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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Draft conclusions on an inclusive and participatory response that safeguards the rights and well-being of all young people
- *Presentation and examination of the text*

With a view to the meeting of the Youth Working Party on 3 July 2023, delegations will find attached a proposal of the incoming Presidency for conclusions on the above-mentioned subject.

Any written comments from delegations should be sent to the incoming Spanish Presidency (maria-jose.tarrero@reper.maec.es; adrian.diaz@reper.maec.es and aurelio.fernandez@reper.maec.es) and to the General Secretariat of the Council (eycs@consilium.europa.eu; carmen.ochoa@consilium.europa.eu) by **3 July 2023**.

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Draft conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States on an inclusive and participatory response that safeguards the rights and well-being of all young people

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THAT:

1. The series of economic and social crises faced in recent years, together with the global COVID-19 health crisis, have had a profound impact on young people, exacerbating inequalities and violations of pre-existing rights, while accentuating the complexity of the challenges that young Europeans face every day. Addressing these challenges forms part of the third goal of the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027¹.
2. This exposure to a series of crises², such as the COVID-19 crisis, has highlighted some of our societies' pre-existing structural problems. The complexity of the challenges that young people face has become clearer than ever, underscoring the close relationship between such factors as employment or housing and the social cohesion and socio-emotional well-being of young Europeans.

¹ 'Improve policy decisions with regard to their impact on young people across all sectors—notably employment, education, health and social inclusion.'

² As indicated by 2020 Eurostat figures, all EU Member States showed a higher rate of serious housing privation among young people than among the population as a whole. Moreover, 11.6 % of young people aged 15-29 in the EU were living in households that spent more than 40 % of their income on housing. This is a crucial figure because, as the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) pointed out in its 2021 EU Poverty Watch report, limited or no access to adequate housing is a determining factor behind processes of social exclusion and situations of extreme poverty among the most vulnerable people.

3. The war in Ukraine has brought new challenges, partly frustrating the expectations of young Europeans regarding their life projects and plans for the future after the toughest phases of a global pandemic.
4. Combating social exclusion, discrimination and violence of all kinds is a priority goal for the European Union. In particular, the principle of non-discrimination is a fundamental value of the European Union, enshrined in the Treaty establishing the European Community and in Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
5. If we take a closer look at data on young Europeans' risk of poverty and social exclusion, the statistics show that Europeans between 16 and 29 years of age have a higher probability than the general population of experiencing serious material deprivation. In 2021, the risk of experiencing poverty or social exclusion was higher among 16-to-29-year-olds than in the general population (24.8 % compared with 21.6 %). This pattern – a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion among youth – can be seen in nearly half (13 out of 27) of EU Member States³.
6. Opportunities for living independently continue to be insufficient, taking into account the difficulties that young Europeans face in gaining access to housing, owing to job insecurity and the high cost of buying or renting, which is unaffordable for a large proportion of young people. Access to decent housing is a basic condition for guaranteeing truly inclusive and egalitarian societies, as reflected in a European Parliament resolution⁴ from January 2021 encouraging the EU to recognise access to decent and affordable housing as a human right, which is an even more pressing issue for young people⁵.

³ Eurostat. Statistics explained: Young people and social inclusion.

⁴ European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2021 on access to decent and affordable housing for all (2019/2187(INI)).

⁵ As indicated by 2020 Eurostat figures, all EU Member States showed a higher rate of serious housing privation among young people than among the population as a whole.

7. The different forms of violence to which young Europeans are exposed represent another problem that needs to be addressed. The Fundamental Rights Report, published in February 2021⁶, indicated that the rate of physical violence, harassment and cyberbullying was much higher among young people than in other age groups. Furthermore, the report highlighted that LGBTIQ+ groups, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and young women were especially vulnerable to violence and harassment.
8. A comprehensive approach to the problems affecting young people requires their involvement and participation in public institutions and in policy-making processes. According to the most recent European Parliament Youth Survey⁷, 55 % of young Europeans said that they understood little to nothing about the EU. Most of the young people surveyed believed that they did not have much, or any, say over important decisions, laws and policies affecting them. Young people increasingly turn to non-traditional ways of expressing themselves politically, because they do not perceive that the European institutions provide them with any possibility of being involved in decision-making processes or of addressing their needs and difficulties.
9. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)⁸ believes that 'an EU Youth Test should be part of the Better Regulation Toolbox as a separate tool'. The EESC stresses that it is important to carry out an impact assessment to guarantee that policies take into account the needs and expectations of young people and offer a scope of application that goes beyond the traditional area of youth policies.

⁶ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Rights Report 2021.

⁷ Flash Eurobarometer, Report September 2021.

⁸ European Youth Forum, EU Youth test.

10. The proposal promoted by the European Youth Forum, presented in the concept note *The EU Youth Test: Investing Now in the Union's Future*, pointed out that the EU Youth Test was an essential pillar for mainstreaming youth in all decision-making processes.

RECOGNISING THAT:

11. As highlighted in the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027: 'An increasing number of young people lack trust in the EU, encounter difficulties in understanding its principles, values, and functioning. Democratic deficits in EU processes have also been identified as one of the reasons for rising Euroscepticism among young people'.
12. In the sixth cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue consultations, carried out to give young people a voice in the process of designing the EU Youth Strategy, it became clear that young people felt that they were underrepresented in decision-making processes and had a limited capacity to have a cross-cutting influence on all of the policies having an impact on the challenges they face at local, national and European level.
13. The Flash Eurobarometer youth survey⁹ indicated that one of the main expectations of young people was for society as a whole and for decision-makers to listen more to their views and to address their needs.
14. Age is a major discrimination factor generating inequalities in our societies, as acknowledged by the World Health Organization¹⁰, and is of vital importance when designing public policies relating to young people's issues.

⁹ Flash Eurobarometer, European Parliament Youth Survey. September 2021.

¹⁰ The World Health Organization considers ageism to be the third main cause of discrimination worldwide.

15. The transition from training to the labour market continues to represent an obstacle for many young people in Europe, who face serious difficulties in finding decent jobs that would enable them to fully realise their life projects and have better prospects for the future.
16. Unemployment affects young people to a greater extent and has a major impact on those in situations of social exclusion and who live and work in southern European countries¹¹, clearly indicating that young people's vulnerability regarding unemployment is exacerbated by the intersectionality of the different forms of inequality that affect them¹².
17. Jobs and housing are essential rights for everyone, and even more so for those who are beginning a new phase of life in a disadvantaged situation, facing precarious employment prospects and other cross-cutting challenges that compound these inequalities, with the lack of opportunities reducing their chances for a better life and putting many young people in a weak position from the very start.
18. These effects are increased exponentially in the case of young women, LGBTIQ+ youth, young people from racialised communities, young migrants, and young persons with disabilities.
19. The year 2023 presents a golden opportunity for taking advantage of the legacy of the 2022 European Year of Youth and the presentation by the European Commission of the mid-term evaluation of the European Youth Strategy 2019-2027, for taking stock of past experiences and enhancing existing key youth tools, and for putting the priorities and well-being of young people at the centre of policy-making and offering them equal opportunities to carry out their life projects, free from violence and fully enjoying their rights.

¹¹ Eurostat, statistics explained: Youth unemployment, August 2022.

¹² Eurostat. Statistics explained: Socioeconomic situation of young people, October 2022.

20. The role played by the EU Youth Coordinator, as a reference for joint efforts to coordinate youth-oriented public policies in the EU, was a major innovation that sprang from the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

CONSIDERING THAT:

21. Young people need policies designed to protect their rights. A Europe that guarantees the human rights of its young people, addresses their challenges and responds to their needs and expectations will be a Europe that invests in its own future and preserves its economic and environmental sustainability.

22. Young people are subjects of law with potential, capabilities and talents that are essential for any society, and they should be fully incorporated into political processes and decision-making spaces.

23. The participation of young people is an essential condition for legitimising any political process, as well as for enabling young people to trust and believe in the European project, strengthening the ties that bind them to the identity and values of a Europe that must also commit to the future of its young people.

24. The young people of Europe comprise a complex and diverse population, and the EU should guarantee that the design of youth-oriented policies takes a rights-based approach that mainstreams young people, enabling these policies to be truly inclusive and target all young people across Europe.

25. These policies must also focus on well-being, mental health and healthcare, including a collective reflection and subsequent political action to protect the role of young people in resource-sharing and their ability to influence decision-making processes from a generational standpoint.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IS INVITED TO:

26. Enhance coordination and cooperation between EU institutions and Member States, with decision-making unequivocally grounded in scientific evidence and empirical data. A focus on young people is essential in the development of public policies, as is their participation in decision-making spaces.
27. Incorporate systematically a youth-based approach in the design, monitoring and assessment of European public policies, applying this viewpoint to the entire spectrum of areas that affect young people, giving a prominent role to the EU Youth Coordinator.
28. Promote, with the European institutions as an instrument, the systematic implementation of the EU Youth Test. The proposal for a 'EU Youth Test' should incorporate two essential components:
 - i) a set of indicators designed by consensus among the EU institutions, representatives of the Member States and youth representatives, which enables a disaggregated analysis of the cross-cutting approaches of different public policies targeting young people.
 - ii) mitigating measures to address the adversities identified by the impact assessment and to offset negative effects for young Europeans in general and for any specific group of young people. who form part of the diverse reality of EU youth.

THE COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES ARE INVITED TO:

29. Consolidate a European youth framework, through the figure of the EU Youth Coordinator, with the Member States appointing an equivalent national figure - either through a newly created or pre-existing position- to act in that role. This would mark a significant step forward for the representation and advancement of youth-oriented public policies across Europe, favouring coordination, cooperation and the exchange of experiences and good practices, as well as guaranteeing the internal coherence of the EU with regard to youth policies and ensuring its capacity to have a truly transformative impact on young people in Europe.
30. Consolidate a European framework for young people, which, besides involving the EU Youth Coordinator and the equivalent representatives designated by the Member States, would also involve representatives of young Europeans chosen by consensus using criteria of representativeness, diversity and plural accessibility. This would make it possible to ensure young people's participation in the entire decision-making process.
31. Provide maximum coherence and comprehensiveness to the entire decision-making process, thereby involving youth representatives chosen through a legitimate electoral process in order to:
 - i) identify the set of indicators to be used in the EU Youth Test.
 - ii) analyse its results and plan the mitigation measures that may be deemed necessary in each case.
32. Taking as a reference the lessons learned during the European Year of Youth through the public consultations, led by the EYY national coordinators, and working groups conducted, continue to generate multi-level working spaces involving European institutions, Member States and young Europeans, emphasising the values of transparency and accessibility, to generate a positive impact on the ties that bind young Europeans to the EU.

The promotion of youth policies has been constant in recent years, as shown by the following:

- The European Youth Strategy 2019-2027, with its 11 European Youth Goals, designed with the participation of young people from across Europe.
- The emphasis on young people in the European Pillar of Social Rights, which establishes 20 key principles that are essential for fair and effective labour markets and social protection systems.
- The adoption in 2020 of the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, which pays special attention to young Europeans.
- The commitment made in 2020 to apply the enhanced Youth Guarantee, which strengthened broad support for youth employment across the EU, with a more inclusive approach.
- The designation of 2022 as the European Year of Youth, with the goal of enhancing, empowering and promoting new spaces and opportunities for young people to participate and play a leading role in Europe.
