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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Draft 2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of
the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (EU Youth Strategy
2010-2018)**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Council Resolution on the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)¹, requires an EU Youth Report to be drawn up at the end of each three-year cycle, with a **dual objective**: namely to **evaluate the progress made towards the overall objectives of the EU Youth Strategy**, and to serve as a basis for **establishing a set of priorities for the coming work cycle**.

This Communication presents a draft EU Youth Report to be agreed upon by the Council. It is accompanied by two Staff Working Documents: one which reviews the situation of young people in the EU and one which analyses actions taken under the strategy.

2. EUROPE 2020 – SUPPORTING YOUTH IN A CONTEXT OF CRISIS

Europe is undergoing a crisis that has hit young Europeans with unprecedented levels of unemployment and the risk of social exclusion and poverty. Europe 2020, the EU strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, sets the framework for a coordinated European response in order to emerge stronger from the crisis and to improve the long-term prosperity of Europe's citizens.

Europe 2020 focuses strongly on young people, with a headline target of reducing early school-leaving and increasing tertiary attainment. Two other headline targets also share a clear youth dimension – to reduce the risk of poverty and to increase the share of the population in employment. Furthermore, the flagship initiative entitled Youth on the Move² promotes youth mobility, while young people are also included in An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs³ and A Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion⁴.

In the second European Semester of economic policy coordination, the European Commission emphasised the need to act towards reducing the unacceptably high rate of youth unemployment. The Annual Growth Survey 2012, which sets out priorities for action at EU and national levels in order to boost growth and jobs, called on Member States to support youth employment. Concrete recommendations included promoting quality apprenticeships and traineeships, as well as entrepreneurial skills. It also called for reforms in employment legislation and in education and training. Expressing concerns that the social tissue of the EU

¹ OJ C 311, 19.12.2009, p. 1-11.

² COM(2010) 477.

³ COM(2010) 682.

⁴ COM(2010) 758.

is being put to the test, the Commission also called on Member States to protect the vulnerable, with regard to social protection, inclusion strategies and access to services ensuring integration in the labour market and society⁵. [Country-specific recommendations](#)⁶ have been adopted according to the particular situations of individual Member States.

Against this backdrop, the European Commission proposed a dedicated Youth Opportunities Initiative (YOI),⁷ which aims to mobilise resources and increase efforts to drive down youth unemployment and make young people more employable. In this context, the Commission urged Member States to make better use of the European Social Fund to support young people. Commission action teams are assisting eight Member States⁸ where youth unemployment rates are above average. Furthermore, the recent ‘Employment Package’⁹ includes a first progress report on the YOI and a consultation on a new quality framework for traineeships.

The Commission is also endeavouring to lift obstacles that EU citizens, including the youth, encounter when invoking their rights as EU citizens, notably their right to free movement within the EU, including for volunteering, study or work.

Efforts to boost the employability, learning mobility and participation of young people are supported through the current Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action programmes, which – from 2014 onwards – will be succeeded by a new EU programme targeting education, training and youth.

3. THE EU YOUTH STRATEGY – INVESTING AND EMPOWERING

In 2009, the Council endorsed a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), based on the Communication ‘EU Youth Strategy: Investing and Empowering’¹⁰. By reinforcing cooperation and sharing good practices, the EU Youth Strategy's two overall objectives are to:

- (i) create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market, and
- (ii) promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people.

⁵ COM(2011) 815.

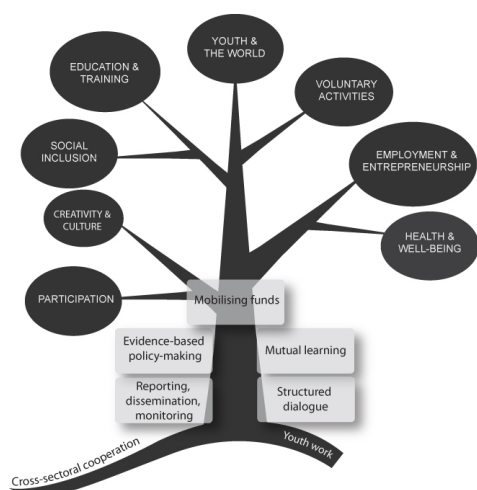
⁶ COM(2012) 299.

⁷ COM(2011) 933.

⁸ Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain.

⁹ COM(2012)173, SWD(2012)98, SWD(2012)99.

¹⁰ The framework hereafter called ‘EU Youth Strategy’.



The EU Youth Strategy is action-based. As illustrated by the tree diagram, it branches out into eight policy areas ('fields of action'): education & training; employment & entrepreneurship; social inclusion; health & well-being; participation; culture & creativity; volunteering and youth & the world.

The strategy is rooted in the following instruments: evidence-based policy-making; mutual learning; regular progress-reporting, dissemination of results and monitoring; structured dialogue with young people and youth organisations and mobilisation of EU programmes and funds. This strategy sees youth work¹¹ as a support to all fields of action and cross-sectoral cooperation as an underlying principle.

4. THE FIRST CYCLE OF THE EU YOUTH STRATEGY (2010-2012)

Nearly all Member States report that the EU Youth Strategy has reinforced existing priorities at national level, with several Member States emphasising its direct impact. Lithuania, for example, mentions the strategy as a guiding document for developing its own National Youth Policy Programme, Austria mentions that the link between youth policy and labour market policies has been strengthened, and dialogue with youth has been further developed in the Flemish Community of Belgium.

The EU Youth Strategy advocates a cross-sectoral approach at all levels in implementing the youth policy framework. Most Member States report having a national youth strategy or a cross-sectoral plan targeting youth. All but two Member States have an inter-ministerial working group on youth or some other institutionalised mechanism. While some National Youth Reports set a good example, such groups often consist of different actors and stakeholders in the 'core' youth policy field, with little or no involvement from other government ministries, thereby limiting their cross-sectoral nature.

Youth work supports many fields of action. A majority of Member States report that they have taken measures to support youth work in line with the Council Resolution on youth

¹¹ Youth work covers a large scope of social, cultural, educational or political activities by, with and for young people. It is about 'out-of-school' education and leisure time activities managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders. It is based on non-formal learning and voluntary participation.

work¹². In July 2010, a European Convention on Youth Work was held under the Belgian Presidency, bringing together policy-makers and youth stakeholders from across Europe resulting in the adoption of a [declaration](#) addressing priorities and actions for youth work in the coming years.

4.1. IMPLEMENTING THE EIGHT FIELDS OF ACTION

In each of its fields of action, the EU Youth Strategy proposes initiatives for the Member States and/or the Commission. Below is an overview of measures taken at EU level and those reported by Member States for the work cycle 2010-2012¹³.

Education & Training

The Commission and Member States are working together to improve education and training through the 'ET2020' framework¹⁴. In this context, the Commission presented a strategy for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems in 2011¹⁵, and is preparing an initiative on 'Rethinking skills', which is due to be launched later in 2012 to support policy development on skills and competences.

The EU Youth Strategy focuses primarily on non-formal learning as a complementary tool, in order to acquire the cross-cutting skills¹⁶ that are much appreciated in the labour market¹⁷. The Commission will propose a draft Council recommendation on the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning in 2012, and is also working on tools to make it easier to record the skills acquired through non-formal learning.

Both the Commission and Member States actively support youth organisations as an important provider of non-formal learning opportunities. Many Member States emphasise the role of youth work in reaching out to early school leavers and helping them to get back into education or work. In this context, they have recently taken action to raise awareness of non-formal learning and to recognise learning outcomes at national level.

Employment & Entrepreneurship

Youth employment was the overall thematic priority of the first Trio Presidency after the entry into force of the EU Youth Strategy. During this period, the Council adopted resolutions on the active inclusion of young people¹⁸ and the role of youth work in promoting employability of young people. The first cycle of Structured Dialogue also focused on youth employment. Young people recommended concrete actions, which fed into a Council Resolution¹⁹ highlighting the need for access to labour market information, non-formal learning, a quality framework for internships, focus on flexicurity and equal access to mobility. The recommendations were taken up in subsequent Commission initiatives, such as

¹² OJ C 327, 4.12.2010, p. 1-5.

¹³ Activities in the Strategy's fields of action are further described in the Staff Working Document accompanying this Communication.

¹⁴ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2-10.

¹⁵ COM(2011) 567.

¹⁶ See also framework on key competences for lifelong learning, OJ L 394 of 30.12.2006.

¹⁷ Eurobarometer survey 'employers' attitudes to skills'.

¹⁸ OJ C 137, 27.5.2010, p. 1-6.

¹⁹ OJ C 164, 2.6.2011, p. 1-4.

the draft recommendation on non-formal and informal learning and in the wider context of YOI.

According to National Youth Reports, several Member States have changed their labour laws or applied tax incentives to improve access to the labour market for young people. These are frequently combined with programmes to allow young people to gain work experience or benefit from counselling.

Entrepreneurship education is being increasingly promoted in most European countries. To date, eight countries have launched specific strategies, while 13 others include it as a part of their national lifelong learning, youth or growth strategies²⁰.

At EU-level, youth entrepreneurship was given a more visible profile during European Youth Week, raising awareness of the value of entrepreneurial skills and of starting a business as a career option. Also, a number of actions are currently being taken to support entrepreneurial learning at all levels of education.

Health & Well-being

At EU level, young people are a particular target group of EU health initiatives put in place to tackle smoking, alcohol related harm, nutrition, obesity and drug-use.

All but two Member States report that they have taken concrete measures to follow up the Council Resolution on the Health and Well-being of Young People²¹. Many Member States mention initiatives that focus on specific issues, such as alcohol, tobacco or healthy nutrition, or emphasise the value of peer-to-peer education in promoting healthy lifestyles.

Social Inclusion

EU initiatives to combat youth unemployment also make important contributions to the social inclusion of young people. A majority of Member States also addressed youth as a specific target group during the European Year of 2010: Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. These initiatives stress the need to fight poverty from an early age in order to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty.

Many Member States confirm the importance of a cross-sectoral approach to social inclusion, linking it with education, employment or health policies, for example. Many of them report on specialised training programmes for youth workers, youth leaders and young people to develop intercultural awareness and combat prejudice. A number of Member States cited examples of youth-targeted support measures related to housing.

Participation

Youth participation has figured prominently on the EU youth policy agenda in recent years. The Council confirmed its dedication to this field by making ‘youth participation in democratic life’ the overall priority of the second Trio Presidency in the youth field (mid 2011-2012), in line with Article 165 TFEU. Structured Dialogue has become an increasingly influential instrument for involving young people in decision-making. All Member States

²⁰ Entrepreneurship Education at School in Europe, European Commission, 2012

²¹ OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p. 1-3.

have set up National Working Groups to organise consultations with young people in their countries and to feed into EU-level debates.

The Commission took steps to strengthen the evidence base on participation through the Eurobarometer on ‘Youth on the Move’²² and a forthcoming study on changing patterns of youth participation. It furthermore initiated two processes that will come to fruition in the next three-year cycle: namely re-developing the European Youth Portal²³ as an interactive platform for online engagement, and a ‘Youth on the Move Card’ which will further enable youth mobility and participation through incentives, information and support services.

Participation is key to youth policy in all Member States and many activities have been carried out, including the development of structures for involving young people in decision-making, with room for more dialogue online.

Voluntary Activities

Member States and the Commission have worked together to implement the Recommendation on the Mobility of Young Volunteers across the EU²⁴ in an expert group. Around half of the Member States report that they have raised awareness about opportunities for mobility of young volunteers further to this recommendation. Alongside the [European Voluntary Service](#), a number of Member States report having bilateral or multi-lateral exchange programmes.

Several Member States report that they have developed national volunteering schemes or have established a new civic service. The European Year of Volunteering (2011) involved young people and youth organisations in emphasising its youth dimension.

Culture & Creativity

Member States and the Commission cooperate closely in this area through a European Agenda for Culture²⁵. The Council emphasised the importance of creativity, culture and the role of young people in a number of its conclusions²⁶. Under the EU Youth Strategy, a [study](#) on youth access to culture in Europe from 2010²⁷ included good practices and proposals to address obstacles such as cost and distance.

Although the Member States acknowledge the links between culture and creativity and youth policy, the National Youth Reports do not report many activities in this ‘field of action’.

Youth & the World

Through the youth partnership with the Council of Europe, the Commission organised and contributed to high-level youth policy symposia in its Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods²⁸. The Council adopted Conclusions on the Eastern Dimension of Youth

²² Youth on the Move – Analytical reports ([Flash Eurobarometer 319a](#) and [319b](#) May 2011), target group age 15-30.

²³ <http://europa.eu/youth>.

²⁴ OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p. 8-10.

²⁵ OJ C 287, 29.11.2007, p. 1-4.

²⁶ OJ C 326, 3.12.2010; p. 2-3. OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, p. 19-23; OJ C 169, 15.6.2012, p. 1-4.

²⁷ Interarts, EACEA/2008/01.

²⁸ Sharm-al-Sheikh (2010), Odessa (2011), Tbilisi (2012), Tunis (2012).

Participation²⁹ designed to reach out further into Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Moreover, a decision was taken to set up an Eastern Partnership Youth Window to fund more opportunities for youth partnerships and cooperation under the Youth in Action programme. Activities were organised in Europe and China throughout the 2011 EU-China Youth Year. The Commission also contributed to the UN Year of Youth and its youth summit in Mexico in 2011; it also co-organised two policy conferences as part of a bilateral cooperation agreement with Canada.

‘Youth & the world’ is a new ‘field of action’. Member States nonetheless report that they had already been active prior to 2010, and they continue to underline its relevance. Almost half of the Member States report that they have addressed this issue in their education curricula or as part of youth policy strategies. Most Member States provide opportunities for young people to exchange views with policy-makers on global issues.

4.2. IMPLEMENTATION INSTRUMENTS

The EU Youth Strategy applies a set of dedicated instruments to pursue activities in the eight fields described above. The following paragraphs assess to what extent these instruments have been used successfully in order to achieve the overall objectives of the strategy.

Evidence-based Policy-making

Further to the EU Youth Strategy, the Commission – together with experts nominated by Member States and youth stakeholders – developed a dashboard of EU Youth Indicators, which was released in 2011³⁰. This dashboard presents 40 indicators covering all eight fields of action. A [study](#) documents the fact that the development of EU Youth Indicators has not only improved the recognition and visibility of youth policy, but has also triggered positive developments in Member States, both in pursuing cross-sectoral co-operation and in applying an evidence-based approach.

During the first work cycle of the strategy, the Commission carried out two studies³¹ and conducted a Flash Eurobarometer-survey on youth ([FI319a](#) and [FI319b](#)). The European Knowledge Centre on Youth Policy (EKCYC) within the EU-CoE youth partnership also contributed to strengthening the evidence-base for youth policy in Europe through its [online portal](#).

Mutual Learning

The Open Method of Coordination is a good framework for peer learning and the sharing of experience among national policy-makers in the youth field. Every six months, EU Youth Conferences are organised by the country holding the Presidency, with the support of the Commission, in conjunction with meetings of Directors-General for youth. These conferences bring together young people and policy-makers from across the EU to discuss the results of the Structured Dialogue and to prepare joint recommendations which feed into Council

²⁹ OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, p. 10-14.

³⁰ SEC (2011) 401.

³¹ Studies on youth access to culture (InterARTS, 2010) and youth participation in democratic life (London School of Economics, 2012).

resolutions or conclusions³². Mutual learning was also achieved through a specific peer-learning activity on cross-sectoral cooperation³³.

Regular Progress-reporting, Dissemination of Results and Monitoring

For this reporting exercise, the Commission developed an online questionnaire which addressed specific concrete action lines mentioned in the EU Youth Strategy. This made it possible to conduct a comparative assessment of the National Youth Reports submitted by all Member States, Norway, Switzerland, Montenegro and Croatia³⁴. Input was also provided by the European Youth Forum, the representative platform of international non-governmental youth organisations and national youth councils.

In addition to releasing the Staff Working Document to the EU Youth Report, all National Youth Reports are made public on the Commission's website. This is in line with the EU Youth Strategy, which calls for broad dissemination of the results of the reporting exercise.

Structured Dialogue with Young People and Youth Organisations

All Member States established National Working Groups for Structured Dialogue with young people early in the first cycle. The Structured Dialogue – which is an elaborate and formal method of consultation with young people – has become a vibrant and integral part of youth policy-making. The consultations during the first Trio Presidency (2010-11) resulted in valuable joint recommendations between youth policy-makers and young people on the most pressing employment issues.

More and more people are participating in the evolving and on-going dialogue – over 20 000 youth leaders and young people were directly involved in the latest round of consultations.

Mobilisation of EU programmes

The Youth in Action programme is a key instrument to support the EU Youth Strategy. Alongside the Lifelong Learning programme, it has contributed to the learning mobility of young people. It focuses on non-formal learning activities for young people, youth workers and youth organisations. In line with the EU Youth Strategy, it promotes a sense of citizenship and solidarity among young people and places the emphasis on youth work, volunteering and civic activities as a suitable environment in which to acquire transversal skills. This programme involved around 150 000 and 185 000 participants in 2010 and 2011 respectively, which was a noticeable increase compared to the beginning of the programme (111 000 participants in 2007).

Almost all Member States report having used other sources of EU funding, such as the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and/or PROGRESS to integrate young people into the labour market.

³² See the Staff Working Document which accompanies this Communication.

³³ Organised under the Spanish Presidency.

³⁴ These four non-EU countries responded to the Commission's invitation to EU candidate countries and EFTA states to submit National Youth Reports on a voluntary basis. Separate contributions were submitted by Belgium's three language communities.

5. THE NEXT CYCLE (2013-2015)

Strengthening the link between the EU Youth Strategy and Europe 2020

According to the Council Resolution on the EU Youth Strategy, a number of priorities for European cooperation will be set for each work cycle to contribute to the fields of action identified under the framework. The priorities for the next cycle are to be adopted on the basis of the current EU Youth Report.

The EU presidencies focused in the first cycle on 'employment and entrepreneurship' and 'participation'. The EU Youth Strategy and its fields of action together encompass the full range of issues that concern young people in transition, albeit affecting them to differing degrees. More importantly, the strategy acknowledges and reinforces inter-relationships between these fields and among stakeholders, to deliver effective instruments to achieve policy coordination and synergies.

The EU and National Youth Reports confirm the robustness and relevance of the EU Youth Strategy and its two overall objectives: (i) creating more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market, and (ii) promoting citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity. Both tie in well with Europe 2020, the Annual Growth Survey 2012, Youth on the Move and the Youth Opportunities Initiative.

The priorities for the next work cycle should reflect the current overall priorities and activities under Europe 2020. Youth employment will remain high on the EU agenda. Building on the Annual Growth Survey 2012 and possible reviews of priorities under the upcoming Annual Growth Survey 2013, and on the Youth Opportunities Initiative, Member States should in particular target young people who are not in employment, education or training, and therein make full use of available EU funding. They should undertake more efforts to increase young people's access to work, apprenticeships and traineeship contracts and improve their employability.

The Commission supports the efforts of Member States with new EU initiatives, such as "Your first EURES job", which helps young people find a job abroad, support to the development of Youth Guarantees³⁵ and a quality framework for traineeships. It has also increased possibilities for learning mobility through the Lifelong Learning³⁶ and Youth in Action³⁷ programmes. Furthermore, the cross-cutting tools developed under the EU Youth Strategy can serve to foster partnerships between different actors involved in delivering support to young people in transition, including employment services, education providers, youth work, social services, employers and young people themselves. Stronger cooperation on the ground can be beneficial in offering tailor-made approaches, especially to young people with more complex life situations or that are hard to reach through conventional methods. The strategy can also play a role in the promotion and recognition of non-formal and informal learning through youth work and in encouraging participation in youth organisations as means to gain transversal skills. It can thereby contribute to strengthening synergies between different forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

³⁵ The Commission intends to propose by the end of 2012 a Council recommendation on guidelines to establish youth guarantees, which are schemes to be designed by Member States to ensure that all young people receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed (or leaving formal education).

³⁶ 130 000 [company placements](#) in 2012 in other EU countries for university-level and vocational students

³⁷ 10 000 young people with opportunities through the [European Voluntary Service](#)

The situation on the labour market and unemployment has related social effects. The Annual Growth Survey 2012 refers to clear signs of increases in the number of people at risk of income poverty, notably child poverty, and social exclusion, with acute health problems and homelessness in the most extreme cases. A growing group of young people are at risk of social exclusion.

The EU Youth Strategy can play a role in reaching out to vulnerable young people. Based on its cross-cutting perspective and focus on the participation of *all* young people in various aspects of society, it addresses a multitude of challenges linked to exclusion, alienation and young people's efforts in building an independent life. For the coming years, the strategy should increasingly focus on the consequences of the current crisis and its effects on social inclusion and the health & well-being of young people. To this purpose, it needs to step up its focus on participation in democratic and societal activities, as well as build on youth work in developing young people's life skills, their overall personal development and a sense of belonging to the society in which they live.

Taking implementation forward

Cross-sectoral cooperation can be further improved across all policy areas that affect young people. Member States should seek to further enhance inter-ministerial cooperation at national level. Additional efforts should be made to strengthen the evidence base of youth policy and to share examples of good practice through mutual learning.

Youth policy should continue the dialogue with young people, in order to fully understand the challenges youth face and their expectations towards policy-makers and support providers. The Structured Dialogue with young people can be further developed by making the membership of National Working Groups more inclusive and ensuring that decision-makers take recommendations from young people more fully into account.

The Commission will develop the initiative of the 'Youth on the Move Card' in order to make it easier for young people to be mobile across Europe. It will also reach out to, and facilitate dialogue with, *all* young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities, through the new interactive tools of the European Youth Portal. Youth policy will also explore measures to foster the creative and innovative potential of young people when attempting to tackle challenges related to employment, employability and inclusion³⁸.

The Youth in Action programme and the future EU programme targeting youth will play a particular role in supporting these initiatives.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the first three-year work cycle of the EU Youth Strategy, covering 2010-2012, demonstrated that it is both lasting and flexible as a framework for a whole range of actions – by the Commission, Member States and other relevant stakeholders. The strategy, with its cross-sectoral and all-inclusive perspective, has been greeted with interest and has inspired not only EU Member States, but also countries in the larger Europe and the world beyond.

³⁸ Council Conclusions on fostering the creative and innovative potential of young people, OJ C 169, 15.6.2012, p. 1-4.

The EU Youth Strategy has served as a vehicle to forge links between fields of action, including employment & entrepreneurship, education & training and social inclusion, to develop multi-faceted solutions in support of young people. This has proved relevant in looking for answers to address the current high levels of youth unemployment and to support the growing number of young people who are not in employment, education or training. Youth work has contributed to young people's development and has the potential to do more in all fields of action.

The participation of young people in democratic life is central to youth policy. Deepening and widening the dialogue with young people not only raises both the quality and legitimacy of youth policy, but also raises expectations for the EU and its Member States to deliver. The EU should do its utmost to encourage *all* of its young people to become involved in shaping the EU's future, particularly on those issues which – as successive consultations and opinion surveys have demonstrated – matter most to them.

In order to further its contribution to Europe 2020, the second three-year work cycle of the EU Youth Strategy (2013-2015) should address the challenges facing young people as a result of the crisis. Emphasis should continue to be placed on employment and entrepreneurship, increasing access to work, along with developing the innovative and creative capacities of young people. It should increasingly focus on social inclusion, health and well-being. The future EU programme targeting young people will contribute towards achieving these objectives of the EU Youth Strategy.