



Brussels, 10 May 2016
(OR. en)

8365/16

JEUN 32
EDUC 121
SPORT 18
CULT 32
EMPL 127
JAI 330

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
No. prev. doc.:	8101/16 JEUN 29 EDUC 109 SPORT 13 CULT 29 EMPL 117 JAI 303
Subject:	The role of youth policy and the youth sector in an integrated approach to support youth in their identity development - <i>Policy debate</i> (public debate pursuant to Article 8(2) CRP [proposed by the Presidency])

Following consultation of the Youth Working Party, the Presidency has drawn up the attached discussion paper as the basis for the policy debate at the EYCS Council meeting on 30-31 May 2016.

By way of preparation for the debate at Council, the Presidency has collected best practices from Member States and intends to distribute a compendium of the contributions received to all delegations well in advance of the Council meeting. In this way, Member States will be able to focus on the identification of synergies and European cooperation during the debate.

Discussion paper
for the policy debate at the EYCS Council of 30-31 May 2016 on

**The role of youth policy and the youth sector in an integrated approach
to support youth in their identity development**

Introduction

The changes that Europe is currently facing bring challenges for young people. Europe's population is increasingly visibly diversified, the social-economic situation makes it difficult for young people to enter the labour market, the legitimacy of a united Europe is being questioned and international conflicts, sometimes at the borders of Europe, are being brought close by through confrontational images. These issues are challenging identity issues of Europe as a whole, but also specifically of young people within Europe.

The Youth session of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports (EYCS) Council on 23 November 2015 paid specific attention to the importance of a cross-sectoral approach where youth, education, culture and sports need to stand side-by-side in their aim to achieve intercultural awareness and an inclusive society. During the Youth Session of the EYCS Council on 30 May 2016, the Netherlands Presidency would like to bring this discussion further by discussing the possibilities for youth policies to contribute to support the positive development of young vulnerable people based on a specific form of integrative and cross-sectoral cooperation between schools, youth work and youth care centers including the role of young people themselves, their families, peers and informal local leaders.

The need for strong and positive identity development of young people

Identity formation is a central psychosocial process during adolescence¹. In this highly insecure process young people are dealing with many uncertainties, about themselves, their position among peers, changing relationship with their family and identifying with the world. That is part of their life, but can also lead to unforeseen risks. These days strong and positive identity is needed to be able to successfully participate in education, on the labour market, and within society at large. Finding your way in these social contexts, while feeling positive about yourself, is a prerequisite for being able to contribute actively to society.

This strong and positive identity development is also essential for democratic citizenship. Besides having knowledge about democracy and political participation, democratic citizenship requires the socialisation of young people to be competent participants in an open and diverse democratic society. It requires the capacity but also the courage to engage in self-reflection, learn critical thinking, how to deal with situations and emotions that cause them discomfort and fight injustice peacefully². Positive identity development is also needed to build resilience against anti-democratic influences and forces. Developing ideals, even radical ideals, is an essential part of adolescence³. However, a strong and positive development contributes to preventing these ideals going ‘adrift’ and preventing young people getting isolated from European societies⁴.

¹ Erikson, E. H. (1968, 1987). *Identity, youth, crisis*. London: Faber & Faber

² Sieckelink, S., Kaulingfreks, F. & De Winter, M. (2015). Neither villains nor victims. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 63 (3), 329-343.

³ Sieckelink, S.M.A. & De Ruyter, D.J. (2009). Mad about ideals? Educating children to become reasonably passionate. *Educational Theory*, 59 (2), 181-196.

⁴ De Winter, M. & Sieckelink, S. (eds.) (2015) *Formers and Families*. The Hague: NCTV

For a positive identity development skills are needed⁵. This implies meeting different kind of people, learn to deal or engage with them and to stand up for what you believe in in a constructive way. These skills are especially difficult for youngsters at risk, who have troubled family backgrounds, problems at school (dropouts) or within society (marginalisation). These young people lack the necessary safety and support for positive identity formation. Supporting young people in developing these skills is most effective with an integrative approach where youth policy, education policy and other relevant policies are matched leading to concrete and effective measures.

Integrated pedagogic networks for positive identity development

Young people have the power to grow up quite independently or with their peers, but cannot develop positive identities completely on their own. They need empathic encouragement, clear boundaries, and mentoring. Especially adolescents, at that stage of life more programmed to binary thinking and social peer-group forming⁶, need sometimes support and encouragement to develop these skills.

To support young people in their identity formation, a collaboration of all pedagogical actors is needed, including parents, family, sports coaches, religious and other informal leaders, youth workers, and teachers. No single actor can do this on its own. Especially regarding young people vulnerable for exclusion and marginalisation the influencing factors are too complex for individual parents, youth workers or teachers to handle⁷. Therefore a pedagogic network with an integrated approach, supporting young people's positive identity development, is necessary. A network which may contribute to helping youth who grow up in this world, not to turn their back against the democratic project under construction.

⁵ *Firstly, it requires cognitive skills, including critical thinking, self-reflection and media literacy. Secondly, it requires emotional skills, psychological skills to deal with inner conflict and frustration and to learn to avoid scapegoating. Thirdly, it requires social skills. (Mann, L. et al. (2015) Indicators and manifestations of resilience of the Dutch population against extremist messages The Hague: WODC)*

⁶ [Steinberg, L.](#) (2010). *Adolescence*. New York: McGraw Hill

⁷ De Winter, M. & Sieckelinck, S. (eds.) (2015) *Formers and Families*. The Hague: NCTV

Such a network should aim as well at building trust in society at local level and supporting young people in developing a strong and positive identity and include parents, peers and other individual educators. These integrated networks can play an effective role in supporting various groups of young people at risk of marginalisation or choosing the wrong path.

Conditions for a successful integrated and cross-sectoral networks

In youth policy there is no doubt that a more integrated and cross-sectoral approach with a focus on positive identify development of young people is needed. There are examples of cross sectoral approaches for example in the field of youth mental health working, giving support, having low thresholds, aiming at achieving prevention by being open and free services for all young people. However, according to the OECD in a recent study (Fit Mind, Fit job)⁸ they are not used widely and there are only a few which are rolled out on a national scale. Fewer are the examples where the youth sector is involved in such an integrated or cross sectoral approach.

The implementation of such an approach seems to be challenging; various conditions at different levels should be fulfilled to make it happen:

At the organisation level there is a need for:

- clarity and consistency in roles and responsibilities of the different actors;
- sharing of concerns and exchange of relevant information;
- attuning activities, cooperation and sometimes even harmonisation of actions and interventions;
- cooperation with individual educators like parents, peers, volunteers, and other local key figures.

⁸ OECD (2015) *Fit Mind, Fit Job: From Evidence to Practice in Mental Health and Work, Mental Health and Work*, Paris: OECD Publishing.

The forming of successful integrated or so called pedagogic networks is not an easy task. Specific attention is needed on how, at the political and youth policy level, these networks are or could be realised and promoted. These networks require well-focused initiatives by credible parties, supported by policies, and cross-sectoral cooperation at all levels. It needs full support of decision makers at local and national level and the right conditions should be in place. Administrative and legal issues for linking different sectors should be worked out well; the role, relationship and responsibility of for example voluntary youth(-led) organisations and parents should be clear; first line practitioners, such as youth workers, need additional training to act in the right way, with partners in the coalitions. Inspiration by similar projects at national level or abroad and supported at European level can be of great importance.

Policy debate

The Netherlands EU Presidency aims to exchange views and experiences in various Member States regarding all kinds of (pedagogic) networks with an integrative approach. The policy debate will focus on the role of youth policy; the cooperation with other youth related policies and the different organisations within and outside the youth sector, preferably based on concrete good practices. The debate should clarify which support is needed and what conditions to be created for the implementation of these networks around young people. The following questions indicate the topics we would like to discuss.

- 1. What sort of conditions and support did you create (should be created) in the framework of national youth policies to implement pedagogic networks with an integrated approach around young people? If possible, could you please illustrate this with concrete examples based on practices and challenges you face in the implementation of an integrated approach in your country?**
- 2. How can the cooperation between Member States at EU level be organized in such a way that it contributes to encourage building pedagogic networks with an integrated approach?**

The Presidency will be inviting one or two external speakers who will introduce the discussion and provide their insights and perspectives to this issue. Collected good practices in the Member States will facilitate the debate in exchanging points of views regarding concrete measures and actions in the framework of national youth and youth related policies.
