

FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PORTAL

Eurodesk's vision statement

March 2018

Youth policies and Youth work have increasingly been recognised as important policy areas for the European Union, especially as the economic crisis has hit young people particularly hard. Unemployment, poverty rates, radicalisation, exclusion and Euro-scepticism are some of the challenges facing many young people today. EU policy-makers have stressed the need to reach out to young people from all parts of society, to ensure that they know and are able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the EU and, that they are able to have their voices heard on policies that affect them. The European Youth Portal (EYP) is one of the **key tools of reaching out to young people aged 13-30** by offering them quality and neutral information on what Europe has for them.

The first version of the European Youth Portal was launched in 2004 with the aim:

*"to give young people information on Europe (which includes information at the national, regional and local levels) which will **enhance their participation** in public life and thus contribute to their active citizenship. The EYP should be a gateway to information covering a broad range of issues (**'generalist information'**) and should direct the user to information which is available on other sites."*

In 2013 the EYP was revamped to adapt to the changes of the youth field and digital youth trends. Today the Portal stands as the result of 14 years of evolving youth policies and participation instruments. The Portal is **supported by the Eurodesk Network** that has complemented this offer with further professional online and face-to-face information services as well as outreach activities.

The Portal is meant as a tool **for all young people**, focusing on their needs and providing them with information covering all aspects of their lives, drawn from a wide range of sources. Portal statistics show that young people are **mainly interested in volunteering** opportunities. The increase in the number of visits about the European Solidarity Corps confirms that young people are in need of mobility related information.

For the Portal's 15th anniversary in 2019 – which is also the year of the EU elections, **Eurodesk recommends that the European Commission invests in a third revamp of the EYP**. The technological landscape has changed drastically since 2013 and, with it, young people's behaviours towards information and technology. In order to offer a Portal that is better aligned with the needs of young people, that corresponds with EU's policy priorities and that makes the best out of new technology and digital trends, Eurodesk believes this is an emerging priority.

This vision statement aims to lay out the current state of the European Youth Portal and Eurodesk's recommendations for a truly future-ready information-point for young people. In the wake of the European Solidarity Corps and the development of the future community programmes for youth (Multiannual Financial Framework), and in the process of drafting the coming EU Youth Strategy, Eurodesk proposes to take on a greater responsibility of the European Youth Portal.

RELEVANCE OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH PORTAL

The purpose of informing young people about opportunities and promoting youth participation is more relevant today than ever. These goals are given a central place in the current EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018). They have been highlighted by several policy initiatives at EU level, for instance following the Paris, Copenhagen and Brussels attacks. Below we have identified two important objectives of the Portal that we believe need to be emphasised more strongly in the future.

A. Informing all young people about European and International opportunities: towards a comprehensive approach to European youth information

In the draft report of 2015, it is stated under the « **widening outreach**» objective that:

*« Using both online and offline tools, the Commission undertook to better inform young people about the opportunities offered by EU policies and programmes. More importantly, it sought to listen to their views and ideas. **With 1.5 million unique visitors in 2014, the European Youth Portal has become the pillar of these activities, advertising opportunities for cross-border volunteering and connecting to EURES information on job and traineeship offers...** The Commission will further improve the design and functionality of the European Youth Portal and other online platforms. It will work more closely with networks in direct contact with young people, such as the Eurodesk network with its 1 200 information specialists. »¹*

Along with these successful practices, the EYP has played a **significant role in promoting new initiatives such as the European Solidarity Corps**. The Eurodesk network experienced an increase of over 80% in the number of enquiries received and answered on the EYP after the new initiative was launched². It has proved to be a relevant tool to ensure the successful launch of this initiative through information outreach and technical support for applicants ("Ask a Question" service). The Portal has therefore a **strong added value and a great potential** as a go-to-point for information about EU opportunities.

Besides, in its communication "Strengthening European identity through education and culture"³, the Commission sets out a vision for **boosting the future Erasmus+** in all categories of learners (including pupils, students, trainees and apprentices) and teachers, with the aim of doubling the number of participants and reaching out to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds by 2025 (without prejudice to the next MFF). Eurodesk can contribute to this goal by providing a **comprehensive set of online tools and services offered via the European Youth Portal and related social media channels**.

¹ [Draft 2015 Joint Report](#) of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)

² Enquiries received per month via the European Youth Portal (europa.eu/youth) "Ask a question" service since June 2016 until June 2017. 83% is the increase between the total number of enquiries received 6 months before the launch of the ESC and the 6 months that followed.

³ [Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture](#), The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017, COM(2017)

B. Offering a one-stop-shop service for young people: a cross-sectoral approach

The EU recognised that there is a need for a **reinforced cross-sectoral cooperation** in the field of youth in order to adequately deal with the challenges faced by young people today⁴. The need for this approach is stressed both for the European as well as the national level. Most Member States report having a national youth strategy or a cross-sectoral plan targeting youth.⁵ This cross-sectoral approach is directly in line with President Juncker's key principle of **closer inter-service collaboration to provide more joint services** to European Citizens. The high level report on Reaching out to EU Citizens recommends to «*Focus on communicating with young people to increase their understanding of European issues.*»⁶

The European Youth Portal offers a space to inform young people of relevant policy fields as covered by the EU Youth Strategy. The Portal has the potential of a broader use as youth issues are not an isolated issue but **cover many different fields of actions**. As a Portal with the aim to inform young people about relevant policy fields as mentioned in the EUYS, the portal's use has the potential of going beyond the classical "youth issues", by involving several DG's of the Commission to offer a '**one-stop-shop**'⁷ service.

Eurodesk believes that the European Youth Portal should be the single gateway to various EU policies and programmes that impact young people. For that:

- The Portal should be **widely known and used by citizens**; it should benefit from a strong promotion by the EU and its Member States.
- The Portal should be better known and used by other EC Directorates and other EU Institutions. DG EAC, in partnership with Eurodesk, should make sure the EYP gets a **wider recognition** within the EU in order for it to be used to its full potential.
- It shall have a strong **role to play in the future EU Youth Strategy and EU2020 strategy** as a tool for information and participation when it comes to reaching out to youth. All initiatives directly targeted at young people such as the European Youth Week should systematically be featured on it.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE EU YOUTH PORTAL

Eurodesk believes that a revamped European Youth Portal should aim at **reaching out to more young people**. In order for this to be accomplished the Portal is in need of a new approach, improved structure, comprehensive outreach and management strategy.

We have highlighted five areas which we believe are essential to reach this goal: Scope, Content, Visual, Approach, Management and Coordination.

⁴ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on a [European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2016-2018](#) (2015/C 417/01)

⁵ [2012 Joint Report](#) of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-18) - 2012/C 394/03

⁶ [Reaching out to EU Citizens: A new Opportunity](#) - report by Luc Van den Brande, Special Adviser to the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker - October 2017

⁷ One-Stop-Shop definition: an establishment where many different services or products are available – [Collins Dictionary](#)

SCOPE

Our vision of the scope of the future EYP is a Portal that ensures that young people receive **free, updated, neutral and attractive information about Europe**. It should focus on its **European added value**, not duplicating content/services already available at national level.

The EYP's **primary goal is to inform as many young people as possible** about the opportunities Europe offers them. It should provide them with **practical information** by being a user-friendly, youth-oriented tool that is easily accessible. The Portal hosts important tools such as the European Voluntary Service and European Solidarity Corps databases, and informs about youth participation with policy processes such as the Structured Dialogue and the New Narrative for Europe. Eurodesk believes that today's focus is still relevant to keep, but that the way the information is presented and organised must be further improved in order to be truly user-friendly.

The architecture of the EYP follows the priority fields of the EU Youth Strategy⁸. Currently, it is very difficult for young people to guess what these themes encompass, and **statistics show that 93% of page views are related to only 4 themes**: voluntary activities, education and training, employment and entrepreneurship, creativity and culture. **Eurodesk believes that the EYP should be re-focused around two main areas: youth mobility and youth participation seen as overarching topics**.

When it comes to the mobility part, Eurodesk can offer its **mobility tools** to the EYP with links to the Programme Database which provides qualitatively selected mobility opportunities. The Eurodesk Programme Database currently has over 500 national programmes and 288 European programmes that are constantly updated. Eurodesk can also offer a **Map of Eurodesk contact points** for further support. The map contains all Eurodesk partners' contact information in one place (national offices, as well as partner organisations and individuals). Both tools revamped and re-launched in February 2018, could serve a great dimension to the experience and services provided on the EYP.

When it comes to the **youth participation** part, Eurodesk believes participation is a wider umbrella that covers topics connected to the future priorities of the EU Youth Strategy with a specific focus on civic participation on local, national and European level. Youth participation and youth engagement will be encouraged by making sure the information is meaningful to young people. The topics under this umbrella shall be **flexible** enough to adapt to adjust to changing political contexts. Eurodesk calls for stronger **partnerships** with youth organisations such as the European Youth Forum and platforms such as SALTO, in making sure the information is easily understandable and is enabling young people to take part.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The European Commission announced in 2016 that a potentially revamped EYP would aim to fulfil **five key principles**: inspire, inform, support, engage and reflect with young people. Eurodesk supports this new overarching approach to structure the content through these key principles and see the following opportunities ahead:

⁸ The EYP is structured around the eight policy fields of the EU Youth Strategy: Education & Training; Employment & Entrepreneurship; Health and well being; Social Inclusion; Participation; Voluntary activities; Culture and creativity and Youth and the world.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Inspire</u></p> <p>The EYP would aim to inspire young Europeans to embark in an experience of living, learning, volunteering or working abroad. Through various forms of testimonials, stories, account take-overs and feedback could be shared by other mobile young people. This could be structured in a way that visitors of the Portal are invited to discover destination countries in the country pages, with useful tips, information about their rights and real-life experiences.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Inform</u></p> <p>The role of the EYP is to inform young Europeans, and those working with them, about opportunities available to them, and practical information on how to participate.</p> <p>This information should be comprehensive yet dynamic and pedagogic. A large portion could be static information e.g. in sub-pages, while the front page is more interactive. The use of videos and animations would be favoured based on the general approach “What’s in for me in Europe?”</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Support</u></p> <p>The importance of providing quality support before, during and after a mobility period can be the determining factor for a young person who is in-between decisions. Quality support both online and face-to-face are essential mechanisms and Eurodesk have been providing online support through the EYP’s “Ask a question” service since 2004. In 2017 Eurodesk received 8358 enquiries through the Portal.⁹ With better links to the services offered by the Eurodesk network and other relevant services such as EURES, the expertise of these networks could better serve the EYP.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Engage</u></p> <p>Our vision for the content of the future EYP is a Portal that not only informs but engages its visitors through pedagogic content that contributes to media literacy and counter-balances Eurosceptic discourses e.g. through specific campaigns. The future EYP should aim to encourage active citizenship by engaging young Europeans on the issues that affect them. The EYP could contribute to building communities around the ESC initiative.</p> <p>Links to open consultations, opinion polls and different interactive mechanisms should allow for better participation and could collect the views of young people in different topics. The information of these should be easily understandable, user-friendly and available in all EU languages. Broader campaigns such as the European Youth Week, European Sports Week and the Structured Dialogue could easily be featured by allowing young people to register for events, propose activities or share their experiences.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Reflect</u></p> <p>The EYP could include a more apparent link to the different competence tools such as YouthPass, Europass, SALTO and the future Resource Centre of the European Solidarity Corps.</p>	

⁹ In 2016 Eurodesk answered in total 295.523 enquires through all of its services to young people.

With this new approach, Eurodesk proposes to develop **dynamic and pedagogic content** on various policy processes of direct interest to young people and in which they are encouraged to take an active role (e.g. New Narrative for Europe, Ask Navracsecs, open consultations, Structured Dialogue).

In conclusion, our vision for the content of the revamped EYP is:

- We believe that the EYP can encompass these principles and at the same time restructure from 8 priority fields down to two areas: **youth mobility and youth participation**. The EYP should be a Portal that brings together several programmes/initiatives that are targeted at young people; explain why they matter in a youth-friendly manner and link to trusted sources of information. More static content should be available while reducing the number of news items, therefore avoiding extensive human resources to produce content that is difficult to browse.
- We propose to create an **Editorial board**, comprised of the EC, EBL and a number of national coordinators, who would be responsible for ensuring the quality and coherence of the editorial content.
- We believe that a simplification of the language regime (**multilingual platform**) is necessary and would guarantee that all Europeans access the same quality information.

VISUALS

In order to attract young people to the EYP, the design of the interface should be improved to include an easily navigable structure, highlighting the key areas mentioned above: **youth mobility and youth participation**.

Our recommendations for the visual of the future EYP is that:

- The Portal must be aesthetically pleasing, taking into account accessibility needs and encouraging visitors to stay longer and interact with the information.
- The future Portal must be compatible with several different devices as almost 1 out of 5 users are accessing it via mobile phones and tablets. This modern approach means less banners, no side-line banners, streamlined front-page information, easy navigation.
- It should be integrated with social media and forums, providing young people with more interaction such as the European Solidarity Corps app.
- It should have accessibility features to allow people with different disabilities to navigate the site.
- It should refresh its visuals to be more modern and appealing to young people.

APPROACH

Our experience tells us that **information is not enough in order to reach out to citizens**. We believe that we need a coordinated approach with a strong communication and outreach strategy. This goes in line with Junker's report on ensuring more cross-sectorial collaboration in order to ensure a wider outreach. Important to note is that the EYP needs an adequate promotion, through face-to-face outreach as much as through online promotion. A revamp would allow a new face for the Portal and the likelihood of more networks to support and promote its valuable features.

Eurodesk has the capacity to offer **targeted services** thanks to its many years of experience at local, national and European level. The work of Eurodesk could be shifted to managing more of the content and infrastructure of the platform in collaboration with the Commission. This way,

Eurodesk could provide more interactive services to young people and those who work with them while focusing on developing its **network of multipliers**.

With respect to this, the **management of the social media channels and tools should be aligned to increase the overall visibility**. A coherent social media strategy should fall in line with the revamped version of the EYP in order to capitalise on the added value of social media presence. We believe a discussion has to be carried out to address how to ensure that we have a coherent approach to the Portal and its social media accounts.

Last but not least, Eurodesk proposes to **engage young people in the design of the EYP**. In several countries, Eurodesk national coordinators are managing **pools of young journalists** to provide content on the EYP. This successful project could be mainstreamed within the network. EBL could develop, in partnership with those partners, training material and courses for other national coordinators, and organise a yearly gathering of the European young journalists. Partnerships with schools of journalists would be fostered. This would ensure **peer-to-peer information and the building of a youth community behind the EYP**. These young people could also be involved in following up Structure Dialogue processes at the national and EU level.

Our vision for the approach of the EYP is:

- To create an approach that is **relevant to young people and efficient in management**.
- To create a truly **youth-friendly and attractive Portal** that meets the demands of today's young people and **engages youth** in its development – the EYP needs more investments for further development of these services and interactive features.
- To include the **expertise of organisations and networks** with know-how and experience to support its implementation and management.
- To allow **improvements in the language and text management** system through different editor accounts, in order to increase the efficiency and resources used for the language translations.

Of course, in order to ensure impact and successful delivery, the European Union should **make sure that all the Eurodesk Centres are allocated a sufficient budget** to be in capacity to offer quality services. Today the average budget allocated to a national Eurodesk Centre is 54.000 EUR, with huge differences between countries (grants range from circa 6.000 EUR to 150.000 EUR per year per country). The know-how, network and tools are there; the missing link is the amount of **human resources** allocated to implement them.

MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

Eurodesk has a **strong experience** in working with and for young people and has, since the launch of the EYP in 2004, offered support through its European-wide network of trained Eurodesk Mobility Advisors. Eurodesk has played a **significant role in the creation, development and management of the European Youth Portal**¹⁰ and has always acted with interest of a qualitative

¹⁰ Today, the European Commission has the overall responsibility for the European Youth Portal. The content providers of the Portal consist of Eurodesk Brussels Link and National Eurodesk Coordinators and their local networks. Eurodesk Brussels Link has daily editorial responsibility of the Portal, especially for maintaining the content for the European level of the 8 EU Youth Strategy themes, news and events. National Eurodesk Coordinators have editorial responsibility for the content of their respective country on the EYP (articles for the 8 EU Youth Strategy themes, news, events). An Editorial Board is responsible for the overall editorial policy. The Board is in charge of adapting and changing guidelines, and it can be consulted in case of

and comprehensive youth-targeted Portal. Eurodesk's vision for the governance of the portal stems from the point of view of making the above-mentioned suggestions a reality.

Several measures could be implemented to improve the management of the Portal:

- Make sure that the editorial board meets every month and provides a clear direction on the content and design development of the Portal;
- Ensure that EBL is in direct and regular contact with a web developer assigned to the Portal for further technical developments;
- Increase the visibility of the connected services offered by EBL, in particular the Eurodesk network and "Ask a Question" service;
- Ensure that the content is adapted to the needs of young people by giving EBL access to Europa analytics; indeed, we cannot adapt the content to young people's needs if we do not have access to such data (successful visited parts of the EYP, target groups, length of stay, unique visitors from each country, less visited parts, etc.);
- Ensure political commitment from the EC to use the EYP at its full potential and that all youth related initiatives led by DG EAC (and other DGs if possible), in particular the European Youth Week, are featured on the EYP;
- Put in place coordination mechanisms to take into account the expertise of Eurodesk in planning such campaigns to ensure successful promotion and outreach.

As we are about to enter the 15th year of the Portal, we believe the vision stated in this paper leads to developing the EYP to reach its purpose and objective and follows the current trends, behaviours and needs of young people in Europe.

questions. Before 2017, the Editorial Board met on a monthly basis. However, in 2017 DG-EAC choose to host these meetings only when necessary.