consultative structures that guide youth policies and specific youth commissions that report directly to the Prime Minister. The Youth impact assesment nowadays is only for government bills. Its intention is to extend the impact assessment. It says that this conversation and the one taking place in the Council is the "legacy European Year of Youth 2022" and that the youth test will make it possible to take on board the demands of young people to include their perspective in the EU policy.

4º Bernadett Humer. Youth Director. Austria

Youth test is a mechanism to talk about young people in the EU, "a necessary step", although we need to accompany this process in the EU with national participation mechanisms. The DG says that the Youth and Child impact assessment in Austria has been in place since 2013. "Its mandatory for all new bills and regulation", says the DG. Every minister in Austria always have to ask her/him the question: "what impact will this proposal have on young people?"

To ensure the quality of the implementation we have a standard procedure an Austria is welcome to replicate a "similar procedure" at EU level.

5º Bart Temmerman. Secretary General. Belgium

SG says he is aligned with colleagues from France, Germany and Austria. EU Test or Check is important "in order to check the impact of any further legislation on child and youth within the EU". They "actually ask for it this morning in the EUYC", SG states. Impact assesment is key because we are talking about 25% of the European citizens. Although it is of course "up

to the member states” to decide whether this is possible. In the particular case of Belgium, the Flemish part has an ex ante procedure, a public management tool, the German part is considering implementing it, and the French part is not yet at that point.

The SG ended his intervention by saying that this debate should be brought down to earth and it should be specified how the Youth Test would be carried out in practice in the EU.

6º Jolanta Sakalauskiene. Youth Director. Lithuania

The DG wants to highlight that in Lithuania there is a good system to hear the youth voice through the National Youth Council with 8 governmental institutions and 8 NGOs and the task of the Council is “to deal with fundamental youth policies problems” and to report the findings to the ministry. The DG says that in Lithuania there are 60 municipalities and in each municipality there is a Local Youth Council which are good instruments to use to youth issues because of their proximity to local realities.

One problem with the possible EU Youth Test we have in Lithuania in the field of youth “is how to deal with horizontal problems”.

7º Tina Kosi. Youth Director. Slovenia

They are now actively collaborating with the National Youth Councils to involve them in decision-making processes. “We must double our effort to encourage their active participation in shaping their own future”, says the DG. Youth Test and Youth Check would promote a meaningful engagement with our young people.

We support the statements made by Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, etc.

8º Henni Axelin. Youth Director. Finland

“What is the Youth Test?”, she wonders. The Director says she is not sure what we are talking about when we talk about the Youth Test. “We should discuss it and see which model we adopt” among those proposed: do we adopt the Youth Forum, the German one, which one do we want?”, she asks.

It is necessary to start from analysis of concrete examples. She gave the example of Finland; they do not have a Youth Test, but we have a “new youth national programme which includes mainstreaming in all policies and there are already 7000 young people participating in the process”, we have tools but they are not mandatory, she concludes.

9^o Miriam Teuma. Youth Director. Malta

The DG of Malta recognises that we are in a debate that is a legacy of the European Year of Youth. Young people are not satisfied with just being consulted. She wants to understand what ideas are behind the Youth Test and what each country understands when they apply it within their borders.

There is one question we have not yet asked: does this have a real benefit for young people? "Sometimes Young people ask for things they dont really need", she states, what results does this measure deliver? "What happens when the Youth Test is implemented and there is no benefit for young people?" she concludes.

10^o Peter Papsó. Youth Director. Slovakia

"Everything who has an impact on young people has to be consulted with youth organisations in Slovakia", DG says. In Slovakia they attach a lot of importance to associations, they support more than 70 youth organisations and allocate a significant amount of money for youth participation in them. There are interdepartmental working groups for youth policies since this year in the ministries all made up of members of youth associations that deal with the demands of youth with a cross-cutting and committed perspective, DG says.

11^o Zeljka Josic. State Secretary. Croatia

The State Secretary of Croatia considers it relevant that we have further discussions on the EU Youth Test. It is important to have in-depth discussions on this measure in order to set the first conditions. The Secretary of State believes it is important that the new mechanism does not make things more complicated for decision-makers.

She advocates sharing relevant information and good practices between countries on this issue.

12^o Maria Christodoulou. Youth Policy Officer. Cyprus

As a representative of Cyprus, she said that his country is open to listen to all the opinions. She believes it is necessary to cooperate with other nations in order to work in a coordinated way in the EU. "We don't have an opinion yet", she concludes.

13º Raoul Wirion. Youth Director. Luxembourg

Youth mainstreaming as a principle started in Luxembourg in 2008, although the current tools are not equivalent to the Youth Test. They are now looking at improving the existing mechanisms for youth participation.

He believes that the Youth Test is interesting because it pays attention to the issues affecting young people in all new legislation and also allows for the inclusion in the impact analysis of those areas that are not traditionally considered as youth policies, he argues.

However, he believes that the discussion needs to be translated into practice so that the Youth Test is effective and beneficial and does not become an obstacle to legislative processes or a measure that is difficult to implement.

The DG also believes that this mechanism have to operate as “an expert level”. It is essential for experts to have up-to-date and accurate knowledge to analyse the measure and the impact it is having where it is being implemented, in order to have evidence of the possibilities of the Youth Test.

14º Orla Corrigan. Youth Director. Ireland

We don't have a formal Youth Test in Ireland, but we are looking at ways of implementing some kind of participation instrument "beyond public consultations", she argues.

The DG is very glad about the possibility of opening up this door in the EU. However, she believes it is essential to bear in mind in the debate that most people are not committed to participation and most young people in the EU do not have the profile of “those involved in the EU Youth Dialogue: that its certainly a challenge”, she concludes.

15º Katrine Winther. Youth Policy Officer. Denmark

“I would like to eco some of the points already made, especially by Finland”, she starts. “We don't have this instrument in Denmark,” she says. “We have a lot of questions about the Youth Test and few things are clear; we don't know what its specificities are and how it would be set up technically,” says Katrine.

They believe it is important to open the debate in depth to find out if it can really make a difference compared to the current situation and if it is the best way to solve the problems of youth.



16º Anders Lindholm. Youth Director. Sweden

Sweden aligns itself with its Nordic colleagues as they share a similar approach. The DG says that more information is needed and although in principle it does not seem like a bad idea, he believes that a thorough debate needs to be opened at EU level in order to specify the details of the measure because they do not see that it can be implemented in a simple way without involving a lot of red tape. "We need a debate at the European level," he says, to "talk together about how the technical aspects of it would be articulated".

In Sweden, he says they have other ways of ensuring that policies have a positive impact on youth, but they do not have instruments comparable to the Youth test.

17º Ana Sofia Pimenta. Youth Director. Portugal

She thanked Spain for bringing this point to the European Presidency. The DG says that "there are several mechanisms implemented in Portugal to know the opinion of youth on the legislative drafts at national, regional and local levels" and especially through the Youth Advisory Councils and the Youth Municipal Councils.

Youth Test is an added value in mainstreaming and decision-making processes. They are open to study it but also consider that above all "we need a technical discussion at EU level in the Youth Working Party", she concludes.

18º Randa Kenge. Youth Director. Latvia

In Latvia there is no specific procedure similar to the Youth Test to bring youth into decision-making processes but "all state administrative institutions when they implemented youth policies should evaluate their impact", she says; which is "13 to 25 years in Latvia". However, there are not specific and standardized procedures or even monitoring tools.

They want to create a commitment to youth and are starting negotiations on how to do it without creating burdensome bureaucracy. They are very interested in the debate and welcome explanations from the other countries.

19º Magda Witan. Youth Director. Poland

They do public consultations at many levels, but they do not have an instrument similar to the Youth Test. They have public consultations and dialogues between authorities and young people but in the end decisions are taken by the authorities.

On the EU Youth Test, he asked about the cost of the measure at EU level and whether it will really have an impact on policies affecting young people. They believe that the issue is very important but they still have many questions.

For Poland it is very important "to make it clear that the Youth Test is a European instrument and not a national one".

20º Diana Aleksandrova. Youth Director. Bulgaria

There is no such thing as a Youth Test in Bulgaria. They are open to discussion. The first thing is to come to a "common understanding about the Youth Test", says the DG.

21º Zsófia Nagy-Vargha. Deputy State Secretary. Hungary

The State Secretary thanks the Chair for bringing this topic up for discussion. She wonders about the possibility of collecting information about the experiences of the countries with their national Youth Tests.

He believes it is essential to carry out an in-depth analysis of the measure and its potential impact.

22º Sophia Eriksson. Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+

The Director emphasised the quality of exchanges and useful input. She noted that most interventions focused on the second 'leg' of youth mainstreaming, and quite limited reflection on the youth policy 'leg'.

The Director considered that the discussion showed that we are at a very early stage of the reflection on a way forward and that we need to determine clearly what is the common objective, as delegations show a mixed picture of willingness to go further and what concretely they are ready to engage in. We have heard everything from needs to do more to fear of adding administrative burden.

She proposed to look into upcoming work by the Youth Wiki network, constituted of national correspondents. It could help in systematising the evidence. The work of the OECD with its toolkit also looks promising in this evidence building phase. The Director said we could clearly see from the round of discussion that more work on what is needed and how to make



it happen is needed. She also emphasised that this must be a collective effort, so to involve youth mainstreaming both at EU and national levels.

The Director recalls that in the Commission we have a solid system for ‘Better Regulation’, which systematically analyses the impact of legislation in all its aspects (including on youth) and work on mitigating measures where needed. She invited Member States to analyse this system and clarify what exactly they see as to be improved.

Finally, she thanked the Spanish Presidency, all other Member States, the European Youth Forum and other delegates at the meeting for a very good discussion, and that based on it we can conclude we are moving in the right direction. This echoes well with the European Year of Youth legacy of youth mainstreaming: “the momentum is there”, she concluded.

6.- SESSION II: EUYS and EU Youth Programmes: fostering synergies to support common goals, in the context of interim evaluations

6.1.- OPENING

Mr. David Lafuente introduced the meeting and thanked the Commission (COM), State Secretaries, Directors-General (DG) and Ministerial Representatives for their presence in Alicante.

The first session started with a statement by the Spanish Director General, **Mr. David Veloso**:

Dear EU Youth Delegations, Commission and guests of honour. In this second meeting we will discuss the EU Youth Strategy and the European Programmes in the context of mid-term evaluations we are currently in. As you know, the evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy will be presented at the end of this year 2023 and the evaluation of the Erasmus+ and ESC Programmes is scheduled for 2024. We will try to make this Session useful to feed with the evidence of your work both evaluations.

The coordinated work of the EU Youth Directors, the civil society and the Commission is fundamental to enhance the conditions of young people, to involve them in the European institutions and to promote their rights. As we already said in the previous session, recognising the rights of European youth is a political obligation of our States, but it is also a strategic issue for the EU, since it is our young people who will work, tax and defend the institutions that shape the Union. But they must know what rights and benefits they have as EU citizens in order to be able to defend them.

However, according to Eurobarometer 2021 data⁸, more than half of young people say they know little or nothing about the EU and only one third feel identified with it or are satisfied with the EU as it works today, which should make us reflect on how to strengthen their engagement.

The EU Youth Strategy focuses on three key areas: engaging, connecting and empowering; and is characterized by a coordinated and cross-sectoral implementation to engage young people and make them aware of the instruments available to them as European citizens.

The coordinated implementation of the Strategy together with the initiatives created previously (to which the Strategy gives a framework for action) is fundamental. The EU's main instruments for ensuring social cohesion and achieving the objectives set out in the EU Youth Strategy are the European Mobility Programmes, in particular the ESC and Erasmus+. At the core of these programmes is enshrining EU values such as solidarity and social inclusion and realising a sense of belonging to the EU. It is the best instrument at the disposal of the Youth

⁸European Parliament, Directorate-General for Communication, European Parliament youth survey – Report, European Parliament, 2021, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6ea3a3ab-27e3-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1>

Strategy to demonstrate in practice the implementation of the 11 goals and the usefulness and commitment of the EU to improve the living conditions of youth.

Among the most valuable learnings from the last meeting of National Agency Directors in Sweden is, and I quote, that "the development of competences and values of young people, through non-formal learning activities, is an essential contribution of the programmes. However, it was stated that the current programmes have a more important focus on individual benefits rather than structural changes, which differs from the approach and objectives of the EU Youth Strategy and of the previous programmes". Another interesting outcome to assess is that exchanges of young workers should be accompanied by a commitment to local engagement of the beneficiaries together with measures to evaluate it, as well as promoting programmes related to the concerns that most interest young people, such as environmentalism or social inclusion. It also seems to have been demonstrated that the most useful way to generate such engagement is through the ESC's long-term volunteering and solidarity projects.

Furthermore, while efforts have been made to ensure that the most disadvantaged young people are targeted, it is important to adapt outreach strategies and provide specialised support mechanisms to overcome specific barriers, as all the principles of the Strategy are based on equality.

So I am pleased to start another very stimulating discussion with you, which I am sure will be extremely useful to improve the ongoing programmes and to strengthen the objectives set by the European Youth Strategy.

6.2.- ROUND OF INTERVENTIONS

1^o Ioannis Malekos, Deputy of the Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+ (COM)

The EU Youth Strategy is "our cooperation framework that fosters youth participation", Mr Malekos stated. The EUYS is an instrument to connect young people and to support social and civil engagement. Its three pillars are: "engage" and the best example is the Youth Dialogue, "connect", which we do through the exchange opportunities of our programmes, "empower", which they reach for example with the funds we allocate to create real change in their communities.

Mr Malekos said that the Commission "welcomes the engagement of the member states to make the most of the instruments that support European youth and also welcomed the successful launch of the 10th Cycle of EUY Dialogue in the Conference that have just finished".

Youth is now a very important issue for the national policies of the member states and the Commission will "continue to support and compliment the actions of the member states.

Mainly through":

- EU Youth Dialogue.
- EU Youth Strategy Platform.
- EU Youth Portal.
- Eu Youth coordinator.
- Peer-learning activities.
- Youth research, youth Indicators, surveys, studies, Youth Wiki, etc.
- International cooperation with youth organisations and in particular with the Council of Europe.

He pointed out that since the Strategy was adopted there have been many challenges that have affected young people: the covid pandemic, the Russian war in Ukraine, the climate crisis, inflation, etc. All of these have had an impact on our performance but also our tools “have shown certain flexibility” to cope with these changes. However, we will nevertheless try to identify “those areas where a new approach is needed”.

COM will continue the legacy of the European Year of Youth building on the "momentum" created during the Year and will seek to maintain it. The evaluations and communications that are underway will contribute to this end:

- The implementation report of the Year of Youth that comes together with a communication on the legacy of the Year.
- Interim evaluation EU Youth Strategy.
- Mid-term evaluation of the E+ and ESC programmes.

The timing of these coincides with the start of the discussion for the new programmes under the next MFF. It is a unique opportunity to coordinate the response on how the strategy impacts on the programmes. Regarding inclusion, we will try to reduce the technical complexities for applying to the calls in the programmes to enable truly everybody to benefit. We will make the best effort together to enhance our tools that they serve better youth and the youth sector.

2º David Lafuente, Deputy-Director General, Spanish Presidency

"In line with what was discussed at the Conference, inclusion is an umbrella framework for the Strategy", Lafuente states.

The Erasmus + programmes are an example of integration and inclusion because they do not involve the model example of a young person, you don't have to have a degree to be a

beneficiary of one of the programmes and they are sufficiently financed financially so that young people from low social backgrounds can have access to them.

In Spain we have recently learned that there have been 40% more applications for the programmes, which speaks of its success.

3º Miriam Teuma. Youth Director. Malta

She hopes that the results of the evaluations will be positive and enlightening because "we have put a lot of effort and hard work into the smooth running of these programmes", says the Director.

The Director asks "how can we start using Erasmus+ to strengthen national structures, how can we create more sustainable and stronger structures in support of youth at national level," she asks.

Finally, she says that we should not think in terms of sporadic projects, but focus on those with a long term vision.

4º Anders Lindholm. Youth Director. Sweden

He said that in such a short space of time it is not easy to summarise what we have done. These meetings are very important and we need more of them, perhaps also in other formats that enable greater frequency.

It is not easy to measure the impact of the Strategy, because there is no clear tool, there is no "governance structure" in the Strategy itself to evaluate its achievements and failures. Maybe its the time to think about a kind of a coherence implementation to answer the question on its optimization to our Ministers.

3º Jana Borkamp. Youth Director. Germany

The reality has changed a lot in the last years and it has changed "faster than the evolution of the programmes", the DGs says. A gap is opening up with democratic values and this is undoubtedly a problem that the younger generations in particular are going to suffer from it."There are many individual measures but we have not yet succeeded in filling the narrative of social cohesion on a large scale", the DG states.

This is an important moment to know the scope and the correctness of the framework of action of the Strategy, which must take into account this changing context.

4^o Jolanta Sakalauskiene. Youth Director. Lithuania

We have many strategies in the EU, but what really matters is the impact of them. We are now at the moment of evaluating ours and this should be done jointly between the Member States and the Commission. She also believes that it is important to make an effort to link youth goals with national goals.

5^o Diana Aleksandrova. Youth Director. Bulgaria

She says that for Bulgaria the EU Youth Strategy is very important and they are very attentive to the results of the midterm evaluations.

6^o Ioannis Malekos. Deputy of the Director for Youth, Education and Erasmus+ (COM)

Mr Malekos stated that, as the Conference has shown, inclusion must be at the centre because it is fundamental for social cohesion. Moreover, its promotion must be also done at the political level. The programme of volunteering, the ESC, a programme which has inclusion at its core, needs to be reinforced financially to be able to have a more important impact on inclusion and social cohesion. Youth could benefit from more investment.

The Member States have an important role to play in the reinforcement of both the E+ and the ESC programmes. A good investment in the youth programmes is necessary in order to help more our youth.

7^o Thibaut de Saint Pol. Youth Director. France

The DG says that the EU Strategy is “an important framework for collaboration”. There are, however, things we have to take care of, such as the “lack of visibility of the EU Youth Dialogue”, the DG states.

In order to overcome the deficits in the communication of the Dialogue and the European solidarity programmes, it is very important that the Member States work together with the Commission. Coordinated cooperation to improve communication is important.

A toolkit can be promoted with the support of the Member States to improve this gap. It cannot happen that the lack of a good communication plan prevents stakeholders from accessing the programmes, the Dialogue or the benefits of the EU Youth Strategy.

Continuing with this, the DG says that the results obtained in the mid-term evaluations must also be “widely disseminated” and furthermore proposes to formalise an “exchange of good practices in the implementation of the programmes at national, regional and local level”, the



DG states.

Finally the Erasmus + and ESC play a leading role in the implementation of the EUYC. They should therefore seriously take into consideration the Youth Goals and also the outcomes of the Dialogue.

8º Bart Temmerman. Secretary General. Belgium

The Secretary of State thanked the Spanish Presidency for having focused its programme on European values, both democratic (Youth Test) and social (Strategy and Programmes; and the Conclusions on Youth and Mental Health). The DGs shares with the Presidency a committed and comprehensive approach to youth policies. We must respond to the needs and demands of children and young people.

A regular updates are desirable to realese what we have done and, from there, how to achieve a better alliance with the EUYC. The 11 European Youth Goals should be more explicitly reflected in our programmes and in the programme guides, argues the Secretary General.

It is important to know the current possibilities of the youth mobility framework and from there to make better approaches to the needs that exist. This knowledge should be summarised in the guides in order to take advantage of all the existing instruments.

Participation and inclusion are very important legs but going to the concrete, there is a well-known concern of young people towards climate change issues and somehow we have to take care of that in and through Youth work. The Secretary General concludes by saying that to achieve all these goals sufficient funding is needed.

9º Zsófia Nagy-Vargha. Deputy State Secretary. Hungary

The State Secretary says that the Strategy and Programmes promote the participation of young people in EU affairs but this is not working because the last Eurobarometer on Youth and Democracy has made it clear that less and less young people trust the EU.

The programmes encourage the participation and involvement of young people and should take into account their different realities, for example in Hungary many of them live in villages and in countryside and have different needs than young people in the city the conditions for people living in rural areas need to be improved at EU and national level.

Society is a whole and young people are not feeling it. “We should focus on involving them”, the DG states. In Hungary there is interest in the debate on youth engaging. They are also concerned in Hungary about the mental health problems and “we want to share some views with the Member States”, the DG says.



10^o Maria Christodoulou. Youth Policy Officer. Cyprus

"We do a lot, but we need to invest more and be clearer about what we want and where we want to go" says the officer. Youth need more feedback from us and more conversation and progress so that we don't feel that we are in an endless wheel that does not concretise direct actions and policies for our youth.

11^o Daniel Hajek. Youth Policy Officer. Czech Republic

The representative of Czech Republic says that we should make an effort to share good practices between Member States. It could also be a good idea to collaborate by identifying weaknesses through expert groups to adapt priorities and put emphasis on strengthening youth skills in order to work towards inclusiveness and solidarity.

Danie Hajek considers key to incorporate case studies for evaluations with concrete examples of good practices or programmes, or successful projects from the MMEEs.

Hajek also believes it is important to pursue a more direct alignment between the Strategy and the Programmes, because it is in the Programmes that the objectives of the Strategy can be most directly achieved. He also believes that emphasis should be placed on those that have to do with mental health and climate change.

12^o Michele Sciscioli. Youth Director. Italy

The Italian DG says that this is "too many words, we need more action", he declares. He talks about the importance of young people in civil services. He says that bilateral cooperation talks have started in Italy with France about "engaging, connecting and empowering youth". In Italy they have consulted young people and got back to them that they want more environmental and digital civil services.

The DG defends cooperation between states: "we have similar realities and problems to those of France and Spain, so we should work on exchanging public policies and results". We are very focused on mid-term evaluation, but I am not sure that this is useful because there is no concrete approach to where we want to go, we need diagnosis, experience, solutions, alliances. The countries that are close to us have similar contexts and we need concrete actions to give concrete solutions.

13º Sofia Pimenta. Youth Director. Portugal

We need Member States to share their best practices, she states. Youth dialogue is a good example of participation but there is no way to know if the outcomes really have an impact on legislation or on the executive or political direction of the EU. The Commission should also assess the relevance of the youth coordinator: what has he/she done, does it help or not? We should also rethink these meetings and move them to a format that really has the capacity to generate impact and change.

14º Tina Kosi. Youth Director. Slovenia

The Director advocates "building synergies between countries to create a more harmonised and efficient system". She gave the example of Slovenia, which has already carried out an evaluation of its national action plan to improve opportunities in education and active citizenship.

They work towards concrete objectives that are updated year by year and they have realised that a exhaustive evaluation is essential to ensure and maximise the impact of the objectives set.

15º Randa Kenge. Youth Director. Latvia

The DG defends that in addition to everything that has been mentioned, the programmes are very important instruments of cooperation between the Member States and we must work to improve and maintain them.

16º Zeljka Josic. State Secretary. Croatia

EU Youth Strategy needs more flexibility, especially in the face of events such as the recent ones, and we need to make sure that our national plans reflect the objectives of the European Strategy, she argues. The evaluation should put special emphasis on getting more young people involved and improving their rights especially in housing and mental health.

6.3.- BRINGING THE DEBATE DOWN TO EARTH

Mr. Antonio Benaches, Project manager and Senior Trainer at AMICS.

I have come here to talk about how everything you are talking now is translated into reality in a small town in Alicante, called Agres. It is important to 'Think global and act local'. For us the benefit of these programmes is huge and in small communities it is super empowering. In Agres only 500 people live. We as an association operate since 2005 and we have specialized in non-formal education. I come from the Scouts and I am also a Salto trainer.

For example, we are developing a programme of the Discover EU- Inclusion. It is a great opportunity that you gave us. Inclusion is at the heart of this programme because there is an important inequality of opportunities among young people living in isolated areas who suddenly have the chance to travel to Europe and for them it is a real opportunity that actually "change their lives". Without your help and funds the reality for rural youth would be much darker and complicated.

I would like to introduce you to Alex, he is not from the Discover EU programme, he is a European volunteer who has come to our village for a few months.

Mr. Alexander, volunteer.

"When I was at the end of my school I had a lot of doubts about my future. So one day there was a meeting about European programmes in my school and what they told me stayed in my head for a few months: maybe going for a year on a project could be a good experience to get to know myself, to get to know new cultures, and everything we have done during these three weeks has been very interesting. We work with the children in the village, we try to make the village a better place, we do activities with the kids coming out of school, sports, and we are also starting plans to make our own podcast... All in all I am very grateful for what I am doing".

Mr. David Veloso asked 2 questions:

- What more we can do to promote inclusion?,- To Antonio
- Which has been your main motivation to participate in this programme?,- To Alex

Antonio: One of the things that you are currently doing is to include the inclusion in all the sections of the programmes, also in the budgets of course, and to give them prominence. For us, the budget that you have given us is a condition of possibility for us to be able to carry out these programmes, as well as the strengthening of the communication of the programmes that is being promoted by the European institutions.

Alex: Nobody had ever told me about these programmes. When I was doing my last exams last year, one of my ideas was to dedicate myself to something related to technology but I wasn't sure about it and when I came across this programme, I saw an opportunity to channel that uncertainty and lack of knowledge I had about what I wanted to do with my future.

Member States contributions:

FI: How can we bring ERASMUS+ or ESC programmes to young people like Alex?

Antonio says that one of the connections that has the most pull to engage young people is sport. Information about the programmes is disseminated in schools, but information can also be disseminated in sports groups or clubs. "I am sure that disseminating the information with sports entities will be very successful", he says, because young sportsmen and women are usually active people and are likely to participate in these programmes.

COM: What channels can be used to connect with the youth (instagram, tiktok)?

Antonio says that since he was a scout he wondered why there is never a scout doing normal things, not just freaky things? Why don't you think about how to change the image of volunteers through TV series or social networks?

Alex says that at school they never mentioned anything about these projects, they should mention them more in schools especially for people like me who don't know what to do with their future. This is an idea that can serve as a basis for campaigns: "if you don't know what to do with your future and you want to spend an enriching time meeting people and new countries, this is a good opportunity for you".

CY: "We are very interested in rural areas". She asks how to make the local people more active, how to make the programmes also a value for the people.

Antonio says that one thing happens in Agres that generally happens in rural areas: at the age of 18 all the young people leave the village. Our association is focussing on the 13 to 17 age group in order to focus our actions on them and to get them involved in the opportunities that the village has. Also, kids in general don't have high school in small towns, so if you work with that age group you end up linking them with a large group of young people from different towns who all go to high school in the biggest town, but who come from different areas. This network is very powerful because for example on the solidarity projects that we have, one of them in one village started to create a magazine and this was replicated in two others because of the connections of the kids, etc. Another group now wants to do a podcast, another one a dance group, it's a bit of a snowball effect that starts from an active group and spreads its actions and its power, strengthened by the work we do to connect and finance their ideas.



MT: Antonio is the perfect example of how to generate valid and lasting structures with qualified people rooted in the territory.

COM:

- **Ms. Marta Touykova:** the report on the interim evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the communication on the Legacy of the Year of Youth will take stock of the achievements and to explore how to further support young people and the youth sector . It will also include proposals for engaging the stakeholders, national Youth councils, etc. building on the co-creative approach for the design and implementation of the EYY. She thanked the project coordinator and volunteer and asked for their ideas how to improve outreach and awareness on EU opportunities of youth, encouraging them to share their experience.
- **Mr. Ioannis Malekos:** He thanked the volunteers for their previous insides. This is valuable information that is not easily accessible and we appreciate highly what you presented today. He underlined that presenting to the general public and our youth the stories and successes from our projects remains a big challenge. Both on social media and on more traditional media, like the television, our effort is to bring these opportunities to young people and pass the message the “volunteering is cool” and that volunteers are role models to immitate. He thanked the volunteers once more and remarked tha we need more of these stories.

Spanish Presidency, Mr. David Lafuente:

“It is true that we need the involvement of stakeholders. For example, in Spain we are developing a new website for the programmes and we will share the best practices of the volunteers who will send us a short video to connect realities within the national territory. Also, when we thought of a communication strategy, we always thought of Eurodesk, which works very well in Spain. Another thing to keep in mind is that in Spain most of the associations that apply find the applications on Facebook, but there is a younger segment that doesn't use Facebook anymore, so we are thinking about trying to replicate the success of Facebook on Instagram or tiktok”.



7.- CLOSURE OF THE DIRECTORS-GENERAL YOUTH MEETING

Mr. Bart Temmerman from Belgium briefly presents the outline of its future Presidency and announces the following events:

- European Conference on Youth Work (from the 20th to the 23rd of February).
- EUYC (from the 2nd to the 5th of March).
- DGYM (from the 26th to the 28th of March) (one joint journey with the Directors of Youth Agencies for Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps).

Mr. David Veloso closes the meeting:

“Dear colleagues, after three highly inspiring sessions and with a lot of insights behind us, we bring the Directos General Youth Meeting to its end.

The Spanish Presidency is committed to having a positive impact on EU institutions and decisions, and we believe it is essential to ensure that the ideas put together at the meetings are not lost or remain a dead letter.

In this very important context of mid-term evaluations, we believe it is essential to make available to the Commission the expertise we have generated in order to take advantage of what has been discussed here. The experience of all of you must serve as a basis for the conclusions to be drawn in the mid-term and youth evaluations, since you are the ones who know the needs of young Europeans at first hand and it is from your work that we must start.

Thank you very much for joining us and I hope that the experience has been as satisfying for you as it has been for me”.