

## SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUTH FRAMEWORKS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND UNITED NATIONS

Author: Alessio Lupi



### INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO defines the term “**Youth**” as a *period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community*.

**Youth policies** target all young people, that is, adolescents (aged 10-19 years) and youth (aged 15-24 years). In certain contexts and areas (e.g. political inclusion, employment and entrepreneurship), the definition of youth highly varies according to the different regional/national backgrounds and is often stretched beyond 25 years of age. For instance for the African Youth Charter “youth” means “*every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years*”.

In this context we will refer to “**youth policies**” as all those initiatives of any stakeholder at local/national/international levels that are intended to improve the capacities and empower the aspirations of young people. A primary goal of the initiatives is to ensure that youth contribute to and benefit from more stable, democratic and prosperous communities and nations.

Today all the principal international organizations worldwide recognize the strategic importance of “**Investing and empowering youth**” by “*putting in place greater resources in policy areas that affect young people (...): promoting the potential of youth for the renewal of society*”<sup>1</sup>.

In particular fostering the “**Social inclusion of youth**” features high on their political agenda since, “*The capacity for progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on their capacity to consult with youth, listen to them and incorporate their contribution and responsibility today as well as in the building and designing of the future. Youth have a right to participate and they have proven that they can be drivers of positive change*”<sup>2</sup>.

### SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUTH - FRAMEWORKS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND UNITED NATIONS

*“Participation is a fundamental right. It is one of the guiding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that has been reiterated in many other Conventions and Declarations. Through civic engagement, young people are empowered to play a vital role in their own development as well as in that of their communities, helping them to learn essential life-skills, develop knowledge on human rights and citizenship, and to promote positive civic action. To effectively participate, young people must be given the proper tools, such as education about, and access to, their civil rights”*<sup>3</sup>.

The Members States of the **United Nations** have, since 1965, acknowledged that the imagination, ideals and energies of young people are vital for the continuing development of societies<sup>4</sup>. Two decades later, the UN General Assembly observed 1985 as the **International Youth Year: Participation, Development and Peace**. In 1995 the UN strengthened its commitment to young people by adopting an international strategy - the **World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond** – which currently continues to provide a policy

<sup>1</sup> EC: “An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering”. 2009

<sup>2</sup> UN: “World Programme of Action for Youth – 2007. [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay\\_text\\_final.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay_text_final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> UN DESA. Society and Decision Making. Factsheet. 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965) - UN General Assembly, resolution 2037 (XX), A/RES/20/2037, 7 December 1965)

framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of young people around the world.

In 2000, world leaders committed their countries to achieve the **Millennium Development Goals** by 2015, considering young people's participation and inclusion as crucial to ensure a successful and sustainable outcome. In 2010 the UN funded its "**Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development**" (IANYD) consisting of representatives of UN entities whose work is relevant to youth issue. The aim of the Network is to increase the effectiveness of UN work in youth development by strengthening collaboration and exchange among all relevant UN entities.

In January 2012 the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, outlined his Five-year Action Agenda, which identified working with and for women and young people as a key priority for the United Nations for the following five years. Within this context the Secretary-General outlined a number of concrete actions to be undertaken so as to better "**address the needs of the largest generation of young people the world has ever known**".

Despite the long lasting involvement of the UN, the "inclusion of youth" as a concept in **European policy** is a relatively recent phenomenon. It was mentioned for the first time in 1993 in the **Treaty of Maastricht**. The Lisbon Treaty adds to the tasks of the Union in relation to young people that of promoting participation by young people in democracy in Europe (Article 165 TFEU).

The EU has recently adopted the **Youth Strategy 2010-18**. The Strategy is a far-reaching policy framework in the field of youth. The Strategy puts special focus "to encourage youth active participation in society" with particular attention "*to the protection of young people who are not in an **employment, education or training situation (NEET)**: since their number has sharply increased during the actual economic crisis*".

The **Erasmus+** is the main EU programme intended to support young people's education, employment and social inclusion by providing opportunities to study, train, gain work experience and volunteer abroad. Such opportunities may include opportunities in developing countries. In particular the sub-action "**Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices**" supports initiatives promoting cooperation with the aims:

- a) To **foster the modernization, accessibility and internationalization of higher education**, worldwide
- b) To **develop basic and transversal skills** (such as entrepreneurship, digital skills and language competences) in all fields of education, training and youth, using innovative and learner-centred pedagogical approaches
- c) To **enhance digital integration** in learning, teaching, training and youth work
- d) To **reduce disparities in learning outcomes** affecting learners from disadvantaged backgrounds/with fewer opportunities.
- e) To **promote transnational mobility** between EU and other countries of the world, notably targeting young people with fewer opportunities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The capacity for progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future.

In this sense the pillar document of the EU Youth Strategy 2010-18 adopted in 2009, **An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities**, clearly expressed the EU commitment towards young people, affirming that: "*Europe's future depends on its youth. Young people are not a burdensome responsibility but a critical resource to society which can be mobilized to achieve higher social goals*".

Nevertheless, despite all the initiatives and resolutions provided by the main international organizations worldwide, the actual economic crisis hit young people particularly hard, "*In all geographic regions of the globe, youth*

unemployment rates are significantly higher than adult rates”<sup>5</sup> (...) and the problem is increasing since “During economic downturn, young people are often the last to be hired, and the first to be dismissed”<sup>6</sup>. There are currently 81 million youth unemployed and an additional 152 million work but live in households that earn less than the equivalent of 1 euro a day.<sup>7</sup>

Given the present context, the international community multiplied its efforts (political and financial) to foster the social inclusion of youth worldwide.

As the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon recently recalled: “In this landmark year, as leaders prepare to adopt a bold new vision for sustainable development, the engagement of youth is more valuable than ever. At this critical moment in history, I call on young people to demand and foster the dramatic progress so urgently needed in our world” stated.

## REFERENCES

- [An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering: A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities](#)
- [2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field \(2010-18\)](#)
- [Council conclusions on enhancing the social inclusion of young people not in employment, education or training](#)
- [Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes.](#)
- [Resolution CM/Res\(2008\)23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe](#)
- [A/RES/20/2037 - Declaration on the Promotion Among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples](#)
- [A/RES/39/22 - International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace](#)
- [A/RES/50/81 - World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond](#)
- [A/RES/64/134 - Proclamation of 2010 as the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding](#)
- [A/RES/66/121 - Policies and programmes involving youth](#)
- [Third International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training - SHANGHAI CONSENSUS](#)
- [Secretary-General's Message for the International Youth Day 2015](#)
- [Message for the International Youth Day 2015 from Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova](#)

## CONTACTS

**Alessio Lupi – IESF Team**

E-mail: [a.lupi@arsprogetti.com](mailto:a.lupi@arsprogetti.com)

**The opinions and recommendations included in this Thematic Brief are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission.**

<sup>5</sup> UN World Youth Report launched on 6 February 2012

<sup>6</sup> IDEM

<sup>7</sup> UN Secretary-General's high-level panel report on sustainable development, “Resilient People, Resilient Planet” -2012