

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 6 November 2015

CCJ(2015)INF1

English only

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH (CCJ)
comments on
the draft Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies (2016-2019)

Advisory Council on Youth welcomes the Council of Europe Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies (2016-2017)

'No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.'

Nelson Mandela, Long walk to freedom (1995)

The Advisory Council on Youth, in accordance with its terms of reference to advise the Committee of Ministers on all questions relating to youth, has examined the draft Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies. We welcome the Action Plan with its intention to address the root causes of exclusion in our societies. This Action Plan has a much more constructive tone than the previous Action Plan on fighting radicalization and violent extremism leading to terrorism. We want to emphasize that this initiative which aims at creating more inclusive societies is a much more appropriate way for the Council of Europe to address the current situation in Europe.

The Advisory Council on Youth wants to stress that existing policies and recommendations towards building more inclusive societies are not enough. They are sufficient for addressing structural problems and barriers to social inclusion and for removing structural discrimination and unequal opportunities. However, to have a meaningful impact these policies must be accompanied with initiatives at grass root-, community- and national levels and in strong partnerships with civil society and NGOs. After all, hate is learned, but love comes naturally as Nelson Mandela said. It is young people who need to be in the centre of the process towards more inclusive societies. It is imperative that young people have a say in all these policies and that they are the key stakeholders in all initiatives.

In reference to the section on **education** the Advisory Council on Youth would like to draw the attention to:

- Learning competences for democratic citizenship in the formal education system is of vital importance. However, equally important environment to learn these competences is the non-formal education sector and the work of youth organizations. We must not forget that much of our learning, especially when it comes to empowering young people to fully participate in society, happens in non-formal and informal settings. The process on mapping competences and their descriptors should therefore be enlarged to the non-formal education sphere.
- Access to education for undocumented children and young people must be made into a high priority, as we believe this is a precondition to any form of social inclusion of young people.

In reference to the section on **combating intolerance and discrimination** the Advisory Council on Youth would like to draw the attention to:

- The No Hate Speech Campaign was an initiative of the Advisory Council on Youth and we are extremely pleased that the campaign is continuing. We hope that this Action Plan will also reinforce the political and financial support for the campaign at national and European levels and thus increase member states' ownership of this movement.
- The campaign is based primarily on the idea of promoting human rights and it should not be considered as an instrument for anything else besides what it was set out to achieve (contrary to how it was depicted in the Action Plan on fighting radicalization and violent extremism leading to terrorism). We are convinced that the No Hate Speech Campaign can help to achieve more inclusive societies, but the starting point must above all be to address hate speech and the principle that human rights apply to the Internet also.
- Besides the campaign, the section on intolerance and discrimination gives very little attention to young people, who are key to the promotion of tolerance and inclusiveness.
- The introduction references the Roma Action Plan (that has a strong focus on youth) but it is not elaborated further in the concrete actions.
- 'Military' terminology, such as 'combat' and 'fight' something, is not helpful language and not compatible with the Council of Europe values. We would suggest rephrasing these issues and instead promote terminology such as 'inclusiveness' and 'tolerance'.
- Youth NGOs play a vital role in promoting human rights and tolerance at all levels (community/national/European) of society. We urge the Council of Europe to find ways of increasing its support for these NGOs and their important work. A way of doing so is by reinforcing the European Youth Foundation which will in 2016 support local and national youth NGOs in projects aiming at inclusive societies.¹ Support through the EYF is a meaningful and powerful way to have an impact on local level.
- In the end, tolerance cannot be created only with policy recommendations - it must be learned and understood. The Advisory Council on Youth believes this is best achieved with non-formal education activities and youth work in partnership with civil society actors and the public sector.

In reference to the section on **support for effective integration policies**, the Advisory Council on Youth would like to draw the attention to:

- The Recommendation on access to rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods will be disseminated and implemented in 2016 and we welcome the fact that this Recommendation is included in the Action Plan. We call for cooperation with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on this matter and we stress that no youth policy (local or national) should be developed without the full participation of young people. The provisions of the Recommendation were developed with young people. To implement them successfully at local level it must also be with the full participation of young people. Essential is also to develop easy-to-use tools for the purpose of implementing the provisions of the Recommendation in targeted ways at municipal level.

¹ European Youth Foundation pilot project priority 2: Building inclusive societies

a) Initiatives supporting social inclusion strategies for young migrants and refugees. An intergenerational approach would be welcomed.

b) Initiatives strengthening social cohesion in multicultural settings, creating political and social environments valuing diversity and conducive to dialogue and understanding among communities.

c) Activities responding to stigmatisation and discrimination of/by young people based on religion or on ethnic grounds (Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, Romaphobia...).

<http://www.coe.int/en/web/european-youth-foundation/coe-themes-and-youth-sector-priorities>

- The Action Plan also promises to engage a range of non-state actors from civil society, to understand the role of civil society better and to coordinate this work. This is not fully reflected in the actions and we underline the importance that the Action Plan should be developed towards initiatives that support civil society actors, notably youth NGOs, by capacity building measures, materials, financial support and networking. The No Hate Speech Campaign is a good example of such combination of support and actors.