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Strengthening the EU Youth Dialogue follow-up via monitoring and transparency guidelines

(own initiative opinion)

(C/2024/6866)

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1. Active participation of young people in policy-making, policy development and decision-making is recognised as a vital component of a healthy democracy fit for all generations ([1]). In order to be meaningful, youth participation mechanisms need to be transparent for every stakeholder ([2]), building trust among all players and generations ([3]). The interests and concerns of young people need to be considered at each stage of the policy-making cycle, while taking into account that youth policies are mostly a matter for the Member States.

1.2. While recognising that young people who have the right to vote and stand for office can be represented in democratic systems, and that they are represented by civil society organisations and civil dialogue, there are efforts by the EU institutions and bodies that work to increasingly strengthen youth aspects in EU policy-making, for example, the EU youth check ([4]). The EU Youth Dialogue (EUYD) is another mechanism that allows young people to become part of the democratic processes at the EU level.

1.3. The EESC underlines that any youth engagement and participation mechanism should be designed to avoid overlaps and multiplication of tasks and roles. In this framework, each youth participation mechanism, such as the EUYD, should involve young people in the choice of topics and in preparation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and dissemination. Young people should also, where appropriate, have a chance to participate in follow-up activities and deliberations. Therefore, monitoring and dissemination strategies ([5]) should be in place in each youth participation mechanism to inform young people of the impact that their participation has had ([6]), including in EUYD processes.

([1]) 567528-fit-for-generations-global-youth-report-highlights.pdf (oecd.org).
https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261953/PREMS+149821+GBR+2600+Study+on+Youth+political+participation+WEB+16x24+%281%29.pdf/d2ecb223-edda-a9d2-30f7-c77692a086bd.
https://app.box.com/s/e2stctnkiv14amhdugn12814cp1jx2ta.

([2]) https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261953/PREMS+149821+GBR+2600+Study+on+Youth+political+participation+WEB+16x24+%281%29.pdf/d2ecb223-edda-a9d2-30f7-c77692a086bd.
https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/seven-key-findings-from-the-youth-governance-survey.pdf.

([3]) https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/Young-people-in-OG.pdf.

([4]) https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_86.

([5]) Youth Participation Strategy (salto-youth.net).

([6]) 0017-20_FINAL_Policy20Paper20on20Quality20Youth20Participation.pdf (youthforum.org).

1.4. The EESC is proposing guidelines to be set up to support the monitoring and dissemination of EUYD outcomes and impact and calls on the Commission and the Member States to support long-term, sustainable and well-functioning management of EUYD, including establishment of institutional memory processes to increase openness, transparency and accountability of the EUYD process.

1.5. The EESC's potential role in the EUYD will be further explored, for example, by being a partner of the EU Youth Stakeholders Group or by cooperating with the country holding the presidency of the Council of the EU in the European Steering Group (ESG) to strengthen the link with youth organisations and their engagement in the EUYD process.

2. **General comments**

2.1. The EUYD is a consultative mechanism coordinated by the Trio of Presidencies of the Council of the EU. Each EU Presidency Member State brings forward priorities and leads the process of implementing the EUYD during its six-month mandate. The ESG is a platform for the Trio of Presidencies to regularly meet and coordinate the EUYD processes. The European Youth Forum (YFJ) is a permanent member of the ESG and provides administrative support. National working groups are conducting consultations and other EUYD activities at the national level. Youth researchers selected via open calls have been supporting the methodology and analyses within the EUYD processes since 2017.

2.2. The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 ([7]) is the key overarching policy document that establishes and defines the EUYD, its processes and objectives; it also makes clear that Erasmus+ Youth is one of the main implementation mechanisms of the EUYD ([8]). An interim evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy has recently been conducted ([9]) and a similar exercise is underway in the case of Erasmus+ Youth ([10]), both aiming to establish what mechanisms have been implemented to the best possible extent and what adjustments may be needed to better reach these initiatives' goals. The resolution establishing governance processes applying to the EUYD explicitly outlines (in para. 15) a review process for appropriate adjustments after 2024 ([11]). This presents an opportunity to further develop the EUYD, namely its transparency and accountability towards young people and other stakeholders. Moreover, one of the explicit goals of the current (10th) EUYD cycle is to further strengthen and develop the EUYD processes ([12]), and an already available evaluation report clearly mentions monitoring and data collection among the recommendations for further EUYD development ([13]).

2.3. The resolution establishing the operational framework of the EUYD clearly states that it is necessary to '*[e]nsure a participatory evaluation of the cycle, as well as its monitoring, follow-up, use and wide dissemination of the EUYD's outcomes*' ([14]). It should be noted, however, that the EUYD is implemented by various EU Member States and therefore the coordination authority in practice changes every six months due to the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU. The possibility of establishing guidelines to support the presidency countries to ensure that monitoring and dissemination are carried out consistently across all EUYD cycles is outlined in the Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Member States meeting within the Council establishing guidelines on the governance of the EU Youth Dialogue *European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027* ([15]).

2.4. The resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the outcomes of the 9th cycle of the EUYD also signals the need for a unified and systematic approach to monitoring and dissemination ([16]).

([7]) OJ C 456, 18.12.2018, p. 1.
([8]) See for example: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-3/youth-together.
([9]) Report on the interim evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 COM/2024/162 final.
([10]) https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13454-Erasmus%2B-2021-27-interim-evaluation-Erasmus%2B-2014-20-final-evaluation_en.
([11]) OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 1.
([12]) Para. 42: https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9134-2023-INIT/en/pdf.
([13]) https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261884/Review+of+the+9+cycles+of+the+EU+Youth+Dialogue+%282010-2022%29+executive+summary.pdf/b95d939d-ffd2-382c-68f7-5597557d4e20?t=1708012066530.
([14]) Para. 9d: OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 1.
([15]) Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Member States meeting within the Council establishing guidelines on the governance of the EU Youth Dialogue, point 9.
([16]) Resolution of the Council and of the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the outcomes of the 9th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue, para 12 and 19: https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9134-2023-INIT/en/pdf.

2.5. Important deliberations on monitoring and dissemination of the EUYD outcomes have recently been supported by the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU. As one of the results of the 10th cycle of the EUYD, Council Conclusions on Inclusive Societies for Young People were adopted in May 2024, stressing the importance of monitoring, follow-up and evaluation of the outcomes of the EUYD (para. 47). Furthermore, the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU organised an EU Youth Council meeting bringing together the Youth Ministers from all 27 EU Member States, representatives of the EU institutions, as well as representatives of national youth councils and the YFJ. Support for establishing monitoring and feedback mechanisms through which outcomes of the EUYD would be collected and disseminated to young people was discussed and widely welcomed by present parties.

2.6. The EESC invites the Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States, in line with the subsidiarity principle and within their respective competences, to consider a unified and systematic approach to monitoring and dissemination of the EUYD outcomes in the form of guidelines. The EESC recognises that such guidelines have the potential to support fulfilment of the EUYD's objectives and increase openness, transparency and accountability towards the tens of thousands of young people who participate in EUYD processes, as well as towards the millions of others to whom the outcomes and impact are relevant. They also have the potential to create a basis for continuous long-term monitoring of the EUYD and for quality evaluations, thus contributing to evidence-based policy-making and evidence-based development of the EUYD itself in the future.

2.7. In order to achieve the above-mentioned goals of transparency and meaningful participation in the EUYD, the EESC invites the Member States and the Commission, in line with the subsidiarity principle and within their respective competences, to take the measures necessary to monitor policy and other outcomes and impact, and well as to disseminate any information collected. The aims of monitoring and dissemination include to support raising awareness of EUYD outcomes and impact, to widen and deepen the expertise of young people in topics dealt with in the EUYD, to provide a basis for various evaluation efforts linked to the EUYD, to contribute to the transparency of democratic processes in the European Union and to build trust between young people and the democratic institutions. All of these aims are in line with current deliberations ([17]).

2.8. This own-initiative opinion was supported by a survey designed by the advisor and the rapporteur for the opinion, as well as by round table deliberations, individual or group consultations and repeated deliberations of the EESC study group. All of these activities brought together relevant EUYD actors such as national youth councils, EU Member States' representatives involved in presidencies of the Council of the EU, representatives of the EU institutions (e.g., the EU Youth Coordinator), experts in communication and analysis (e.g., Eurodesk, youth researchers involved in the EUYD), or international youth organisations (e.g., the YFJ).

3. **Specific comments**

3.1. The Commission and the Member States should support long-term, sustainable and well-functioning management of the EUYD, including establishment of institutional memory and capacity building processes. This could be achieved through establishing a long-term EUYD secretariat supporting EUYD processes across various presidencies and continuously providing expertise, administration and data management, and even capacity building services regarding the EUYD for the ESG. Such an EUYD secretariat could build on the expertise of relevant actors who are already active in EUYD processes, for example by bringing together an international youth-led body with relevant EUYD expertise (e.g., seasoned actors, such as the YFJ), a youth information expert body (e.g., organisations with an excellent track record in providing information for young people on the European level, such as Eurodesk) and a representative of the European Commission (e.g., an experienced actor such as the EU Youth Coordinator).

([17]) Report on the interim evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 (COM/2024/162 final).

3.2. The EESC believes that monitoring EUYD policy outcomes should be carried out at EU level and Member State level. At EU level, better information collection could improve the follow-up of different EUYD-related activities. For this purpose the following information could be compiled: policy documents created as a result of the EUYD (e.g. Council conclusions and resolutions); policy documents building on the outcomes of the EUYD (e.g. action plans, strategies, policy initiatives and measures); and policy debates building on or initiated as a result of the EUYD (e.g. deliberations at meetings of directors-general for youth, deliberations at the Council of the EU, etc.). The EU Youth Coordinator, who works within the Commission in cooperation with the Council presidencies, is well-placed to monitor the aforementioned outcomes at EU level, and sufficient resources should be made available to support the EU Youth Coordinator in this task. At Member State level, the following information could be compiled: policy documents relating to, or building on, the outcomes of the EUYD (e.g. national policies, strategies, action plans, etc.). Monitoring could also include regional levels where relevant, especially where regions have responsibility for certain policy domains. Monitoring could include both binding and non-binding measures. Furthermore, clarity of roles and responsibilities is key given the complexity of the EUYD. The EUYD national working groups are well placed to undertake monitoring of EUYD outcomes at national levels, and sufficient resources and guidance should be made available to support the national working groups in this task ([18]). The YFJ is likewise well placed to support the ESG in coordinating the EUYD monitoring.

3.3. Each document collected could be briefly described in an accompanying memo explaining the following: document name, author/origin (e.g. a specific body at a ministry or an EU institution department) and relevance. Explanations on 'relevance' could entail a short description of how a given document is related to EUYD processes or outcomes, how it builds up or relates to other EUYD outcomes, and whether or not it is binding.

3.4. Information on further outcomes could also be compiled in the domain of youth political participation itself. Such outcomes could include activities organised for and by young people in connection with EUYD policy outcomes or processes (e.g. educational videos), structural changes to youth political participation processes linked to the EUYD (e.g. more structured and frequent cooperation between youth bodies and ministries) and follow-up implementation activities (e.g. Erasmus+ Key Action 3 projects related to EUYD outcomes). These are to be referred to as participatory outcomes of the EUYD in order to distinguish them from the policy outcomes described in previous paragraphs.

3.5. Compilation of information on EUYD outcomes could be carried out at pre-agreed intervals (e.g. once during each presidency of the Council of the EU, or once a year) and could focus on all cycles of the EUYD – the previous one as well as the current one. This creates an opportunity to track policy and other outcomes that are linked to a certain EUYD cycle, but created after the given cycle has been completed.

3.6. An online repository where collected documents would be made available is to be set up in line with existing platforms ([19]) and in keeping with current good practice in the domain of open data presentation. An expert body in the field of youth information (e.g. organisations with an excellent track record in providing information for young people on the European level, such as Eurodesk) could be made responsible for the setup and maintenance of the repository, supported by sufficient resources. The repository should be user-friendly, open, free, searchable and regularly updated; it should contain accompanying memos as well as the collected documents available for download. It might be possible to use the repository for outcomes of other EU-level youth participation processes, inter alia citizens' panels and EESC youth participation activities, with the repository contributing to coordination and knowledge-building across various EU youth participation mechanisms. The repository would create an evidence and data basis for disseminating and communicating the activities described below, including – but not limited to – various evaluations, preparations for future EUYD cycles, summary reports such as the triannual EU youth report, and the work of dedicated youth bodies, such as the EU Youth Stakeholders Group ([20]). A communication strategy could be developed to raise awareness of the online repository among EUYD stakeholders and among young people and youth organisations in general in order to maximise the usefulness of the repository itself, thus supporting the implementation of recommendations from past EUYD cycles ([21]).

([18]) In line with current debates, see position of the European Youth Forum (YFJ): https://www.youthforum.org/policy-library/eu-youth-dialogue-grants.

([19]) CoE https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/official-documents.
European Youth Portal https://youth.europa.eu/strategy/library_en.
European Youth Portal on EU Youth Dialogue https://youth.europa.eu/get-involved/eu-youth-dialogue/previous-eu-youth-dialogue-consultations_en.
Council of the EU library of Council Conclusions https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/public-register/council-concl/.
Youth Wiki platform https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki.

([20]) The EU Youth Stakeholders Group is to be set up by the European Commission: https://youth.europa.eu/strategy/euyouthstrategygroup_en.

([21]) Commission Staff Working Document on the Interim Evaluation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 (SWD/2024/90 final).

3.7. Monitoring of EUYD outcomes should be coordinated by the ESG. In line with its role as defined in the 2019 resolution, the ESG could be responsible for collecting data from the national and EU levels, involving the stakeholders listed below. The ESG could also be responsible for data processing and publishing, potentially supported by the newly established long-term EUYD secretariat (see para. 3.2). Appropriate resources should be made available to the newly established long-term EUYD secretariat to complete these tasks.

3.8. Monitoring of EUYD impact could be carried out in cooperation with existing stakeholders such as Eurostat and other relevant bodies. Eurostat statistics relating to outcomes of the EUYD, such as concrete action plans, and policies and initiatives that have already been implemented, could be reported on regularly by the ESG and updated in the relevant section of the online repository. Evaluation reports and other publications measuring the impact of various EUYD-related policies could be compiled by the ESG via the channels mentioned above and published in the relevant section of the online repository.

3.9. Dissemination of information on EUYD outcomes and impact should involve organisations with an excellent track record in providing information for young people on the European level, such as Eurodesk, building on their capacities as well as supporting them in know-how retention and capacity-building. A dedicated EUYD communication and dissemination strategy could be put in place, accompanied by appropriate resources. The EUYD communication and dissemination strategy could ensure coherent and consistent long-term EUYD communications, supporting the EUYD under different presidencies of the Council of the EU. The EUYD communication and dissemination strategy could aim to disseminate information on EUYD outcomes and impact, raise awareness of EUYD processes among young people generally (e.g. in cooperation with other relevant sectors, such as formal education), encourage newcomers to actively participate in EUYD processes nation-wide (e.g. as part of national consultations) and at EU level (e.g. during EU Youth Conferences and by supporting the dissemination activities of the EU institutions) and support capacity building of the EUYD national working groups. The EUYD communication and dissemination strategy should utilise diverse communication methods, formats and platforms, and should also support national-level actors as multipliers and use inclusive formats, language and approaches.

3.10. Analyses and summaries of developments within the EUYD, both during a given cycle (i.e. under one trio presidency of the Council of the EU), and over the long term (e.g. focusing on a given topic or policy domain and covering it over several cycles), could be produced on a regular basis. This could be coordinated by the ESG and the expert body implementing the EUYD communication and dissemination strategy and could potentially involve various players, such as researchers from the Pool of European Youth Researchers, coordinated by the EU-CoE Youth Partnership, and researchers and experts identified via open calls for bidding, in cooperation with Eurostat and other expert bodies at EU level (e.g. SALTO Participation and Information) and in other ways.

Brussels, 18 September 2024.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
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