

COMMISSION COMMUNICATION ON EUROPEAN POLICIES CONCERNING YOUTH**UNICE POSITION PAPER****Introduction**

1. On 30 May 2005 the European Commission issued a communication on European policies concerning Youth entitled "addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship"¹.
2. With this communication, the Commission follows up to adoption of the European Youth Pact by the European Council in March 2005. It recalls the importance of youth policies, notably in a context of ageing societies, and the possible contribution of young people to growth.
3. The Commission lists a number of initiatives to be undertaken in the framework of the growth and employment strategy through the Open Method of Coordination on education and training, employment, social inclusion, youth. The proposals for actions to be taken at European and national levels concern the fields of employment and social inclusion, education and training, mobility, reconciliation of work and family lives and active citizenship of young people. They also aim at mainstreaming youth policies in other policy fields such as the fight against racism or health and research. Moreover, the Commission highlights the importance of involving young people in decision-making and improving access of youth organisations to Community funding.
4. The Commission calls on Member States to report on their actions regarding young people in the framework of the Lisbon reports but does not call for the creation of new structures of cooperation on youth policies.

General comments

5. UNICE considers the integration of young people into the labour market as an important challenge for Europe's growth and competitiveness. It therefore welcomes the Council's and Commission's emphasis on this issue.
6. European employers agree with the Commission that actions targeting young people are needed to release their potential as the future workforce and boost their abilities to generate research, innovation and entrepreneurship. High quality education and training systems, starting as the earliest possible age, are needed to equip young people with the necessary skills in order for them to manage their working lives and lifelong learning pathways successfully. It is also necessary to promote on-the-job-learning.

¹ Com (2005)206

7. However, young people are not a homogenous category. Policy responses need to be sufficiently differentiated in order to meet individual and labour market needs. Shortages in advanced managerial skills and science and technology require priority attention because they create bottlenecks for economic and employment growth in Europe. UNICE regrets that the Commission communication is not backed by any analytical information on the different situations and needs of young people in Europe. UNICE considers this a missed opportunity.
8. Moreover, it is crucial to keep in mind that the overall functioning of labour markets has to be improved for the entire workforce. Member States should implement strategies both for young and older people in a truly intergenerational approach. Failing that, any measure targeting a particular group will be detrimental to other categories.
9. In their joint contribution to the EU Youth initiative adopted ahead of the European Spring Council, European social partners advocated such an intergenerational approach. They also recalled the work being undertaken in the framework of their social dialogue work programme on young people and in particular their intention to produce a joint declaration with a view notably to promoting young people's interest in science and technology.

Specific comments

10. The Commission recalls not less than 28 different initiatives to be undertaken by the Commission or the Member States using existing Community instruments and programmes to target young people. Most of these initiatives were already announced earlier.
11. UNICE notes the following with particular interest:
 - a. The call on Member States to take action in order to develop personalised actions plans with job search assistance, guidance and training for young people in the framework of national employment strategies. It is indeed crucial that public employment services design activation measures for young people which are in line with labour market needs.
 - b. The adoption by the Commission of a communication on entrepreneurship education in 2005. UNICE member federations repeatedly stress the need to foster entrepreneurial mindsets. They have first-hand experience of taking actions in this field. UNICE very much hopes that the recommendations it issued in November 2004 regarding entrepreneurship education will be fully taken into account by the Commission in its future work².
 - c. The proposal to include special actions for young people in the European Year of Worker Mobility 2006. Actions could be usefully developed to:
 - i. Improve the user-friendliness of European tools such as the Europass;
 - ii. Promote marketing strategies to ensure world-wide campaigning for EU universities and research centres and hence turn the brain drain of young researchers into a brain gain for Europe;
 - iii. Promote the interest of young people for entrepreneurship as a career opportunity and an essential part of personal development.

² UNICE Statement "Entrepreneurship education among young people: vital for European competitiveness", November 2004

- d. The mention of the Marie Curie Programme as a possible funding source for projects targeting young people. The Marie Curie Programme as a scheme enables the provision of industrial training and experience to young academic researchers. European employers believe that this sort of scheme should be prioritised and urge the European Commission to reintegrate the key characteristics of the Marie Curie Industrial Host Fellowship in its proposal for a Seventh Framework Programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (2007 to 2013).
12. However, UNICE is very concerned about the way in which the Commission approaches the issue of work-life balance. In UNICE's view, the main priority for Member States is to allow men and women to join and remain on the labour market, by organising adequate child care facilities and all-day schools. The availability of flexible working arrangements can also facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life. However, the development of new forms of work organisation as a means to ease work-life balance can only be freely decided by the companies and workers concerned. By focusing exclusively on public authorities, the Commission seems to disregard the competences of the social partners and the results achieved in the EU social dialogue through the adoption of agreements on part-time work, parental leave and telework.

Conclusion

13. UNICE broadly welcomes the Commission communication following on from the EU Youth Pact initiative. European employers recall that to pay the necessary attention to the crucial issue of integrating young people into the labour market, any future initiative must be fully in line with the growth and employment strategy objectives. They also recall the importance of embedding specific actions targeting young people in a truly intergenerational approach in order to avoid adverse effects on other categories of workers.