

Future of the EU Youth Strategy

Policy document with the theme "Towards a more effective delivery of results"

Framework Service Contract to Provide Expertise and Support
for European Cooperation in Education, Training, Youth and Sport
(EAC/07/2015)



Future of the EU Youth Strategy: Towards a more effective delivery of results

Introduction

This paper summarises the key outcomes of a Focus Group working on the theme of “Towards a more effective delivery of results” conducted as part of the preparations for the Stakeholder Conference on the future of the EU Youth Strategy, 3-4 May 2017. The Focus Group, organised by the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture - DG EAC), took place in Brussels on the 14th March 2017 and involved participants representing a range of stakeholder organisations and European institutions. This paper provides a brief overview of the policy context for the topic addressed in the Focus Group, notes key points emerging from the discussions and, on this basis, provides some suggestions for potential topics for discussion on this theme at the EU Youth Strategy conference.

Policy context

The external mid-term evaluation of the current EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018)¹, published in 2016, contains a number of observations and recommendations relevant to the theme of this focus group, including on the following points:

On the **ownership** of the cooperation by Member States (MS) and their **commitment** level, the evaluation found that the **general level of awareness** of the EU Youth Strategy (EUYs) on the part of relevant actors, other than Youth Ministry (or relevant government agency) officials, needs to be improved. The mid-term evaluation also recommended that results should be **disseminated more broadly** and that **associations of municipalities should be engaged** in a devolved approach to youth policy in MS. Related to this point, it was recommended that the new EU Youth Strategy should take into account the varying **needs of policy-makers** at local and regional levels when formulating new objectives and instruments. MS authorities should also be encouraged to **circulate information** related to cooperation at policy level more broadly. Support for **mutual learning** on MS implementation approaches and results was also suggested. **Limitations of financial and human resources** was widespread across MS and was seen to potentially hinder youth organisations’ participation in activities organised under the EU Youth Strategy.

On the Youth Strategy’s **objectives** and instruments of **cooperation**, the evaluation found that current **reporting** by MS does not capture the **relationship** between the EUYS and the EU activities and national developments. In relation to this point, the reporting progress was reported as being particularly **burdensome** and could benefit from improvements to streamline the process.

On the **monitoring framework**, the evaluation reported that the process of monitoring the EUYS was seen as **relevant** to national and EU policy-makers, but its **relevance could be improved**. It was suggested that a **monitoring framework linked to the EUYS intervention logic** could be designed and implemented in order to better capture the outcomes of the EUYS and its added value on youth organisations and national policy makers. Use of the dashboard instrument led to setting up **monitoring**

¹ European Commission (2016), Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy and the Council Recommendation on the mobility of young volunteers across the EU, Final Report, https://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/20160531-eu-youth-strategy-evaluation_en

procedures in some MSs, for example in Slovenia where it inspired a new monitoring process under the National Youth Programme.

Key points emerging from Focus Group discussions

There was a strong view that it was **important to consult and listen to MS and youth groups** on their real priorities. MS diversity was highlighted as was the associated need to accommodate differing national realities and preferences when establishing policy. It was noted that MS are increasingly decentralising youth policy competences to local/municipal levels and that this related to a need to understand differing interests within MS as well as between them. **Regional strategies and sub-sets of objectives** could therefore be useful for the next phase of the Youth Strategy.

This point was countered however, with a larger discussion related to whether the Commission seeks to adopt a top-down or bottom-up approach. On one level the formal endorsement of an **a la carte approach** means that MS can legitimately select particular objectives from the overall EUYS to prioritise (an already common process) however the **lack of common strategic goals** for all MS calls into question the extent to which the Strategy is a truly European policy. It was noted that the Commission needed to address more clearly the intricacies of national and in-country differences, which casts doubt on its ability to truly cater to all national and regional realities.

As a response to this, it was noted that the Commission could set out a **frame of EU added value**, linking the Youth Strategy more clearly to the overarching strategy of the EU and making it clear that the strategy is intended to complement rather than to replace national, regional and local level approaches to youth.

It was suggested that MS could be asked to focus on a **sub-set of priorities of real importance** to them from a long list of policy objectives to prioritise and deliver. This was seen to cater more to different national realities and to provide opportunities for peer learning, although the point was raised again that this selection process is already happening across all eight areas of action.

Setting clear and specific goals and objectives at the outset was regarded positively, and this could help build stronger MS motivation and facilitating monitoring processes. Establishing clearly focused objectives through both quantitative and qualitative benchmarks was seen as a desirable approach, however the practical challenges of actually establishing such benchmarks was also raised in terms of identifying factors that could be compared equally across all MS.

In terms of the **mutual learning processes**, it was noted that support should be built around MS through expert groups, commission studies, peer learning and peer review through seminars and events involving multi-stakeholder approaches. By sharing and communicating successful national youth strategies, other MS can formulate a strategy that is of relevance to them.

Knowledge and competences on evaluation and impact assessment should be bolstered. Where possible it was argued that the impact of the Strategy on MS and how this builds to European added value should be evaluated. Whilst it is critical to attempt to measure the impact of policy measures, this was recognised as an incredibly challenging task particularly where the impact of EU level initiatives are indistinguishably intermingled with national level approaches.

The Group felt that it was important to measure at the EU level only where measurement is needed, including commissioning Eurobarometer surveys. There was concern about the need to **avoid overburdening MS with requests for reporting**; utilising the Youth Wiki in the future and using existing

tools for monitoring was suggested as a way to alleviate the reporting burden for MS. DGs also need to work together to address complimentary needs when reporting on similar thematic areas.

It was argued that information about youth policy and actions is distributed across many websites at the EU level, it would be useful to have a single website at the EU level, for all information on youth (an example at national level is in the Netherlands <http://jeugdmonitor.cbs.nl/en-GB>).

Potential topics for further discussion

The following topics were discussed as possible points to cover at the conference:

1. How far should the EUYS be tailored to nationally or regionally specific contexts; how far should a common set of European objectives be pursued?
2. In what ways can the mutual learning process in relation to the successful implementation of national and European youth policies be further supported?
3. If a set of European benchmarks were established for monitoring the impact of the EUYS, how might the Commission go about defining them in practical terms?
4. The Youth Wiki looks set to be a very useful tool in terms of providing a comprehensive database of national structures, policies and actions, presenting coherent, reliable and comparable information; in what ways could the Commission ensure that there is a good level of national-level awareness of this tool?

The information and views set out in this document are those of the authors and meetings participants and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Commission.

Neither the Commission nor any other person acting on the Commission's behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

