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**COMMISSION REPORT TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL,  
THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE  
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Final evaluation of the "Youth" Community action programme (2000-2006) and of the  
Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of  
youth (2004-2006)**

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

From 2000 to 2006, there were two types of Community action for youth:

- support for projects covered by Decision No 1031/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 April 2000 establishing the "Youth" Community action programme<sup>1</sup>
- contributions to the operating costs of European youth NGOs and the European Youth Forum (EYF). Between 2004 and 2006, this support was covered by Decision No 2006/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 establishing a Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level in the field of youth<sup>2</sup>.

Given the concomitant final evaluation of the two instruments and the fact that they were merged into one programme as of 2007, the Commission has drafted a single report to present the conclusions drawn from the evaluations and the recommendations to be applied to the Youth in Action programme (2007-2013).

The evaluations can be consulted at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/evalreports/index\\_en.htm#youthHeader](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/index_en.htm#youthHeader)

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 117, 18.5.2000, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 138, 30.4.2004, p. 24.

## 2. REMINDER OF THE PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

### 2.1. Youth Programme

The objectives of the "Youth" programme were to promote the active contribution of young people to the building of Europe, strengthen their sense of solidarity, encourage their spirit of initiative and enterprise and their creativity, and reinforce cooperation in the field of youth. These objectives have been pursued through various actions:

- Youth for Europe, which supported youth exchanges;
- European voluntary service (EVS), which allowed young people to participate in voluntary work in a country other than their own;
- youth initiatives to support innovation and creativity, centred on the social commitment of young people;
- activities to be undertaken jointly with other Community schemes relating to the Europe of knowledge, in particular Socrates and Leonardo;
- accompanying measures to finance various support measures, particularly the training and cooperation of stakeholders in youth policy.

As many subsidies were granted and close proximity to the beneficiaries was necessary, the programme was generally managed in a "decentralised" manner by national agencies (NA). Some NAs, in addition to their mission as an NA for their country, provided support for all the NAs by developing a special area of competence; this function is called SALTO (Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities). The programme also supported centres providing information on Europe-wide opportunities for young people (the Eurodesk network, with a relay in each country).

Some strands of the programme required "centralised" management at European level, for which the Commission used a Technical Assistance Office (TAO) until 2006, when the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency was created (EACEA), with a department which took over the responsibility for managing these actions.

Available budget for 2000-2006 (commitment appropriations in EUR million)

EU budget	624.2
Other contributions (EFTA/EEA and candidate countries)	90.6
Total	714.8
Of which: budget used	701.4

Estimated number of participants 2000-2006 (thousands)

Youth exchanges	465.8
European Voluntary Service	25.7
Youth initiatives	153.4
Accompanying measures	206.9
Total	851.8

## **2.2. Programme for the promotion of bodies active in the field of youth**

The general aim of the programme was to provide operating grants as support for the activities of international youth NGOs and the EYF (a platform uniting almost one hundred youth organisations). These activities were to contribute in particular to the active participation of young people in public life and society and to the development of Community cooperation actions in the field of youth.

All programme management was "centralised".

Available budget for 2004-2006 (commitment appropriations in EUR million)

EU budget	12.9
Other contributions (EFTA/EEA and candidate countries)	0.2
Total	13.1
Of which: budget used	12.9

Number of subsidies granted, 2004-2006

To the European Youth Forum	3
To European youth NGOs	234

## **3. EVALUATION**

### **3.1. Procedures**

The final evaluation of the "Youth" programme is based on:

- evaluation reports from the Member States (MS) and other participating countries;

- a report drawn up by an external evaluation service which, in addition to the aforementioned national reports, used the results of its own research, conducted in particular using questionnaires sent to the main stakeholders. This external evaluation was carried out by ECORYS, under a framework contract concluded with the Commission in 2006 following a call for tenders.

The final evaluation of the programme for the promotion of bodies active in the field of youth is based on a report written by an external evaluation service called "The Evaluation Partnership", selected following a restricted call for tenders launched in 2006.

### **3.2. Methods**

The process chosen for the external evaluation of "Youth" comprised the following activities: a desk-based study; the definition of indicators; interviews; questionnaire-based Internet surveys; country studies. Approximately 2 500 youth organisations, 900 youth participants and 450 youth workers responded to the questionnaires, which proved particularly useful.

The process chosen for the other programme comprised a desk-based study, online questionnaires, discussion groups, direct interviews and the submission of short electronic questionnaires.

### **3.3. The evaluators' conclusions**

The evaluations of the two programmes were very positive in a number of aspects.

The "Youth" programme corresponded well to overall EU youth policy. It met the needs of most of the beneficiaries. For young people, it was effective as far as their sense of citizenship, including European citizenship, was concerned, and also as regarded career guidance and heightening young people's sense of solidarity; it was less effective in reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities. It had significant positive results for youth workers and generated knock-on positive effects for youth organisations. The evaluators of the other programme note that it has succeeded in familiarising its beneficiaries with the European vision and the European institutions.

The funding available for "Youth" was sufficient, although some national reports recommended increasing it. Overall, the structures created for programme management are deemed to be appropriate and efficient. The main recommendations for improvement concern the SALTOs and Eurodesks, and also the general methods for monitoring programme implementation.

### 3.3.1. *Complementarity and relevance of "Youth"*

EU policy action in favour of youth progressed during the "Youth" implementation period, thanks in particular to the 2001 White Paper, "A new impetus for European youth"<sup>3</sup> and the European Youth Pact of 2005<sup>4</sup>. The evaluators underline the fact that "Youth" complements the objectives of this policy action.

They observe only partial complementarity with Socrates and Leonardo; cooperation between these programmes could have been better developed.

"Youth" is generally considered to be complementary to national youth instruments. The programme successfully targeted the needs of most beneficiaries, especially young people. Youth workers likewise found the programme to be of great value; however, greater flexibility would make it easier to meet their needs.

### 3.3.2. *Efficiency of "Youth"*

The programme is considered to have been very successful in improving the sense of citizenship of the young participants, in particular in terms of attitude, communication and social skills.

90% of the participants in exchanges declare that they have become more tolerant.

The programme effectively strengthened participants' feeling of belonging to the EU.

As regards active participation, many young people stayed or became active in local or international organisations once their activities had ended. Although this is not always due to the programme, around one third of participants say that they became involved in international activities through it.

Participation in the programme affects the employability of young people, particularly young volunteers. It influences education choices.

62% of volunteers report an influence on their professional career.

Young people say that they have a greater sense of solidarity since participating in the programme.

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<sup>3</sup> COM(2001)681 final, 21.11.2001.

<sup>4</sup> Adopted by the European Council in March 2005.

The programme was only moderately successful in reaching out to young people with fewer opportunities (21% for the exchanges and 13% for the EVS). The participants generally have a high level of education. The programme was effective in terms of gender equality.

Among youth workers, the programme created greater awareness of the intercultural dimension and contact with new working methods.

91% of youth workers who participated in the programme report added value over other training which they have received.

The evaluators consider that accompanying measures effectively support the professional development of youth workers, e.g. greater involvement in European networks. However, greater attention to the needs of youth workers would increase the practical use of the knowledge acquired. Furthermore, youth workers are not sufficiently informed of the possibilities offered by the programme.

Lastly, indirect positive effects are observed, such as a more international perspective in the organisations which took on volunteers.

### 3.3.3. *Usefulness and durability of "Youth"*

The programme encouraged non-formal learning. It had a bigger impact on professional practices among young people than on youth policy: it had no significant effect on policy (although some impact was noted in the new MS) and seems to have had a greater influence in terms of innovative approaches.

79% of youth organisations which took part in a EVS project consider that the project fostered the exchange of good practices.

According to the organisations asked, the programme contributed to the establishment of new international contacts between organisations, even if contacts already existed. The programme was able to help strengthen these networks and encourage their continuing existence.

In general, there is no real influence on the administrative structures within the MS, except in a few new MS. The programme does not seem to have helped reduce administrative obstacles to mobility.

### 3.3.4. *The Efficiency of "Youth"*

While the funding allocated to the decentralised parts of the programme is generally considered to be appropriate, around half of the national authorities and the NAs deem it necessary to increase the budget earmarked for youth exchanges and around one third want to see an increase in the budget for accompanying measures. The external evaluators consider that more funding should be allocated to the functioning of the NAs to develop activities such

as their advisory role, which is important if we are to prevent project submission procedures from having a negative effect on the accessibility of the programme.

In general, the management structures are considered to be effective, although there is room for improvement. It is too early to draw conclusions as to the efficiency of the EACEA which replaced the old TAO in 2006. It is thought that good use is made of the NAs, although the Commission is sometimes late in releasing the funds that they manage. The main remarks concern the SALTOs and the Eurodesks. The SALTOs are seen as suitable structures and the importance of their work is recognised; however, there is still room for improvement. More critical comments were made about the role and added value of the Eurodesks, and the evaluators consider that their activities need to be re-examined.

It would be a good idea to improve the visibility of the programme, particularly in order for it to target young people with fewer opportunities more successfully.

Lastly, progress will be necessary in order to ensure better follow-up to the programme, on the basis of rationalised procedures, instruments and indicators.

### *3.3.5. Convergence of opinions on the impact of the programme*

The national evaluations show notable convergence with each other and also with the evaluation conducted at European level, particularly as regards the impact of the programme.

According to the national reports, the programme had a clear impact on knowledge, skills and attitudes liable to improve the employability of young people and their sense of citizenship; the main impact is on a personal level.

These reports stress the contribution made to non-formal learning among young people: "The main element in this programme is non-formal learning. (...) the projects supported by the programme target learning rather than "happenings" devoid of any real interest. Non-formal learning shows that learning also takes place outside institutional structures like school." (NO) "Participation in the 'Youth' programme (...) is good on a CV and can be of interest to future employers." (DK) "Participation in the 'Youth' programme is generally perceived as a boost to employability as it develops basic skills." (UK)

They stress the contribution to the development of citizenship and intercultural dialogue: "All the actions (...) have had tangible, lasting effects: greater willingness to become socially involved, learn foreign languages and work in a foreign (European) country, and a better understanding of foreign cultures. At the same time, it has been possible to successfully combat xenophobia." (DE) "The personal contact established between participants and young people of the same age in another country (...) goes beyond the normal encounters made on holiday or visits and creates new intensive opportunities for experience and learning." (LU)

They underline that the benefit of participating in the programme is primarily on a personal level: "Learning is mainly 'tacit learning', and life skills (...) such as making friends, learning a language, or vaguer issues such as learning (...) about new cultures, being more open to other "cultures", (...) to others, being able to see one's own situation and that of others more impartially, etc." (BE-NL) "... for many [of the participants], the experience gained through the programme brought about a certain degree of change in their lives (e.g. greater independence, improved self-image, new vision of the world) and also influenced life choices: e.g. active citizenship and new school or professional prospects." (BE-FR)

Mobility plays an important role in this learning: "Before the exchanges, many participants had never been outside Ireland." (IE) "For some young people with fewer opportunities, the youth exchange was their first trip abroad." (EE)

Practically all the reports conclude that the programme had an overall positive effect on youth workers and youth organisations: "The programme led to the professionalisation of organisations in the European field, which also benefited youth professionals who provide information, advice and support for young people in their projects." (FR) "Youth organisations benefit in particular from the deepening of contacts and international partnerships." (AT) "The programme (...) enhanced the European dimension of the activities conducted by the responsible organisations, encouraging team spirit and also a non-discriminatory, professional attitude to Community activities." (SI) "The 'Youth' programme gives organisations publicity and improves their image... The fact that the 'Youth' programme is an EU programme contributes significantly to increasing its prestige." (PL)

They point out that the programme encouraged networking: "70 per cent of respondents confirm that they would never have taken the initiative to engage in European cooperation without the 'Youth' programme. (...) 40 per cent of organisations admit that their participation in 'Youth' is their only European experience." (BE-NL) "Youth workers (...) and their organisations and groups have developed functional partnerships in almost all the countries of the programme." (CZ)

The impact on national policy is considerable in the new MS: "The 'Youth' programme (...) had an unquestionably positive impact on the attitudes and skills of young people (...) and also on the development of national youth policy and legislation." (SK) "The 'Youth' programme as a Community activity is a source of information on how youth policies are pursued in other EU Member States." (PL)

The evaluations portrayed the various actions of the programme and their characteristics in a positive light: "Improvements in the experience and self-esteem of the volunteers and their enlarged network of European contacts probably have a more long-term impact than, for example, youth exchanges. But it is very possible that some participants in youth exchanges also had positive impressions which could stay with them all their lives." (SE)

### *3.3.6. Main conclusions of the evaluation of the programme for the promotion of bodies active in the field of youth*

The programme familiarised young people with the European project and the European institutions. Its aims clearly reflected the objectives and working methods of NGOs. Its purpose extended beyond the provision of financial aid (strengthening the image and administrative ability of the beneficiaries). The need to have a broad network has encouraged NGOs to extend beyond their countries of origin.

Over 40% of the beneficiaries who responded think that they would not have been able to survive without the EU aid, which suggests that the programme is often perceived as the only means of financing, although it is possible that the beneficiaries overestimate the impact of an absence of aid; the grants provided may be taking the place of financing available elsewhere. The programme attracted small NGOs, which are in the greatest need of support. To a certain extent, it encouraged the NGOs and the EYF to reach out to young people not yet involved in an organisation.

The evaluators consider that the grants helped to increase the credibility and visibility of the NGOs and the EYF in the eyes of their members and potential sponsors, but it is difficult to tell whether this has improved their image vis-à-vis young people in general. 65% of the NGOs asked confirm that they have not needed to change the purpose or structure of their organisation in order to take part in the programme, and that the programme did not significantly affect the number of their activities, but allowed them to be conducted more professionally.

The support given to the EYF does not necessarily affect the ability of its members to involve more young people or be more efficient in finding funding. The grants did not always lead young people to become more personally involved in European affairs, but they did encourage the members of the EYF to stay better informed.

More than 50% of those who responded to the survey found the application procedure complex but bearable. Very few applications were refused for reasons of quality, but many were refused for non-compliance with the administrative requirements. The participants would like to be able to receive multi-annual grants.

The programme strengthened NGOs and the EYF, thus corresponding to the Commission philosophy, which places NGOs at the heart of its strategy for the involvement of civil society.

#### **4. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS – COMMENTS BY THE COMMISSION**

##### **4.1. Ensure the greater inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities**

*A strategy should be developed to reach more young people with a lower level of education. This can also be done through a publicity strategy targeting all potential programme participants as directly as possible.*

The Commission has developed an inclusion strategy to increase the participation of more disadvantaged young people; their involvement is identified as an award criterion for the actions concerned. It has made it easier to measure the degree of participation of these young people. Lastly, it will follow this recommendation in its information strategy.

##### **4.2. Ensure more involvement of young people in the preparation of projects**

*Participants should be involved in preparing the projects more often. Offering training focused on the preparation, organisation and implementation of projects would support this objective.*

In the advice it offers, the Programme Guide stresses the importance of involving young people. The financing rules sometimes offer the possibility for the young people who will be involved in projects to take part in preparatory visits.

##### **4.3. Provide better support for youth workers**

*Improved evaluation of the needs of training providers is recommended, in the aim of developing training courses which are more tailor-made.*

The Commission will take account of this recommendation in its reflections on the SALTOs and will examine how to ensure better consultation of youth workers on the format, content, methodology, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the training courses.

##### **4.4. Improve support for promoters**

*The NAs have an important assistance role to play. It would be useful to identify the main obstacles encountered when submitting a project.*

The Commission has reasserted the "supportive approach" principle, through which the NAs provide assistance to the promoters, so that the programme is accessible to as many people as possible and achieves the aim of being open to young people with fewer opportunities. It has clarified the criteria and conditions for participation in the programme. It will work together with the NAs to examine how to identify the main difficulties still perceived by promoters.

#### **4.5. Strengthen the efficiency of NGO and EYF action**

*Reports on the activities of the NGOs and the EYF should focus on the measurement and evaluation of practical details. The NGOs and the EYF could establish mechanisms for measuring participants' satisfaction. They could encourage their members to involve young people with no prior experience in policymaking or in the NGOs; the EYF could define best practices for the consultation of young people by its member organisations. The Commission should continue to assist promoters in their applications, and there should be wider publicity for this potential support.*

The Commission agrees to these recommendations.

#### **4.6. Improve project monitoring**

*The efforts already made to collect data on the implementation of the programme should be built on. It is suggested that the data on the centralised and decentralised strands be integrated into one single monitoring system.*

The Commission will develop a strategy for the continuous evaluation of the programme, identifying indicators to be monitored. It has undertaken to improve the IT tools which the NAs are required to use. It will take care to integrate information from the NAs and also from centralised management into this system.

#### **4.7. Raise the profile of the programme**

*The profile of the programme should be raised in order to broaden the aims of its young participants and better inform youth workers of the possibilities on offer. Greater attention to the exchange of best practices would also help to achieve a higher profile.*

The Commission is developing an information strategy to make the programme and its results more widely known. Preliminary measures have already been taken: improvement of the website presenting the programme; a requirement for promoters to work at raising its profile; the development of a database accessible to everyone using information on project results.

#### **4.8. More resources for the NAs**

*Some NAs lack the means to offer sufficient support for promoters. They need to be given more resources.*

The Commission, while taking care to limit the administrative costs of the programme, will examine how to act on this recommendation when preparing the 2009 budget.

#### **4.9. Accelerate the disbursement of funding to the NAs**

*It is recommended that the Commission disburse funds to the NAs without delay.*

The changes made when Youth in Action entered into force streamline the procedures governing the disbursement of funds to the NAs. The Commission has undertaken to transfer the funds before May, when projects from the first annual selection phase start.

#### **4.10. Re-examine the activities of the SALTOs**

*The SALTOs are generally considered to be appropriate structures, although certain aspects should be reviewed.*

The Commission will think about adjustments which should be made.

#### **4.11. Re-examine the activities of the Eurodesks**

*Although the Eurodesks are generally considered to be efficient, there are doubts concerning the added value which they bring to the programme. A review of their activities would make their work more relevant.*

The Commission agrees to this recommendation, although it points out that the usefulness of the Eurodesks is not determined solely by the information they provide on the programme.

### **5. THE COMMISSION'S CONCLUSIONS**

The Commission agrees with the positive assessment made by the evaluators of the implementation of the two programmes. It is convinced that the programmes were efficient in supporting young participants as regards their personal development, their employability (through the non-formal learning opportunities) and the development of their sense of citizenship and solidarity; it is also aware of the positive impact these programmes have on the main intermediaries in a successful youth policy, namely youth workers and youth organisations.

These results back up the conclusions from other analyses which led the Commission to propose continuing the most promising actions from former programmes through Youth in Action.

The recommendations which have been put forward, which the Commission intends to implement, should further reinforce the impact of the Youth in Action programme in the future.