

SOC/051
YOUTH POLICY

Brussels, 4 December 2000

OPINION
of the
Economic and Social Committee
on the
White Paper: Youth Policy
(Own-initiative)

On 13 July 2000 the Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 23(3) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on:

White Paper: Youth Policy.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 14 November 2000. The rapporteur was **Mrs Hassett**.

At its 377th plenary session (meeting of 29 November 2000), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 113 in favour, no votes against and one abstention.

1. **Basis of the Opinion**

1.1 At the Council meeting of 23 November 1999, **Commissioner Viviane Reding** announced the plan of the European Commission to develop a White Paper on Youth Policy. The Commission subsequently started a broad consultation process including young people themselves, youth organisations, governments of member states, youth researchers and other actors in the field of youth. Due to its keen interest in youth policy and its promotion at Community level¹, the Committee felt the need to present an own-initiative opinion on the White Paper on Youth Policy in order to contribute to the discussion at an early stage.

1.2 Since the late 1980s Community action has rapidly developed in the youth field. After the launch of a new generation of ambitious youth and education programmes it seems to be a timely moment to reflect on youth policy in the European Union in a longer-term perspective. The Luxembourg European Council and the Lisbon European Council have opened new avenues of co-operation between Member States in policy areas that affect young people, such as employment, training and education. Progressing European integration requires the substantiation of the concept of European citizenship introduced in the Treaty of Maastricht in order to bridge the increasing gap between the European Union and young people. The Committee therefore welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to develop a White Paper: Youth Policy, in order to promote clear perspectives and a broad consensus for future Community action and Member State co-operation.

1.3 The Community has targeted its action in the field of youth to the 15-25 age group². This age range encompasses roughly the period between adolescence and independent adulthood commonly described as youth. Though this period of youth varies individually and throughout the

¹ ESC Opinion on Community action programme European voluntary service for young people, 19 March 1997, OJ C158, 26.5.97

² Decision No. 1031/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2000 establishing the "Youth" Community action programme, OJ L117, 18.05.00, p. 1

Member States, the Committee believes that youth policy should have this general age range as its focus³.

2. Youth policy in the European Union

2.1 Youth policy at the European Union level has sought to "intensify co-operation in the field of youth, so as to reinforce young people's consciousness of belonging to Europe and take account of their wish to play a positive role in the building of the European Community"⁴. Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty provide the legal basis for Community policy in the field of education, vocational training and youth⁵. The Treaty confines youth policy measures to "encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio-educational instructors"⁶. Community action was able to successfully build upon the experiences and the values of European youth work developed in the context of the Council of Europe and successfully contributed to the consolidation and dissemination of a European perspective in youth work. European Union youth policy is embodied in a number of programmes to support the mobility of young people, the work of youth organisations and vocational training. Thanks to the development of instruments like the Youth for Europe programme and the European Voluntary Service for young people, Community action reaches out to a high number of young people, both individually and their organisations. Stimulated through the decentralised nature of Community action, the debate about youth policy in Europe has evolved considerably.

2.2 Policies aimed at young people at Member State level have contributed to improving the social situation of young people in the second half of the twentieth century. Young people in the European Union are more independent and they have greater opportunities to fulfil their own expectations than previous generations. Nevertheless, the society in which young people have to establish themselves is not one that they have had an opportunity to create. It is a society that is at the same time an inheritance while also on loan from future generations. The transitional character of youth is underlined by various transitions that young people undergo: from childhood to adulthood, from education to work, from dependency to autonomy and becoming a full citizen. Any resources that are used to enable young people to develop their abilities, to participate and to contribute to society are an investment and must be seen as such, allowing young people to take their full responsibility towards society.

2.3 The importance of youth policy has been highlighted by recent political developments at European level. In preparing the Lisbon European Council, the Portuguese

³ In Greece, Italy and Spain the unemployment rate of young people with tertiary education in the 20-24 and 25-29 age groups is higher than the percentage of young people with only compulsory or upper-secondary level education. "Education at a Glance" OECD 2000, p. 271.

⁴ Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers meeting within the Council of 26 June 1991 on priority actions in the youth field OJ C208, 1991

⁵ Consolidated Treaty Establishing the European Community, Articles 149 and 150.

⁶ Consolidated Treaty Establishing the European Community, Article 149.

Presidency stressed the commitment of the European Union to young people by stating: "Europe's population, and young people in particular, must have access to basic skills, such as being able to learn and resolve problems, develop scientific, culture and technical skills, use information technologies, speak foreign languages, develop a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and be active, free and responsible citizens." Integrated youth policies at all levels for all young people with their broadest possible participation, whether this participation be of institutional, associative or individual nature are essential to attain these objectives.

2.4 Youth policy must embody the spirit of the commitments made at Community level to young people over recent years, value them as a resource to society and provide them with opportunities to become "active, free and responsible citizens"⁷. Youth policy is in an integrated cross-sectoral policy aimed at young people, with young people and starting from the needs of young people. Its aim is to improve and develop the living conditions and participation of young people, encompassing the whole range of social, cultural and political issues affecting them and other groups in society. Youth policy is by definition a horizontal policy where coherent and co-ordinated efforts across different policy and administrative sectors are ensured through integrated actions. At all levels, youth policy co-ordinates measures to serve the interests of youth, and integrates young people to shape social, economic, political and cultural life. Young people are at the heart of youth policy, not as clients, but as actors and contributors to this dynamic process.

2.5 For a youth policy in the European Union, a link needs to be established between youth policy as such and sectoral policies of the European Union. However the development of youth policy cannot be limited to mainstreaming youth aspects into employment, social integration and other policies. Specific action for young people is needed at European level in order to respect the values of youth work and services, in particular their participatory nature, thus making them more than an instrument of social policy, but rather a key to the successful renewal of European democracies⁸. Apart from the specific action programmes in the fields of youth and education, the Community supports measures aimed at young people through structural fund programmes⁹ Youth policy guidelines would not only assist the European Commission in planning and evaluation, but also Member States authorities in developing coherent programmes.

2.6 Young people have rights and responsibilities just like any other group in society. Young people must have the same rights as other citizens, regardless of any discrimination

⁷ Resolution on a youth policy for Europe adopted by the European Parliament A4-0100/99, OJ C42, 1999; Resolution of the Council and the Ministers of Youth meeting within the Council on 8 February 1999, OJ C42, 17.02.99; Contribution to the Presidency report on the European Employment Pact - Memorandum of the German Presidency "Youth and Europe - Our Future". Vienna European Council, Conclusions of the Presidency, point 46 (11 December 1998).

⁸ In a comparative European study of the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Intergovernmental Co-operation in the Youth Field, eight areas constituting youth policy were considered (CDEJ (96) 11 rev. 2 – revised text as of 15 October 1998). These areas are: (1) bodies responsible for co-ordinating government policy in youth affairs, (2) government policy in the youth sector, (3) parliamentary committees on youth, (4) constitutional and legislative provisions relating to youth affairs, (5) laws relating specifically to young people, (6) associative life of young people, (7) international co-operation in the youth field, (8) criteria and arrangements for recognising funding youth organisations and projects.

⁹ In the 2000-2006 programming period, the European Social Fund and the EQUAL Community Initiative in particular will promote training and employability measures for young people. The implementation of the Structural Funds has largely been decentralised to the Member State level, so programmes are decided in accordance with national priorities.

experienced in accordance with the definition given in Article 13 of the Treaty. Active equal opportunity policies must be an integral part of youth policy. In order to realise their full rights and responsibilities, young people must be offered access to a sufficient income, to participation in shaping the decisions that affect their lives, to information, to the employment market, to decent housing, to health care, to proper educational opportunities, to a non-polluted environment, to freedom of movement and to leisure. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child constitutes a unique legal reference to promote child and youth rights. The European Social Charter addresses rights that are of particular relevance to young people, while on the European Union level the outcome of the debate on a Charter of Fundamental Rights will have an impact on them.

2.7 There are currently 46.9 million young people aged between 15-24 in the European Union¹⁰. The youth population in the ten pre-accession countries in Central and Eastern Europe stood at 16.9 million in 1999¹¹. Young people constitute an ever-diminishing proportion of the population of the European Union due to declining birth rates and as a result of increasing life expectancy. This demographic trend is set to become even more pronounced over the next decade and the generational imbalance will be exacerbated by the increasing number of people over 65. This will have a significant impact on the future of democracy and our society. It is predicted that by 2015 the number of people in the 15-29 age group, will have declined by 13 million¹². Young people will thus become an even more vital resource for the renewal and innovation of European societies and economies in the early twenty-first century. Their full and democratic participation in society will be crucial. Moreover, young people are also becoming autonomous at a later age, mostly because of the increasing time spent in education but also due to the high cost of living in many countries, the need to finance studying, the lack of social protection and problems in entering the labour market. Thus, many young people are still not financially independent in their mid-twenties. This has both social and economic implications. Young people cannot fully take on their rights or responsibilities, nor can they be financially self-sufficient.

2.8 In acknowledgement of the multitude of challenges for young people in today's society, and the scope of youth policy, the Committee has regularly contributed to the youth policy development at Community level during the last decade. It has initiated important debates on key areas, such as youth unemployment, education and youth programmes, the NGOs, including youth organisations, and civil society in Europe¹³. In this opinion, the Committee shall focus on youth employment and social integration, education and mobility, participation and civil society.

¹⁰ European Social Statistics - Labour Force survey results 1999, p. 34.

¹¹ The MONEE Project CEE/CIS/Baltic's, UNICEF 2000, p. 127.

¹² Communication from the Commission "Towards a Europe for All Ages", COM (1999) 221 final, p.7

¹³ ESC Opinions include; the European Dimension of Education: its nature, content and prospects, Information Report CES 1113/99 fin + Appendix; Youth unemployment, OJ C18, 22.01.96; Community Youth Action Programmes, OJ C410, 30.12.98.

3. Youth employment and social integration

3.1 Although youth unemployment has declined in the last two decades it has remained high in comparison to the levels among other age groups. Currently, the unemployment rate among the 15-24 age group in the European Union is almost double the rate for those aged 25-65, making approximately five million young people unemployed. This hides significant variations between countries, within countries and between young men and women. Youth unemployment has been particularly high in Spain, Italy, France, Greece and Finland, and young female unemployment levels are a severe problem in Greece, Italy and Spain. Existing evidence also indicates that employment rates among ethnic minorities and the disabled are lower than the average. It is estimated that 45% of young people become unemployed at least once, and that 20% are unemployed two or three times¹⁴.

3.2 Though unemployment is one of the key causes of social exclusion, social exclusion is frequently multi-dimensional. A number of factors combining to effectively exclude an individual from participating in society, including low levels of skills and education, low income, limited access to social security benefits, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, poverty during childhood, family breakdown, lack of access to information, mobility and justice. The transition from childhood and education to adulthood and employment is a very vulnerable period for young people. Those who drop out of school and do not succeed in finding employment often have limited access to social protection. Moreover, employment does not automatically end social exclusion, as young people constitute a significant number of the "working poor" due to their low levels of income¹⁵.

3.3 Youth employment

3.3.1 At the Lisbon European Council, the heads of State and government of the European Union committed to making Europe the world's most dynamic and competitive area, based on innovation and knowledge, able to boost economic growth levels with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion by 2010. The realisation of the vision outlined in Lisbon will require major progress in the economic and employment sectors. Sustained annual growth of 3%, combined with the development of innovation and knowledge and the expansion of the service sector will provide the conditions for increasing employment levels to 70% for men and 60% for women. The new knowledge economy will depend on a larger, better educated and more highly trained workforce. Thus, the generation of young people making the transition from formal education to the labour market in the next ten years will be crucial to achieving this move towards the knowledge-based economy.

3.3.2 The Lisbon European Council also marked a significant development in the methods used by the European Union to achieve its aims, with the move away from legislation to "soft law" as

¹⁴ "Implementing the European Employment Strategy," European Commission 1999, p.19. In recognition of these problems, guideline 1 of the European Employment Guidelines for 2000 aims to ensure that: "every young person is offered a new start before reaching six months of unemployment, in the form of training, retraining, work practice, a job or other employability measure with a view to effective integration into the labour market".

¹⁵ Youth in the European Union - from Education to working life. Eurostat 1997, p. 58

epitomised by the "open method of co-ordination"¹⁶. The Lisbon conclusions promote the extension of the open-method of co-ordination to the fields of social exclusion, *e*-Europe policies, policies relating to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and to Research and Innovation. The adoption of the "open method of co-ordination" in these areas is designed to ensure that the objectives of the Lisbon Summit are realised. This will be reinforced by the submission of an annual report from the Commission to the Spring European Council on progress in key areas. A White Paper on youth policy must take these developments as both a starting point and as the key to promoting a cross-sectoral youth policy at the European level in order to unlock the potential of young people as a source of economic development and innovation.

3.3.3 Under the Employment Guidelines, the Member States are to ensure by 2002 that all young people are offered a new start in the form of "training, retraining, work practice, a job or other employability measure with a view to effective integration into the labour market"¹⁷. It is vital that all opportunities offered in accordance with the Guidelines provide high quality schemes in areas of interest to the young people concerned, allowing them to determine their own career paths. These measures should not merely be a means of reducing the levels of youth unemployment, but should offer young people a permanent pathway out of unemployment. Employability measures linked to existing opportunities and gaps in the employment market should be prioritised. The provision of social protection should not be dependent on participation in such measures

3.3.4 All training for young people, especially for traditional occupations, should include the development of skills relevant to the growing knowledge economy. Training in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is particularly important to prevent the emergence of a group excluded from certain occupations due to their lack of skills. Training in ICT must begin in compulsory education and continue in training and lifelong learning to ensure that a two-speed Europe does not emerge.

3.3.5 The Member States are encouraged to provide support to entrepreneurs and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) under Pillar II of the Employment Guidelines. Measures developed at the national level in response to the Guidelines should not discriminate on the basis of age. Young entrepreneurs can make a valuable contribution to the economy through innovative ideas and by employing staff themselves. Fostering young entrepreneurship by providing financial and technical support and by minimising the bureaucracy involved in establishing an enterprise should be encouraged¹⁸.

3.3.6 Many young people who are in employment nevertheless face various forms of discrimination in the employment market and in the work place. The principle of equal pay for equal

¹⁶ The "open method of co-ordination" is defined in Lisbon European Council, Conclusions of the Presidency, point 37 (24 March 2000).

¹⁷ European Employment Guidelines for 2000, Guideline 1.

¹⁸ In its "Opinion on the Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for Member States' employment policies for the year 2001", the Economic and Social Committee stressed the need "to remove the obstacles to company formation and development." CES 1188/2000, p.6.

work needs to be ensured, and the whole body of the *acquis communautaire* as it relates to working conditions must be properly implemented at the Member State level.

3.3.7 The role of the third sector in the implementation of the European Employment Strategy should be promoted at the local, the Member State and the Community level.¹⁹ Through their direct experience with groups facing difficulties in entering the labour market, NGOs and youth organisations can provide innovative and high quality solutions²⁰. A deeper involvement in developing policy would also ensure that the interests of the people concerned by employability measures would be represented.

3.4 Social Integration

3.4.1 Young people experienced a restriction in their entitlement to social protection at the end of the twentieth century²¹. In some countries young people are not entitled to unemployment benefit unless they have worked previously, and the provision of social security benefits is often linked to taking a training course or proving that they are involved in a genuine job search. As a result of this, and the fact that more young people are staying longer in education, the age at which young people leave the parental home has become higher. Young people are becoming independent at a later age and therefore also establishing their own households and having children when they are older. Social protection, financial support in tertiary education and access to housing would allow young people to be autonomous at an earlier age, and make full use of their rights - as well as exercising their responsibilities - as adults.

3.4.2 The support structures for young people are not sufficient to counterbalance the problems resulting from social exclusion and from the multifarious risks in contemporary society. In particular it is calculated that around 10% of young people in some European Union countries are in "status zero", that is they are not in education, training, employment or entitled to unemployment benefit²². Young school dropouts and the homeless do not receive sufficient support²³. The social and economic costs of failing to deal with these problems - as well as problems such as delinquency and substance misuse - at an initial stage augment over the life-course, supporting the argument that such problems should be addressed as early as possible. Policies aimed at delinquent and alienated young people must be prioritised and pay specific attention to the social reintegration of this group. In order for effective action to be taken to relieve this problem, a range of actors must be involved, including not just government but the business community as well as third sector organisations working with

¹⁹ ESC Opinion on Social The Social Economy and the single market, OJ C117, 24.4.00, p. 52

²⁰ The "Get In!" Youth Convention on Social Exclusion and Employment hosted by the Economic and Social Committee on 21 February 2000, provide first-hand examples of the contribution that youth organisations could make in developing and running projects for the young socially excluded and unemployed. See the "Get In!" report published by the European Youth Forum, April 2000.

²¹ Green, David: Taking Steps – Young People and Social Protection in the European Union, a report published by the European Youth Forum 1998

²² This is the case in Belgium, Greece, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom, see: "Education at a Glance", OECD 2000, p. 287.

²³ The problems are examined in detail in: "Youth Homelessness in the European Union", European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) 1998.

young people. Lack of action and complacency regarding socially excluded young people should no longer be tolerated and all actors should accept responsibility for introducing measures to redress this situation.

3.4.3 Discrimination "based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation"²⁴ is also strongly in evidence in relation to young people, especially in the fields of education and employment. Unemployment statistics indicate that young people experience discrimination in the labour market, a fact that is commonly attributed to their age and lack of experience²⁵. Young women, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and the young disabled are even more vulnerable to discrimination in the employment market. More research on young people and discrimination would assist in the development of policies and programmes to address the problem and prevent early exclusion continuing throughout the life-course. Young people and their organisations should be supported to carry out work to combat racism and discrimination. Young people can be actors in promoting social integration and multicultural societies. By addressing such issues at an early age, tolerance and openness can be established.

3.4.4 In many areas it is clear that there is not real gender equality between young women and men in the European Union. In the majority of Member States a higher percentage of young men are in employment than young women. As social security benefits have become increasingly linked to previous employment, this means that young women are disadvantaged in their access to social security benefits. Vertical and horizontal segregation in education and the labour market needs to be addressed to prevent young women suffering from structural discrimination and being discouraged from pursuing certain career choices. It is clear that all statistics and indicators concerning young people should take into account the gender factor as a first step to understanding the extent of discrimination. This will allow the mainstreaming of gender in relation to young people to be more successful.

²⁴ Consolidated Treaty Establishing the European Community, Article 13.

²⁵ Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on Youth Unemployment OJ C18, 22.01.96

4. Education and Mobility

4.1 Education is an important part of the lives of young people and in the last two decades young people have been staying longer in education²⁶. Education and access to education are indispensable elements of the socialisation process and of a young person's integration into society, and a means for personal and social development and fulfilment.²⁷ In most countries, there is a clear correlation between educational achievement and successful integration into the employment market. The prospects of those with low educational attainment are more limited, while those who leave education later fare better in the employment market²⁸. In 1997, the unemployment rate in the EU for young people who had only completed compulsory education was 14%, for those who had finished upper secondary education it was 10%, and it was only 6% for those with a tertiary education qualification²⁹. A further increase in the level of education obtained must be combined with an improvement in the quality of that education and the degree to which it is geared to the needs of the modern employment market.

4.2 The mobility of young people, in a group or individually, makes a vital contribution to intercultural understanding. This is true primarily on the individual level, while the social potential of mobility remains to be exhausted, as the total number of young people taking part in exchanges, studying or volunteering in another country still is marginal. Intercultural skills are increasingly important in the globalised economies and multicultural societies of Europe. Europe becoming an educational area with citizens facing the challenges of drastic economic and societal change, both language skills and the capacity to interact and co-operate with people from different cultures must be at the centre of concern in European educational policies. Living in another country for some time, intercultural exchanges and training, put young people in a position where they can reflect on their cultural background and come to a proper appreciation and respect of the diversity of Europe. These skills are important for personal development, tolerant attitudes towards others, and already today valued in the employment market. The basis for these skills is most effectively laid at an early age in life. The same applies to language skills. The development of mobility in the European Union will promote tolerance and sense of European citizenship. The opportunity to participate in exchanges should therefore cover all groups of young people, including school and university students, young volunteers, young people in training, young people in employment, but in particular also young people which are not in training, education or employment (young people in "status zero").

²⁶ In OECD countries, a fifteen-year old could expect to be in education for another 6 years of her or his life in 1998. This figure had risen by over one and a half years since 1985, see: "Education at a Glance", OECD 2000.

²⁷ ESC Opinion on European pathways for work-linked training, including apprenticeship, OJ C241, 10.7.98

²⁸ Italy and Spain are an exception as they have high graduate unemployment levels in the 25-29 age group, see: "Employment Outlook", OECD 1999.

²⁹ 'The Social Situation in the European Union 2000', Eurostat, 2000, p.14.

4.3 Education

4.3.1 Rapid and continuing structural change in the European employment market has led to a mismatch between the demand and supply for skills, resulting in what is commonly termed the "skills gap". Although there has been a significant improvement in general levels of educational achievement, there is still a notable problem of young people dropping out of education, or leaving education early. In some Member States, poor levels of literacy and numeracy impede employers in recruiting staff to certain posts. Throughout Europe, the growth of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector has outstripped the supply of appropriately educated and trained employees³⁰. Globalisation and the success of the internal market has created an increasing demand for mobile employees and employees with language skills. Furthermore, with the rapid technological developments in many sectors, the labour force needs to be able to adapt to new needs through lifelong learning. The Lisbon European Council agreed to reduce the number of 18-24 year-olds "with only lower-secondary level education who are not in further education and training" by half by 2010, and also to improve access to the Internet and training in the ICT sector. However, it is clear that further measures need to be introduced at the Member State level to ensure that future generations are equipped with the skills that they need. For example, efforts need to be made to increase the number of people completing secondary education, to make sure that young people are equipped with the skills required by the employment market, and make the practice of lifelong learning an integral part of active participation in the employment market and society.

4.3.2 Lifelong learning has been broadly defined as "all purposeful learning activity, whether formal or non-formal³¹, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of personal development and of improving knowledge, skills and competence"³². For young people, initial vocational education and training is the form of lifelong learning which is currently most relevant to them. However, this rarely emphasises the need to update the knowledge accumulated and the skills acquired, as its primary aim is to promote first-entry into employment. Lifelong learning strategies have too often been exclusively focused on vocational training aspects and not taken enough into account that lifelong learning is a process that starts from early childhood. Non-formal education, which is provided through youth and community work from an early age and opening avenues into lifelong learning patterns, is seldom recognised officially and the development of skills, knowledge and self-confidence through participation in open youth work and youth organisations is not sufficiently valued³³. In lifelong learning strategies, little emphasis has been placed on providing

³⁰ It is estimated that half a million jobs were vacant in this sector in 1998 and the figure expected to reach 1.6 million by 2002. European Commission Communication 'Strategy for Jobs in the Information Society' European Commission, 2000, p. 7.

³¹ "Non-formal education is organised educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended to serve an identifiable learning clientele with identifiable learning objectives.", in: National Youth Policies, a working document produced by the Chief Executive Officers of World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations, World Young Women's Christian Association, World Organisation of the Scout Movement, World association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, The International Award Association, Geneva/London 1998, p.6.

³² European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture working paper 'Implementing Lifelong Learning for Active Citizenship in a Europe of Knowledge'. Paper presented at the Launch Conference for the new generation of education and youth programmes, Lisbon March 2000.

³³ Sahlberg, Pasi: Building Bridges for Learning – the recognition and value of non-formal education in youth activity, study published by the European Youth Forum and the National Board of Education Finland, 1999. Also: Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Recommendation "Non-Formal Education", Recommendation 1437 (2000) 1.

already the very young with information and orientation for their professional development. Early guidance is vital in order to ensure that young people can realise a broad range of opportunities throughout their lives. Already prior to the transition from education and employment, young people need to be equipped for this, as the opportunities available throughout the life course are increasingly determined at an ever-earlier age.

4.3.3 Lifelong learning, including non-formal education, should be expanded so that it is accessible to young people from an early age to allow them to continually update their knowledge and skills so that they can adapt to the fast-changing employment market. The interaction and mutual recognition of non-formal education taking place in the different learning environments has not yet been developed sufficiently. In this respect, the role of non-formal learning and training taking place at the work place need to be stronger recognised. "Bridges" and transitions between the various forms of education and educational environments are still the exception in the European Union.

4.4 **Mobility**

4.4.1 Mobility is a right enshrined in Article 18 of the Treaty.³⁴ The Community and the Member States have to take the appropriate measures to ensure that the citizens have an equal opportunity in making use of this right. Currently this right remains theoretical for most young people. The reasons can be found in the lack of opportunities and resources, lack of recognition of the value of mobility as such and the skills acquired through mobility, uneven distribution of opportunities, social and cultural resistance to the idea of mobility, legal and administrative barriers. Particular attention should therefore be paid to administrative obstacles, which exist in the Member States in regard to social security (unemployment insurance in particular), taxation, residence rights and the recognition of skills acquired both formally as well as through means of non-formal and informal education.³⁵

4.4.2 Within the Community programmes, the focus in regard to long-term mobility (six months or longer) is primarily on university student mobility. The ERASMUS programme, even though limited in numbers, is a great success. It is however restricted to students in higher education. The potential of medium and long-term mobility at an early age (below the age of 21) should be promoted by the Community and supported by the Member States. Too few young people leaving secondary schools have spent a considerable period of time in another European country. For those that have, there is a high risk that this period of education in another country is not fully recognised by the country of origin as an integral and valuable part of their secondary education. Resources available for the support of young people's mobility on all levels are not yet adequate, as the demand

³⁴ Consolidated Treaty Establishing the European Community, Article 18.

³⁵ As defined in the Appendix to the Information Report on "The European dimension of education: its nature, content and prospects", CES 1113/99 fin rev; **Formal education:** The hierarchically structured, chronologically graded education system running from primary through to tertiary instruction. **Informal education:** The process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience, such as family, friends, peer groups, the media and other influences and factors in the person's environment. **Non-formal education:** Organised educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended to serve an identifiable learning clientele with identifiable learning objectives.

for the mobility programmes has shown. Given the limited public resources for supporting increased mobility, it seems negligent not to have explored more public-private partnerships.

4.4.3 The European Union and the Member States should promote mobility targeting young people themselves as well as decision makers and multipliers (employers, educational institutions, general media, etc.), highlighting the individual, social and economic value of mobility. Many young people face obstacles in finding information, since no one-stop information system on opportunities for all sorts of mobility (internships abroad, city partnerships, transnational volunteering, youth exchanges, mobility in secondary, higher and vocational education, etc.) is available³⁶. An innovative input is needed into developing new qualifications recognised throughout the European Union, such as skills passports and Europass. This would act as an incentive for young people to participate in education, training, and mobility projects.

4.4.4 In addition, young people's mobility is likely to increase if their educators, teachers and vocational trainers have made experiences abroad. Though progress has been made over the last decade, the percentage of educators, teachers and vocational trainers with work and teaching experiences in another Member State is still minimal. The French Presidency of the Council initiative to set up an action plan on mobility should also be welcomed. It seems appropriate that this action plan is implemented through an open method of co-ordination including peer group review. Social partners and non-governmental organisations in the field of youth and education should be closely integrated in the realisation of the plan.

5. Participation and Civil Society

5.1 Any policy aimed at young people must be characterised by the fundamental principle of youth participation: a principle that is reiterated at European and international level³⁷. The benefits of promoting, encouraging and supporting young people's participation are evident from existing practice in the Member States of the European Union. Through participation various issues of concern and the often multiple problems faced by young people in their lives come to the fore and can be addressed pro-actively by the young people themselves but also by decision-makers and administrations. While youth participation in elections has been consistently low throughout the Member States - and the levels in the European Parliament elections in 1999 even lower - young people feel strongly about a number of issues. Young people can bring their unique experience of specific problems to the process of finding solutions at all levels - local, regional, national, European

³⁶ The "Contribution to the Presidency report on the European Employment Pact - Memorandum of the German Presidency "Youth and Europe - Our Future" suggested that Member States should increase support for educational exchanges and cross-border training both bilaterally and multilaterally. It also called for a reduction in the barriers to the mutual recognition of qualifications and for the promotion of language skills.

³⁷ Declaration of the United Nations on the International Year of Youth 1985, "Peace, Participation, Development"; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; European Charter on Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe, 1992; Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe "On youth participation and the future of Civil Society", Recommendation No. R (97) 3 of 4 February 1997; Resolution of Council and Ministers for Youth meeting within the Council of 8 February 1999 (OJ 1999/C42/01)

and global³⁸. Youth policy should seek to involve young people at all stages in the decision-making process in order both to benefit from their first-hand experience and to motivate them as active and responsible citizens. There is also no limit to participation. Nevertheless, in particular possibilities for participation in the decision-making in the formal education sector and at the work place are not responsive enough to the needs of young people.

5.2 The next decade will also see the expansion of the European Union with the accession of a number of countries in Central and Eastern, as well Southern Europe. Through the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, these countries will introduce legislation relating to a huge number of issues relevant to young people. It is vital that young people and their organisations in these countries should be aware of the implications of their country's entry into the European Union and have a full and proper understanding of the impact that membership will have in key policy areas affecting them. The participation of civil society should be encouraged and resources devoted to allowing them to participate in decision making.

5.3 Though young people from the candidate and pre-accession countries are increasingly integrated in Community action in the field of youth and education, they are not participating on equal footing. For the development of youth policy in the European Union it is important to take the experiences from those countries into account. This will enable the Community to pro-actively develop a thorough understanding of the needs and aspirations of its future citizens. The last years have also seen an increase of co-operation with regions bordering the European Union and beyond.³⁹ To encourage a genuine feeling of European citizenship and global responsibility, and to fill these co-operation initiatives with life on a people-to-people as well as civil society level, the Community needs to further develop youth co-operation inside all regional agreements. Currently, the youth dimension in the regional co-operation initiatives of the Union is rather weak. More opening towards young people is desirable to give a feeling of ownership to the young citizens. Active participation in global and regional co-operation will increase the awareness about the interdependence of the Union in the world, and contribute to acceptance and understanding of immigration from outside the Union.

5.4 Non-governmental organisations and their activities are the basis of any stable democracy. Non-governmental organisations provide a safeguard for democracy, solidarity and human rights through their complex networks and democratic decision-making procedures. They also serve as the vanguard in renewing society. Young people's first experience in taking on and sharing responsibility for society and others takes places through in youth organisations in all expressions of youth associative life. Reducing society to pure individualism and the exercise of consumer choice should not and cannot replace the role of youth organisations. Youth NGOs should be adequately financially supported and given the necessary recognition and means to be able to participate as real actors in decision-making and society at all levels. Contributing to change is a major motivation for

³⁸ See report of 'Get In!' Youth Convention on Social Exclusion and Employment published by the European Youth Forum 2000.

³⁹ For instance co-operation within the Baltic Sea region, the Mediterranean, with South Eastern Europe, the countries of the ACP agreement, the Barents Sea region, the Common Strategies towards the Russian Federation and Ukraine, as well as others.

young people to get involved. It is important that young people are given the opportunity and encouraged to engage themselves in a broad and diverse range of structures, organisations and issues, in particular on local level where special emphasis needs to be put on the development of mechanisms for participation in decision-making. Participation and ownership can be promoted through involvement and partnership - whether in relation to youth organisations, European institutions, the work place, schools or universities. Only real influence leads to real responsibility.

5.5 The ways in which young people participate have evolved dynamically since the late 1960s as representative democracy has been increasingly reinforced by participatory elements. Young people in particular have contributed to this change by the continual development of existing youth organisations through new forms of participation, as well as by creating new networks and organisations⁴⁰. Youth organisations at all levels remain a key instrument for the development of youth policy, thanks to internal democracy, participatory approach and their establishment at the grass root and local community level. The concept of open youth work in informal groups, youth clubs, youth councils and parliaments has opened avenues to participation and ownership that have not only provided valuable experience but have also produced tangible results in fostering the social integration of young people, particularly the disadvantaged. Experience has shown that these initiatives can only be made sustainable if youth structures and organisations are available and appropriately funded to channel information, to provide exchange of good practice and networking opportunities, and to advocate efficiently for youth needs and interests.

5.6 The European institutions and national governments must actively facilitate youth information policies to provide young people with as accurate information as possible on the issues affecting them as well as the possibilities for participation. The governments and institutions have to invest in a "two way democracy" by consulting and involving young people on decisions. At the Community level, centralised information about measures aimed at young people is hard to come by, potentially leading to incoherence in their applications and a sub-optimal use of the scarce resources available.

6. Rural/peripheral areas

6.1 Young people are often disadvantaged because of the area they live in. In many rural areas and poor urban areas, young people do not have access to high quality education, training, mobility, health services, leisure facilities, employment opportunities or chances to participate in civil society. Specific measures should be introduced to ensure that young people in certain geographical areas could benefit fully from opportunities and can make choices in their own lives. The remoteness of many rural areas means that young people do not have good access to information, especially on opportunities. Many rural areas are becoming depopulated, as young people have to move in order to complete their education, find employment, or have access to greater opportunities, better health facilities and more extensive leisure. Support needs to be extended so that young people can live in

⁴⁰ Report of the round table "New forms of youth participation", Bienne (Switzerland), 4-6 May 2000, Council of Europe Steering Committee for Intergovernmental Co-operation in the Youth Field, RT-Part (2000) 3.

rural areas without suffering social exclusion and without having to compromise their dreams, wishes or ambitions. The particular problems faced by young people in rural areas should be taken into account in key policy areas such as employment, education, training, and welfare, and solutions developed to ensure their equal participation. Furthermore, young people living in rural areas should be able to benefit from investment and strategies to promote sustainable economic activity in remote and rural areas.

7. Recommendations

7.1 General recommendations

7.1.1 The Committee believes that it is a basic principle that young people and youth organisations should be involved in the formulation of and decision-making on youth policy at local, regional, national and Community level. Furthermore, youth policy needs to be developed in public administrations through the establishment of departments dealing with youth issues at all levels and in all relevant sectors in Member States, as well as in the institutions at the Community level.

7.1.2 The Committee believes that in line with the guidelines set by the Helsinki European Council on “An effective Council for an enlarged Union”, it is important to effectively use the interaction between youth and education policies in the newly created Council formation “Education and Youth Affairs”⁴¹. To this end a proper system of back-to-back Council session needs to be developed in order avoid youth policy issues becoming a subsidiary item to education. The Committee believes that two distinct agendas need to be set up for the Education and Youth Affairs Council, one for the Education Ministers and one for the Youth Ministers. The Committee believes that Youth Ministers should undertake a regular review of the progress made in youth policy.

7.1.3 The Committee believes that the Commission should bring together experts and senior civil servants from Member State ministries responsible for the development of youth policy in key areas such as employment, social integration, education, mobility and participation. The European Commission would be responsible for facilitating and co-ordinating this work, and would submit an annual report on the progress in youth policy to the Spring European Council.

7.1.4 The Committee supports the development of initiatives to bring together policy experts, practitioners and representatives of young people, to collect and analyse information on the situation of young people in the European Union and make proposals for the further development of youth policy and co-operation among Member States within the framework set by the European Council and the Education and Youth Affairs Council

⁴¹ Communication from the Council - Follow-up to the Helsinki European Council Conclusions on 10 and 11 December 1999 - Council formations OJ C174, 2000.

7.2 Youth Employment and Social Integration

7.2.1 The Committee believes that Member States, with the support of the Community, should make a quantitative commitment to reducing youth unemployment. The commitment should include the introduction of new measures to encourage and support the improvement of employment levels in the Member States with particularly low youth employment, and among those groups who suffer discrimination in the employment market.

7.2.2 The Committee believes that appropriate measures in the field of education and training must be developed to meet the needs of the contemporary employment market and the developing knowledge economy, particularly the promotion of ICT skills and entrepreneurship. Young people should be provided with early guidance and information on educational pathways and the employment market, including possibilities and requirements for being self-employed or establishing an SME. In addition, young people should have the opportunity to acquire communication and team skills both in a formal and non-formal context.

7.2.3 The Committee believes that Member States should make a firm commitment to the provision of adequate social protection for young people.

7.2.4 The Committee believes that all efforts should be undertaken to initiate measures to promote the social inclusion of young people, in particular to combat the problem of young people who are not in education, training, employment or registered as unemployed.

7.2.5 The Committee believes that non-governmental organisations in particular youth organisations should be more strongly associated in the European Employment Strategy at the European, Member State and local level.

7.3 Education and Mobility

7.3.1 The Committee believes that lifelong learning measure must be expanded to ensure that they are available from a young age, that there are improved opportunities, and that the value of non-formal education is recognised as an important aspect of lifelong learning. These should include measures to promote learning for active European citizenship.

7.3.2 The Committee believes that governments, the business community and the third sector should together develop methods of official recognition for the value of non-formal education, and the importance it can play in individual development.

7.3.3 The Committee believes that Member States should commit to raising educational standards, in addition to the implementation of the Lisbon European Council conclusions to increase the number of young people completing secondary education.

7.3.4 In the light of its Opinion on the proposal of the European Commission for a

recommendation on mobility within the Community for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers⁴², the Committee welcomes the Action Plan on Mobility proposed by the French Presidency and believes that support should be given to all measures to increase mobility among young people by developing opportunities for mobility in secondary school, university, as a trainee, as a volunteer and in employment. Obstacles to mobility should be removed by improving the mutual recognition of qualifications⁴³.

7.3.5 The Committee believes that Member States should commit to fighting discrimination in education and reducing school dropout rates.

7.4 Participation and Civil Society

7.4.1 The Committee reaffirms the basic principle of youth participation in the development, implementation and evaluation of youth policy. Participation does not limit and should reach from the immediate environments of young people like schools and the work place to policy-making at international level. In this respect, the White Paper must outline measures to implement the recommendations contained in the Resolution on youth participation of Council and Ministers for Youth meeting within the Council. Furthermore, the European Charter on Participation of Youth People in Municipal and Regional life offers a good basis to develop youth participation at the local level⁴⁴. Community support should be in line with the recommendations and guidelines included therein.

7.4.2 The Committee believes that representative structures of young people and youth organisations are a key constituent of youth policy and a unique instrument for fostering youth participation at all levels⁴⁵. Appropriate support and recognition should be given to youth organisations as a vital part of civil society. At Community level, the European Youth Forum fulfils this role. It should be given formal recognition by all the institutions of the European Union. The Committee believes that the work of the European Youth Forum is vital to the representation and participation of young people at the Community level⁴⁶. The Member States and the Community, acting at the relevant level in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, must support and recognise the establishment of representative national youth platforms such as National Youth Councils, both in the Member States and in the accession countries. International Non-Governmental

⁴² Opinion on Mobility for students, persons undergoing training, young volunteers, teachers and trainers. C168 16/6/2000, p.25

⁴³ See Contribution to the Presidency report on the European Employment Pact - Memorandum of the German Presidency "Youth and Europe - Our Future"? The Memorandum suggests that Member States should increase support for educational exchanges and cross-border training both bilaterally and multilaterally. It also called for the breaking down the barriers to the mutual recognition of qualifications and for the promotion of language skills.

⁴⁴ European Charter on Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe, 1992.

⁴⁵ Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the Commission discussion paper "The Commission and non-governmental organisations: building a stronger partnership", Official Journal of the European Communities 2000/OJ C268/15C42.

⁴⁶ The work of more sectoral organisations like European associations of faculty-based students and young entrepreneurs should also given more recognition at Community level, and their involvement and representative role are vital to the development of specific policies in their areas of concern.

Youth Organisation play an important role in the development of youth work and policies at all levels, and an increase in the funding available to these organisations will support the continuing development of their work⁴⁷. They have an important function to involve young people directly in the European construction and through their encounters and exchanges they provide spaces for the development of mutual understanding and conciliation throughout Europe, not only the European Union.

7.4.3 The Committee believes that national and European youth structures should be consulted on policies and programmes affecting young people, including for example, the YOUTH Community Action Programme⁴⁸ and the European Social Fund.

7.4.4 The Committee believes that Member States and the Community should firmly commit to supporting equal opportunities and combating the multiple discrimination experienced by many young people in accordance with the definition of Article 13 of the Treaty, and to promoting tolerance.

7.4.5 The Committee believes that youth information policies need to be further developed on all levels, in particular Member States should pro-actively inform young people more about national and European policies that affect them. The European Commission should provide an inventory of all Community or Community supported measures that affect young people, provided through an internet portal for young people following the model of the CORDIS database⁴⁹

⁴⁷ The European Union supports the Youth Forum through budget line A3023 and grants support to International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations through budget line A3029 of the General Budget of the European Communities.

⁴⁸ Opinion of the ESC on the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing the Community action programme "Youth", CES 1309/98, 15 October 1998

⁴⁹ <http://www.cordis.lu>

7.4.6 In order to contribute to the consultation process on the White Paper on Youth Policy, the Committee will send its own-initiative opinion to the various actors in the youth field, in particular to the European Youth Forum, International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations, the organised Civil Society at European and national level in the youth sector, as well as to the participants of the European youth meeting organised by the European Commission and the French Presidency of the Council in Paris 5-7 October 2000.

Brussels, 29 November 2000

The President
of the
Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
Economic and Social Committee

Göke Frerichs

Patrick Venturini