

EURODESK REACTION TO THE PROPOSED EU YOUTH STRATEGY

September 2018

Youth policies and youth work have increasingly been recognised as important policy areas for the European Union. The proposed EU Youth Strategy puts a strong emphasis on youth participation, cross-border solidarity, and on strengthening youth work in Europe. It reminds key challenges young people face today such as higher risks of poverty, unemployment; social exclusion and radicalisation; fake news and populism. **The proposed eight-year strategy carries the important mandate to coordinate policy actions for young people accros sectors and countries.**

Eurodesk welcomes the proposal and believes its cross-sectorial approach is shedding light on broad priorities that once fulfilled will positively benefit young people. **It stresses the importance of inclusion, solidarity and reaching out to those with fewer opportunities** by fostering a "*vision of a continent where young people can seize opportunities and relate to European values*". Eurodesk regrets that this ambition is not sufficiently reflected by concrete measures. Indeed, **young people need to understand what is considered to be European values and need to know about European opportunities in order to seize them.** Having access to free and reliable sources of information, at European, national and local level, empowers them to make informed decisions and to fully participate in society. Unfortunately today access to such information remains very unequal.

Despite different youth information systems, there is a common understanding that without **information there is no participation.** Youth information is a youth right; it spans to all areas of young people's life from quality internships and employment rights, social and political rights to mobility opportunities; it should not be limited to the European elections. Ensuring proper information around the EU and the opportunities it offers is even more important when we consider the current political context and the potential increased budget for Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps post 2020. In order to address those challenges, **Eurodesk calls for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to youth information. An approach that aims at ensuring an inclusive, participative, transparent, qualitative and efficient outreach.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **A priority is added to the strategy on "ensuring equal access to quality, impartial and youth-friendly information about how the EU works, how to engage in it and what opportunities it offers"**¹. Having specialised Youth Information Networks such as Eurodesk was recognised as a success factor in ensuring outreach in the evaluation of the current strategy². Despite the policy priority given to youth, Eurodesk (that focuses on informing young people about ways to participate and be mobile in Europe) still suffers from lack of human and financial resources. On average a Eurodesk Centre receives EUR 56K per year with huge differences accros countries (from EUR 6K to 150K).³ Therefore, only the countries receiving grants on the top of this ladder can implement the full range of Eurodesk services.
 - o **Measure:** more investment is needed to ensure a network such as Eurodesk can deliver to its full potential (working with local multipliers, having strong digital and outreach strategies and well trained staff to ensure a wide outreach). All Eurodesk Centres should operate with a least a full time equivalent national coordinator.

¹ [Youth Goal](#) #1 "Connecting EU with Youth" ; adopted in the VIth Cycle of the Structured Dialogue.

² Eurodesk performed "substantially above target" according to the Commission [Staff Working Document](#) "Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020)" accompanying the "Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020)" Report, COM(2018) 50 final.

2. **Youth information services** have been stressed as an essential public service in providing trusted information, specific guidance and support to young people, developing critical-thinking and media literacy and in enhancing autonomous decision-making³⁴. Despite the Council Resolution⁷ of 2005, only a few Member States have a clearly identifiable youth information strategy. As part of their **National Action Plans, Member States should prioritise youth information** with a more proactive approach to outreach, combining digital and face-to-face methods, to connect and engage with young people with fewer opportunities. Investing in quality information services and making sure they also offer European information will ensure a greater awareness about the EU and the opportunities it offers (e.g. working and learning abroad).
 - **Measure:** Peer learning activities between the Member States should tackle youth information and participation, which is one of the Youth Goals⁵. **Member States should adopt youth information plans as part of their National Action Plans.**
 - **Measure:** Define specific **youth information indicators** to be taken into account by the Expert Group on EUYS policy indicators.
 - **Measure:** **Capacity building** actions for youth information services and their staff should be supported through EU programmes such as Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and the Structural Funds.
3. **Foster youth participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the strategy** especially when it comes to the Youth Dialogue. Youth participation can only be fostered through quality consultative processes and by having young people, youth organisations and researchers involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of the process to make it truly participative and inclusive. Youth information and outreach should be a strategic component of the process.
 - **Measure:** Ensure a **youth information perspective in the European Steering Committee** of the EU Youth Dialogue by including networks such as EURODESK, ERYICA and EYCA who have years of experience in reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities. European policy processes such as the EU Youth Dialogue and other consultations, are difficult to grasp for many young people. The work of youth information workers is about translating this information into something meaningful to young people.
4. **Ensure a stronger coherence between policies and programmes** as well as between the various policy initiatives targeting young people. Young people are confronted with an overload of information; efforts should be taken to coordinate actions. The EU Youth Coordinator should work hand in hand with various stakeholders to ensure a coherent communication towards young people. The EU Youth Portal should genuinely become "the digital single-entry point for young people to engage with the EU".
 - **Measure:** The EU Youth Portal offers a space to inform young people about relevant policy fields as covered by the EU Youth Strategy and has the potential to offer a 'one-stop-shop' service to young people e.g. about ways to go abroad, to discover new countries and participate in EU debates. National channels should also disseminate this information. The Portal should be revamped to match the needs of young people and come with interactive features to encourage youth participation; it should continue to offer helpdesk services such as the "Ask a Question" service provided by Eurodesk (over 10.000 enquiries were answered during the DiscoverEU launch campaign, during the month of June 2018).

³ Communication from the Commission to the Council - Follow-up to the White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth" - Proposed common objectives for the participation and information of young people, in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of EU cooperation in the youth field, [COM\(2003\) 184](#)

⁴ ERYICA, EYCA and EURODESK joint position paper "Engage. Inform. Empower." (2016)

⁵ Youth Goal #4 "Information and constructive dialogue"; adopted in the VIth Cycle of the Structured Dialogue.

ANNEX – Youth Information Action Plan

The proposed framework for cooperation in the field of youth has identified the need to broaden youth participation as a priority issue. Challenges related to involving young people from a more diverse background and with fewer opportunities still remain. This EU Youth Information Action Plan supports this goal by making sure all young people are informed about the different opportunities that exist for them. This document sets out a non-exhaustive list of possible actions to tackle those challenges.

The following objectives should be considered in all the fields of actions identified by the strategy:

- **Improving access to quality youth information** through all possible channels at local, regional, national level with the support of European-wide organisations such as Eurodesk, ERYICA, EYCA.
- **Design and monitor the implementation** of the EU and national Youth Information Action Plans (as part of National Work Plans), with the following objectives:
 - Improve access for all young people to quality information services, especially through effective use of information and communication technologies.
 - Increase provision of quality information about what Europe offers to young people and those working with them.
 - Encourage youth participation through quality consultative processes, involving young people and those working with them, to ensure youth-friendly, open and easily accessible processes.

The expected impact of the EU Youth Information Action Plan is a:

- **Broader participation** of young people with fewer opportunities in EU public consultations and processes, such as the EU Youth Dialogue, and in EU programmes.
- **Better inclusion** by involving young people from all backgrounds in EU processes.
- **Greater visibility and understanding** about Europe and European opportunities.
- **Stronger civil society engagement** behind public campaigns aimed at young people (e.g. educational and youth stakeholders) to ensure greater dissemination and ownership.

I. WIDENING OUTREACH AND IMPROVING ACCESS TO QUALITY INFORMATION

It is important to note that not all young people are digitally connected. **Face-to-face communication** is an important measure when reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities. In order to inform and engage all young people, it is important to **combine online and face-to-face measures** and continuously adapt to young people's behaviours and needs. Alongside youth-friendly digital measures, the importance of ensuring **access to local information points** is key to being inclusive. Indeed, a face-to-face outreach has better potential of **reaching younger target groups, especially those with fewer opportunities**, by giving a personal and trusted face to European information and by combining information and counseling services.

To be inclusive, the youth information strategy aims to:

- **Offer outreach activities** targeted at young people where they are active (e.g. workshops in schools, street work, infopoints, fairs). Eurodesk offers a great model to combine European, national and local actions with its network of 1000 multipliers. Much more could be achieved with stronger human and financial resources.
- **Increase the participation of young people with fewer opportunities** in the EU Youth Dialogue.
- **Support and encourage partnerships** between various youth information services, educational and youth organisations to ensure a coordinated approach to reach out to specific target groups.

Actions:

- **Implement a proactive approach** combining digital and face-to-face outreach measures. Support grassroots organisations who can reach young people with fewer opportunities.
- **Invest more funding to support information structures** on local and national level, to ensure that the services are sustainable, modern and equipped with trained staff.
- **Ensure a youth information perspective in the European Steering Committee of the EU Youth Dialogue** by including networks such as EURODESK, ERYICA and EYCA.
- **Supporting existing European Networks of Youth Information Services** such as EYCA, ERYICA and EURODESK that enhance European cooperation in terms of capacity building, training, and peer-learning; pooling resources to ensure (cost) efficiency and a strong multiplying effect and impact.

II. INCREASE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUTH INFORMATION

With regards to widening participation, measures are needed to encourage young people to exercise their citizenship and participate effectively in democratic life at all levels. Access for young people to information shall be promoted in order to increase their participation in public life and help them realise their potential as active, responsible citizens. Innovative ways of involving young people should be fostered. Young people are confronted with an overload of information and opportunities are scattered on various websites. At EU level, the **European Youth Portal** offers a space to inform young people about relevant policy fields as covered by the EU Youth Strategy and has the potential to serve as a European **'one-stop-shop'** service to young people. Of course, national youth portals and websites should also disseminate such information.

To be participative, the youth information plan aims to:

- Ensure coherence of information through the EU Youth Portal, by offering a one-stop-shop with all the relevant opportunities available (e.g. EU Programmes, EU Youth Week, EU Youth Dialogue).
- Support and implement youth participation mechanisms in order for young people to be involved in youth information creation and provision.
- Pay specific attention to media literacy of young people and youth workers.

Actions:

- **Revamped the European Youth Portal to match the needs of young people and current trends.** Re-design the current structure and make it more user-centred by taking into account the needs of youth.
- **Involve young people and youth organisations in the design of outreach campaigns** such as the European Youth Week to ensure a youth perspective.
- **An EU-level expert group** should be set up to measure the implementation of the Youth Information Plan, ensuring key partners are involved in its design, delivery and monitoring.

III. INCREASE THE QUALITY OF YOUTH INFORMATION IN EUROPE

The Council Resolution⁶ of 2005, only managed to encourage a few Member States to implement a clearly identifiable youth information strategy. These are implemented by national youth information networks (when they exist), ensuring coordination between the European, national and local level. In order to offer all young people in Europe equal access to information and advisory services⁷, EU Member States are encouraged to implement clearly identifiable youth information goals.

⁶ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States of 24 May 2005 meeting within the Council on implementing the common objectives for youth information [Official Journal C 141/03 of 10 June 2005]

⁷ Communication from the Commission to the Council - Follow-up to the White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth" - Proposed common objectives for the participation and information of young people, in response to the

To be qualitative, efficient and comprehensive, the youth information strategy aims to:

- **Support Member States in developing national youth information plans** in their National Action Plans for the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy.
- **Develop a common European definition and standard for youth information**, to support institutions, organisations and other structures that work with youth information.
- **Ensure a youth information perspective in the expert groups** established on European level. Take into account youth information in the online course on youth work, on the Youth Wiki and peer-learning activities such as the EU Youth Strategy Platform.

Actions:

- **Invite EU Member States to join a thematic working group on youth information** to support peer learning activities. The aim will be to support Member States in defining their youth information strategies at national and local levels, define and support the EU Youth Strategy Information Action Plan through the exchange of information and best practice. Youth Information Networks such as Eurodesk, ERYICA and EYCA shall be invited to seat in this group in order to share their expertise.
- **Support European research and studies** aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the information needs of young people, how they create, engage and disseminate information and the role that professionals and volunteers in the youth field can play in the process.
- **Recognising the role of youth information workers.** Although the situation of youth information workers varies across countries, more efforts should be put in defining **common standards** for this profession in line with policy developments regarding competence frameworks, recognition and transparency mechanisms such as the EQF and ESCO⁸.
- **Prioritise youth information within community programmes** in the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework, in particular within the successor programmes of Erasmus+, Horizon 2020, Structural Funds and European Solidarity Corps.

Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field, [COM\(2003\) 184](#)

⁸ Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the [validation of non-formal and informal learning](#) and Resolution of the Council of 18 May 2006 on the [recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field](#). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the [European Qualifications Framework](#) for lifelong learning and [European Area of Skills and Qualifications](#), Special Eurobarometer 417, European Union, 2014