



Policy Paper on Youth & the European Social Model

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Executive summary

Through this Policy Paper, the European Youth Forum proposes a set of basic elements that ensure a comprehensive, inclusive and participatory approach in developing social policies.

The European Youth Forum does not see the European Social Model as a single and unified model in which social policies are produced, but rather as a system that combines freedom and civil equality with social justice and solidarity. The European Youth Forum considers it necessary to build on these principles and to further elaborate them, with an aim to framing a European Union that develops coherent policies which allow young people to achieve their full potential and live autonomously.

For the European Youth Forum, the European Social Model should be transparent, democratic, accountable and reliable to people. Moreover, it should be based on the principle of social inclusion, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their circumstances and background, has the possibility and means to participate fully in society. In addition, the European Social Model should be based on intergenerational solidarity, taking into account the demographic changes that have taken place in European society over recent decades.

In this framework, the European Youth Forum considers there are four key elements for the European Social Model: employment, education, autonomy and active citizenship. Employment, on the one hand, is the key to welfare and full integration in society and therefore, ensuring that young people can enter the world of work and have decent jobs must be one of the overall aims of the European Social Model. Education lays the basis for achieving one's potential as well as for one's integration in society, both through the transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for active participation as a citizen, and also through the development of skills and competencies to be creative, entrepreneurial and employable. Autonomy signifies that young people have the necessary support, resources and opportunities to choose to live independently; to enjoy the possibility of full social and political participation in all sectors of everyday life; and to be able to take independent decisions. Employment and education are important prerequisites for young people to achieve autonomy, but in addition, a wider range of services and policies needs to be considered in order to support the independence and well-being of young people, necessary for their transition towards adulthood. Lastly, the European Youth Forum is convinced that the prosperity and well-being of societies stems from active citizenship and participation.

In order to build a participatory Social Model this should, in the view of the European Youth Forum, be done through a multi-stakeholder approach, where youth organisations are involved, as well as through intergenerational dialogue.

1. Introduction

The European Social Model (ESM), and the involvement of young people in its development, is of increasing importance given recent trends towards a globalised Europe which challenges the socio-economic status of youth. Demographic changes, coupled with changes in the economy and in labour markets, are challenging traditional social systems in Europe: Europe therefore needs to reflect

on how to manage these changes effectively. At the same time, young people are facing increasing difficulties in accessing quality education, decent employment and in their ability to live autonomously as equal members of society. In this context, it is of the utmost importance to ensure the availability, sustainability and functioning of social policy that encourages and enables young people to achieve their full potential and to live autonomous lives¹.

The European Youth Forum (YFJ) does not see the ‘European Social Model’ as a single, unified model in which social policies are produced, and even less as a collection of policies equally applicable throughout the European Union. The ESM is seen rather as a set of measures able to harness the economic power of the free market, within a regulatory system designed not only to prevent abuses but also to guarantee the satisfaction of basic social needs and social security; a system that combines freedom and civil equality before the law with social justice and solidarity. For the European Youth Forum, a European Social Model should consist of a common set of principles, which organises the development of social policies and social protection systems; outlines the main aims and scope of these policies; and defines the basics of a broad social dialogue ensuring the involvement of citizens and civil society in the shaping of these policies.

Despite the diversity in policies and practices, a number of such principles already clearly exist across the European Union. The European Youth Forum considers it necessary to build on these principles, policies and practices and further elaborate them, with an aim to achieving a European Union that develops coherent policies that allow young people to achieve their full potential and live autonomously.

This paper proposes a European Social Model as a set of basic elements that ensures a comprehensive, inclusive and participatory approach in developing social policies. The paper consists of three parts: the first outlines the basic principles on which such a European Social Model should be based, in order to work for young people (inclusion and intergenerational solidarity). The second part focuses on education, employment, autonomy and active citizenship. The third section presents the European Youth Forum’s views on how a participatory Social Model could function, addressing the role of the social partners, the need for a multi-stakeholder’ approach and mechanisms for intergenerational dialogue.

2. Fundamental Principles - A Fair European Social Model for all

At the European Union level - although many policy areas come under the responsibility of each Member State, such as education, social protection and social inclusion, - there are a set of key elements that must be taken into account to ensure the proper functioning of the ESM. For the European Youth Forum, it is imperative that the European Social Model should be transparent, democratic, accountable and reliable to people. In order to achieve this aim, involvement of all relevant stakeholders in policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation must be considered as a fundamental principle.

In the framework of policy development, and the debate on the European Social Model in the European Union, the European Youth Forum reminds the Member States and the European institutions that they have already agreed upon a certain set of common aims and objectives for social policy and social protection. In this

¹ This is the overall vision that youth organisations have set for youth policy - i.e. functioning of public policies targeted in favour of young people. See YFJ Policy Paper “Meeting Young People’s Needs - A European Youth Forum Approach to Youth Policy” 0590-06, adopted in November 2006.

context, the European Youth Forum recalls that the European Council explicitly highlighted the need to combat social exclusion and poverty², and underlines the commitments made within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the field of Social Protection and Social Inclusion. The introduction of minimum social standards in EU legislation is required to have the tools that correspond to the demands of society today. In terms of reshaping the European Social Model, the European Youth Forum welcomed the approach agreed by the EU concerning flexicurity³ as a means to contributing to the achievement of greater cohesion, provided that a balanced approach between 'flexibility' and 'security' is implemented - and with a guarantee that implementation will have a positive impact for young people⁴.

It is important to take into account that the European Union social and cohesion policies, especially in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy, do not only effect countries belonging to the European Union, but also accession countries and candidates (Turkey, Croatia and Macedonia), countries belonging to the European Neighbourhood Policy⁵, EFTA countries (Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland), as well as Western Balkans countries belonging to the Stabilisation and Association Process⁶. This situation arises due to preconditions that the European Union requires from these countries, and which include diverse financial support measures and access to the internal EU market. In addition, European countries have also committed to taking into consideration the goals of ensuring youth access to employment, education and social protection, as presented by the UN Secretary General to the 62nd session of the UN General Assembly⁷. In this context, it is important to consider the role of a European Social Model - reflected and promoted by the specific policies and actions of the EU - in supporting young people in the wider Europe and also globally, and the need to involve the perspective of young people from all these countries in the debate.

❖ Including young people as full members in society

The makers and shapers of policy must ensure that young people have the resources, opportunities and support to reach their full potential in all aspects of their lives - now and in the future. In this respect, the European Social Model should be based upon the principle of social inclusion: it should aim to ensure that everyone, regardless of their circumstances and background, has the possibility and

² Conclusions of the European Spring Council 2007 (08-09/03/2007) - 7224/1/07 REV 1 CONCL 1

³ Council Conclusions "Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity" CONS 16201/07 and Presidency Conclusions of Brussels European Council, 14 December 2007, CONS 16616/1/07 REV 1

⁴ YFJ contribution to the Green Paper "Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century"

⁵ The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was developed in 2004, with the objective of avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and instead strengthening the prosperity, stability and security of all concerned. The EU offers its neighbours a privileged relationship, building upon a mutual commitment to common values (democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development). The European Neighbourhood Policy applies to the EU's immediate neighbours by land or sea - Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

⁶ All the countries of the Western Balkans have the prospect of future membership of the European Union, an objective endorsed by the European Council in Feira in June 2000 and confirmed by the European Council in Thessaloniki in June 2003. The European Council in June 2005 clearly re-confirmed these existing commitments. Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which have been granted candidate country status, remain part of the SAP. The other countries of the Western Balkans are potential candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia including Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/how_does_a_country_join_the_eu/sap/index_en.htm

⁷ A/62/61/Add.1-E/2007/7/Add

means to participate fully in society (e.g. in economic, civic and cultural activities)⁸. When considering inclusion policies, it is essential to distinguish European youth as a group, from young people with fewer opportunities. While the most disadvantaged groups need specific focus and tailored measures, it is nonetheless extremely important to remember that all young people are facing challenges to become integrated in society and the employment market, whatever their social background. This should be a fundamental aspect of the European Social Model. Issues of inequality disproportionately affect young people. The European Social Model should proactively promote equality rather than only seek to prevent discrimination.

The question of social inclusion, as it pertains to young people, is often scaled down to simply the improvement of employment policies. Improved employment policies are indeed a prerequisite to promoting the social inclusion of young people, but are not, on their own, sufficient. In order to ensure full social inclusion, employment policies must be complemented by other social measures. All facets of young peoples' lives should be taken into consideration: for example, education policy, access to services, housing and improved political representation need also to be fully considered.

❖ Ensuring intergenerational sustainability through intergenerational solidarity

European demographic evolution is very challenging not only for the European Union's future economic development, but also for our social systems and communities. Between 2005 and 2030, the working age population (15-64) is due to fall by 20.8 million⁹. Moreover, the demographic dependency ratio, as defined as the ratio of the population aged 0 to 14 and over 65 to the population aged between 15 and 64 years, will rise from a rate of 49% in 2005 to 66% in 2030.

In this context it is vital to reflect on how Europe can maintain the existing principles and guarantees of its Social Model, while reshaping it to meet the challenges of the 21st century; and, moreover, how this reshaping will affect young people. The European Youth Forum insists that changes to the functioning of social systems cannot be made to the detriment of younger generations: intergenerational sustainability can only be achieved through intergenerational solidarity. In this respect, ensuring intergenerational sustainability must be one of the transversal aspects to be respected, when considering the future of the European Social Model.

In order to ensure the sustainable development of the European Social Model, the European Youth Forum calls for the design of an 'intergenerational solidarity plan' in which the European Social Model would take into account the demographic changes that have taken place in European society over recent decades. This plan should avoid presenting the demographic issue as a conflict between young and older people, but rather promote social cohesion, notably between the different generations.

⁸ 0070-06 Policy Paper on Social inclusion through Youth Participation. April 2006

⁹ European Commission Green paper: "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations", 16.3.2005, COM (2005) 94

3. Key Elements of the European Social Model - Ensuring a Good Life for all Young People

❖ Employment

Employment is the key to welfare and full integration in society. Therefore, ensuring that young people can enter the world of work and have decent jobs must be one of the overall aims of the European Social Model.

However, in recent decades, young people have been deeply affected by the increasing segmentation of the labour market and the parallel development of precarious forms of work - often leading to young people facing exploitive situations in their working lives. Despite the designation of policy instruments that were designed (since the European Employment Strategy in 1997) to improve the integration of youth in the labour market, the situation of youth in employment has not improved. In this sense, it is imperative that employment and social policies are now genuinely tuned in favour of young people and that the interests of younger generations are taken onboard in policy development.

❖ Education

Education lays the basis for achieving one's potential as well as for one's integration in society - both through the transfer of the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for active participation as a citizen, and also through the development of skills and competencies to be creative, entrepreneurial and employable. In this sense, quality education free of charge, tailored to the needs of the learner in terms of personal development and relevance to the labour market should be a key element of the European Social Model.

The education systems in Europe are currently failing in terms of inclusiveness, quality and their philosophy. Nearly one in six young people in the EU is an early school leaver, and one in four young adults (aged 25-29) has not completed the upper secondary education level -with surveys pointing at considerable deficiencies in pupils' mastery of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Access to education is also inequitable: some groups of young people are more likely to leave education earlier than others and therefore less likely to achieve high level qualifications. Early school leaving is often a result of discrimination, whether overt or covert, and it is clear that this particularly affects young people who are members of minorities, including but not limited to LGBTQ, black and minority ethnic, and disabled young people, and young people from lower socio-economic groups.

A social Europe that is conducive to economic growth needs to be built on high quality, well funded and inclusive lifelong learning. Improving education should be at the core of any growth agenda, as well as the European Social Model that the European Youth Forum wishes to promote. Education systems need to be reformed in order to make sure that all Europeans can achieve high level qualifications. In addition to higher education, attention should be paid to vocational training.

Lifelong learning means that high level qualifications can be reached from an early age as well as at later stages in life. Moreover, it means that learners are enabled to develop competences to continue updating their qualifications after having finalised formal education. In order for lifelong learning to develop, linkages between levels and profiles of formal education need to be built or improved. The

European Qualifications Framework plays an important role in promoting these linkages.

The transition from education to employment is one of the key concerns for young people. While more educated than ever, young people are increasingly facing barriers to entry into the world of work: this, to a great extent, is due to the incapacity of educational systems to equip young people with skills necessary and relevant to the labour market. The relevance of available education to the labour market must be duly considered as part of the reform of education systems in Europe. While doing so, it should be noted that education systems cannot be streamlined only to serve this goal, but also to support broadly the personal development of young people and especially to encourage creativity, critical thinking and responsibility which are in turn, elements for building a prosperous society.

While considering the development of quality education as a key element of the European Social Model, the role of non-formal education must be taken into account. Involvement in voluntary activities, non-formal education and youth NGOs provides opportunities for young people not only to contribute to the well-being of society and to learn and adopt values, but also to develop a variety of skills, knowledge and attitudes, which are relevant to society and thus to the labour market. Such experiences are often not well understood or recognised by the labour market, as they are usually, as a matter of principle, not certified in any way - even though often reflected upon and evaluated by the young people themselves. The European Youth Forum believes that these experiences should be more broadly recognised despite the lack of certification or validation. Therefore, the European Youth Forum calls for greater recognition by different actors, including employers, of the work of youth NGOs as the main providers of non-formal education, and of the opportunities for young people to learn how to take responsibility for themselves and for others.

❖ Autonomy

Autonomy signifies that young people have the necessary support, resources and opportunities to choose to live independently; to enjoy the possibility of full social and political participation in all sectors of everyday life; and to be able to take independent decisions. Employment and education are important prerequisites for young people to achieve autonomy. In addition, a wider range of services and policies needs to be considered in order to support the independence and well-being of young people, necessary for their transition towards adulthood.

Today, young people face greater challenges, and longer transitions to realising autonomy. Unaffordable housing costs, reduced access to social protection benefits, accompanied with difficulties in finding a secure footing in the employment market are realities that can stand in the way of young people becoming autonomous. The lack or unavailability of quality basic services are also factors which can prevent young people from achieving autonomy.

In order to be inclusive, fair and reliable, the European Social Model must encompass and ensure the autonomy of young people through access to quality basic services (such as healthcare and transport), housing, social protection as well as to a safe and healthy living environment. Given the key role that they play in supporting young people's autonomy, and in the challenging context of contemporary demographic change, migration and economic change, assurance

must be made that these social systems are reformed and exist in favour of young people.

❖ Active Citizenship

The European Youth Forum is convinced that the prosperity and well-being of societies stems from active citizenship and participation. Well-being cannot be shaped only by the acts of public authorities. A democratic, sustainable and truly prosperous society requires that its citizens take the responsibility to care for the common good. To this end, active citizenship should be seen as an integral part of the European Social Model.

The participation of young people in society creates welfare and social cohesion. In this sense, policies promoting the participation of young people need to be considered as an integral part of the European Social Model. Support to associative life and volunteering, creation of participation structures, quality youth information services and improvement of possibilities of young people to participate in representative democracy are key policies to be addressed in order to promote a Social Model that favours young people.

In order to foster active citizenship, the functioning of a vivid and sustainable civil society needs to be ensured. Traditional civil society is being challenged in the context of social fragmentation, multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity, the increasing pressure of working life, as well as social trends including consumerism and individualism. Civil society - and youth organisations as its key component - needs to reform and adapt to this new reality; the important role of public policies - embodied by the European Social Model - is to support and strengthen the functioning of civil society in this regard also.

4. Developing the European Social Model for and with Young People

❖ Towards a Multi-Stakeholder Approach

The debate around the European Social Model is complex and involves the interests of various actors. Social partners have traditionally played a key role in voicing the concerns of civil society in the discussion on employment and social policies. Considering the varying impact that changes to the European Social Model, and the policies that it produces, can have on different generations, it is of the utmost importance to make sure that young people are heard - and that they can take an integral part in the debate: this requires the development of an enhanced multi-stakeholder approach towards policy development.

Indeed, when it comes to the integration of young people into the labour market, the role of the social partners is crucial, because they know how the market works and what the needs are concerning both employees and employers. Nevertheless, the European Youth Forum strongly believes that the improvement of the labour market integration of young people should be conceived as a collective responsibility which requires the involvement of actors such as public authorities, the social partners, and youth organisations. In addition, as outlined in this paper, the debate on the European Social Model goes beyond employment policies. The interests of young people as a group and as a generation, need to be taken into account in a wide range of social and education policies: and this requires the active participation of youth organisations.

At the national level, employers, trade unions and National Youth Councils should be involved in a genuine dialogue regarding the situation of young people in the labour market, and regarding the impact of social and education policies on young people. Only such a multi-stakeholder approach can help create a better understanding of the reality in which young people are living. Such a dialogue would also contribute to better policies and better links between young people and the world of work, which is a prerequisite for the better integration of youth in the labour market. More particularly, youth organisations have a lot to contribute in view of the skills acquired and fostered through non-formal education (e.g. entrepreneurship and a sense of initiative), which can be highly valued by the labour market.

❖ **Inter-generational dialogue**

All EU Member States have to prepare for major demographic changes that will strongly affect the relationships between generations. It is therefore of the utmost importance to explore new approaches to policy development - approaches that promote intergenerational solidarity and cooperation and thereby contribute to a more cohesive society. Both younger and older people will increasingly find themselves in vulnerable positions, and this deserves special attention by policy makers.

On behalf of young people in Europe, the European Youth Forum calls for the full inclusion of youth organisations in the debate and policy-making process regarding demographic change. The European Youth Forum believes that the increased participation of older people and of younger people in the labour market should be at the core of the strategy on demography. In order to find responses to the challenges facing young people, with regards to their integration into both the labour market and society in general, their voices and interests need to be heard in the debate on policy and reform. To this end, youth organisations need to be involved as key actors in the debate.

Increased intergenerational dialogue would serve as a similar means to finding solutions and better policies to address demographic change. Every year, greater numbers of Europeans are reaching retirement age: the European Youth Forum believes that the retirement of older people without the useful transmission of their knowledge is a waste of valuable human resources. We therefore call for the design of an “intergenerational learning scheme”. Such a scheme should accommodate job-sharing between older workers who want to move progressively towards retirement and younger people in the process of entering or moving within the labour market.

Demographic change also has significant implications on the functioning of democracy, as older generations will clearly be dominant in the electorate. This will not only affect political debate, but may also have a major impact on the decisions on the future of European Social Model. To balance this trend - one that could jeopardise the intergenerational sustainability of those decisions - and to also increase intergenerational debate within the framework of representative democracy, the European Youth Forum calls for the lowering of the voting age to 16. Such a decision would be an important sign that European societies take the concerns of young people seriously and are also willing to engage in genuine intergenerational dialogue.

5. Conclusion

Social justice will only be reached when governments and institutions set a concrete agenda for creating a free and equitable society where everyone matters; an agenda that sets its basis on equal access to resources, goods and services, where a stable relationship between a free market economy, human rights and environment is reached.

Despite the diversity in policies and practices at the social level that already exist across the European Union, the European Youth Forum believes it is necessary to build on these and further elaborate them, in order to achieve a European Union that develops coherent policies that allow young people to achieve their full potential and live autonomous lives. In this sense, the European Social Model should consist of a set of basic elements that ensure a comprehensive, inclusive and participatory approach to developing social policies.

The European Youth Forum believes that the basic principles on which such a European Social Model should be based, in order for it to work for young people, are inclusion and intergenerational solidarity; moreover, that the issues that should be addressed in the framework of an effective European Social Model are education and employment, autonomy and active citizenship. In addition, the European Youth Forum believes that a participatory Social Model should function based upon a multi-stakeholder approach and upon mechanisms for intergenerational dialogue.

Reflection on the European Social Model, and the involvement of youth in the development of this Model, is increasingly important given the recent developments in demography and in the functioning of labour markets and social inclusion systems - all of which are increasing the challenges faced by young people today. Contemporary Europe needs to reconnect its priorities and pre-occupations with the challenges being faced by its people; and policy answers to these challenges must be determined.

Establishing lasting stability and peace, combating poverty and unemployment, and increasing participation demand an emphasis on education, democracy and cooperation. We must remain cognisant that these will not be easy tasks; whatever solutions Europe defines will require consensus among groups with divergent interests: this means that everybody needs to have an opportunity to contribute. To ensure that the interests of the young are heard and taken into account in decisions concerning the European Social Model, it is imperative that youth organisations are also given this opportunity, and are actively taking part wherever those decisions are made.