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Forever young? The role of youth policies and youth work at local and regional levels in supporting young people's transition to autonomy and working life

Current Affairs Committee

Rapporteur:¹ Eunice CAMPBELL-CLARK, United Kingdom (R, SOC)

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Summary

This report analyses the current situation of young people in Europe in their transition to adulthood and reviews the main challenges to this period, with examples of good practice on how it should be accompanied at the local and regional level. Young people should be considered to be equal citizens and legitimate partners for public authorities, contributing to the construction of European societies. The report stresses the importance of investing in youth who can be viewed as a welfare indicator for the society and offers to search for new forms of local participation encouraging young people to get involved in public life.

Recommendations are addressed to local and regional authorities concerning the design and implementation of innovative youth policies and as regards co-operation around youth work, youth policy, youth research and with the young people themselves. A variety of actions are recommended at local and regional levels to enable youth, including the most vulnerable among them, to achieve autonomy and to access professional life, particularly in terms of information, employment, education, housing and health.

1 L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

RESOLUTION 414 (2017)²

1. Young Europeans are facing many challenges in their transition to autonomy and working life because of the ongoing economic and financial crisis which has hit young people hard, the youth unemployment rate, and a human rights crisis with young people finding it increasingly difficult to access and exercise their human, social and economic rights. Some young people who are vulnerable or have special needs, such as disadvantaged or marginalised young people, Roma youth, refugees and those with disabilities may face additional challenges.
2. Young people can be seen as indicators of the well-being of a society. They need to be considered as fully-fledged, legitimate citizens who contribute to shaping European societies. Effort must be made to accompany their transitions by the development and implementation of innovative youth policies, as well as new ideas for youth work adaptable to individual needs and to local contexts.
3. The Congress, for its part, is committed to promoting youth participation within its own institution. Indeed, it invites one youth delegate per country, between the ages of 16 to 30, from each of the 47 member States to attend each session alongside delegation members and to take part in all discussions and meetings.
4. The 27th Session of the Congress was held in October 2014 under the theme “Empowering youth: a shared responsibility for cities and regions” and had the aim of creating a forum for dialogue between the youth delegates and local and regional elected representatives and fostering youth participation in policy framing and decision-making processes at local and regional level.
5. The Congress is determined to pursue its dialogue with young people and to involve them in its work, in particular through projects that they are invited to develop in their countries in co-operation with local authorities and to present at the sessions.
6. In addition, the Congress reiterates the invitation previously made to member States of the Council of Europe in its Resolutions 346(2012) and 386(2015) to include young people in their national delegations to the Congress, both as full and substitute members, so that the composition of the Congress reflects that of European societies.
7. The Congress welcomes the fact that the 2014 edition of the European Local Democracy Week was consecrated to the theme “Participatory democracy: sharing, proposing, deciding”, with a special focus on youth.
8. In view of the above, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe strongly encourages local and regional authorities of its members States to:
 - a. implement the recommendations contained in its Resolutions 386(2015), 346(2012), 319(2010) and 259(2008),³
 - b. raise awareness of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and take it into consideration in all aspects of their youth policy making.
9. The Congress is convinced that a successful transition to autonomy for young people requires some investment both in creating municipal youth departments, launching youth projects, supporting youth NGOs and youth clubs and in developing their programmes and activities as well as training youth councillors.
10. Support given to youth in transition needs to be complete, catered by various actors at local and regional level and to be the outcome of co-operation between youth work, youth policy and youth research actors, involving at the same time young people themselves, who need to be seen as partners in constructing their career paths.

² Debated and adopted by the Congress on 29 March 2017, 2nd sitting (see Document [CG32\(2017\)11](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Eunice CAMPBELL-CLARK, United Kingdom (R, SOC).

³ [Resolution 386 \(2015\)](#) on “Bringing down barriers to youth participation: adopting a lingua franca for local and regional authorities and young people”, [Resolution 346 \(2012\)](#) on “Youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement”; [Resolution 319 \(2010\)](#) on “Integration of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods”, [Resolution 259 \(2008\)](#) on “Integration and participation of young people at local and regional level”.

11. For this purpose, the Congress invites local and regional authorities, depending on their competences, to assist young people in their transition to autonomy and adulthood by taking the following actions:

a. As regards information:

- i. set up online and face-to-face youth counselling and information centres, which provide individual coaching, specific training sessions;
- ii. provide counselling on mobility and information in these centres on existing opportunities in other European countries;

b. As regards education:

- i. offer to all young people from an early age onwards human rights education at school and in non-formal and informal settings;
- ii. ensure close co-operation between formal, non-formal and informal education and intensify the links between formal education institutions on the one hand and youth clubs or youth NGOs on the other;
- iii. ensure access to quality education for youth who are disadvantaged or have special needs (refugee youth, early school leavers) and propose alternatives to classical secondary education for those who are school drop-outs or foreign to the system;
- iv. encourage access to apprenticeship and provide support to those pursuing their education beyond the age of 18;

c. As regards employment:

- i. facilitate access to "first employment" contracts with stable conditions through co-operation with the public and private sectors and accompany young entrepreneurs in the set up and development of their new companies;
- ii. establish a local government programme for official recognition as professional experience of competences developed in the context of traineeships and volunteer work;

d. As regards housing:

- i. develop low budget housing opportunities for young people, with loan opportunities and municipal financial support;
- ii. set up transition shared homes in which young people would live together (two or three people) and share tasks, accompanied (if need be) by social workers or youth workers;
- iii. provide a mechanism that allows local and regional authorities to stand as guarantors to isolated young people for rental homes;
- iv. offer young people training opportunities through youth information centres on autonomous living as well as visits from municipal youth councillors in their new homes upon request to mentor them on particular challenges;

e. As regards health:

- i. set up free physical and mental health centres for young people, if possible as part of youth information centres and provide regular medical counselling;
- ii. provide in the framework of these structures (disadvantaged neighbourhoods and rural areas included) regular information sessions or trainings on sexual and reproductive rights, depression, violence and harassment or other health-related issues;

f. As regards international and trans-frontier co-operation:

- i. cooperate with European information centres for youth in order to transmit news on training, education or job opportunities abroad;
- ii. establish trans-frontier youth information centres in regions situated on the borders between Member States in order to encourage young people's mobility across the region and to share information on youth-related opportunities.

12. Moreover, further attention should be given to isolated or disadvantaged youth. The Congress encourages local authorities to invest in reaching out to all young people and thus inform and motivate them to get involved in local government led projects.

13. Finally, the Congress reaffirms its intention to pursue its co-operation with the Council of Europe's Directorate General of Democracy, in particular the Youth Department, on promoting youth participation and access to social rights for youth.

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1. Introduction**a. Background to the report**

1. The Congress's report on "Youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement"⁵ adopted on 17 October 2012, showed that, contrary to popular belief, young people have not disengaged from democratic and civic behaviour. Their democratic values are still strong. Young people engage today in different forms of democratic activities appropriate to their own understanding of democracy and citizenship, in a society in which they feel marginalised from the political process. The recent demonstrations, protests or riots in many European countries could be seen as young people's answer to a political system that they feel does not give them their share of power and full citizenship. Young people have found other ways to make their voices heard.

2. Faced with these conclusions, the Congress' next step was to examine the apparent paradox of youth participation whereby political institutions are placing greater emphasis on its promotion, but young people are rejecting the opportunities on offer. The Congress' latest recommendation 376(2015)¹ on "Bringing down barriers to youth participation: a lingua franca for local and regional authorities and young people", which was adopted in Strasbourg in October 2015, summarises the findings of recent youth research which illustrates that political institutions and young people are just not talking the same language: young people have created a new "vocabulary of citizenship", they are mobilised by specific issues linked to their concerns and interests which, in their eyes, are not dealt with by the policies being adopted by democratically elected representatives. Political institutions, on the other hand, seem still to consider voting as the only relevant instrument of participation, political activity and consultation. Real citizen participation is only achieved, however, if citizens are able to influence decision and policy making.

3. The Congress is committed to getting to the bottom of the youth participation issue as one of its priorities for 2017-2020 is to foster citizen participation. The active participation of citizens in democratic structures and representative institutions is decisive in guaranteeing the legitimacy, credibility and operation of democratic systems thus it is crucial to the local and regional authorities across Europe that the Congress represents.

4. Over the past five years, the Congress has recommended several policy measures to promote young people's access to their social and economic rights and to promote their participation. However one big obstacle still remains and that is the issue of young people's transition to autonomy and adulthood which has changed in recent years, especially because of the ongoing economic and financial crisis which has hit young people hard, the youth unemployment rate having soared above 50% in some Council of Europe member States. However, this is not just an economic crisis, it is also

⁴ This explanatory memorandum is based on the document prepared by the Council of Europe consultant Ms Nadine Lyamouri, and is available from the Secretariat upon request.

⁵ [Youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement](#)

a human rights crisis with young people finding it increasingly difficult to access and exercise their human, social and economic rights: their participation is being undermined and faith and trust in democracy declining. Efforts must be made to promote young people's autonomy and their social inclusion in a society where many of them are increasingly marginalised. These transitions are no longer linear, rather they are fragmented – there are growing examples where youth-like dependency (living with parents) co-exists with adult autonomy (being employed) for longer periods of time than before. Young people are experiencing “yo-yo transitions”, ie prolonged periods of time with shifts between youth and adulthood.

5. The Congress wishes to explore this situation and to make recommendations to local and regional authorities on the development and implementation of innovative youth policies, as well as new ideas for youth work which will support young people's transitions. It is particularly important to examine possible local and regional action at this time as current policy approaches continue to focus on standard life trajectories which concentrate on social integration – understood as labour market integration – resulting in a mismatch between young people's realities and institutional assumptions.

6. In 2016, the Council of Europe launched an Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies (2016-2019) adopted by the Committee of Ministers, 15-16 March 2016. This report should also feed into the plan by looking into ways of creating more inclusive structures for young people to find their place, grow and integrate.

7. This report aims at analysing the current situation of young Europeans in transition to adulthood, by looking firstly into defining youth, autonomy, adulthood and employment. Secondly, the report looks into main challenges linked to this transition period, with concrete examples provided by young people and youth NGOs involved in youth activities in the Council of Europe Youth Department. Many good practices on how to accompany the transition of young people at local and regional level have already been collected. These will be shared. Finally, the report ends with concrete recommendations to local and regional authorities in order to better support access to autonomy and working life of young Europeans.

8. Although the economic crisis has hit all groups of population almost worldwide, young people are particularly concerned. Youth unemployment reaches over 50% in some European countries, which has direct consequences on housing, education, access to health and other social rights. Education does not guarantee access to employment anymore; many young people follow higher education as an alternative to being unemployed. The "painful sacrifices" are many: Firstly, young people choose their careers and studies more and more according to statistics of employment rather than based on values, choices or deep interests. These sacrifices also concern family vs. career, moving away from home to find more job opportunities, or taking on badly paid, underqualified jobs. All these factors contribute to demotivating young people.

9. One additional challenge for young people today is discrimination. Being young as such is sometimes already reason enough for discrimination when it comes to renting a place, being trusted to act in a responsible way, being given a first job with no work experience etc. But young people with lower socio-economic backgrounds or with migration backgrounds are even more at risk of facing discrimination in their access to social rights. In France, studies show that young people coming from certain disadvantaged neighbourhoods are less likely to be offered a job on the basis of the geographical origins (ONZUS, 2013).⁶ Roma young people face discrimination everywhere in Europe in accessing their rights to education, health, employment etc. Young people with disabilities are also targets of discrimination and are still not given equal opportunities to accessing their social rights.

10. Legally, young people are given access to voting and therefore to democratic decision making at the age of 18 (with some exceptions). But the social recognition does not go together with the legal status, which creates feelings of frustration and lack of recognition. In France for example, young people are considered major at the age of 18. However, social welfare benefits⁷ can only be attributed as from the age of 25. This means that young people in precarious transition are not supported by the State. This is highly incoherent.

6 Observatoire National des zones urbaines sensibles: "Effets de quartier: discrimination territoriale et accès à l'emploi". (2013) http://www.ville.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/document_onzus_n4_effets_de_quartier_-_discrimination_territoriale.pdf

7 "Revenu de Solidarité Active (RSA)"

11. There is no universal or institutional agreement when it comes to define terms such as youth (young people), autonomy and transition to autonomy and labour life and different institutions, states and researchers propose a variety of approaches and definitions.

12. The economic crisis and changing worlds have lead young people to become independent later than previous generations, leaving space to the emergence of new concepts such as "adulthood" (Tyre, 2002) to describe a generation which cannot be considered adolescents anymore, but do not fit the criteria of adulthood yet.

b. What is transition to autonomy?

13. In 1960s, transitions to adulthood were perceived as linear temporal processes that were marked by clear rites of passage: moving out of parental home, marriage, first job, etc. Nowadays, the experience is individualised, de-standardised and fragmented.

14. It is hard to define when the transition period to adulthood starts and ends, since it involves many processes from psychological to acquirement of legal responsibilities, to financial independence, but as well such processes as establishing a family of one's own or having a personal living space. Eventually, each young person has its own transition story and trajectory that is marked by different circumstances and contexts, opportunities and challenges, and different starting points, so the end of such a transition process is a subjective opinion.⁸

15. It is an individual path, which cannot be equally defined for all young people. However, there have been various attempts to come up with characteristics or factors of "autonomy".

16. In the report of the consultative meeting on "addressing challenges to transition to working life and autonomy of young people in Europe"⁹ which took place in the European Youth Center Strasbourg in February 2014, as well as on the Transit online platform,¹⁰ the following factors were mentioned:

- Capacity and resources to make decisions independently;
- Access to and exercise of human rights, with a particular focus on access to social rights (social security, decent work, education, health, housing);
- Recognition as equal in society, including capacity and possibility to participate at all levels and in all aspects. This includes citizenship and participation competences;
- A sense of self-esteem and resilience;
- The existence of support networks ;
- Financial independence;
- capacity to maintain a sustainable independent living;
- capacity to establish a family of one's own choice;
- capacity to develop and pursue life prospects;
- ability to make and implement life decisions.

17. These factors vary strongly in different European countries. Whereas in some, moving out of home is a clear indicator for transition to autonomy, some cultural traditions consider common intergenerational co-habitation as the norm, even for adults, who remain in their parent's home even after creating their own family.

18. If we take a look at the situation of unaccompanied minors who leave home to reach a safer place in Europe, we can say that they have shown a strong capacity to survive by themselves, without an adult to support, protect and accompany them. They manage to cross countries, to reach Europe, to ask for help. Very often, they manage to learn a new language, adapt to a totally new system and, in some cases, follow the education path. However, in the case of these young people, none of the factors mentioned above can be applied. In the majority of cases, these young people did not have a choice, but were forced to flee prosecution, war or poverty. They are particularly vulnerable and at risk of facing difficult transitions to adulthood and autonomy. Sometimes, these young people face an

⁸ Text taken from the Council of Europe TRANZIT platform: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/tranzit/transitions>

⁹ [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Documents/2014_Consultative_meeting_Transition\(s\).pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Documents/2014_Consultative_meeting_Transition(s).pdf)

¹⁰ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/tranzit>

additional burden of having to sustain their families back home, thus adding additional responsibilities to their transition phase. Finally, when reaching Europe, they risk to fall into mafia or prostitution networks. These additional trauma need to be taken into account when reflecting on criteria for the path towards adulthood. What does this mean of their transition to autonomy? And what does it tell us in relation to the support mechanisms that need to be put into place?

c. What is transition to adulthood?

19. In the 70s, reaching adulthood could easily be measured through some normative criteria such as accessing employment, moving out of parents' home or becoming a parent. In today's global society, these elements cannot be taken as indicators for adulthood anymore: Higher education does not ensure direct access to employment; economic crisis implies that many young people stay at their parent's home even during or after completing higher education. Marriage cannot be considered as a relevant criterion either, as in many countries couples live together without getting married, and the divorce rates have highly increased. Finally, research in Western countries shows that women's average age when giving birth to their first child is 27,5 (OECD, 2004). All in all, reaching adulthood has become an ambiguous, thus very vague and never defined aim.

20. This paradigmatic change forces us to question what "adulthood" is. By trying to define youth as a stage between childhood and adulthood, we put adulthood as a final destination, an aim to be reached to join the higher category of fully recognised first class citizens. This ambitious objective clearly cannot be related to age.

21. In 2000, Jeffrey Arnett proposed the concept of "emerging adulthood" a phase of the life span between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood. For Arnett, emerging adulthood also encompasses late adolescence and early adulthood. According to him, it is the period between 18 and 25 years of age where adolescents become more independent and explore various life possibilities. Although this concept takes into account the process dimension of becoming an adult, it is mainly linked to economic factors, not taking into account personal development, social integration, well-being and the acquisition of certain life skills and attitudes. One could then question if the loss of employment, for example, could lead to a loss of the adult status?

22. In times of scarcity and crisis, "adulthood" cannot be defined as a final destination of completion and success. Here again, there are various ways of defining "youth" and adulthood. One common way is age-based, although even there, institutions, countries and individuals do not always share their definitions.

23. Whereas "childhood" is legally defined as a period from 0-18, youth is rather vague, going from 14-25 or sometimes 30.

24. Another way of looking at the transition from youth to adulthood is a sociological approach, which requires a set of criteria for what defines an adult.

25. Some of these are :

- The psychological maturity and readiness to take on responsibilities;
- Financial independence ;
- Having an own family ;
- Having an own family space ;
- Having the right to vote.

26. This shows that access to autonomy and adulthood are clearly linked, but not necessarily intertwined. For the purpose of this report, we choose to focus on adulthood as a sociological and psychological process rather than on the basis of age criteria.

27. The point "having an own family" requires further attention. First of all, we could look into defining "family". Many young women in transition become single mothers and have to face the access to autonomy while taking care of their child. This puts them into a particularly difficult situation when it comes to pursuing education, accessing employment or finding appropriate housing.

28. The independence of young girls can also be an additional challenge. In the case of traditional, conservative or highly religious families, young women are not allowed to leave the family home until they marry, although they study or have a job. In these cases, "marriage" is considered as criteria for accessing autonomy, or at least adult life. And what about forced marriage?

29. Further attention should also be given to young people with disabilities, who in all Member States are not considered to be able to reach autonomy and make own choices of orientation, housing or education. The transition to autonomy and adulthood of these young people should be given high priority.

d. What is transition to working life?

30. In this particular case, the end of education could mark the start of transition to working life. However, many young people drop out of school early, without necessarily entering a transition phase or any kind of preparation to employment. Job search or career orientation are to be considered as the start of transition to working life, whereas the end of the transition can only be characterized once the person reaches a stable, satisfying employment. Very often, this occurs after a range of various, temporary and also precarious jobs.

31. We can see that the only fact of accessing employment is not necessarily a guarantee for a successful access to autonomy and working life. Transitions are not linear and "norm-al", they are individual paths, sometimes reversible, related with risks and fallbacks, possible exclusion, sometimes exploitation and isolation. Active support, counselling and accompanying of young people in this phase are therefore essential factors of successful transitions.

2. Challenges faced by young people in relation to transition to autonomy and working life

32. As already mentioned above, young people in Europe are confronted to a variety of challenges in pursuing their transition to autonomy and working life. These challenges can be divided in categories:

- Human rights and social rights related challenges:
 - Access to employment ;
 - Access to education ;
 - Access to housing ;
 - Access to health ;
 - Access to information.
- Participation of young people ;
- Self-esteem and life projects.

33. Added to these challenges concerning young people in general, a certain category of young people are more vulnerable and can be confronted to additional challenges. This particularly concerns young migrants and refugees (and even more so unaccompanied minors), as well as young people with low socio-economic backgrounds or disadvantaged neighborhoods and young people at risk of manipulation or indoctrination.

a. Access to human rights

34. In the past decade, when talking about young people and their challenges, the focus has mainly been lying on employment and access to work. However, young people are also confronted to a human rights crisis.

35. As the Commissioner for Human Rights stated in " Youth human rights at risk during the crisis" (Strasbourg, 3 June 2014), :

"Young people are not only concerned about unemployment, poverty and financial autonomy. The European Youth Forum has also highlighted the rights to education, participation and non-discrimination, the freedoms of expression, religion and movement, and the right to a healthy life and reproductive rights. The European youth movement is advocating a rights-based approach towards young people and raises awareness of the lack of specific attention afforded to young people in most European and international human rights instruments."¹¹

36. In the current era of threat and the rise of terrorism in Europe, many young people feel discriminated against for reasons of their cultural origins, beliefs, religious practices or geographical residence. Freedom of movement is being restricted in the interest of security and control, thus stopping some young people from their right to mobility. In a global context, events happening in one part of the world directly affect other young people in any other part of the world.

¹¹ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/youth-human-rights-at-risk-during-the-crisis>

37. The last edition of the World Forum on Democracy which took place in Strasbourg on 18-20th November 2015, focused on the question of "freedom vs. control: for a democratic response."¹² It aimed at exploring this dilemma in order to find a right balance between freedom on one hand, and control and security on the other. Young people are strongly concerned by this topic, and even more so young people with migrant or foreign background.

38. In this context, it is important to remind ourselves that human rights are equal for all human beings, independently of their legal status, origins or beliefs. In a period of inequalities, human rights education becomes necessary for all citizens. Young people need to learn about their rights and obligations in order to recognize human rights violations and have the tools to protect, practice, defend and recognise human rights for all. Education plays an essential role in the promotion of the core values of the Council of Europe: democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as well as in the prevention of human rights violations. More generally, education is increasingly seen as a defence against the rise of violence, racism, extremism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance.

39. This growing awareness is reflected in the adoption of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education by the Organisation's 47 member states in the framework of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7.¹³

40. The strongest impact on young people seems to lie in their limited access to social and economic rights. In 2008, the Council of Europe Youth Department launched a project called "Enter!" on access to social rights of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The project aimed at strengthening the vision of youth work as an important mechanism for young people to participate and share their future, despite any form of discrimination they may be subject to.

41. The rights tackled included:

- Access to education,
 - Access to housing,
 - Access to health,
 - Access to employment,
 - Non-discrimination,
 - Access to leisure and sport,
 - Access to information and counselling,
- together with cross-cutting issues such as participation, social inclusion, citizenship, prevention of violence or gender equality.

42. The project was adopted through a Recommendation by the Committee of Ministers in 2015 (CM/Rec (2015)3).¹⁴ The recommendation provides a list of concrete suggestions addressed to member States and local authorities in order to implement the recommendations. The role of local and regional authorities was essential in the Enter! project. Young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods of the 47 members States developed local projects with the support of their local authorities in order to respond to challenges of discrimination, violence and exclusion. Successful partnerships were made between youth work, young people and youth policy at local level.

43. As a continuation of this work, a group of young people created the "Youth Social Rights Network" (Y-SRN).¹⁵ It is international network working on improvement of access to social rights for all young people (particularly young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods deprived of some of the basic necessities and/ or young people facing variety of disadvantages).

44. The objectives of the network are the following:

- Creating conditions and mechanism for improvement of the access to social rights of young people their protection and respect, social inclusion and youth participation;
- Ensuring better living standards and equal opportunities for all young people;

¹²<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168063e1fb>

¹³<https://www.coe.int/en/web/edc/charter-on-education-for-democratic-citizenship-and-human-rights-education>

¹⁴ https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c46f7

¹⁵ <http://ysrnetwork.weebly.com/>

- Monitoring and supporting the improvement of youth policy in European countries;
- Initiating, supporting and encouraging the establishment of long term local partnerships and networks of different stakeholders (young people, youth organisations, local authorities, business organisations and other public and/or private entities like schools, health organisations, media etc.) that will counteract disadvantages and work towards improvement of access to social rights of young people and their successful transition to autonomy.

45. In January 2015, YSRN organised an international meeting, "Employability United" in cooperation with the youth Department of the Council of Europe, which brought together young people, youth workers, local authorities and business sector representatives in order to support access to employment and autonomy of young people.

46. The report produced after the meeting proposes a range of good practices at local or regional level in Member States to respond to the challenges in relation to access to employment and/ or autonomy. Here are some examples.¹⁶

AU Career international at Aarhus University in Denmark¹⁷

AU Career International is an organisation at Aarhus University, which helps and prepares international students for the job market. AU Career International organises events related to career development, offers services such as counselling and advising. They also run a job bank, which is a data base of study-relevant jobs. The organisation has 19 employees, 3 interns and 20 volunteers. The general aim is to connect companies with students and form a bridge between the university and the job market. This is an example on how a career guidance and counselling centre can support young people in accessing employment and autonomy.

Territorial Employment Pact Inter-municipal Community of Ave in Portugal

The objective was to promote participation in the labour market and the development of the Ave Region. The Territorial Employment Pact in the Ave Region is an institutional innovation based on "negotiated planning", where different actors at the local level assume complementary and interconnected roles and responsibilities in view of employment objectives. The Pact for the municipalities of the Ave Region involves national and local partners.

The Territorial Employment Pact involves regional partnerships to better link the employment policy with other policies in order to improve the employment situation on regional and local level. Each working group is developing joint work programmes in order to implement specific measures at local level; Each working group involves several partners according their field, like schools, companies, universities, local development agencies, municipalities, social institutions. The working groups of this Pact are characterised by openness, flexibility and dynamism and it is considered a good practice in working partnership and cooperation between different actors and entities.

47. Finally, participants in the international seminar made concrete recommendations to all stakeholders involved. Here are some recommendations made to local authorities in order to respond to the challenges of employment and transition to autonomy.

- Local authorities and governments could:
 - Invest in young people's education and in the education of civil servants ;
 - Reform the education system, in collaboration with the private sector;
 - Promote and invest in practical and technical education;
 - Provide technical re-education programmes for the long-term unemployed (including young people);
 - Develop further connections with the private sector ;
 - Develop soft skills in the curriculum;
 - Provide one year internships financed by the state and/or the companies;
 - Provide free education to the mandatory years ;
 - Provide free university education ;
 - Provide profession orientation/counselling;

¹⁶ The full report can be found under: <http://ysrnetwork.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/9/0/13907000/299110996-untitled.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://studerende.au.dk/en/career/>

- Support youth organisations, youth initiated and youth lead projects;
- Include young people in decision making processes;
- Reformulate the student unions legislation, as it is a failed democracy system and does not educate for democracy;
- Lower taxes on employers;
- Study pragmatically how the division in the burden of the income taxes between companies and people at national and local level in terms of employment of young people should be.

48. These recommendations are the result of one single seminar with 38 participants. However, some of the points are relevant for local and regional authorities. However, it is also clear that member States have different systems of decision-making, so that recommendations have to be taken up individually and re-adapted to local possibilities and realities.

49. Furthermore, the YSRN network is working on further developing the implementation of the Council of Europe recommendation on access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods in local authorities.

Enter-ing

The Enter-ing project, in its first phase, aimed at promoting the use of the Enter recommendations by local authorities in Greece by supporting a pilot initiative by the Municipality of Neapoli-Skyes. The recommendation was translated into Greek. Regular meetings were organised with the Mayor, the youth sector of the Municipality, young people and local NGOs.

As a result, the recommendations were included in the municipal action plan for 2014-2019. The Municipality further developed its relationship with local youth organisations. Further municipalities, such as the city of Thessaloniki, have shown interest in joining the project.

50. When working on access to social rights, on the basis of the European Social Charter,¹⁸ it becomes clear that these rights are interlinked and indivisible. Although a lot of accent has been put on access to employment, young people without adequate housing or access to health will struggle in their work. Young people with access to housing but no education path or employment will struggle to pay their rent, and thus put various rights at risk. It is therefore essential to work towards the respect and full access to all social rights in a combined, equal way, in order to ensure to provide young people with all necessary conditions for a healthy transition to autonomy and adulthood.

51. For the purpose of this report, the various social rights mentioned above will be addressed individually in order to identify challenges linked to these, and to share developed practices in order to respond.

i. Access to employment

52. Unemployed people are those who report that they are without work, that they are available for work and that they have taken active steps to find work in the last four weeks (OECD definition). The economic crisis in the past decade has strongly contributed to making transition to adulthood harder. Youth unemployment (under the age of 25) has doubled in the European Union since the beginning of the crisis, with pics reaching up to 56,8% in Greece or 53,9% in Spain in 2014. The statistics in October 2016 maintain high rates, although the tendency has slightly decreased in the past year. Greece still shows 46,5% of unemployment, followed closely by Spain and Italy.¹⁹

53. European policy makers are using the term "NEETs" more commonly in the past years to talk about young people who are "not in employment, education and training". Over 14 Million young people were concerned by this situation in 2014. On the long run, this lack of status and perspective can have a strong impact on life planning, self-esteem and access to autonomy altogether.

54. Another important category of young people to take into account in this debate are employed young people in precarious conditions. These youngsters fall out of unemployment statistics, while still suffering from financial dependency, lack of motivation or recognition of their competences and lack of long term perspectives.

¹⁸ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/turin-european-social-charter/home>

¹⁹ Source: Statsista platform: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/266228/youth-unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/>

55. As a response to this situation, many institutions, local authorities, governments have encouraged young people to focus on entrepreneurship. This is an alternative related to many risks, and to which young people are often not prepared. Entrepreneurship is not a viable career path for all young people, just for the minority equipped with the right skills, attitudes and values.²⁰ In a period of economic stagnation, youth entrepreneurship was seen as the golden solution. In 2011, 28% of young people in Europe said they could imagine to be self-employed. Again, on a long term basis, if young people are not accompanied, many young start-ups break down and do not survive the high market pressure. Entrepreneurship does provide a statistical response to unemployment, but seldom provides a solution to young people's transition to autonomy and working life.

In Italy, local research shows that around 40% of new start-ups close again within their first three years. This trend strongly decreases if the start-up is accompanied by professional counselling. The Liguria Region therefore invested in a programme to support and accompany new businesses, in close cooperation with the local chamber of commerce. The programme includes tutoring and mentoring, a business incubator, as well as networking between start-ups. This is a way to encourage young people in their project ideas without leaving them alone with their challenges. The programme is financed by the European Social Fund.²¹

56. Young people are sometimes faced with the paradox of not having experience. Companies often look for young employees with several years of work experience. For young people finishing school this is simply absurd. This leads some young people to volunteer in public institutions or business companies and to engage themselves in different unpaid internships programmes that do not contribute enough in fighting this situation. Usually volunteering and internship programmes are misused by the employers and, instead of helping young people, they create more challenges on their way to autonomy and employment treating youth as cheap or sometimes even free labour force.²²

The recognition of volunteering and internships

57. For many young people, access to employment starts through first professional experiences in often unpaid internships or volunteering. If properly accompanied, these experiences can be life-forming, helping young people to put their knowledge into practice, to learn by doing, to experience, to develop life skills, to work on attitudes. They can learn about team work and working "rules", trial and error. They can develop leadership skills and better understand the market.

58. However, internships and volunteering are only of added value when limited in time. They do not replace paid employment and should therefore not last forever. Volunteering can be a very rewarding experience for young people who can invest their energy, their competences and their values into a particular cause thus participate actively in society and feel useful and valued.

Voluntary Service for Roma Youth Empowerment

Phiren Armenca International Network²³ creates opportunities for young Roma and non-Roma to experience themselves as skilful and independent social actors through voluntary services. The approach is based on a "try and fail and try again" approach. A constant system of quality management, preparation, coaching and follow-up to each volunteering is provided. Volunteers can benefit from supervision by the sending and hosting organisations. This project strongly contributes to developing self-confidence, autonomy and critical thinking of participants. A volunteer network was created in order to continue the work after young people finish their voluntary Service.

59. All these points explain partly why access to employment has been put as a high priority for European institutions. However, as we will see throughout this report, employment alone is not enough to ensure a healthy and successful transition to adulthood.

20 Eurofound (2015), Youth entrepreneurship in Europe: Values, attitudes, policies, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

21 <http://www.regione.liguria.it/gare-concorsi-e-avvisi/gare-concorsi-e-avvisi/contributi/document/1900.html?view=document&id=1900:start-growth-liguria&Itemid=>

22 Paragraph quoted from the YSRN report "Employability United", (2015)

<http://ysrnetwork.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/9/0/13907000/299110996-untitled.pdf>

23 www.phirenamenca.eu

ii. Access to education

60. Access to education has been a high priority for Council of Europe member States forever. However, what the term education includes, and how it is put into practice, varies greatly.

61. The Eurostat "Key Data on Education report 2012"²⁴ states:

"(...) structural and organisational reforms to education systems have been implemented with a view to reducing early school-leaving rates and, in some cases, to ensure that all students obtain a certificate of basic education. The most significant reform in this area is the extension of compulsory schooling in some countries. A further organisational trend that emerges from the study is an overall high level of autonomy for schools and local level authorities to manage financial and human resources. A similar trend is also evident in the management of academic staff in higher education."

62. However, not all young people complete secondary education, and those with less access to quality education and with early drop-outs are most at risk of becoming so-called NEETS (not in education, employment or training). As stated by Eurofund²⁵, "those with low levels of education are three times more likely to be NEET than those with third-level education. The risk is 70% higher for young people from an immigration background than nationals while having a disability or health issue is also a strong risk factor."

63. Even young people engaged in a schooling system can face high challenges in accessing their social rights. As shown in a study in France, geographical discrimination influences the level of employability and access to higher education for young people. Certain "sensitive zones", also called "ZUP - zone urbaine prioritaire" (urban priority zone) do benefit from larger public funding, but often show higher amounts of pupils per class, high ranges of violence and difficult learning conditions. Young people growing up in these disadvantaged areas often grow with a feeling of inequality and limited opportunities.²⁶

64. Access to education also includes access to orientation, support and making choices. Young people are often oriented in secondary schooling in relation to their overall profile and marks, or influenced towards certain fields or professional areas, which are re-defined by economical and market factors. Thus, young people do not dare to dream anymore, and the answer to the question "what will you do when you grow up" is sadly replaced by "which careers guarantee employment, what is the safest path?"

The campaign "**I wish for myself (sebi zelim)**" was launched in Montenegro as part of a UN programme for Youth Empowerment in close cooperation with local municipalities, youth NGOs, the Ministry of Education as well as the Directorate of Youth and Sports. It aimed at helping young people to identify their aspirations and potentials and to equip them with motivation, knowledge, skills and information needed for fulfilling their dreams. The programme involved various steps, including peer to peer education, coaching, training, workshops and online information. It involved more than 400 young people from 9 towns and touched over 1000 online users. Over 50 partners were involved, and many success stories for young people were shared. This campaign challenged the current paradigm where young people's life plans are based on finding a secure job in a public administration.²⁷

65. One additional challenge when it comes to access to quality education is the gap between what education systems teach, and what the employment market needs. Most European education systems have not adapted to new learning methods, to new rhythms of young people and to contemporary topics and subjects. In general, school education focuses on acquiring knowledge, thus missing the transmission of professional skills, and even more so, attitudes.

Formal, non-formal and informal education

66. In everyday understanding, when we speak about education, most people tend to think exclusively of formal education. The type of learning which takes place in an institutional, planned setting with a curriculum, a marking system and "teachers".

²⁴<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/5741409/978-92-9201-242-7-EN.PDF/d0dcb0da-5c52-4b33-becb-027f05e1651f>

²⁵ <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/young-people-and-neets-1>

²⁶ Observatoire National des zones urbaines sensibles: "Effets de quartier: discrimination territoriale et accès à l'emploi". (2013) http://www.ville.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/document_onzs_n4_effets_de_quartier_-

²⁷ More information can be found on www.sebizelim.me

67. We tend to forget about the importance of non-formal education and learning. The type of learning which takes place outside of educational institutions, in youth clubs, associations, NGOs or other setting. Non formal education plays a crucial role in complementing formal education when it comes to access to autonomy and adulthood. It focuses on developing knowledge, but mostly skills and attitudes in order to prepare young people to enter professional life: leadership, communication, conflict transformation, project management, intercultural learning are just some examples of competences which young people often develop in non-formal (or also in informal) settings, rather than in school education.

68. Non-formal learning is an extensively used and intensely debated notion in the youth field. It stands for a range of core learning principles, methodologies and approaches in the youth sector, commonly emphasising the learner's intrinsic motivation, voluntary participation, critical thinking and democratic agency. It is widely acknowledged and recognised that non-formal learning provides unique learning opportunities to millions of young Europeans on a daily basis.

69. The glossary of the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy²⁸ describes non-formal learning as follows:

"Non-formal learning is purposive but voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. These environments and situations may be intermittent or transitory, and the activities or courses that take place may be staffed by professional learning facilitators (such as youth trainers) or by volunteers (such as youth leaders). The activities and courses are planned, but are seldom structured by conventional rhythms or curriculum subjects. They usually address specific target groups, but rarely document or assess learning outcomes or achievements in conventionally visible ways".

70. In recent years, both the Council of Europe and the European Commission have given strong importance to the recognition of non-formal education: the Council of Europe with Recommendation (2003)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning of young people;²⁹ the European Union with Resolution 2006/C168 01 on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field.³⁰

71. Non formal education has also shown its importance when it comes to integrating disadvantaged youth or excluded young people. Some young people who dropped out of school find opportunities for socialising and learning in their local youth clubs or neighbourhood cultural centres. Non formal education activities are offered to young people all over Europe in refugee camps in order to accompany youth until they can access formal education (for those who can).

72. This is not to say that non-formal education is more important than formal education. But various studies show that the combination of both makes a big difference in the development of young people, and that stronger cooperation between formal and non-formal sectors should be further encouraged and supported.

Apprenticeship as an opportunity

73. In the past 15 years, most European societies have moved away from valorising vocational training, putting the emphasis on the intellect and on academic studies. For many young people, leaving the "classical" path of secondary education in order to learn a profession is seen as a failure, or qualified less qualitative than graduating from high school.

74. However, with the economic crisis, apprenticeship has re-gained in importance, showing its efficiency in training young people on the job market and, in many cases, ensuring access to employment.

75. This can particularly be true in the integration process of young refugees, and more particularly unaccompanied minors arriving in Europe. As shown in the study "Unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking and refugee children turning eighteen: what to celebrate?"³¹ published by UNHCR

28 <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/knowledge/-/ekcyp>

29 http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1668227/COE_rec_2003_8_en.pdf/7f6642ac-c3ea-4d5d-8b66-35492d37f9d1

30 http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1668227/c_16820060720en00010003.pdf/55bc3955-9e5f-41c5-ab4c-51be2ed18dc9

31 https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Documents/2014_UNHCR_and_Council_of_Europe_Report_Transition_Adulthood.pdf

and the Council of Europe in 2014, apprenticeship was shown as a helpful alternative to secondary school. In France for example, school is only compulsory until the age of 16. Therefore, unaccompanied minors arriving after this age are not given priority in integrating the education system. In that case, apprenticeship can be a useful alternative, which ensures that young people learn the language, learn a profession and can stay beyond their eighteen's birthday.

The French association France Terre d'Asile in Créteil opened a facility which works exclusively on access to apprenticeship to unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking and refugee children (UASASRC). 20 young people are living there with the support of child social welfare, with the aim of accessing apprenticeships. They have easier access to work permits with the support of the Municipality.

76. In Austria, young asylum seekers can pursue an apprenticeship in a field where candidates are lacking in a specific region. However, any young person loses the support of the State at the age of 21. If the young adults have not finished their apprenticeship by that time, they have to be self-sufficient and will not receive any further support.

In order to further support the education of young adults, the Fonds Soziales Wien makes their own funding available to cover for school fees and transportation costs for young adults up to the age of 26 if they are following adult education (apprenticeship, alphabetisation courses, basic training).

77. Finally, in some cases, unaccompanied minors are "survivors" for their families left behind in conflict areas. This gives them the additional weight of having to send money back home in order to support their family's needs. This constraint puts a lot of pressure on some young people who are in a hurry to access employment and cannot afford to follow up their studies. In this case again, apprenticeships can be an alternative ensuring both education and some income. However, apprenticeship should not become the automated path for newly arrived refugees or asylum seekers. Again, the aspect of "choice" is important, and young people wishing to pursue schooling and higher education should be given an opportunity to do so.

78. Access to free and qualitative education for all young people is a milestone for a healthy transition to autonomy and adulthood. As far as possible, local authorities need to support various means of education as mentioned in this report, so that young people have equal chances to succeed and develop their life path with accurate support of local authorities and youth workers.

iii. Access to housing

79. In the city of Strasbourg in France, a local youth NGO, l'Etage,³² works on the integration of homeless youth under the age of 25. For most of these young people, the main challenge leading to homelessness was isolation, lack of family support or rupture in family contacts. Some of these young people do have a job. However, without proper housing, they struggle to stay clean, to respect working hours, to be fit for a working day. The lack of "home", the lack of sleep, the lack of a play in which they could feel secure and resourced makes it very difficult to keep a regular professional life. Here again, we see how interlinked these social rights are.

80. It is therefore urgent to invest in access to affordable housing and in fighting homelessness of young people. Municipalities can also take a leading role in taking up the role of guarantors for young people in transition, with a long term support and counselling process.

81. Young people are often mistrusted when it comes to taking up adult's responsibilities, such as signing a rental contract or respecting regular payment. In many European countries, young students need their parents to act as guarantors. In the absence of support by the parents, access to housing becomes difficult.

82. Additionally, the cost of living can be very high, and depending on the financial situation, young people struggle to access to housing. Therefore, in many European countries, young people remain in their parent's home even when studying or in employment. This guarantees a certain level of financial security, but can strongly impact on the feeling of autonomy. Living alone is not easy for everyone. Access to autonomy in this field should be accompanied, with a training process in order to learn anything going from paying bills to cooking, security etc.

³² <http://www.etage.fr/etage/Accueil.html>

83. Again, unaccompanied minors and refugee youth are particularly challenged when it comes to housing conditions.

84. *"This is not a home; this is a camp. We would like to live in Budapest, to share a flat [...]. We have to share rooms with four other people; we have no autonomy at all."* (Ali, young beneficiary of subsidiary protection in Hungary).³³

In Sweden, young unaccompanied and separated asylum seekers can move to an after-care home when they turn 18. These homes are special accommodation facilities to facilitate the transition to adulthood up to the age of 21. They are given lodging, have some social workers with them, and usually get to cook for themselves. The activities in these facilities further encourage self-empowerment and young adults receive detailed information about the implications for when they turn 21.

85. Young people with disabilities are often very limited when it comes to accessible housing. First of all, many places are *not* adapted and accessible. Then, further efforts are needed in order to empower young disabled to live by themselves and in autonomy. This requires particular transversal cooperation between various sectors (health, education and housing) in municipalities.

86. The housing conditions of young people in transition should not be an emergency state or prevent them from following their occupations. In order to construct their future, young people need appropriate living conditions.

iv. Access to health

87. Access to health is crucial for anyone. Again, the transition from youth to adulthood brings its extra challenges and certain particular needs when it comes to healthcare. This concerns physical health, but also mental health.

88. The Eurostat report "being young in Europe today" (2015) shows that self-harm is the second most frequent cause of death amongst 15-29 year olds today.³⁴ *"The most important risk factors for suicidal behaviour are psychological and social in nature. Social factors may include discrimination (e.g. bullying at school), social isolation, relationship conflicts with family and friends, unemployment or poverty. Mental and psychological problems play a key role in the emergence of suicidal behaviour, with depression and hopelessness being associated with nine out of ten cases of suicide."*

89. This requires some special attention. In transition to adulthood, young people need to have free access to medical counselling and to needed medication, without having to inform parents or ask for financial support. Precariousness, a high level of stress, anxiety related to job search, unemployment, worries related to housing or *health*, can highly affect the psychological health of young people and lead to depression. Here again, some groups of young people are more vulnerable than others. Particular attention needs to be drawn to young transgender or transsexual people, who are more subject to discrimination and need access to support and information. Access to health centres, including information on sexual and reproductive rights, is an essential part of access to health.

90. Young people without a regular administrative situation in Council of Europe member States often struggle in accessing proper health systems. Young refugees often arrive with strong psychological burdens and traumata, which can only be addressed once they feel settled and in security. This cannot be the case as long as their access to other social rights is not secured. All young people in transition should have free and easy access to health centres, to health information and to healthcare in order to respond to medical and psychological health issues.

91. The refugee girls need a specific treatment, especially pregnant girls, sometimes as a result of rape they have suffered on their way from their country of origin to their destination point.

³³ Quoted from the report "unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children turning eighteen- what to celebrate?" UNHCR/ Council of Europe (2014)

³⁴ Quoted from "Resolution on youth autonomy and inclusion, European Youth Forum (2016)

v. Access to information

92. Young people are expected to grow quickly, to adapt to changing societies, to find their way, be independent, understand systems and fit in. However, steps towards autonomy and adulthood are numerous and *extremely* complex. A high amount of information is required, which is often not accessible. Young people need to first find out where to find the information, which by itself can already require quite some competences!

93. It is essential for young people to have contact points in which resource persons can guide them about any topic related to employment, education, mobility, taxes, housing etc.

94. Such centres exist in isolated cases, but a generalisation of youth information centres, including in more rural and isolated areas would be extremely useful.

In the Municipality of Ylivieska in Finland, the Settinetti Youth Information Service³⁵ was set up as an initial fixed term project, and has now become a steady operator in the city. It aims at providing information to young people about work, studies, lodging, health and opportunities for involvement in the community. It informs youth about rights and obligations as citizens and encourages young people to take action. The Service functions mainly over a website in order to be accessible to masses of young people, including youth in rural areas or young people with special needs. Settinetti regularly updates its offer and adapts to young people's needs and habits, by combining information with fun and joyful activities.

95. Access to information can also be given by youth themselves. In some cases, young people who have been through certain processes and experiences can share their competences with others in order to empower them, support them and show them guidance.

SEF³⁶

Amir M., a recognised refugee, together with some of his friends, decided to create an association for unaccompanied children in Sweden.

"We started it in 2012 and our goals were to help other unaccompanied minors with starting to find a job, have a network, be in contact with each other, talk about society, racism and everything else; to improve our access to information about the country, culture etc., and also have some leisure activities to have fun. Because when we lived in the refugee camps, we had no contact with Swedish guys, Swedish culture. Our camp was like a prison, it was in a district where Swedish people don't live. We have about 150 Members in Stockholm, but now we also have this organisation in Göteborg, Malmö and Northern Sweden, so almost 500 Members."

96. Europe also presents many trans-border zones. In various member States, young people cross the border daily for education, access to employment or other opportunities. Here again, laws, regulations, existing support and mobility programmes are sometimes confusing and difficult to understand. Various trans-border youth information initiatives were started, for example between France and Belgium, but they remain project-based and individual. In times of economic crisis and variations in demography and opportunities, allowing youth to cross borders in an informed way can only contribute to successfully accompanying their transition to autonomy by increasing the fields of opportunities.

97. Access to information is a social right and should be ensured to all young people, independently of their language, geographical situation or individual path.

98. In April 2016, the Youth Department of the Council of Europe launched the Tranzit Online Platform³⁷. This website is dedicated to youth work and youth policy measures related to the theme of the transition to autonomy and the working lives of young Europeans. The site is aimed at youth workers, youth organizations, trade unions, local authorities and private actors from all over Europe. It analyses the issues of transition to autonomy and to adulthood and offers information on exchange opportunities and training organised by the Council of Europe.

³⁵ <http://www.settinetti.fi>

³⁶ <http://www.hejsverige.nu/en/engagemang/sef/>

³⁷ <http://www.coe.int/en/web/tranzit/home>

99. The platform not only provides ground for sharing practices and reflections on access to autonomy. It is also a good practice of information sharing and presenting young people with opportunities for further training and development.

b. Youth participation

100. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe has many years of expertise in promoting youth participation. Both the Revised European Charter on the participation of young people at local and regional life,³⁸ the Manual "Have Your Say"³⁹ or the recent recommendation 376 (2015): "Bringing down barriers to youth participation: adopting a lingua franca for local and regional authorities and young people"⁴⁰ show the high importance given by the Congress to the participation of young people in all spheres of public life. Young people are not, as politicians love to claim "the future": they are now, they are present and they are interested in shaping better presents before even talking about better futures.

101. In the past years and in the context of a wide economic, but also identity crisis in Europe, young people tend to distance themselves from traditional forms of political participation (voting, joining youth clubs or youth centres). Although this is partly due to a sense of disenchantment and disbelief in their possible impact, saying that young people no longer want to participate is a common mistake in public discourse. The forms of participation have changed and are moving towards more radical, anti-system forms of raising their voice. On one hand, the digital revolution has contributed to developing new forms of social expression and movements over social media.

102. Change.org or other online global petition platforms, Facebook or Twitter, are only some of the many examples of global platforms chosen by youth worldwide to express, disagree, make proposals, develop ideas and initiatives, mobilize for or against things, collect funds.

103. The Arab Revolution, the *Indignados* Movement in Spain, NuitDebout in France or Occupy Wall street are all movements started by and lead by young people as a way to express discontent with existing systems and to require concrete change.

104. Unfortunately, this fragile period also gives more space to the emergence of radical, extremist movements. Over 1700 young French citizens have joined ISIS in 24 months (2015-2016), and many hundred Belgian young citizens have too. Europe is facing a massive security crisis, leading to new dilemmas related to intercultural and interreligious dialogue, living together in diversity, and the raise of xenophobia and racism.

105. On the other side, extreme right wing movements have grown importantly in the past years, with the example of the AFD in Germany, Right and Justice in Poland, Jobbik in Hungary or Golden Dawn in Greece to site only a few. Lead by fear and proposals of return to more stable, clean and national identities, these parties recruit young people to get involve in shaping their societies in a particular way.

106. In both cases, the active engagement of young people is linked to violence, but in both cases, a form of value-based indoctrination manages to motivate young people to get involved and participate actively.

107. This, of course, is far away from the wished forms of participation in democratic societies. However, looking at the mechanisms of recruitment and motivation can give some indications on what young people strive for. In both cases, strong value systems are promised and spread, strong feelings of belonging and feelings of usefulness.

108. In both cases, recruitment takes place massively over the internet, thus looking for young people where they can be found. In both cases, recruiters argue by underlining feelings of injustice and social inclusion, and promising to respond to these by proposing alternatives. We cannot generalise the profile of these young people by saying that they were systematically deprived their access to social rights. In some cases, young people grew up in loving, socially upper-class environments with access to their rights, and still joined these movements. How can this be explained? What can we learn from this?

38 https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Coe_youth/Participation/COE_charter_participation_en.pdf

39 http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Publications/Have_your_say_en.pdf

40 <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=2376473&Site=COE&direct=true>

109. It would be too easy, and even dangerous, to reduce jihadism and extreme right wing movements to these particular aspects, and to take the few thousands of young people who join these movements as indicators for a tendency. Of course, this is not an overall response, but it is one to be looked at.

110. This also poses the question of adequate responses to these new forms of extremist movements. At the moment, most European member States imprison young people who come back from Syria or Iraq. They are criminalised, without any form of re-integration into society or re-socialisation into democratic values. These young people are excluded from any possible form of active, constructive participation.

The Municipality of Aarhus, in Denmark, thus proposes an integrative programme for young returnees from Jihad. This model proposes first of all preventive work, and then family counselling, career coaching, psychological support, school reintegration and cooperation with religious leaders.

*"We cannot afford not to include them back in our society and make sure that their path of radicalization is changed, so they can be an active part of our society."*⁴¹

Jacob Bundsgard, the Social Democrat mayor of Aarhus

111. If we want to take an all-inclusive approach to youth participation, this implies a way of including all young people in society. Here again, certain groups are more at risk of exclusion when it comes to participation.

112. Roma young people are often prevented from participating in societies. All across Europe, they face high levels of discrimination and face additional challenges when it comes to making their voices heard or accessing their rights. As a direct response, the Council of Europe launched the Roma Youth Action plan.⁴² This plan was developed following the Roma Youth Conference 2011. It aims at supporting Roma youth participation, promoting equality of opportunities to participate, and countering the effects of discrimination on young Roma. It gives priority to human rights and intercultural dialogue as responses to discrimination and antigypsyism, together with the development and capacity building of Roma youth organisations and movements.

113. Unfortunately, in common understanding, youth participation is still very much understood as either political participation, or leisure and sports activities. Young people are seldom seen as equal actors in decision-making, in the development of societies and in mainstreaming opinions.

114. As Peter Lauritzen said in a speech on participation in 2006: *"Youth participation cannot be had cheaply anymore; it has to come over as a real offer to share the power, and it is time that this happened."*⁴³

3. What regional and local authorities can do: responding to challenges

115. Based on the findings and considerations made above, a set of recommendations can be made to local and regional authorities in order to support young people in their transition to autonomy and adulthood.

116. Furthermore, local authorities should further invest in reaching out to ALL young people. Unorganised, isolated or disadvantaged youth is often not directly in touch with various municipal or regional programmes and projects. Therefore, it is essential to concentrate on finding these young people where they are in order to propose targeted, adapted responses.

a. Young people are diverse

117. Young people cannot be considered as a homogenous group, and transition to adulthood does not happen in a linear way. Local and regional authorities in Europe should develop counselling and support structures that can welcome young people and accompany them/ coach them in their individuality. Such structures (that could be municipal or NGO lead with municipal support) should be ready to listen to young people's needs and aspirations and to provide them with suitable information.

41 New York Times, For Jihadists, Denmark Tries Rehabilitation, December 13th 2014

42 <http://www.coe.int/en/web/youth-roma/home?desktop=true>

43 Lauritzen, Peter: 'On Participation – Guiding Questions', March 2006, in Eggs in a Pan- Speeches, Writings and Reflections by Peter Lauritzen, Council of Europe Publishing (2008)

b. The magic triangle - or square?

118. In order to be successful, support to youth in transition needs to be complete, thus brought by various actors at local and regional level. The so-called "magic triangle of cooperation" between youth work, youth policy and youth research needs to be put into practice by regularly bringing together these actors, without forgetting to involve young people themselves.

119. The development of youth policies, in particular those concerning employment, should be the result of a high degree of cooperation and continuous collaboration between local and regional authorities, employers, trade unions, decision-makers at different levels of education, training and employment bodies, and representatives of young people, be they workers, unemployed or NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

120. Furthermore, regional and local authorities need to further develop trans-sectorial policies when working on youth transition. "Youth" is not an issue by itself. Youth services need to work closely with municipal sectors related to employment, housing, education, health etc.

121. Formal, non-formal and informal education need to work closely together. Local and regional authorities should develop more links between the formal education institutions and youth clubs or youth NGOs.

122. Regional and local authorities should promote Recommendation 2003(8) of the Committee of Ministers on the recognition of non-formal education/ learning of young people.

c. Investing in youth

123. Successful transition to autonomy of young people requires some investment. Firstly, regional and local authorities should bring financial investment in creating municipal youth departments, providing means for youth projects, contributing to developing housing policies etc.

124. They should also support youth NGOs and youth clubs in developing their programmes and activities and contributing to funding places where non-formal education can take place.

125. Then, human investment is necessary: Regional and local authorities should train youth councillors and people able to respond to the various needs of young people (education, housing, health...).

126. Various studies show that long-term investment in this generation can only bring positive results on the long-run, and that is an economically beneficial investment. Young people are not "the future", they are "the present", they can be seen as indicators of the well-being of a society, and thus require full attention and support.

d. Believing in youth: Instead of accompanying young people towards adulthood, accompanying young people in being young!

127. First and foremost, young people need to be given the opportunity to dream their future and to make choices about future perspectives, orientation and aspirations, and to be guided by professional youth workers towards achieving these.

i. Access to employment

128. Young people can only develop professional competences if they are given the opportunity to do so. Therefore, local authorities should co-operate with the public and private sector in facilitating access to "first employment" contracts with stable conditions.

129. Local and regional authorities should support and accompany young entrepreneurs in the set up and development of their new companies or cooperatives. The support could involve financial or practical support such as the provision of premises, equipment and furniture, as well as counselling, training, networking opportunities and practice groups. Municipalities could also help young companies in communication and marketing.

130. Local and regional authorities should also participate in the creation and promotion of common working spaces in order to strengthen collaboration and a spirit of solidarity among young people. Particular attention should be paid to the creation of these areas, especially in the peripheral areas in those cities most affected by the phenomena of violence, crime and youth unemployment. Social economy and self-help initiatives should also be encouraged.

131. Consideration should be given to setting up mechanisms that will enable local and regional authorities to present themselves as "guarantors" and to provide financial support for particularly meritorious and innovative employment projects designed and presented by young people.

132. Internships and volunteering work should be officially recognised and valued as professional experience. Local and regional authorities should set up a municipal portfolio for the recognition of competences developed in the context of traineeships and volunteering.

ii. Access to education

133. Local and regional authorities should seek to encourage ongoing vocational training and the exchange of knowledge and skills, both within and outside the education system, as well as the promotion of full and fruitful cooperation between formal, non-formal and informal education systems.

134. Regional and local authorities should facilitate the access of disadvantaged young people to quality education. This concerns young people with special needs, refugee youth, youth from disadvantaged neighbourhoods or early drop-outs.

135. Alternatives to classical secondary education need to be provided for young people failing in the school system.

136. When appropriate, young people should be given access to apprenticeship and supported in pursuing their education beyond the age of 18.

137. All young people from early age onwards should have human rights education at school and in non-formal and informal settings. Municipalities should provide free training on human rights education for schools, youth organisations and young people.

138. Local and regional authorities should promote the European Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and human rights education (CM/Rec(2010)7)

iii. Access to information

139. Local and regional authorities should set up online and face-to-face youth counselling and information centres. These structures should be able to provide individual coaching, specific training sessions and answers to young people in transition to autonomy.

140. These centers should include a section devoted to job search that meets as closely as possible the expectations of the young people concerned and takes into account their aspirations and skills. Youth representatives should be directly involved in the management of these sections, including the creation of tutoring mechanisms by older youth in support and in addition to personal coaching services.

141. Information centres should include counselling on mobility and information on programmes and opportunities in other European countries. Local and regional authorities should cooperate with European information centres in order to transmit news on training, education or job opportunities abroad.

142. In addition to advice on moving to other European countries, information and counseling centers should provide all information and support needed to enable young people to find work in their own countries. The aim is to enable those who wish to train and work in other countries, to acquire the necessary experience and skills, and then return to their country to contribute to its development. Thus, the decision to travel to other countries for work and become self-supporting must be the result of a free choice rather than that of a lack of alternatives.

143. Information on the culture and traditions of the countries where young people choose to travel for training and employment as well as the basic principles of the local legal system should also be disseminated in order to provide a thorough knowledge of these countries, facilitating thereby the process of social and professional integration.

144. In border regions between Member States, transborder youth information centres should be set up in order to encourage young people's mobility across the region and to share information on youth related opportunities.

iv. Access to housing

145. Local and regional authorities should develop low budget housing opportunities for young people in transition, with loan opportunities and municipal financial support. The fact that housing is an important element in job seeking should be taken into consideration.

146. Local and regional authorities, through the youth information centres, should provide young people with training opportunities on autonomous living. This training could include concrete information on obligations, rules, cooking, paying bills, common spaces, security etc. Municipal youth councillors could visit young people in their new homes upon request to mentor them on particular challenges

147. Municipalities could set up transition "shared homes" in which young people would live together (2-3 people) and share tasks. These could be accompanied by social workers/youth workers.

148. Local and regional authorities should be able to stand up as "guarantors" for isolated young people purchasing rental homes.

v. Access to health

149. Local and Regional authorities should develop free physical and mental health centres for young people. These could be part of the youth information centres and provide regular medical counselling.

150. Health centres in municipalities (including disadvantaged neighbourhoods and rural areas) should provide regular information sessions or trainings on sexual and reproductive rights, depression, violence and harassment or other health related issues.

e. Protecting youth

151. Young people should be protected from violence, discrimination, exclusion and poverty.

152. Local and regional authorities should promote and apply Recommendation CM/ Rec (2015)3 of the Committee of Ministers on access to social rights of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

153. In order to protect themselves and their rights, young people should be informed and trained on human rights and social rights.

f. Co-operating with youth

154. Young people should not be considered exclusively as beneficiaries of programmes to achieve autonomy. They need to be seen as partners in constructing their paths.

155. Young people should be given the rights the means, the space, the opportunity and the support to actively participate in shaping their transition.

156. Local and regional authorities should support youth lead projects.

157. Peer-to-peer education should be encouraged and facilitated by municipalities, in providing young people with necessary support to train or accompany other young people.

158. Local and regional authorities should invest in research on new forms of local participation in order to motivate young people to get involved. This can include the use of online platforms, open fora, social networks etc. Again, young people should be consulted in the process.

159. Young people should be given the space to create value-based structures, which can federate and motivate youth. For example, humanitarian projects in the community, solidarity actions or common "green" actions can be organised in order to reach out to young people's values and thus motivate them to get involved.

160. Local and regional authorities should develop programmes for the (re)-integration of excluded young people into local and regional life. Special civic integration initiatives should be taken to work with radicalised youth or young people leaving prisons.

161. Young refugees should be given the opportunity to exchange with local youth in order to integrate and feel part of the society. Municipalities should develop intercultural projects and involve refugee youth in municipal planning.

Conclusion

162. This report proposed to look at challenges faced by young people in their transition to autonomy and working life through various dimensions. With the help of concrete practice examples from Council of Europe Member States, the report proposes a set of recommendations addressed to local and regional authorities in order to respond to these challenges and contribute to developing a Europe of healthy, happy and engaged young people.

163. In order for youth to succeed in transiting towards adulthood, young people need to be considered as full-fledged, legitimate citizens who contribute to shaping European societies. And this is not happening in the future: young people's transition is happening now. Therefore, we need to invest in European youth, first and foremost by considering them as partners, and as real potentials, rather than as societal burdens, lost generations or problems. Young people can and want to participate if they can do it in a way that makes sense to them. This will happen by using their means of communication, by opening for dialogue, by providing them support and by listening to their request for a return to value-based societies. Finally, young people are individuals. Local and regional authorities need to find ways to accompany their transitions by adapting to individual needs and to local contexts.