

The Second Eastern Partnership Youth Forum
9th to 12th February 2014
Riga, Latvia

Background

The 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was organised by the Agency of International Programs for Youth, which is the Latvian National Agency of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme, in cooperation with the European Commission and other stakeholders.

The Forum took place in Riga, Latvia from 9th -12th February 2015, in the framework of Latvia's Presidency of the Council of the EU and the Eastern Partnership Platform 4 'Contacts between people'.

The Forum brought together more than 250 participants from over 30 different countries. These included all the Eastern Partnership countries and representatives from most of the Erasmus+ Programme countries. The participants were made up of major relevant sectors, including young people, youth workers and representatives of the labour market, formal education and research, Ministries, the European Commission and other international institutions.

The main aim of the Forum was to foster greater cooperation between the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Erasmus+ Programme Countries.

The Forum provided space to discuss and recommend steps to be taken as regards young people's employability / employment, with a focus on:

- Young people's mobility and programmes supported e.g. by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the United Nations;
- Cross-sectorial cooperation in the field of youth;
- Exchange of good practices (innovative ideas);
- Youth policy development.

Notes

AUTHOR

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ORGANISERS

The event was organised by the Agency for International Programs for Youth that is subordinated to the Minister of Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia. The objective of Agency is to promote youth activities and mobility, to work with voluntary services for youth, non-formal learning and youth information programs and projects as well as support the link between non-formal learning and lifelong education.

The 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was coordinated by **Vladislava Skele**.

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SPEAKERS

Ms Inara Murniece, Speaker of the Saeima, National Parliament
Ms Marite Seile, Minister for Education and Science
Mr Juris Poikans, Ambassador-at-Large for Eastern Partnership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia
Mr Antonio Silva Mendes, Director for Erasmus+, Youth and Sport Unit, DG EAC, the European Commission
Mr Mathieu Bousquet, Acting Head of the Regional Unit for the Neighbourhood East, the European Commission
Ms Daina Sproge, Director of the Agency for International Programs for Youth, National Agency of Erasmus+: Youth in Action Programme
Ms Elodie Fazi, Policy Officer, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, The European Commission
Mr Massimiliano Mascherini, Eurofound

Mr Sebastian Koenigs, OECD
Ms Lora Lyubenova, Board member of the European Youth Forum
Mr Andrij Pavlovych, SALTO EECA
Mr Maksymilian Frasz, IBF
Mr Behrooz Motamed-Afshari, IBF

EXPERTS

Mr Denis Altschul, Agora Collective
Mr Ian Goldring, ProjectWorks asbl
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Ms Ieva Lace, All nature Ltd.
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Mr Alex Petrov, Secretary General, National Youth Council of Moldova
Ms Francesca Rinaldi, GIOVANISI Project
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Mr Antons Sapriko, Scandiweb Ltd.
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PARTNERS

The 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum would not be possible without following partners and supporters:



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About the Report

The report is structured according to the official Recommendations that came out of the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum (Forum).

The General Introduction sets the scene and atmosphere of the Forum and gives an overview of the whole event and specifically on the situation of young people and employment. This chapter provides some background information as provided by participants, speakers and experts from the two days of the Forum.

After this the following chapters are all titled according to the headings in the Recommendations document and explore the different issues raised during the Forum that led to these titles and subjects.

The full text of the recommendations can be found at the end of the publication

General Introduction

Much appreciated by both participants and facilitators of the Forum, was the diversity of people that were either invited or who applied to be a part of it. There were representatives of youth ministries, state agencies, Erasmus+ National Agencies, European youth organizations, student organizations, local and national youth organizations, research organizations, career centres, media, business sector and formal education sector. In general participants were very much motivated and eager to share personal experiences as well as learn from the different perspective represented.

The inputs from various speakers, the accumulation of information and knowledge from the Learning Space and the hard work of the participants in the workshops provided a wealth of material that gradually narrowed down to the Recommendations. Ms Daina Sproge, Director, Agency for International Programmes for Youth, in her opening speech, highlighted that for her the Forum was an opportunity to present and exchange best practices, to develop and strengthen cooperation and networking between participants from different countries and sectors. Mr Antonio Silva Mendes, Director of Erasmus+, Youth and Sport Unit, DG EAC, European Commission, told the participants that he believed the Forum was an excellent opportunity for sharing ideas and discussions on the employment issues of young people. He went on to share that at the European level many good things can be said and policies created but that the real action is based on the side of those who directly work with young people.

Speakers and facilitators alike asked the participants to consider many things, the 'economic crisis' being one factor to take into account and one of the main themes behind youth unemployment. However the Forum was reminded that it is not just about economics, the cost is also a social one. As Ms Inara Murniece, Speaker of Latvian Parliament stated, "Investing in youth should not be a question of choice but a necessity for getting out of crisis."

Ms Murniece, went on to talk about how the Forum is a form of solidarity, "Your participation today is a form of solidarity, it is one of the main fundamentals for a healthy, strong and democratic system, it means mutual understanding between people and institutions." She referred to the participants as 'messengers of hope' for peace and cultural diversity through mobility programmes and youth work. Ms Sproge added, "I believe this forum will raise deeper understanding about different cultural contexts in different countries and I also believe that this will help to break stereotypes and help to strengthen European values and principles of democracy."

Mr Juris Poikans Ambassador-at-Large for Eastern Partnership, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia spoke about the importance of the Forum for emphasising the mutual interest in further advancing ties between the six partners of the Eastern Partnership. He believed the recommendations produced at the Forum would be an important part of the ties between the European Union and the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Ms Marite Seile, Ministry of Education and Science, hoped that the recommendations of the forum would become a tool for jointly developing common youth policy in the Europe Union and Eastern Partner countries.

During the entirety of the Forum there was a library corner full of publications and resources that everyone could access, with materials from a variety of sectors and subjects. The Learning Badges were in full force throughout the Forum with participants able to collect badges through learning and through simply having fun, (<http://www.learningbadges.eu/>).

Ms Inara Murniece, Speaker of Latvian Parliament reminded us of Margaret Mead, the North American cultural anthropologist, in a quote;

"The young, free to act on their initiative can lead their elders in the direction of the unknown, the young must ask the questions that we would never think to ask"

EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY

The main focus of the Forum was on the employment and employability issues of young people. This next section presents some of the key issues raised as well as a number of facts and figures on the subject.

Mr Antonio Silva Mendes, Director of Erasmus+, Youth and Sport Unit, DG EAC, European Commission, shared that young people between the ages of 14 and 29 years 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' were now more than 15 million in Europe. On average in European Union countries 22% of young people are unemployed, the general average is 11%, meaning that young people are twice as likely to be unemployed than those of other generations. In Armenia and Georgia the number is more than 30% while in the other countries of the Eastern Partnership the percentages are between 12 and 18%. Lora Lyubenova, Board Member of the European Youth Forum, highlighted that 11% of other generations are taking temporary contracts while 42% of young people are on temporary contracts. Another factor is that many more young women are unemployed than young men.

Mr Massimiliano Mascherini, Research Manager in the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EuroFound), a European Union Agency, was part of a study on the 'Transition of young people in Europe'. He shared that the challenge to young people entering the labour market is not single issue but a combination of many challenges. Young people are increasingly in competition with older and more experienced workers. Most young people have a lack of job experience, he explained that in countries where young people combine labour market experience and education (formal and non-formal), the transition from school to work is much smoother. He talked about how the local, regional and national economic situation plays a role in the number of jobs actually available. Cultural reasons also have an effect on shaping the transition of young people from school to work.

Mr Mendes stated, "We know that more than 20% of the young people do not have the necessary skills and when they do have skills they are not the skills needed by the market, these skills mismatch". The participants themselves also reflected on key issues throughout the two days, many of the issues raised were; the practical skills gap, the soft skills gap between education and labour market, a lack of jobs, and the values of labour market having changed – with both the education system and public being unable to respond. In one of the IQ Polls the participants were asked, 'What is the main challenge a young people faces in your community when entering the labour market?' they responded with the following:

- Mismatch of competences 21%
- No or lack of previous job experience 28%
- Lack of guidance and support 16%
- Not enough job places 12%
- No interest or readiness to work 5%
- Expectation of a high position or high salary 18%
- Other 1%

In relation to youth policy and youth unemployment the participants raised the issue that there is not enough involvement and cooperation between different sectors for the development of youth policies.

'Alternative job opportunities' were also explored. Ms Daina Sproge, Director, Agency for International Programmes for Youth, encouraged the participants to analyse, discuss, develop and search for new ways to tackle youth unemployment, through innovation and the sharing of good practice. During the Forum participants did exactly this from the perspective of the various sectors represented. In the end more than 50 ideas were collected which almost all focussed on 2 main areas: Youth work – fostering young people's possibilities and competences towards entrepreneurship and self-employability; and Education – making positive changes in the education system, structures and approaches.

Cross-Sectorial Cooperation

“All stakeholders – private and public sectors, civil society organisations, particularly youth NGOs, trade unions, business representatives, employment services, and international actors – should team up in fostering young people's employability and employment.”

Recommendations from the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum

Probably the biggest single subject of discussion and debate during the Forum – outside of the subject of employment – was that of cross-sectorial cooperation. From speeches to workshops to learning spaces the subject came up time and again. Participants had the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on corporate social responsibility, how to develop cross-sectorial cooperation, and to take steps towards actually engaging with the concept back home in their own communities. Such engagement on the local level was backed up with support on the international level by Mr Bousquet, Acting Head, Regional Unit for the Neighbourhood East, DG NEAR, European Commission, when he shared that the new Eastern Partnership Youth Window will take into account employability support for the private sector and for micro entrepreneurs.

Ms Marite Seile, Ministry of Education and Science stated, “Cross-sectorial cooperation, meaning cooperation between government and non-government actors is the key to successfully meeting the needs and interests of young people.” Participants themselves supported this view, feedback from the workshop in cross-sectorial cooperation expressed that ‘the key to successful cross-sectorial cooperation is that it is made up of different types and models of cooperation within civil society, private sector, local authorities and national government.’ Ms Seile went on to stress, “the wellbeing of every young person ensures the wellbeing of our society in the long term, the Latvian presidency has brought cross-sectorial cooperation to the forefront of our agenda.” It was proposed that youth policy makers could be key promoters of cooperation among private, youth and formal education sectors. Others felt that cross-sectorial cooperation was something that needed to be initiated not just by one sector but by all sectors approaching each other and establishing communication channels.

Dialogue between people who work with young people and representatives and experts on the labour market are crucial in order to better understand each other and be more effective in cooperation. In fact even before the cooperation between sectors, many believed that there needs to be better cooperation within the youth sector rather than the all too familiar competing that takes place.

PLUS AND MINUS

One advantage of cross-sectorial cooperation between youth NGOs and municipalities for example is that they are much closer to the actual and real needs of young people in everyday life. Cross-sectorial cooperation provides young people with opportunities for personal development, development of various skills such as entrepreneurship and networking skills and encourages taking responsibility. On the other hand cross-sectorial cooperation also needs to overcome misunderstandings between partners, the all too often lack of needs analysis among partners, engagement in too much ‘theoretical intensions’, a lack of motivation among representatives of different sectors to cooperate, and low level of support of youth NGOs.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Ms Inara Murniece, Speaker of Latvian Parliament, informed the Forum that the private sector, as the main beneficiary of skilled labour force, should contribute to a practical learning programme, it should be done to assist the transition from school to labour market. However she warned that the quality of placements for young people in the private sector must provide decent living standards for young people.

EDUCATION

Mr Andrij Pavlovych, Coordinator SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre talked about the importance of the youth sector and mobility programmes in cooperating with other sectors because the Education system itself is often not providing the competences needed at the labour market. He talked about the need for a synergy between the sectors and that it is vital that this synergy includes the formal education sector. Ms Lora Lyubenova, Board Member of the European Youth Forum, responsible for Youth Issues, was passionate in her declaration backing this up, she stated, "Lets not set the non-formal against the formal, we need cooperation, we need a balance." She acknowledged that there were many issues with formal education and many benefits to non-formal education, but as was expressed also by others, 'we are not here to compete we are here to cooperate.'

MOBILITY PROGRAMMES

The participants wanted to see more contact building, experience exchange activities, networking, and promotion meetings, for the creation of future projects related to young people's employment in Erasmus+. Also through the Programme they wanted to see the greater engagement of youth organisations with official institutions, sports organisations, schools and employment-related services. They wanted to increase the awareness about the benefits of mobility programmes to employers and to the community at large, to further insure a better reintegration of young people in their communities.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Mr Antonio Silva Mendes, Director of Erasmus+, Youth and Sport Unit, DG EAC, European Commission, wanted to explore how it could be possible to support young people to be more entrepreneurial. He expressed that he thought this to be a society responsibility, to bring the private sector into supporting the movement to create more skills and creating more capacity for young people. Participants wanted to see entrepreneurs involved in the formal education process (planning curriculum) and that space should be given to entrepreneurs to go to schools and universities, to give motivational speeches or lessons or to share experiences.

POLICY

Many felt that local governments should develop and implement localized youth policy by involving all relevant stakeholders from different sectors. In the Eastern Partnership region the process should be initiated and or facilitated by Eastern Partnership Forum national platforms and or by EU Delegations. Youth policies should define clear responsibilities for each stakeholder involved, including the private sector.

EXAMPLES

Experts from EPYRU recommended participants to get acquainted with 'Youth Policy Review in Ukraine' by the Council of Europe, specifically the part about employment and employability. They believed the results and recommendations could be applicable for the realities of other countries.

Ms Sebastian Koenigs, Economist at the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development. Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, and a Research Affiliate at the Institute for the Study of Labour, shared an example of good practice for cross-sectorial cooperation from a school. He explained that when they experience a problem with a young person, the school principle invites all the relevant actors to a bi-weekly meeting, everyone is immediately contacted, information is shared and the family is engaged with. The situation is managed early and in cooperation, rather than each sector or institution handling it separately.

Education

Governments are invited to facilitate synergies between the formal and non-formal education sectors, include the business sector and non-formal education providers in the design of formal education curricula, and encourage higher education institutions to open cooperation with the private sector.

Recommendations from the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum

ISSUES

Mr Antonio Silva Mendes, Director of Erasmus+, Youth and Sport Unit, DG EAC, European Commission, stated, "We have more than 1 in 6 young people leaving school with no or few qualifications, as a consequence these young people lose the access to the market, so we have to do something." Ms Inara Murniece, Speaker of Latvian Parliament, spoke about how society is facing major challenges with the mismatch between the skills young people have and the labour market in their transition from school to seeking employment.

'Not in Employment Education or Training' or 'NEETs' has become the expression to sum up a whole generation of young people. Mr Sebastian Koenigs, Economist at the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development. Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, and a Research Affiliate at the Institute for the Study of Labour has been working on the NEET issue for two years. He shared that many young people are often in this category for multiple reasons, he stressed that it is not something black and white as the acronym suggests – a simply acronym cannot describe a whole generation and it cannot describe a single individual and it is not just about a young person being unemployed.

The reasons a young person is not in education, employment or training could be because they may be having a problem with the education system or they come from a disadvantaged background or have problems at home or problems with their living situation or they have mobility issues or housing issues or health issues or drug/substance use issues. Mr Koenigs concluded summing up the issue by saying, "There is often a huge area around all of this which is not purely employability and it is not purely education either."

SOLUTIONS

Ms Monika Rinner from the youth organisation 'Spacelab', Austria, shared a development they had within their organisation with regards to the young people referred to by the acronym, 'NEET'. "I wish and dream of not just seeing young people being qualified, we need to work with them on their personal development too, so that the so called 'NEET' becomes a 'SEED' – Searching for Education Employment and Development." She went on to explain that the acronym 'SEED' had been coined by one of her colleagues Mr Ibrahim Celik. They as a team felt that 'Not in' was negative and contrary to their approach with young people. "Someone who's searching for something can grow like a seed". In youth work terms the work with young people is not just about employment, it is about the personal, social and professional development of the young person.

In the workshop on the 'role of youth work' the participants concluded that there needed to be greater cooperation between formal and non-formal education. In order to encourage young people in their future development there need to be joint projects and programmes. Mr Mendes, echoed this when he talked about the need to link the formal and non-formal aspects and how this was a challenge for the future. In the workshop on 'Contribution of Youth Policy' they explored the need for putting more value to non-formal education and for making formal education more flexible. They also wanted to see the development of value-based education starting at the beginning of schooling and that it should involve parents.

In the workshop on 'education to labour market' they shared good practices and looked at ways of improving various sector approaches to improve transition. They in turn concluded that University programmes should; become more practical, that there should be more e-learning tools available, that the Universities should better know the employment market needs, provide practical skills, and recognise competences gained in other settings. In the learning space, 'Youth Career to Future Jobs' they concluded that to be employed a young people needs more than the competences provided by the formal education system.

Mr Koenigs shared that from their research they were exploring two main areas in how to support young people not to be in the position of being unemployed, and not in education or training, in other words how to be in the position to be searching for education, employment and development. The first was to be working on avoiding the situation in the first place, how can school dropout be avoided and how to ensure these young people get the support they need with whatever issues they have in education. The second area is policy related and in relation to those who are unemployed and not in education or training, they are exploring structural reforms in labour market programmes and how what is available for young people can be expanded. In the workshop on 'education to labour market' the participants added to this expressing that they wanted to see the formal education sector moving much closer in its cooperation with the business and employment sector and to concentrate on the learning outcomes rather than out-dated regulations or academic realities.

Ms Marite Seile, Ministry of Education and Science, talked about wanting to see more initiatives of non-formal education and youth organisations dedicated to young people not involved in formal education or employment. She saw this as a way forward because many young people in this situation find it difficult to set goals and achieve them. She believes that the informal approach and the encouragement that comes from other young people can be the most powerful and direct support – youth work. A young person needs support when choosing subjects or a direction for further education, they need to know what is needed when they reach the labour market, they need better understanding of employers expectations, and they need realistic information about vacancies, salaries and working conditions. All this can be provided in a combination of the education and youth sectors.

In another workshop dedicated to the theme of 'mobility programmes' the participants expressed the need for mobility experiences that are coherent with the educational and personal path of a young person, within their own context. In one of the learning spaces participants contributed that learning needs to be seen as being 'life-long learning' and that any activity, in the non-formal and or youth work context, can develop crucial competences that can be relevant for the employment market.

Volunteering

Governments are invited to support volunteering, defining it through legislation and making finances available to support it. Different forms of volunteering are to be promoted among young people. The public and private sector need to be encouraged to recognise volunteering as a means of acquiring competencies which have value to the labour market.

Recommendations from the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum

The workshop on the 'role of youth work in fostering skills and competences' considered the benefits of volunteering for the future employment of young people. They explored how volunteering enhanced the possibilities for young people. The participants wanted to see financial support provided for more local and international volunteering opportunities, and that the experiences gained through any volunteering projects should be recognised.

Mr Andrij Pavlovych, Coordinator SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre, spoke about the importance of volunteering during the panel discussion. He talked about how the mobility programmes encourage volunteering and that through volunteering many young people gain many skills and competences. It is this development of skills and knowledge that increases their confidence when approaching the labour market. He stated that those who engage in extra curricula activities and volunteering in school and university are also more confident in approaching the labour market, they are better at dealing with different actors. Mr Pavlovych explored the possibilities of volunteering being a social norm and that we would engage in it from childhood and how that would impact the employability of young people.

In terms of mobility programme opportunities the European Voluntary Service (EVS) is the most obvious link to volunteering. It has been researched that many young people have found a job because of EVS. Some of the factors involved are the development of language skills, cultural skills, experiencing different contacts, etc. An example of the impact of EVS on the life of a young person was shared through the video of Leonie. It was a video she made of herself and her story, in it she shared how EVS had improved a large number of competences, for example, writing skills and communication skills. She said that she improved these simply by talking and discussing every day in her own language and in English and Greek. She also expressed that she had learned how to promote herself and learned about promoting campaigns and how to make videos. She shared that by taking part in EVS she and many young people feel that they have received real work experience, increased personal skills, ways of learning, ways of presenting themselves and broadening their horizons about what they can do and how to achieve it.

Incentives

Governments are invited to set up and implement a system of incentives for the private sector to attract and hire young people. This could, for example, consist of benefits for providing work places, financial contribution to hire international trainees and interns, tax reduction for companies engaging in youth related social work and charity.

Recommendations from the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum

Not so much was discussed on this specific subject though it came up numerous times in other contexts. Especially the context of young people being valued and not taken advantage of. There was a strong desire to see more paid internships.

In the 'transition' workshop, participants talked a lot about the benefits of preparing young people for the labour market and seeing young people develop skills and competences for their future employment. It was felt that young people who developed such experience and competences were more ready to work, more motivated, had realistic career and salary expectations and were proactive. Lists of skills and competences were made in other workshops and learning spaces but ultimately the lists were the same covering the same main elements, these included:

- Communication
- Leadership
- Team work
- Self-confidence
- Innovation and creativity
- Analytical skills
- Sense of responsibility
- Social skills
- Organisational skills
- Language skills

Many participants wanted to see the use of 'Youth Guarantee' increased, not only for providing support for young people but also because it can improve and strengthen cross-sectorial cooperation. Participants wanted to see tax or other incentives made to businesses to support young people in cooperation with the youth sector and education sector. There was also a push that in some countries the labour laws could be made more flexible to better support half-time and part-time work as well as alternative employment scenarios.

If there are more incentives made to the business sector then it was felt that the sector would be pushed to more social responsibility. Actions need to be initiated by both business and governments. There needs to be support given to companies that involve young people. Participants expressed that they would like to see a balance between a centralisation and decentralisation of youth policies including incentives to employers. In one of the workshops participants said that they would also like to see more incentives and support given to young people for their own entrepreneurship.

Support Systems

Governments are invited to establish support mechanisms for competences acquired through non-formal learning activities. To promote and encourage better use of available tools on youth entrepreneurship and youth employment. To provide coherent quality support systems for mobility programmes. To establish cross-sectorial mentoring programmes.

Recommendations from the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum

The general basis of support is in place and is ongoing in its development. Mr Juris Poikans Ambassador-at-Large for Eastern Partnership, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, shared with the Forum that "the Eastern Partnership is a policy that provides the European Union and the six European neighbours to build links and ties based on mutual interests and wishes." He went on to explain that he believed the European Union was more than ready to provide ground level support in partnership with the respective Governments of the region, especially in implementing reforms. The future holds promise with ambitions for visa free travel and further economic developments. This was backed up by Mr Mathieu Bousquet, Acting Head, Regional Unit for the Neighbourhood East, DG NEAR, European Commission, when he reminded the Forum that people from Moldova no longer needed visas. He went on to emphasise the importance continuing support and engagement with society and especially young people for building stronger ties. He expressed a desire to see more young people communicating and interacting between the region and the programme countries. "We strongly believe in these people to people contacts, in mobility activities such as ones provided under Erasmus+ to further increase young people's sense of citizenship, their capacity to learn, to be open to new cultures, new ideas and to learn new skills which will be in key in opening for them a broader perspectives."

YOUTH GUARANTEE

The main European mechanism for providing support to young people is the 'Youth Guarantee', a mechanism that has been agreed to by all the member states. Ms Elodie Fazi, Policy Officer, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, the European Commission, expanded on it, "the 'Youth Guarantee' ensures that all young people under 25 receive an offer of employment, apprenticeship, traineeship or continued education within 4 months of leaving education or being unemployed." Ms Fazi went on to explain that the thinking behind the 'Youth Guarantee' is that long term unemployment has strong negative impacts in terms of self-esteem and skills degradation.

APPRENTICESHIPS, TRAINEESHIPS AND INTERNSHIPS

Ms Fazi informed the Forum about apprenticeships and traineeships. The Commission is working on measures for combining apprenticeships with work and school based learning. The European Alliance for Apprenticeships is endeavouring to make them more modern and attractive, especially to young women. Traineeships are also in development, the Commission wants to set a minimum standard for quality. However there is a fear that in many cases they could become a substitute for paid employment. Ms Lora Lyubenova, Board Member of the European Youth Forum, highlighted that in terms of internships in the European Union, only 30% are paid!

In the workshop on 'the role of youth work' participants warned about the need to take into consideration different regions and realities. Successful mechanisms and instruments that work well in one place may not do so in another. The Eastern Partnership countries realities are different and unique and so any mechanism would need to be adjusted and set into each cultural context. This sentiment was echoed in the workshop on 'the role of youth work' where they emphasised the need for strategic partnership and capacity building based on the realities of each country to ensure long-term impact on young people. They went on to say that they believe there is a need for each country to make its own research on the competences needed by labour market. They want to see the public sector support such researches financially and take the responsibility to carry them out. Ms Fazi shared that the Commission is working

closely with employment services across the European Union to challenge the way they see support for young people.

MOBILITY PROGRAMMES

Another aspect or mechanism that comes from the European Union is the access young people have to mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ Youth in Action. The participants were asked in an IQ Poll, "How much do mobility programmes contribute to young people's employability?"

- Fully 9%
- Significantly 50%
- Partially 37%
- Not at all 6%

However there is still room for improvement, the workshop on 'the potential of mobility programmes' explored the need for strengthening preparation and follow-up support in projects. The participants proposed the further development of self-reflection tools and support mechanisms for young people to be able to assess their own learning and gain recognition and validation of their acquired competences. Suggestion for this included the development of on-line systems that would be dynamic and contain elements of gamification. They also proposed the establishment of mentoring programmes for young people after their mobility experiences.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

In the 'alternative job opportunities' workshop participants suggested that data, information, and facts about youth entrepreneurship and youth employment should be fed into existing European level tools such as Eurodesk, SALTO Resource Centres, and Erasmus Young Entrepreneurs. Access to this information would better support young people and youth organisations in understanding employment and employability issues.

A number of other mechanisms were also proposed in the Learning Spaces, workshops and speeches. In the Alternative Job Opportunities Learning Space they proposed; start-up support programmes, ideas labs, competitions for funds, mentorship, and easier legislation for being a freelance or self-employed. In the 'youth policy' workshop suggestions included;

- Skills development: encourage work-based learning, summer practice for students, praxis time at universities, state support to youth entrepreneurs
- Language support: many young people in Eastern Partnership countries don't speak other languages as much as their counterparts in the European Union
- Activating young people: providing advocacy, career fairs, etc.

Ms Fazi shared that many countries have changed their approach and are working on bringing the employment market much closer to the young people. She acknowledged that change takes time and not only that but it also takes time to persuade people that change can be good. Another aspect to take into account is that as good as many of these offers and proposals are, for many young people they are not within reach. This could be because of their lack of education, their geographical location, or simply that the offers don't meet their needs and requirements. This she said is "where more cooperation with youth work sector could be really helpful."

Funding

The European Commission is invited to re-open a programme dedicated to young people in Eastern Partnership countries. To provide resources for capacity building of youth NGOs, and to create support systems for young people to foster youth entrepreneurship.

Recommendations from the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum

For the youth sector one of the main sources of funding, and a subject of keen interest among the participants of the Forum, was the European Commission's Eastern Partnership Youth Window (Window). In their evaluation of the previous Window (2012/2013) Mr Behrooz Motamed-Afshari and Mr Maksymilian Fras, Researchers IBF, emphasised that the continuation of the Window should be complimentary to other funding opportunities and not seen as the only source of funding.

They proposed three key components for the direction and implementation of the new programme:

1. Local capacity building and development programme

Rather than there simply being an application process through Brussels, they highlighted the need for more on the ground and localised focus to the funding of projects. Priority should be given to projects that reflect national priorities and youth policy plans. There could be sub granting with such grants being managed through experienced NGOs.

2. Opening a Window under Erasmus+

The main focus should be on KA2 and the promotion and development of youth exchanges, training courses and EVS. They felt that the funding of projects needed to be balanced according to population size – bigger population, more available funding. They also proposed that countries that had signed the Association Agreement (political aspect) being treated as programme countries.

3. Management, monitoring and policy coordination facility

There needs to be more support available and this can be provided by existing frameworks within the region - SALTO EECA and National Agencies of the Erasmus+ offices. They also proposed there to be policy support tailored to the needs and issues of each of the Eastern Partnership countries.

In the workshop on 'mobility programmes' they did an exercise to map the different sources of support and funding for young people with regards to mobility. The following is a selection of sources:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| - Fulbright | - Erste Stiftung |
| - Government scholarships | - Goete |
| - Au pair | - British Council |
| - J-1 Visa | - Scouts |
| - International Civil Service | - Private sector |
| - Council of Europe | - UN Volunteers |
| - International Youth Awards | - Don Bosco |
| - Nordic Sweden funds | - Caritas |
| - Council for International Cooperation | - Gedenkdienst |
| - AIESEC | - WWOOF |
| - SOROS Foundation | - AEGEE |
| - Twin cities | - Ukrainian women's fund |

In the 'Alternative Job Opportunities' workshop they proposed greater use of strategic partnerships in project funding, especially in relation to youth employment and entrepreneurship. This was supported in the report of the Window evaluation where it was pointed out that beneficiaries of the Window funding from the youth sector were able to develop their financial capacities, this allowed them to access other types of funding, especially those provided by international donors.

Transparency of Funding and Monitoring

The European Commission is invited to ensure the maximum transparency in the granting of its funds and appropriate monitoring at all levels.

Recommendations from the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum

Mr Mathieu Bousquet, Acting Head, Regional Unit for the Neighbourhood East, DG NEAR, European Commission, shared that they wanted to see more monitoring and regional cooperation with regards to the distribution of funds in the Eastern Partnership countries. Despite the good result of the Window they wanted to see more effort being made to reach young people with fewer opportunities and who lived in deprived urban and rural areas.

Mr Behrooz Motamed-Afshari and Mr Maksymilian Fras, Researchers IBF, in their presentation on the evaluation of the Eastern Partnership Youth Window, spoke at length about the need for greater monitoring. They recognised that limited capacities and financial constraints restricted the levels of monitoring of projects that took place in the Eastern Partnership region. However for the future they recommended greater levels of cooperation with existing structures, especially with SALTO EECA, where there is already good knowledge of the each of the countries of the region and understanding about the funding needs and requirements. They also wanted to see greater levels of cooperation with the European Commission's Erasmus+ offices in the Eastern Partnership countries, with systematic dissemination and publication of information regarding grants awarded. Project reports should also be made visible.

Youth Work

Governments are invited to support the process of integrating labour market understanding into the youth work sector, recognising that this forms a part of the role of youth work. Youth workers need to receive support to access such understanding and to integrate it into their work dedicated to the personal, social and professional development of young people. Youth workers supporting young people need to explore how young people's competences developed through non-formal education can relate to their future employability.

Recommendations from the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum

Ms Marite Seile, Ministry of Education and Science, said "Being young can mean so many things but among others, being young entails a period of transition, when one reaches the age of maturity, becomes a graduate and we start our professional life and life independent of parents, such change is rapid and is often intertwined, so many layers and possible futures are happening all at once." This summary of 'youth' also sums up the need for youth work and the role that it has to play in the lives of young people. Ms Seile went on to highlight the importance of youth work and through it how young people can grow in their personal, social and professional development. She stressed the necessity of recognising and valuing skills and competencies gained through young people's interaction with youth work

THE WINDOW AND YOUTH WORK

Mr Behrooz Motamed-Afshari and Mr Maksymilian Fras, Researchers IBF, reported that the two years of the Window greatly enhanced awareness about the nature of youth work. They said that training and networking projects were particularly useful for promoting and sharing good practice and therefore contributing to the development of youth work in the region. Overall the Window also supported the strengthening of national structures in relation to the youth sector and regional cooperation between such structures. These combined developments in the youth sector have led to youth work to be better placed to meet and address the needs of young people. In a survey conducted on the impact of the Window, young people were asked:

"Has the activity you have participated in effectively contributed to your personal development in the areas of...?"

- Practical life and soft skills 67%
- Employability 48%
- Active participation 68%
- Self-esteem 66%"

The Window contributed strongly to legitimising youth work and youth policy in the Eastern Partnership region and for promoting them as credible and important parts of civil society. The new programme and the new Window need continue this work of legitimising through maintaining the focus on youth work and keeping the voluntary and civil society sectors at the core of the new programme.

YOUTH WORK AND THE BUSINESS SECTOR

In the workshop on the 'role of youth work' they opened up several related subjects encouraging the youth sector to think about its role in relation to the business sector. They asked the participants to consider what the business sector needs from potential employees and to identify which of these are already developed in youth work and which are not. This particular workshop had four guest speakers from the business sector which provided opportunity for the results and conclusions from discussions to be instantly shared with the sector and if necessary challenged. Discussions also focussed on how the youth and business sectors could develop an equal partnership. They explored what would need to happen for the youth sector to be invited for consultations and to become a service provider in developing youth employment skills.

The same workshop highlighted that youth workers are crucial actors in developing competences among young people. Youth work, it was noted, has the potential to be flexible to adapt to the ever changing needs of the labour market. The 'mobility programmes' workshop also highlighted the importance of flexibility. They concluded that youth workers needed to be supported to understand the current job market situation in order that they in turn can support young people to translate their acquired competences from mobility programme experiences. From the 'youth leadership' Learning Space, participants shared how they felt it was vitally important for young people to not only recognise their competences but also to be able to 'speak the same language as the potential employer'.

However, in the Learning Space on 'youth careers' they received feedback from the participants that not enough youth workers have the tools to help young people to reflect on their abilities and gained competences. In general it was felt that youth work often lacked creativity for supporting young people in the writing of CV's, motivation letters and general preparation for the job market.

MOBILITY PROGRAMMES AND YOUTH WORK

In the 'mobility programmes' workshop they emphasised the huge potential programmes like Erasmus+ Youth in Action have for increasing youth employment. But they also strongly pointed out that the primary role of such programmes is to promote participation and active citizenship, not resolve employment crises.

The same workshop wanted to see an increase in access to mobility experiences for young people, they want to see such experiences as being complementary to general youth work, formal, and non-formal education activities. In order for this to happen all the different elements need to be coherent in working together for the personal and professional paths of young people. There need to be quality support systems made available to youth organizations and young people, this can be achieved through training and information support being given to organizations, youth workers, project managers, mentors, tutors and other stakeholders who directly work with young people. The 'alternative job' Learning Space had a proposal to see youth NGOs help set up groups of young entrepreneurs for starting small businesses.

Not all is what it should or could be, there are still many issues that the youth work faces inside of itself, especially in relation to mobility programmes. There are still too many so called 'project tourists' attending activities simply for the experience of travelling and meeting people and giving nothing back to their home communities. In some countries the selection of participants more often comes down to who you know not whether you meet the criteria to participate. Some National Agencies are hard to contact and communicate with. On the other side of the coin, youth work, and again especially in relation to mobility projects, provides motivation to young people to get involved, supports the development of organisations, sees the development of skills and competences, encourages open-mindedness, and supports career choices.

Participation of Young People with Fewer Opportunities

Governments are invited to ensure that decision-makers include broader youth involvement in policy making, especially related to young people not 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' and Youth Guarantee related measures, and policy implementation, involving young people with fewer opportunities.

Recommendations from the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum

In the Learning Space on 'youth policy' the activity produced a number of images and drawings from participants. These showed that in some cases young people are a part of decision making processes but it also showed that many young people are completely out of the decision making process and in some instances are not being allowed to enter that space.

PARTICIPATION IN ACTION

In the Learning Space run by the EU-CoE Youth Partnership, participants were asked to come up with words that described for them what youth participation means in Eastern Europe and Caucasus. They came up with the following: Motivation, volunteering, civil society, citizenship education, innovation, stakeholders, policy makers, and youth policy.

Mr Antonio Silva Mendes, Director of Erasmus+, Youth and Sport Unit, DG EAC, European Commission, shared that there were a number of initiatives already in existence for the support of young people into employment. He went on to say that, "we have now to do some actions and draw some ideas about how we can participate and involve more, how we can support more young people." Ms Lora Lyubenova, Board Member of the European Youth Forum, responsible for Youth Issues, spoke at length about participation. The European Youth Forum has a strong emphasis on active citizenship and for raising the opinions of young people in the political sector. She shared that they are working on structured dialogue between member states and youth organisations. She explained that it is a framework that is asking young people what they would like to see in the political process.

PARTICIPATION ISSUES

In the Learning Space run by the EU-CoE Youth Partnership they also asked participants to come up with words and phrases for what was missing or stopping youth participation, the list was sadly much longer. Here are a few of the comments: Lack of access to information, no exchanges among policy makers from different countries, no inclusive approach, youth mobility restricted or limited. There is no training for teachers and or youth workers on participation topics to encourage young people. There is little or no involvement of young people in any form of decision making.

In many countries there is a general acceptance that youth councils are a good thing, however in reality they don't exist as much as they could because they are not obligatory and because young people themselves do not push for them. Ms Lyubenova gave the example of Bulgaria where she herself was a part of the National Youth Council. She explained that once you left the main cities and went into the countryside it was almost impossible to convince young people to enter into participation of any form. She said, "In my country only 3% of young people are active in youth organisations, this is a problem."

Ms Lyubenova questioned youth participation in the political arena. She was critical of politicians, saying, "Usually at these meetings the politicians are attending, they are making their speech for 10min passing the message and then they are leaving and so are not participating." To participate would be to meet and interact with young people and be a part of the process and therefore the result of a Forum such as this. Too often young people have the feeling that they are not being heard or listened to, and they are right. The European Youth Forum represent a huge number of active young people across the continent. The criticism of itself here is that these young people are the privileged ones. They have been or are in higher

education and they have experience in participating in mobility programmes – both formal and non-formal education opportunities.

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES

Mr Behrooz Motamed-Afshari and Mr Maksymilian Fras, Researchers IBF, explored this area in their evaluation report. Their research clearly showed that the numbers of young people with fewer opportunities directly reached by the Window was low. Mostly this was in relation to young people from rural areas and deprived urban areas. They also pointed out that the Window indirectly had an impact on this target group mostly through projects taking place in deprived urban and rural areas.

They proposed that at least one third of projects funded under the new Window should directly and actively involve young people with fewer opportunities as participants. National priorities should be set for each of the participating countries from the region. These priorities should include a focus on young people with fewer opportunities with provision for including them in projects. This can also be supported by introducing a comprehensive cross-sectorial cooperation strategy, involving different sectors, ministries, institutions, etc.

In the workshop on 'mobility programmes' they proposed that to include more young people with fewer opportunities there needed to be more short term and group based projects. They expressed that there needs to be better financial support for preparation and follow-up – particularly in working in a more holistic way with the young people, meaning also working with their family, the school and social services. Many young people are afraid to go abroad, this could be because of a lack of information or simply fear of the unknown. If youth workers can offer these young people more support before, during and after the mobility experience it would help them a lot. It was also suggested that organisations that are not considered to be a part of the youth sector but who work with young people with fewer opportunities could be reached out to and included, for example; social and employment services.

Official Recommendations

THE 2ND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP YOUTH FORUM

9th to 12th February 2015

Riga, Latvia

The 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum was organised by the Agency of International Programs for Youth, which is the Latvian National Agency of the Erasmus+ Youth in Action Programme, in cooperation with the European Commission and other stakeholders.

The Forum took place in Riga, Latvia from 9th -12th February 2015, in the framework of Latvia's Presidency of the Council of the EU and the Eastern Partnership Platform 4 'Contacts between people'.

The Forum brought together more than 250 participants from over 30 different countries. These included all the Eastern Partnership countries and representatives from most of the Erasmus+ Programme countries. The participants were made up of major relevant sectors, including young people, youth workers and representatives of the labour market, formal education and research, Ministries, the European Commission and other international institutions.

The main aim of the Forum was to foster greater cooperation between the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Erasmus+ Programme Countries.

The Forum provided space to discuss and recommend steps to be taken as regards young people's employability / employment, with a focus on:

- Young people's mobility and programmes supported e.g. by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the United Nations;
- Cross-sectorial cooperation in the field of youth;
- Exchange of good practices (innovative ideas);
- Youth policy development.

Based on an online consultation prior to the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum and the discussions held in the Forum's workshops, the participants in the 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum recommend the following:

CROSS-SECTORIAL COOPERATION

All stakeholders – private and public sectors, civil society organisations, particularly youth NGOs, trade unions, business representatives, employment services, and international actors – should team up in fostering young people's employability and employment.

They are invited to cooperate more closely, recognising the contribution that each actor brings, in:

- Defining, implementing and evaluating employment policies through cross-sectorial cooperation;
- Identifying current and future skills needs of the labour market;
- Providing career guidance;
- Encouraging the development and recognition of skills and competences through non-formal learning;
- Setting up mobility programmes;
- Informing the employment sector (employment agencies, career guidance workers, employers' associations etc.) about the value of mobility programmes in relation to the labour market;
- Providing opportunities for youth structured dialogue, including at local level.

The dialogue should result in identifying clear roles and responsibilities among the different stakeholders.

The related progress needs to be monitored and regular reports to be provided to all stakeholders – particularly the youth sector.

Local government should develop, implement and strengthen youth policy at local level, e.g. also by involving all stakeholders with a special accent on rural youth.

Governments, notably also local ones, are invited to develop and implement cross-sectorial strategies related to youth unemployment and fostering young people's employability. Through a series of consultations with youth organisations, each Government should set up a committee responsible for the employment and employability of young people – with a specific focus on young people with fewer opportunities. The committees would be responsible for setting up indicators for the monitoring of the ongoing youth employment situation and ensuring appropriate follow-up.

EDUCATION

Governments are invited to:

- Facilitate synergies between the formal and non-formal education sectors. This could be achieved, for example, by introducing non-formal educational activities, such as volunteering, in formal education courses. At the level of higher education the value of this engagement would be recognised through the receiving of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) points.
- Include the business sector and non-formal education providers in the design of formal education curricula, for example, as regards the development of youth creativity and entrepreneurship education courses. To support this, entrepreneurs should be invited to schools and universities to give motivational speeches, lessons and to share experience.
- Encourage higher education institutions to open cooperation with the private sector to set up an education financing model in which companies would sponsor tuition fees with a view to later employing graduates who benefitted from this sponsoring.

VOLUNTEERING

Governments are invited to support volunteering, defining it through legislation and making finances available to support it. Different forms of volunteering are to be promoted among young people. The public and private sector need to be encouraged to recognise volunteering as a means of acquiring competencies which have value to the labour market.

INCENTIVES

Governments are invited to set up and implement a system of incentives for the private sector to attract and hire young people. This could, for example, consist of benefits for providing work places, financial contribution to hire international trainees and interns, tax reduction for companies engaging in youth related social work and charity.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Governments are invited to:

- Establish support mechanisms for the assessment, recognition and validation of competences acquired through non-formal learning activities;
- Promote and encourage better use of available tools to disseminate information about youth entrepreneurship, youth employment and examples of transferable practice, for example, through Eurodesk, the SALTO Youth Resource Centres and the European Youth Portal;
- Provide coherent quality support systems for mobility programmes for youth organisations, project managers, mentors, tutors and other stakeholders directly dealing with young people, through on-going training and the providing of up-to-date information;
- Establish cross-sectorial mentoring programmes to strengthen preparation, implementation and follow-up support in mobility projects, to guide young people in applying the acquired competences as a part of their transition to the labour market.

FUNDING

The European Commission is invited to re-open a programme dedicated to young people in Eastern Partnership countries.

The European Commission and Governments are invited to provide resources for capacity building of youth NGOs, and to create support systems for young people to foster youth entrepreneurship, for example through grants, risk capital, co-working spaces or mentoring programmes.

TRANSPARENCY OF FUNDING AND MONITORING

The European Commission is invited to ensure the maximum transparency in the granting of its funds and appropriate monitoring at all levels.

YOUTH WORK

Governments are invited to support the process of integrating labour market understanding into the youth work sector, recognising that this forms a part of the role of youth work. Youth workers need to receive support to access such understanding and to integrate it into their work dedicated to the personal, social and professional development of young people. Youth workers supporting young people need to explore how young people's competences developed through non-formal education can relate to their future employability.

PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES

Governments are invited to ensure that decision-makers include broader youth involvement in policy making, especially related to young people not "Not in Education, Employment or Training" (NEETs) and Youth Guarantee related measures, and policy implementation, involving young people with fewer opportunities.