

Reaction of the Network of National Agencies of the YOUTH IN ACTION programme on the communication of the European Commission “A budget for Europe 2020”

Within its communication on the Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) the European Commission sets out the concept for a new programme generation ('Education Europe') that would run from 2014 until 2020. Given the importance of the proposed developments, the network of National Agencies wants to react to this communication - with comments divided into 4 main categories as set out below.

This document aims at communicating the results of discussions in the network to the European Commission and to all parties involved in the debate on the MFF proposal. It reflects the ideas and observations that are shared by a large majority of National Agencies, present in the meeting in Warsaw (12-15 September 2011). The text is also an expression of the commitment of the network of NA's to the further development of the YOUTH IN ACTION programme and European policies in the youth field.

Back in April 2011, the network of National Agencies developed and communicated its reflections on the future of Youth in Action programme beyond 2013. The result of this exercise - focusing on the aims, objectives, actions and structures for a new programme - is annexed to this document.

1. The COM proposes to merge the Lifelong Learning, Erasmus Mundus, YOUTH IN ACTION and other programmes into one single programme for education, training and youth to be known as 'Education Europe'. This proposal does not reflect the majority of opinions expressed during the consultation phase for the new generation of programmes.

The network of National Agencies urges the COM when drafting the legal bases for the new programme generation to take into account:

=> the **European Parliament's resolutions on the Youth on the Move-communication** (A7-0169/2011) which states that the "Youth in Action programme is crucial for youth participation in Europe and that this programme should be strengthened and continued; therefore calls on the Commission to maintain a separate Youth in Action programme in the forthcoming MFF" **and on the Multiannual Financial Framework** (A7-0193/2011), which states that "youth-related programmes like Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action, which bear low cost per beneficiary and therefore have high efficiency, should be maintained as separate programmes in the next MFF and that they deserve a much stronger investment."

- ⇒ the opinion of **87% of the 6 787 individuals and organisations** reacting on the Commission's online consultation on the next generation of the Youth in Action programme, who approved the continuation and development of the programme and stated that "the future programme should continue being implemented separately".
- ⇒ the **results of the interim evaluation of the programmes**, as they are summarised in the Commission Staff Working Paper (SEC(2011) 868 final) that accompanies the proposed Multiannual Financial Framework : "Its added value relates to aspects such as the non-formal learning scope, active participation of youth and the fact that young people with fewer opportunities are a specific target. (...) YiA has a sustainable impact on participants and youth workers in terms of participating in events after YiA, follow up work for NGOs and increased subsequent mobility. It has also proved, among others, how a European programme can help develop activities in favour of youth at national level."
- ⇒ the **position voiced repeatedly by a significant number of Member States** and especially in a letter by a major group of 15 Directors-General for Youth to COM, stating the following principles as crucial for a new programme:
 - "It should be independent and oriented on the specific needs of the EU youth field;
 - It should be a European instrument for implementing the EU-youth strategy adopted by the Council of the EU and should fulfil the aims of the Treaty of Lisbon;
 - It should focus more strongly on creating equal opportunities for all young people and continue efforts to integrate young people with fewer opportunities in all areas of the programme".

2. The COM proposes transversal lines of action in Education Europe : (1) Trans-national learning mobility. (2) Co-operation activities. (3) Policy support. The current proposal does not plan to structure the new programme according to the different sectors that it wants to cover and it does not appear to take into account the different profiles of the targeted participants.

The NA network is concerned that:

- ⇒ the proposal of the COM in the MFF does not aim to integrate Youth in Action as a comprehensive programme into Education Europe, but only a number of selected elements and formats, which would mean the end of YOUTH IN ACTION as a visible youth programme, specifically dedicated to youth issues, youth work and youth policy, implemented in a particular, youth specific way.

- ⇒ A programme like Education Europe will not take as much account of the characteristic features of non-formal and informal learning, as a specific Youth in Action programme can and will do. Youth in Action promotes activities and developments in a very different policy area, works in different social settings, and involves organisations that are different from those that operate in education and training.
- ⇒ Education Europe appears to be focused strongly on higher education in contrast to YOUTH IN ACTION, which has been successfully reaching out to those who do not or no longer participate in the formal education system and are in need of fresh perspectives. Youth in Action has been successfully offering disadvantaged young people many direct learning opportunities outside the traditional education system.

Therefore a large majority of National Agencies believes, that

- ⇒ a distinct and youth specific programme for non-formal and informal learning should be preserved, aligned with the specific needs in the youth field, and accessible to the target groups of YOUTH IN ACTION: youth associations, youth work organisations, NGOs, and young people themselves;
- ⇒ YOUTH IN ACTION as a brand name is very well known by young people and all actors in the youth field and should also be kept in the new programme generation;
- ⇒ any new programme should also continue to be accessible for all young people with a clear priority on young people with fewer opportunities.

3. The COM proposes to provide policy support (“to gather evidence on the effectiveness of education investments and to help Member States implement effective policies”) as one of three transversal actions. However, the absence of a dedicated and visible youth policy programme would seriously jeopardise the achievements reached by the youth policy developments during the last 20 years: the White Paper on Youth, the Open Coordination Method, the European Youth Pact, the EU-Youth Strategy 2010-2018.

The Network of NAs is concerned that

- ⇒ the EU-Youth Strategy 2010-2018 might be in danger, not only given the loss of YOUTH IN ACTION as an instrument for its implementation, but also considering that YOUTH IN ACTION currently promotes concrete tools such as the structured dialogue with young people, peer learning, the EU Youth Report and evidence-based youth policy;
- ⇒ Education Europe might have difficulties in adequately addressing the area of

youth policy and youth work as the policies, instruments and processes of the education sector and of Education Europe are not sufficiently aligned with the requirements resulting from the needs of youth policy and youth work strategies;

- ⇒ If it is embedded within Education Europe, the further development of youth work in Europe - through the development of common European activities, tools activities or structures - might be more difficult. Youth work can only be lifted to a higher professional level if it remains part of the youth policy and youth work field, rather than being turned into an aspect of formal education.

The Network of NAs believes, that

- ⇒ the Europe 2020 strategy and in turn, the Youth on the Move flagship initiative, require far greater commitment at the EU level in all areas that affect young people's lives. The EU Youth Strategy will only be able to make a youth-related contribution to the Europe 2020 strategy and the Youth on the Move flagship initiative if it is supported by a programme that gives access to the youth work and youth policy field at European and Member States level;
- ⇒ the EU Youth Strategy needs to be underpinned by a powerful implementation tool, in order to continue to encourage cooperation between the Member States in the youth work and youth policy field, but also to translate the Strategy's elements into practice and builds up the triangle between youth work, youth policy and research and continue contributing to the construction of evidence-based youth policy.

4. Following the proposal of the COM in the MFF, the programme implementation of Education Europe would be steered, advised, funded and managed as only one programme. This will lead to decision making, budgeting and management , that might not sufficiently be linked with the reality of youth work and youth policies.

The Network of NAs is concerned that

- ⇒ the Programme Committee overseeing Youth in Action would be disbanded. Programme decisions on Education Europe, which are affecting youth activities, youth work and youth policy would no longer be taken by experts from the youth field, but instead by a committee composed solely or principally of education and training ministry officials;
- ⇒ within the COM (in DG EAC) the Directorate of Youth and the units currently responsible for youth issues are in danger of becoming obsolete. At the same time it is to be expected, that in the Member States, the Education Ministers would be assigned responsibility for the programme, despite the existence of

dedicated youth ministries in a number of Member States with political and factual responsibility for youth issues;

- ⇒ despite the proposed budget raise, it stays unclear how much money is foreseen to be allocated for activities of the current YOUTH IN ACTION programme. The COM does not give any indication about the budgetary distribution among the existing programmes, nor does it give an overview on the development of funds during the seven years period. At the time when drafting this document, it also remains very unlikely that this budget proposal will be accepted by Member States;
- ⇒ the supportive approach of National Agencies towards project promoters, with a whole set of offers for information, advice, project support and training, is not seen as evident in Education Europe. Organisations in the youth field, and young people themselves all over Europe may lose the support they get by their National Agencies in order to most effectively realise their projects.

The Network of NAs believes, that

- ⇒ in the new programme generation a youth programme would also have to be implemented with its own programme committee in order to ensure decision making is sufficiently linked with the reality of youth work and youth policies;
- ⇒ activities of the current YOUTH IN ACTION programme need to adequately profit from a potential raise of funds over the whole programme period and for every year;
- ⇒ a legal basis for the new programme period needs to have a separate budget indication for youth activities for each programme year;
- ⇒ the different sectors in education, training and youth have entirely different target groups. Therefore the different sectors need different approaches to implement the programme at European and Member States level. And thus the youth specific structures, implementing the programme in the youth sector at a Member State level, should also be kept in the new programme generation. These structures should remain embedded in the youth field taking in account the national youth policy context;
- ⇒ the existing youth specific services need to be kept in the new programme generation. The supportive approach in reaching out to young people, youth work and youth policy sector in each country and at a European level needs to be ensured by maintaining current mechanisms such as Youth in Action's Training and Cooperation Plan for National Agencies.

Annex: Network proposal for a new Youth in Action programme beyond 2013.