

## **The future of youth policy cooperation in Europe post-2018 – Prerequisites for a successful European youth policy**

### **Policy paper by the Child and Youth Welfare Association (AGJ)**

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In light of current political developments in Europe and around the world, including the rise in populism, anti-democracy and xenophobia, youth policy and youth education have a vital role to play in creating perspectives for and in cooperation with young people and in strengthening democratic awareness and social cohesion. At the European level, youth policy cooperation under the EU Youth Strategy makes a crucial contribution to this.

As the current phase of European cooperation in the youth field draws to a close, it is time to reflect on the achievements so far and to suggest recommendations for the period to come. In the past, the Child and Youth Welfare Association (AGJ) has provided continuous input on the various milestones of EU-level youth policy engagement and the evolving instruments for its implementation.<sup>1</sup> The present policy paper outlines the factors that the AGJ considers crucial to the successful continued development of the EU youth policy post-2018.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., the following documents (all in German): AGJ discussion document “Peer-Learning als Instrument der EU-Jugendstrategie”, 29/30 November 2012, downloadable from [web31.server1.hostingforyou.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/Peer\\_Learning.pdf](http://web31.server1.hostingforyou.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/Peer_Learning.pdf); the AGJ statement “Der zweite europäische Jugendbericht: Mehr als ein beschäftigungspolitischer Fokus?”, 29/30 November 2012, downloadable from: [web31.server1.hostingforyou.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/2\\_Europaeischer\\_Jugendbericht\\_2\\_.pdf](http://web31.server1.hostingforyou.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/2_Europaeischer_Jugendbericht_2_.pdf); the AGJ statement “Erasmus für alle? EU-Programm für eigenständige Jugendpolitik”, 23 Februar 2012, downloadable from [www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/ErasmusfuerAlle.pdf](http://www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/ErasmusfuerAlle.pdf); the AGJ statement “Anforderungen an jugendpolitische Indikatoren als Instrument der EU-Jugendstrategie”, 24/25 November 2011, downloadable from [www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2011/Jugendpolitische\\_Indikatoren.pdf](http://www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2011/Jugendpolitische_Indikatoren.pdf); the AGJ discussion document “Anforderungen an Ausgestaltung, Instrumente und Weiterentwicklung der Europäischen Jugendstrategie 2010-2018”, 2/3 December 2010, downloadable from [www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2010/Jugendstrategie%20%283%29.pdf](http://www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2010/Jugendstrategie%20%283%29.pdf); the AGJ policy paper “Neue Qualität: Kernempfehlungen zur EU-Jugendstrategie 2010-2018”, 1/2 July 2009, downloadable from [www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2009/EU-Strategie.pdf](http://www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2009/EU-Strategie.pdf); the AGJ policy paper “Zukunftsperspektiven für eine Jugendpolitik in Europa”, 9/10 April 2008, downloadable from [www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2008/Zukunftsperspektiven\\_Europa.pdf](http://www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2008/Zukunftsperspektiven_Europa.pdf).

## **1. The EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018)**

In November 2009, the Council of Europe adopted what it termed a “Renewed Framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)”, more popularly known as the EU Youth Strategy. The Strategy builds on the “Framework of European cooperation in the youth field” for the period 2002 to 2009, which led to the application of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the youth field. OMC is a cooperation instrument used by the European Commission and Member States under which policy goals are jointly agreed and best practices exchanged, while maintaining the Member States’ sovereign responsibility for youth policy. In other words, the Member States decide themselves how they wish to shape youth policy and implement the EU Youth Strategy.

The Strategy is an umbrella structure for a variety of EU-level youth policy activities and initiatives. For the time being, it marks the culmination of an ever closer youth policy cooperation across the EU.

Its general objectives are to provide more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and the labour market; and to promote young people’s active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity. Accordingly, the EU Youth Strategy proposes initiatives in eight fields of action:

- Education and training
- Employment and entrepreneurship
- Health and well-being
- Participation
- Voluntary activities
- Social inclusion
- Youth and the world
- Creativity and culture

The EU Youth Strategy promotes specific measures in the youth field (sectoral approach), but also incorporates a cross-sectoral approach.

In pursuing the objectives of the Strategy, Member States can make use of various instruments, such as knowledge-building for evidence-based youth policy, regular progress reports (notably the European Commission’s EU Youth Report, compiled in cooperation with

the Member States), European peer learning,<sup>2</sup> the Structured Dialogue<sup>3</sup> with young people and youth organisations, and EU programmes.

The priority issues when it comes to implementing the EU Youth Strategy are determined jointly by the respective trio presidency<sup>4</sup> and adopted by the Council of Europe. In addition, in 2014 the EU Member States adopted their first Work Plan for Youth, which defined thematic priorities notably for activities at the European level. In the long term, this work is to help create a solid knowledge base that strengthens European cooperation in the youth field and provides the Member States with fresh input for their youth policy initiatives. A second EU Work Plan for Youth was adopted for the period 2016 to 2018. While the first work plan focused on employment, the second directs the spotlight on combating youth radicalisation and marginalisation, promoting the inclusion of young people in social, cultural and civic life, and addressing the challenges and opportunities of the digital age.

The external evaluation published by the European Commission in March 2016 offers an insight into the relevance of the EU Youth Strategy. It reveals that the EU Youth Strategy has succeeded in sharpening the profile of the youth field at the EU level, giving much greater visibility to youth policy issues there. By implementing the EU Youth Strategy, some Member States have been able to introduce new or improve existing national youth policies and give them greater definition. In countries that barely had a youth policy at the time the EU Youth Strategy was adopted, the Strategy has delivered strong impacts and encouraged the development of youth policy approaches, principles and structures. The majority of interviewed (youth) policy stakeholders hence generally consider the EU Youth Strategy to be relevant.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Peer learning refers to a process that takes place between young people, policy-makers and practitioners from various countries with the aim of learning from the experiences of others in similar situations. Cf. AGJ discussion document “Peer-Learning als Instrument der EU-Jugendstrategie“, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> The Structured Dialogue is a participatory instrument under the EU Youth Strategy that encourages young people to take an active part in democratic life. It is based on participatory principles and is implemented in the form of a process. Structured Dialogue activities may include seminars, conferences, consultations and other formats at the European, national, regional or local level. For more information, go to [www.strukturierter-dialog.de](http://www.strukturierter-dialog.de) (in German).

<sup>4</sup> “Trio presidency” refers to the cooperation between the three EU Member States that successively hold a Council presidency. These Member States adopt a joint 18-month programme to ensure a consistent agenda.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. European Commission: “Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU. Final report”, March 2016, downloadable from [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/more\\_info/evaluations/docs/youth/youth-strategy-2016\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/evaluations/docs/youth/youth-strategy-2016_en.pdf).

## **2. Recommendations for the continuation of youth policy cooperation in Europe post-2018**

The AGJ is convinced that European cooperation in the youth field is a valuable initiative to strengthen youth work, youth policy and youth services in Europe that must be continued beyond 2018. In these challenging times for the EU, there is a need for a shared European understanding of solutions and objectives, also and particularly in the youth sphere. The next phase of youth policy cooperation should take account of this. The following success factors apply in this context:

### **a. Greater visibility of the added value and relevance of youth policy cooperation in Europe**

Youth policy cooperation in the EU delivers clear benefits for young people and youth policy stakeholders in all Member States: It creates and sharpens an awareness of the needs of young people, triggers specific discussions, helps to free up resources and provides political impulses to help solve the societal challenges. For youth policy cooperation in Europe to continue successfully beyond 2018, it is vital to ensure that this added value remains clearly visible and to highlight it wherever possible and necessary.

European cooperation in the youth field should be understood as having two functions: for one, it fulfils a clear youth policy mission; for another, it provides impulses. The EU's mission is particularly evident in the following five areas: cross-border mobility; promoting active European citizenship and civic engagement in and for Europe; the continued development of youth work; strengthening diversity and combating group-based hostility; and addressing current societal challenges. These core tasks of EU youth policy cooperation should be given greater definition post-2018. Finally, European cooperation in the youth field can be a source of other ideas and approaches that the Member States can choose to make use of depending on their individual needs and situations, and that should be adapted for use in Germany, too.

### **b. Sharper definition of EU youth policy objectives**

The sovereign debt, banking and economic crises have pushed labour market and employment policy aspects — notably youth unemployment — right to the top of the EU Youth Strategy agenda and its implementation. The one-sided emphasis on employment has meant that youth policy objectives have lost definition.<sup>6</sup> As a result, there is a risk that formal

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<sup>6</sup> The differences in the perceived relevance of youth policy, labour market policy and education policy are borne out by the results of the external evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy. The majority of respondents

training and education processes that largely seek to secure young people's employability will continue to take precedence. However, a successful EU youth policy needs a comprehensive approach that does not just see young people as (potential) workers, but also promotes their strengths and interests and gives them access to the many opportunities that Europe offers. To this end, non-formal and informal learning opportunities are vital. The AGJ advocates strengthening the role of non-formal and informal learning in the EU Youth Strategy.

To give clearer focus to the youth policy objectives at the EU and Member State level, more coordination and coherence between the EU Youth Strategy and other youth-related policy fields at the EU level is crucial. This requires closer alignment with the EU's education, employment, social and economic policy strategies. However, this is not to say that the EU Youth Strategy should be given an even more pronounced emphasis on employment policy. Rather, the AGJ is committed to ensuring that youth policy issues are given greater consideration when implementing overarching economic and social policy strategies, as well as to ensuring that greater investments are made in young people.<sup>7</sup>

#### **c. Better balance between stability and flexibility**

A viable EU Youth Strategy must strike a balance between the need for planning certainty and the desire for flexibility. The long term of the EU Youth Strategy represents the planning horizon that is necessary for building structures, networks and expertise, yet it leaves little flexibility to respond to topical developments such as the refugee situation or the emergence of populist, anti-European and racist sentiment all over Europe. For this reason, the AGJ advocates maintaining a longer-term horizon for the Strategy yet making more targeted use of the work plans as a strategic instrument, aligning them more closely with the issues on the trio presidency's agenda so as to be able to respond more adequately to medium-term sociopolitical developments.

#### **d. Improved target group orientation, participation and bottom-up approach**

The choice of priority themes should not just be politically motivated, but also respond to the needs of young people and youth policy-makers on the ground. Specifically, the future agenda of the EU Youth Strategy must take better account of the concerns of disadvantaged

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felt that the "classic" youth issues such as "creativity and culture" or "youth and the world" were far less relevant than, e.g., "employment and entrepreneurship" or "education and training".

<sup>7</sup> Cf. also the AGJ statement "Die Strategie Europa2020 – Die Rechte und das Wohlergehen von Kinder und Jugendlichen stärker berücksichtigen!" (in German), 25/26 June 2015, downloadable from [www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2015/Strategie\\_Europa\\_2020.pdf](http://www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2015/Strategie_Europa_2020.pdf).

young people and those with specific needs. Greater consideration must also be given to support and training for child and youth services experts, e.g., in the form of mobility measures. Experts have a valuable multiplier function and create the support structures on the ground without which youth policy cooperation cannot be put into practice.

Existing youth policy cooperation in Europe has so far not paid sufficient attention to the local level. The AGJ hence urges that the post-2018 EU Youth Strategy prioritise the involvement of the local level and the advancement of corresponding governance models. Overall, the implementation by child and youth services organisations of a Youth Strategy that was set out at the EU level should be replaced by co-production involving all relevant stakeholders. In this context, care should be taken to ensure that the “top-down” transfer is accompanied by a “bottom-up” transfer of local impulses to the European level. Just as vital as a vertical expansion of the Strategy is its horizontal expansion,<sup>8</sup> meaning the broader and more systematic inclusion of civil society stakeholders, independent institutions and youth organisations in the shape of a civil dialogue.<sup>9</sup> Responsibility for this broad-based incorporation of various levels and stakeholders lies with the competent youth policy-makers in the Member States on the one hand, and with the local authorities on the other.

In addition, all instruments of the EU Youth Strategy should be designed with broad participation in mind. As a participatory instrument, the Structured Dialogue needs to be developed further so it can acquire an even broader impact. For instance, greater effort should be made to encourage young people from disadvantaged groups to join the dialogue process. Other issues that require improvement include agenda-setting and the consultation feedback mechanisms. To strengthen the bottom-up approach, there needs to be a better transfer of local and national outcomes to the European level. The AGJ calls upon policy-makers to take better account of the valuable recommendations that come out of the Structured Dialogue and make active use of them. To this end, a systematic follow-up process at the European and national level must be put in place.

#### **e. Strengthened information flow, expert dialogue and networks**

The external evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy reveals that the Strategy could be even more effective if major child and youth services stakeholders, such as youth welfare offices

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<sup>8</sup> Baumbast et al. (2015), “Wissenschaftliche Begleitung der Umsetzung der EU-Jugendstrategie in Deutschland. Abschlussbericht der ersten Projektphase” (in German), p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> The term “civil dialogue” (an analogy to the social dialogue involving social partners and unions) refers to the regular interaction between governments and EU institutions with civil society stakeholders with the aim of improving citizens’ participation in decision and policy-making. The civil dialogue involves consultations with agreed minimum standards, public hearings, written opinions and internet portals.

and independent organisations, were more aware of its objectives and instruments.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, youth policy cooperation across the EU must pay more attention to improving the flow of information. In Germany, the Service and Transfer Agency for the EU Youth Strategy plays a major role in this context.

In addition, the cross-border peer learning instrument should continue to be used and expanded, in particular to benefit child and youth services experts. Peer learning processes have produced formal and informal networks between policy-makers, experts and young people; in other words, they are a living embodiment of youth policy cooperation in Europe. To make even more effective use of this powerful youth policy cooperation instrument, a structural and technical framework must be put in place to perpetuate this type of learning and follow up on its outcomes. The child and youth services community, too, needs to make peer learning part of its professional qualification activities (basic training and CPD).<sup>11</sup>

The AGJ also calls for a more strictly knowledge-based youth policy so as to respond more effectively to the needs of and challenges faced by adolescents and young adults, and to actively bring about change for young Europeans. The EU's Work Plans for Youth incorporate studies, peer learning, seminars and expert groups and hence already make a valuable contribution towards building a knowledge base for the youth field. This activity must be continued. Accordingly, the EU Youth Report should be given a sharper political profile by making reference to individual or general priority themes, mandating an independent expert commission to compile it, basing it on scientifically sound data, and improving its quality of analysis.<sup>12</sup>

#### **f. A solid financial foundation**

Successful youth policy cooperation in Europe does not just require a sound overall concept, it also needs sufficient funding. The external evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy revealed

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. European Commission: "Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU. Final report."

<sup>11</sup> Cf. AGJ discussion document "Peer-Learning als Instrument der EU-Jugendstrategie" (in German), 29/30 November 2012, downloadable from [web31.server1.hostingforyou.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/Peer\\_Learning.pdf](http://web31.server1.hostingforyou.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/Peer_Learning.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. AGJ statement "Der zweite europäische Jugendbericht: Mehr als ein beschäftigungspolitischer Fokus?" (in German), 29/30 November 2012, downloadable from [web31.server1.hostingforyou.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/2\\_Europaeischer\\_Jugendbericht\\_\\_2\\_.pdf](http://web31.server1.hostingforyou.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/2_Europaeischer_Jugendbericht__2_.pdf).

that the Strategy has emerged as most effective wherever sufficient funding was available;<sup>13</sup> accordingly, consideration should be given to tying specific funding programmes to the implementation and further development of the EU Youth Strategy.

Erasmus+ Youth in Action is currently the most important promotion instrument for youth policy cooperation in Europe. In the upcoming debates surrounding the new programme generation, it must be ensured that the clear and specific youth policy character of the Youth in Action programme is maintained within Erasmus+. In addition, the principles underlying the EU Youth Strategy and Erasmus+ Youth in Action must be more closely aligned. The bureaucratic obstacles that are making it difficult for youth organisations and smaller independent associations, in particular, to apply for funding, must be addressed. Consideration could be given to designing a special promotion format for the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy under Erasmus+ Youth in Action.

The European Social Fund (ESF) also has a youth policy dimension without it being explicitly labelled as such.<sup>14</sup> The AGJ argues for the ESF to put more emphasis on encouraging and supporting young people in difficult situations as they transition to adulthood and working life, and on integrating them in society by means of youth welfare activities.

### **3. Conclusion and outlook**

Youth policy cooperation in Europe promotes learning opportunities for young people, experts, practitioners and decision-makers in politics and administration, yet it is also itself the result of a political learning process. Six years after the adoption of the EU Youth Strategy, this learning process can be deemed successful. However, there is still room for improvement in regard to some aspects and instruments of European youth policy. Leveraging this potential for improvement and strengthening youth policy cooperation with and on behalf of the youth of Europe ought to be the objective of all efforts to review and redesign the EU Youth Strategy as the remaining two years of its current term draw to a close.

The AGJ pledges to play an active role in this process. The core prerequisites of a successful youth policy for Europe post-2018 are:

- **Added value and relevance:** European youth policy cooperation increases the visibility of young Europeans' concerns and facilitates the dialogue between youth

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. European Commission: "Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU. Final report", p. 72.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. AGJ statement "Europäischen Sozialfonds für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe nutzen!" (in German), 25 April 2012, downloadable from [www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/Europaeischer\\_Sozialfonds.pdf](http://www.agj.de/fileadmin/files/positionen/2012/Europaeischer_Sozialfonds.pdf).



policy stakeholders. Continued effort must be made to realising this added value. The EU has a clear youth policy mission when it comes to cross-border mobility; promoting active European citizenship and civic engagement in and for Europe; the continued development of youth work; strengthening diversity and combating group-based hostility; and addressing current societal challenges. This mission deserves a brighter spotlight in future.

- **Coherence:** Youth policy objectives must be given greater weight vis-à-vis employment and economic policy objectives. Youth policy must be clearly mainstreamed in other EU policy fields and strategies.
- **Stability and flexibility:** There needs to be a longer-term youth strategy also beyond 2018. In addition, the work plan instrument should be made better use of in order to respond flexibly to medium-term political developments.
- **Participation:** The future agenda for youth policy cooperation in Europe should be defined in line with the needs of young people and of youth policy-makers on the ground. In particular, the concerns of disadvantaged young people, those with specific needs and of child and youth services experts should be given greater attention. All political levels and civil society stakeholders should be invited to participate broadly in the design and implementation of the future EU Youth Strategy.
- **Knowledge and dialogue:** The flow of information on the EU Youth Strategy across Europe must be improved. Peer learning and youth research must be strengthened.
- **Funding:** Successful European cooperation in the youth field requires a stable, adequate financial foundation, the sources of which should include Erasmus+ Youth in Action, the European Social Fund and, where applicable, dedicated funding programmes.

Management Board of the Child and Youth Welfare Association (AGJ)

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