

Speaking points Opening Plenary Cyprus EU Youth Conference
11th September 2012, Nicosia

Structured dialogue: present and future, call for improvements

- It is my pleasure to meet you again at the EU Youth Conference and continue our joint work towards more youth participation in democratic life in Europe. The setting of this Conference shows the existence of the dialogue, shows that participation works. The results of this last round of structured dialogue speak by themselves: All National Working Groups contributed to the process, many of them developed specific approaches to better reach out to young people with migrant background, youth migrant organisations and immigration authorities, and an increasing number of **International Youth Organisations** actively contributed their thoughts, assessment and proposals on youth participation and social inclusion.

- We believe that the dialogue widens, and that International Organisations have proven their **added value** in the process by bringing a unique European perspective to consultations and extending the outreach to more and diverse young people. We can all acknowledge that in this phase both International Youth Organisations and National Working Groups showed their dedication to the process and willingness to improve the inclusivity of the dialogue. Nevertheless, we are concerned that despite of their increased efforts, International Youth Organisations remain underrepresented in the process and at EU Youth Conferences. It is now necessary to reflect their involvement in the process by matching it with a stronger representation at EU Youth Conferences, and by setting up a Working Group for them.

- To achieve an even higher level of involvement of young people in decision-making at EU level, a clearer focus of the structured dialogue is also needed. Consultations should address one overall priority instead of several successive topics. In the end, young people want to see more concrete results and a strong commitment from decision-makers to take into account recommendations expressed in the structured dialogue. The involvement of youth organisations in the preparation of the EU Youth Report is a first good step towards stronger follow-up of the Dialogue. Nevertheless, we want to see efforts invested in consultations matched up with enhanced efforts of the governments and the Commission in turning the structured dialogue outcomes into clear policies and concrete actions.

- The upcoming Council Resolution on the structured dialogue constitutes a great opportunity to refine the process and introduce those improvements. Structured Dialogue is mature enough to get wider!

Social Inclusion and Migration

- Structured Dialogue is also getting more precise with topics reflecting new aspects of EU Youth Policy, as presented in the EU Youth Strategy/ renewed framework of European cooperation in the youth field. The European Youth Forum welcomes the topic put forward by the Cyprus Presidency, participation

and social inclusion, and notably the chosen focus on migration. It is no news that the crisis hits young people hard, and is even harder for specific groups, such as young people with migrant background. Too many young people face difficulties in finding employment, in participating and integrating in society in Europe today. Too many young migrants face discrimination in education, employment and everyday life and are excluded from democratic and social life. We believe that the way out can be found by **working together with young people, not only discussing about young people**, and that's why the focus on social inclusion particularly important.

- Social Inclusion is at the core of Youth Forum's work and values. The Youth Forum represents and works for the rights and benefits of all young people, regardless of their background. As regards young migrants particularly, the Forum has worked extensively over the past 2 years towards the empowerment of young migrants through its **YM+ platform**, which includes over 20 migrant organisations across Europe. The YM+ platform seeks to improve the lives and fundamental rights of young migrants and youth with migrant background by advocating for equal opportunities and by creating spaces for cooperation for and with them as well as with media. The Youth Forum has helped YM+ organise three capacity building events and has promoted representatives of this platform at European conferences, such as this one.

- The Youth Forum echoes the results of the consultations that more work is needed also on inclusion of other minority groups, especially Roma. For this purpose, the Forum has allocated one of its few places at this very conference to a representative from the **International Roma Youth Network**. The Youth Forum strongly believes in the inclusive approach and knows that Roma Youth Network has much to contribute to the joint discussions on issues that directly affect Roma youth.

- Social Inclusion can not be separated from citizenship and participation as both feed the one into the other. Many young migrants and other young people still lack the possibilities and, sometimes, the rights to make their voice heard and to participate on issues that affect them directly, which increases their risk and feeling of social exclusion. Most often what they need is not just social inclusion, **but an active inclusion**, which is social, civic and political inclusion. The European Youth Forum works to empower young people to actively participate in society in order to improve their lives, in a nutshell, to achieve their active inclusion. In that perspective, one of the current focus of our work is lowering the voting age to 16. Therefore, we have launched a Written Declaration 0027/12 in the European Parliament this Monday, and we invite you to follow up related developments on our vote at 16 website.

Youth Organisations key for Social Inclusion of all Young People

- The outcomes of the consultations have shown once more that the young people that participate in youth organisations are better integrated in society. There was a broad agreement among the 12,500 young people consulted that youth organisations play a key role in the active inclusion of all young people. Youth organisations not only advocate for the rights and interests of all young

people, but also create opportunities for intercultural exchanges and peer-learning to develop intercultural skills through non-formal and informal education, spread information and raise awareness about human rights and anti-discrimination, promote a culture of participation and create appropriate spaces and structures for participation of all groups of young people, among many others. Youth organisations play an important part in the integration of migrants, social cohesion and the building of a trans-cultural society. They empower young migrants and get them to learn about their rights and opportunities, while at the same time they offer a safe environment for young migrants and all young people to express and develop themselves.

- To achieve the full potential of their contribution to social inclusion of young migrants and other groups of young people, youth organisations need long-term sustainable support and political and social recognition of their work. As the main representative body of young people in Europe, **the European Youth Forum urges the policy-makers at all levels to recognise, support and engage youth organisations as key players in the integration of migrants and thus in making a more equitable society which embraces diversity.**

Investing in Youth

If it is crucial to discuss youth policy contribution to the social inclusion of young people, it is also important to acknowledge its limits. European Youth Policy can bring improvements for young people's everyday life, but it is important to reach out to other sectors too to ensure coherent action. Therefore, we believe that youth must be mainstreamed in all policy areas and resources that the EU has at its disposal. We will continue asking for the inclusion of a youth perspective on each financial instrument of the EU to support the autonomy and the rights of all young people.

Not investing in youth is costly. The lack of participation in the labour market of NEETs in 21 EU Member States costs 100 billion euro per year to their citizens, the equivalent of 1% to their aggregated GDP. That's why the European Forum made a strong appeal to the European Council at the end of June for a visible, strong and comprehensive investment in young people as a key priority for growth, stability and wellbeing of society as a whole: **a brave new deal for youth!**

Conclusion: investing in youth means improving their active inclusion

Young people witness difficult times with over 50% of unemployment in some Member States and increasing risks of social exclusion. Even more, young migrants often need to bear with highly negative attitude on top of the long list of challenges, inequalities and discriminations they face. Hence, inclusion should be much more than just a rhetoric, it should be based on concrete actions designed together with young people. We believe that concrete actions will lead to better inclusion if they account for the real needs of young people. And then again what young people need is to be prioritised in society, to become a political and financial priority for Europe. Youth deserves further and better investment not only for their future, but also for their present! Now

is the moment that we all need to stand as ambassadors of young people and urge EU leaders to reconsider the priorities of the next financial framework for a more inclusive Europe for and by young people. The better inclusion of young people depends on further investment in youth!