

Joint conclusions of the Spanish Presidency EU Youth Conference “youth employment and social inclusion”, Jerez, Spain 13-15 April 2010

Youth Employment is the common theme of the three EU Youth Conferences of the current Trio Presidency of the Council of the EU (Spain-Belgium-Hungary, January 2010-June 2011). Basing their work on previously led national consultations, 97 youth delegates and 90 political representatives met during the Spanish EU youth conference, in order to jointly define the priorities on youth employment to be addressed at European level.

These priorities will allow to continue the process of structured dialogue between young people and the institutions under the Belgian and Hungarian presidencies, with the aim of proposing concrete actions and political commitment to address youth employment issues.

The discussions took place in six thematic working groups, allowing the identification of a range of priorities for youth employment. These priorities are thematically presented below, together with a short reasoning explaining their relevance.

Youth employment and its impact on youth autonomy. Access to labour market.

Priority 1: To Recognize Non-Formal Learning Outcomes.

Non-Formal Learning for a young person, boosts self-Esteem and confidence,

makes skills visible, helps to get a job.

For an employer, Non-Formal Learning organises knowledge on the employee's potential, optimises the match between the person and task, makes his company perform better productivity with less input.

For Society, it reduces mismatch unemployment, it increases social inclusion, and improves the economy.

Priority 2: Access of young people to long-term jobs fairly paid with secure working conditions.

Youth is the most vulnerable category on the labour market especially at the times of financial crisis: youth is often forced to accept precarious jobs with low salaries, temporary contracts and without (sufficient) social security.

Precarious contracts do not allow sustainable insertion in the labour market and limits young people's autonomy.

Access of young people to long-term jobs fairly paid with secure working conditions would also promote active citizenship and participation.

Priority 3: Secure a smooth transition from education to the labour market through the promotion of support measures such as quality internships, counselling schemes, and effective and balanced interaction with labour policies.

The transition to the labour market is becoming more and more challenging for young people: statistics show that unemployment rates are skyrocketing and many times young people are not able to find a job matching their qualifications and expectations. At the moment the effective interaction between stakeholders does not exist, being it the key factor in increasing the level of skills gained in educational process. Increasing the quality and quantity of internships can ensure market-needed qualifications for graduates.

Priority 4: A youth friendly labour market.

A youth friendly labour market is a sustainable labour market. The current labour market rules do not reflect today's challenges because of old ways of communication and old economy regulations (for example unequal job requirements with flexible employees but rigid employers). A new agreement between generations is needed to provide equal access to social benefits. A youth friendly labour market would increase economic independence and prevent poverty and social exclusion.

Priority 5: Provide young people with access to income support, pension schemes and other services (childcare facilities, housing, transportation etc.), to promote youth autonomy and security.

The lack of security and autonomy contributes to poverty and social exclusion.

Priority 6: In order to decrease the rate of school drop-outs, especially among disadvantaged youth, Member States are invited to rethink their financial support measures and the effectiveness of their education systems.

The main causes of school drop-outs are lack of financial means, unattractive and irrelevant curricula, and/or outdated pedagogical methods. Decreasing the rate of school drop-outs would allow better autonomy for young people and increased participation in the educational process.

Entrepreneurship and self-employment of young people.

Priority 1: Entrepreneurship should be encouraged and all young people willing to become an entrepreneur should have equal opportunities to do

it.

This priority should be understood as the horizontal approach that affects different policy domains. There are some tasks that can be done in the fields of Non-Formal and Formal Education, legislation, programmes and promoting entrepreneurship.

Non-Formal and Formal Education are good environments to foster creativity and skills for entrepreneurs.

There should be adequate legislation that establishes an entrepreneurship friendly environment.

Programmes should be developed focussing on particular groups of young people dealing with their specific needs or existing programmes should be used more effectively.

Spirit of entrepreneurship should be encouraged on different levels and by different actors: government, NGOs, entrepreneurs etc.

Priority 2: Procedures linked to entrepreneurship should be simplified.

The main problems that young people face in establishing a new entrepreneurship most of the times deal with the code of laws and bureaucracy. New technologies should be used not only in creating a new business or venture, but also during its operational lifetime. It is also needed to simplify tax systems and create a competitive tax rate within Europe. An action of cost reduction at the beginning and during the initial growth of youth entrepreneurship should take place together with the fight of bureaucracy. The creation of effective laws can facilitate the process for young people to develop entrepreneurial initiatives. Finally, the promotion of a European system of sharing good practices in different areas can establish a policy of benchmarking.

Priority 3: Better information on entrepreneurship and support programmes is needed.

There is a need to use Formal Education but changes in the curriculum are needed in order to be more practice oriented. Non-Formal Education should be changed as well –learning by doing, motivation on entrepreneurship, and a connection with internships should be fostered.

Information should be provided in a way suitable for young people.

Support should be provided when starting a business and should involve experienced entrepreneurs.

Priority 4: There is a need to support new ideas and provide access to loans and EU funding programmes.

Motivation, a good idea and financial support are the key elements which encourage young people to start up entrepreneurial activities.

Access to loans and EU funding is crucial due to the fact that young people have less opportunities to get support from the private financial sector or to have their own personal financial resources.

If EU funding programmes for young people are tailor-made, transparent and easily accessible, then they will boost up the set up and sustainability of entrepreneurial initiatives.

The accessibility of EU grants could be directly linked to the trust of private financial institutions, granting loans to potential young entrepreneurs when setting up their own business.

Supporting youth entrepreneurship is in line with the overall values and strategies stated in Agenda 2020. In addition, Member States are obliged to inform young people in relation to the availability to EU funding.

Priority 5: There is a need for specific training and support in going through the complex procedures.

Education for entrepreneurship should promote practical experiences together with theory and post-training overview to overcome the lack of connection between basic education and practical knowledge.

The knowledge from all the Member States should be reflected upon and good practices openly shared to combat inefficient State coordination.

Furthermore, strategically-organised training programmes that work in connection with knowledgeable bodies, such as NGOs, Trade Unions, etc. should be implemented to prevent company or government investment diminishing/decreasing.

Working conditions and equal opportunities. Reconciliation of private and working life.

Priority 1: Remove discrimination on hiring and working conditions related to young people.

The youth unemployment rate is twice as high as for the rest of the population. When recruiting, employers need to acknowledge and value the specific attributes that young people can offer to the market. By employing young people, growth and competitiveness can be sustained and expanded. Employers need to recognise the right of young people to work in fair conditions.

Priority 2: The protection of young people against precarious contracts in order to promote equal working rights, employment security and autonomy.

According to the European studies and statistics, 50% of 15-24 year olds and 25% of 25-29 year olds are in precarious employment situations. This has a big impact on the independence of young people – including their possibility to access housing. There is also a big demographic challenge linked to this, as having children appears to be a difficult option.

The first negative employment experience also diminishes the opportunity to further develop qualifications and skills, while staying out of the labour market or being in a situation of “under” or “hetero” employment can cause the loss of skills previously acquired.

Precariousness, as a result, increases the vulnerability of young workers in regards to working conditions and rights, while it also worsens the general working rights and conditions of the whole labour force.

Priority 3: Promote equal opportunities for young women and men to reconcile their private and family life with their working life.

Youth unemployment in the EU is 21,4% (more than twice as high than among the general population). We can not afford to waste the resource that young women and men constitute. Therefore, it is important to develop inclusive labour markets and promote social inclusion as outlined in the EU 2020 Strategy. There is a need to improve opportunities for young women and men to have easy access to affordable childcare services, better parental leave, as well as possibilities for flexible working conditions (tele-working, part-time work and flexible working hours). There is also a need for better child benefits. The balance between private and working life also contributes to better performance at work.

Priority 4: Internships should be a relevant learning experience where fair labour market conditions apply.

Currently internships often replace “real” jobs and are considered as cheap labour with no or little pay, no contract or social security payment, no relevant learning experience.

This problem should be addressed to make internships a valuable learning process both for personal development and the acquisition of skills and competences which meet the needs of the labour market.

Thus, internships will be a positive first contact with the labour market and increase young people’s employability and motivation.

Priority 5: Promote gender equality for young people on and in the labour market and in education.

The gender-pay gap is 17,4% across Europe. Every young person should have the same opportunities when in the labour market regardless of gender. Jobs within the same field of work should be paid the same. There are feminised/female-dominated jobs which are paid less. Parental leave should not have an effect on pensions. Employers should keep in mind that gender equality contributes to and promotes growth.

**Training and education, life long learning and mobility.
Innovation, creativity and the use of new ICT.**

Priority 1: Recognition of Non-Formal Education and the value of synergies and complementarities of Non-Formal Education, Formal Education as well as e-learning.

Non-Formal Education is effective in developing competencies (skills,

knowledge, attitude) of young people and it provides them with the chance to plan their learning according to their needs, placing them as the basic actors of their own learning, bearing in mind the broad concept of education and its social role.

The complementary values and methods of Formal Education, Non-Formal Education as well as e-learning enrich young people's development and learning outcomes. Synergy of these different concepts ensures the inclusion of all young people and their diverse realities in order to prevent early school leaving.

Priority 2: To ensure equal access for all young people to Formal Education, Non-Formal Education, Life Long Learning, training and mobility.

Lots of young people face all forms of discrimination when accessing educational systems, in breach of their human rights. Lacking equal opportunities and social integration within society is increasing social discrepancies as well as youth unemployment. A long-term sustainable funding of education and training is not guaranteed today.

Priority 3: Develop opportunities for work experience through a cross-sectorial approach between educational system public and private sectors, NGO's as well as increasing awareness and validation of Vocational Education and Training.

One of the reasons why young people are facing high unemployment rates is the lack of experiencing a broader education based on skills and competencies. Cross-sectorial opportunities need to be developed in order to provide young people with relevant work experience and to make them suitable for the labour market. Through an exploitation of young people doing internships, equal

opportunities are not given. There is also a need to ensure a youth-rights based approach. Better cooperation involving all actors is expected.

Priority 4: Invest in youth friendly guidance and information on the already existing mobility and educational tools.

Many of the existing tools are not suitable to ensure equal access as well as equal opportunities for all, lacking a focus on minorities that have special needs (i.e. migrants). Very often these tools are not promoted or are wrongly promoted and do not reach their real target groups.

Priority 5: Support creativity and innovation in all forms and all stages of education.

Negative standardisation is one of the issues the educational system is facing today. The system is neither flexible enough, nor changing fast enough to keep pace with today's society. Also, all processes related to education are lacking the input and participation of all stakeholders (i.e. young people).

Priority 6: Increasing access to ICTs and raising awareness about their impact of the individual and society.

ICTs are a crucial part of today's society and economy. They give opportunities (i.e. e-democracy or modern ways of communication etc.), but as well as challenges and dangers (i.e. exploitation of personal data etc.). Without understanding and having necessary skills to handle ICTs, young people face huge problems to access and succeed in the labour market.

Social dialogue, participation and rights of workers.

Priority 1: Both employed and unemployed young people do not get enough information, knowledge, skills and encouragement to participate in the working environment and social dialogue.

Youth needs more information for career decisions and active guidance. Working conditions for young people (instability, temporality, insecurity) are not encouraging their participation in the working environment and social dialogue. Formal Education fails to provide youth with competences for participation in the social dialogue, whereas Non-Formal Education, which does, is not sufficiently recognised.

Priority 2: Labour legislation and social protection do not cover adequately youth specific situations such as internships, part-time employment, parental leave etc.

In the current economical environment, new ways of labour relations are becoming more and more common. The lack of legislation of these particular labour relations and social protection often leads to exploitation of young people. Quality internships and jobs have crucial importance for young people becoming autonomous and starting their family life. EU legislation in this area fails to be fully implemented in all EU Member States.

Priority 3: Corporate environment does not encourage young employees to participate in the decision-making concerning their working environment.

Companies tend to favour short-term employment in the current economic climate. Fear of unemployment leads young people not to commit themselves to advocate for their rights. There is a lack of co-decision for youth related issues

within companies. Companies may not encourage young employees to participate, because they presume it is not in the company's best interest. Additionally, there is a lack of a legal framework to guarantee young people's right to participate in decision-making in the working environment.

Priority 4: The situation of young people on the labour market is precarious, as young people's interests are not fully represented in the social dialogue.

Young people are not fully represented in the social dialogue and therefore their influence is very limited and their voices are not heard. Trade Unions fail to represent interests of young employed and unemployed people. There is a lack of infrastructure and financial means to support participation of youth in the social dialogue. There is a lack of cooperation among youth NGOs and lack of awareness about this being a problem.

Priority 5: Relevant information doesn't reach all young people.

Special attention needs to be paid to disadvantaged groups of young people in order to increase their participation.

Social Cohesion and Inclusion.

Priority 1: Voluntary activities must be supported, promoted and recognized as a means for social inclusion, Non-Formal Education, mobility, preparation for the labour market.

Voluntary activities allow young people to gain responsibility, improve their social skills and help them to create social networks. They also broaden young peoples horizons, enable them to fully participate in society and help to create a positive image of youth. Voluntary activities give young people the experience to

take autonomous decisions and give young peoples life a purpose.

Priority 2: There should be full accessibility for all young people, specifically young people with fewer opportunities.

Young people with fewer opportunities should have full access to society in general. In addition to access to employment, young people need access to: Information, Training (non-formal), Education, Networks / contacts, Opportunities to gain valuable experience, Volunteering, Participation and representation opportunities.

Young people need more than A job, they need adequate professional realisation.

If this dimension is not a priority and it is not dealt with adequately there is a danger of increasing exclusion and its consequences.

Young people are the engine of society. They have the energy, creativity, will, ideas etc.

Priority 3: Minimising early exclusion, already at an early age, not having the same opportunities as your peers and facing obstacles which prevent you to reach your full potential in life.

When you are excluded at an early age you are more likely to remain excluded. Problems, obstacles are best prevented or adressed as early as possible. Tackling (the risk of) exclusion at an early stage is important for the individual but also beneficial for the society as a whole. Active intervention breaks the vicious intergenerational cycle of exclusion and stops the negative spiral.

Priority 4: Youth work - which is characterised by voluntary participation, structured Non-Formal Learning and offers informal learning opportunities provided by voluntary organizations and public bodies - is

an invaluable contribution to the successful integration of young people into society, particularly those with fewer opportunities.

Despite obvious progress to date, there is a continuing need to further improve youth work to fulfill its vital role in ensuring the social inclusion of young people. Ways of further improving youth work include: more funding, better qualified youth workers, defined quality standards, taking full use of research results (evidence-based youth work and sharing of good practice).