

Youth Policies in the European Union

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The European Union has a new Youth Strategy since the 1st January 2019 and for the period 2019-2027. It aims to empower young people and focuses on the 3 following areas of action: «engage, connect, empower». The new European Youth Strategy promotes the participation of young people in civic and political life, volunteering, different forms of mobility, solidarity, youth empowerment through quality, innovation and the recognition of youth work. Young people's opinion must be heard by policy because they are the ones who will live with the consequences of the decisions which are being taken now. For this reason, the Strategy is built upon the issues raised by European young people through the Structured Dialogue. It also seeks to provide young people from diverse social, economic and cultural background with the necessary means to address existing and new challenges.

Structured Dialogue has been an important part of the current Strategy which in the new Youth Strategy is known as European Youth Dialogue. It is a tool to ensure young people's participation in designating the youth policies of the EU. The feedback of the participation of 50.000 young people in Structured Dialogue were 11 Goals (Connecting EU with Youth, Equality of All Genders, Inclusive Societies, Information & Constructive Dialogue, Mental Health & Wellbeing, Moving Rural Youth Forward, Quality Employment for All,

Quality Learning, Space and Participation for All, Sustainable Green Europe, Youth Organisations and European Programs) which are a substantial part of the Youth Strategy and identify areas that affect young people's lives

The challenges that European young people face can be seen in a Eurobarometer published survey (March 2019). Young people were asked which priorities the EU should have. Their first four priorities for the European policies were the environment and fighting climate change (67%), improving education and training (56%), fighting poverty and economic and social inequalities (56%) and boosting unemployment (49%). All European countries do not face the same problems to the same extent. After the crisis of 2008 youth unemployment has been increased in the EU especially in Mediterranean countries like Greece (40%), Spain (31,7%) and Italy (30,5%). Youth unemployment is a huge issue in the EU, because it creates

big inequalities among the European population. For this reason, European leaders have committed to bring at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020.

Among the measures that EU considers for tackling youth unemployment is the new Youth Strategy which provides a clear link between EU youth policy implementation and related program activities in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. The EU Youth Strategy together with the funding programs strives to improve the living conditions of young people in Europe and diminish youth unemployment. Erasmus+ is the most successful European program. It is an efficient tool which promotes adult learning, especially for new skills and those skills that the labour

market requires. Erasmus+ facilitates young people to learn a new language, familiarize themselves with different labour contexts, test themselves in other job markets, help them connect with people from all over the world. Solidarity Corps finances volunteering activities, training and projects for young people all around European Union. The Solidarity Corps supports vulnerable people and contributes to the increase of solidarity for disadvantage young population. It is an extremely motivated experience for young people who want to help, learn and develop. Both programs support vulnerable people and are sources for youth empowerment, especially for young people with fewer opportunities.

According to the challenges that young people face, each Member State can identify its own fields of action to implement the Youth Strategy and build its own national and regional youth policy. The European Commission proposes the Member States should adopt National Action Plans with self-chosen targets and indicators. Young people should be involved in the whole procedure for the implementation of EU initiatives that affect them. A cross sectoral cooperation will contribute to successful implementation of the Strategy in European, national and regional level. Member States must find the means to reach a wider spectrum of young people especially those from disadvantage and hard to reach groups. In this part quality youth work and well training youth workers may successfully contribute to support and inform disadvantaged young people and those live in remote, rural areas about their chances for participation in European programs and ways for improving their knowledge and acquiring new skills to deal with the competitive demands of a new digitalized era. In addition, youth work and youth workers may have a significant role for the empowerment

of young people, the prevention of discrimination, the eradication of youth poverty and the support of social inclusion.

The European Union sets out youth as a priority among different policy areas and promote cross sectoral cooperation in European and national level. It identifies the significance of Youth Strategy for strengthening European young people to reach their potential, face their challenges, increase their participation in policy making and contribute to a prosperous future for them and the European Union.