



**COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS
CONSEIL DES COMMUNES ET REGIONS D'EUROPE**

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CEMR position

On the Communication on an EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering. A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities (COM (2009) 200 final)

Brussels, November 2009

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Background of the Commission's Communication

On 27 April 2009 the European Commission published its Communication on a EU Youth Strategy which was announced in the Renewed Social Agenda in June 2008. The overarching goals of the social agenda and its initiatives are to create opportunities and to ensure that every individual can develop its potential; to provide access to good quality education, social protection, health care and other services and to demonstrate solidarity between Member States, regions, but also between generations.

The Communication on the EU Youth Strategy identifies eight fields of action (education, employment, creativity and entrepreneurship, health and sport, participation, social inclusion, volunteering and youth and the world), defines an objective for each of these fields and proposes actions to be taken at EU or national level. It also proposes to renew the cooperation framework consisting of an Open Method of Coordination in the field of active citizenship and the European Youth Pact which is part of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs.

Key points of CEMR's position

1. CEMR welcomes the EU Strategy for Youth and would like to underline the importance of a positive approach that creates opportunities for all young people.
2. The importance of pursuing long-term objectives, special attention should be paid to the economic crisis that is likely to affect young people in particular. It is therefore necessary to invest in education and qualification to give young people the chance to enter and stay in the labour market.
3. The local level is closest to young people's lives and local and regional authorities therefore play a major role in providing the context needed to empower youth.
4. CEMR advocates for an integrated approach to youth policy. An EU Strategy for Youth should clearly point out that the needs of young people have to be addressed in all relevant policy areas and that they should be part of all overarching EU strategies instead of being restricted to some policy areas only.
5. We call on the European Commission and the Member States to involve local and regional authorities, in particular via their national and European associations, not only in the implementation of the Open Method of Coordination, but also use the opportunity to benefit from local experience and knowledge in earlier phases of the process.
6. CEMR recommends further exchange of experience between all relevant stakeholders, such as public authorities from all government levels, youth organisations and civil society organisations working with youth, actors from the education systems and social partners, in order to provide all young people with better opportunities.

Introduction

1. CEMR promotes a Europe with a strong social dimension that is characterised by tolerance and respect and which involves its citizens. Youth have to be included in this vision, because they are the future of our society.
2. We believe that all young people should have the possibility to fully develop their potential and that the local level, closest to the young people's lives, is crucial in giving a framework for this development. The EU Strategy for Youth therefore is an important issue for local and regional authorities in Europe.
3. CEMR welcomes the EU Strategy for Youth and its approach to invest in youth and to empower young people. From our point of view the strategy should take a positive perspective and help to create opportunities for all young people – regardless of gender or cultural background – instead of focusing on particular “difficult” groups only, while not losing out of sight the special needs of these groups.
4. Europe faces various social and economic challenges that concern the entire population and youth in particular. The consequences of demographic change could become a problem if they are not approached now. These challenges that come along with a declining, ageing and increasingly heterogeneous population call for strong social cohesion and solidarity between all groups of society, including intergenerational solidarity.
5. The economic crisis bears the risk to particularly hit young people because of lacking possibilities to qualify (lack of apprenticeships and jobs suitable for starters) followed by unemployment and eventually long-term unemployment. Thus youth need to be supported with the aim to enable them through good education and other measures to find their way into the labour market or to be able to stay in the labour market. Although the EU Strategy on Youth pursues long-term objectives, it comes at the right time to stimulate support for young people in times of crisis.
6. To create chances for young people pays off: child and youth friendly municipalities and regions provide an attractive climate for families and thus for potential workforce and customers that stimulate the local economy.

Mainstreaming and cooperation

7. CEMR believes that a strategy for youth should not be restricted to some policy areas, but that the needs of young people should be included and taken account of in all relevant policy areas and that the strategy should promote an integral approach.
8. We therefore appreciate the European Commission's intention to strengthen its internal cooperation across all relevant policy areas and we recommend a particularly close cooperation in the fields of education and employment, the latter being determined by the former.
9. It is pivotal that young people's needs are taken into account in every future reform of EU policies, and in particular in important strategies such as the future renewed Lisbon Strategy or the next Social Agenda. When assessing the impact of policies, reforms, priorities, annual themes and campaigns, there should be a part about the impact on children and youth, where appropriate.

Implementation and exchange of experience

10. Local and regional authorities gather a lot of experience and knowledge in their work regarding young people. In many cases, this practical knowledge includes experience

on how to design, develop and implement a youth strategy¹. We believe that the already existing experience and knowledge would add value to the design and implementation of an EU Strategy on Youth.

11. In this context, we call for the Member States and the European Commission to ensure that local and regional authorities are early and strongly involved in the Open Method of Coordination, which is in our view an appropriate tool for cooperation at EU level.
12. The Commission's proposal of peer-learning processes presents a good opportunity to benefit from local and regional authorities' knowledge and experience in political cooperation as well as in more technical matters. It would also allow local and regional authorities to learn from each other and empower themselves.
13. Within the bounds of possibility, CEMR could bring in its broad experience when it comes to active citizenship and town-twinning² which are both areas that traditionally involve young people. We also support two networks of cities that place children and youth in the centre of their work, the European Child Friendly Cities Network and the network Cities for Children, and we believe that the expertise of these networks should be sought where appropriate.
14. We see the need of better spreading the knowledge existing at local level such as local strategies for youth already in place or guides on how to establish such a strategy and experience on effective cooperation of different actors involved. CEMR would therefore welcome support for the exchange of experience so that municipalities across Europe could benefit from it. This could be very helpful in particular for the practical implementation of policies.
15. European Years allow to exchange experience and to promote good practice. In its Strategy on Youth, the Commission refers to the European Year of Volunteering 2011. CEMR welcomes the intention to promote youth volunteering and to reflect on ways to better protect rights of volunteers during this European Year. However, we would like to draw attention to the fact that the next European Years all affect young people: the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010, the European Year of Volunteering 2011 and the European Year on Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity 2012. We hope that the needs of young people will be clearly addressed within all these themes.

EU programmes, funding and reporting

16. CEMR welcomes the EU programmes and funding such as the Youth in Action programme. We would like to underline that it is crucial that these programmes are as accessible as possible to targeted stakeholders.
17. CEMR agrees that reporting should be simplified. We believe that reporting should not result in additional administrative burden.

¹ Amongst many other cities, Liepaja City Council (Latvia) designed and implemented a youth strategy including an analysis of the current situation, an overview of the actors, of short and long-term objectives, indicators etc. Please find the strategy (available only in Latvian) on http://www.liepaja.lv/upload/Bizness/Attistiba/jaunatnes_programma.pdf. The youth strategy of Gent (Belgium) is available in Dutch on http://jeugd.gent.be/repository_jongerensite/documenten/jeugdbeleidsplan2008-2010.pdf.

² See CEMR's publication *Twinning for Tomorrow's world. Practical Handbook* (2007) and in particular p.35 on youth and twinning: http://admin5.geniebuilder.com/users/ccre/bases/T_599_46_3524.pdf.