



YOUTH INFORMATION: BACKBONE OF A SUCCESSFUL EU YOUTH STRATEGY

REPORT ABOUT THE EURODESK AND EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM SEMINAR, 2 MAY 2017

The Eurodesk network and the European Youth Forum organised a seminar on the role of youth information in the upcoming EU Youth Strategy as part of the European Youth Week 2017 and in the framework of the 60th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

Europe offers many opportunities to young people, including grants to study, work or volunteer abroad through several community programmes. It also offers them channels to voice their ideas on the future of Europe, for instance, through the Structured Dialogue. However, only a minority of young people benefits from such opportunities. The lack of information is among the main barriers to participation, as stressed by several reports and by young people themselves during the EU Youth Conferences. How can the European Union ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach to youth information at local, national and European level?

During this seminar, representatives from various EU institutions, NGOs and youth information services shared their views on how to shape such a youth information strategy as the backbone of the upcoming EU Youth Strategy.

The hosts, Audrey Frith, Eurodesk Director and Una Clarke, Policy officer at the European Youth Forum (EYF), welcomed the onsite and online participants to the event.

Audrey Frith underlined the fact that in the evaluation of the EU Strategy most of the young people have seen their situation worsen since the last 5 years, so both youth information providers and policy makers have an important role to play. She reminded the [position paper](#) produced by the three information networks (Eurodesk, EYCA and ERYICA) and the importance and role of youth organisations. She introduced the seminar with its three panels focusing on the different dimensions of the role of youth information for triggering inclusion, mobility and participation.

Una Clarke gave a short presentation on the EYF which represents 105 organisations inside and outside the EU. The Forum tries to bring the youth perspective to the European level. The EYF has produced a [position paper on the EU Strategy](#) outlining the position and vision of young people and youth organisations across Europe for the next EU cooperation framework in the youth field – the EU Youth Strategy after 2018.

PANEL 1

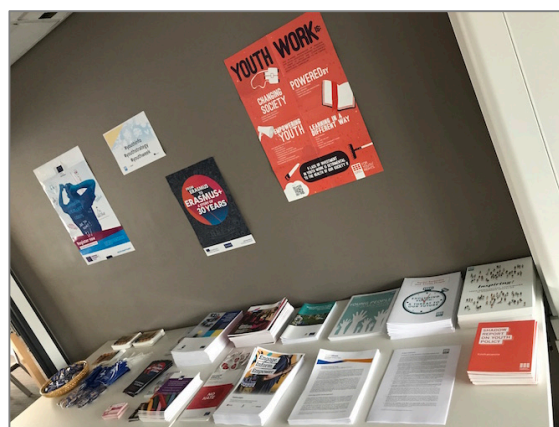
YOUTH INFORMATION: SUPPORTING COHESIVE AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

Sofie Van Zeebroeck (JINT) stressed that access to quality information is a prerequisite for young people to make use of their rights and to make sure they are able to deal with the overload of information in our societies (media literacy) and with more and more complex societies (critical thinking, intercultural understanding, overcoming prejudices and stereotypes). Youth information services and youth organisations play a crucial role in addressing these challenges and in building more cohesive societies by informing young people, outreaching to those who do not know their rights or do not use them, and in empowering them to become active citizens.

Julie Ward, Member of the European Parliament (UK, S&D)

In the context of increasing amounts of sources of information, it is important to create resilience against fake news. This resilience must be built within high standard editorial skills from the media and by investing in media literacy and citizenship education (in formal and non-formal environments). Brexit is a good example of how things can go wrong when people are misinformed and young people are not involved enough. The challenge for civil society, decision makers and youth organisations is “how can we better involve young people and ensure that they have access to quality information?”. Young people need to acquire the necessary skills to become active citizens. The two key pillars are citizenship education and media literacy. For both of these, informal learning structures and grassroots organisations, such as youth information centres, play a crucial role. Media literacy should not be limited to learning about the tools and technologies, it should aim at individuals with a critical perspective for them to become not only users of technologies but also active citizens in connected societies.

Young people also need intercultural skills. In a rich and diverse world, being able to dialogue and learn from another culture is important for self-confidence and all of this can help integration. Education for citizenship should be at the top of the education agenda, young people need to be able to learn about human rights, but also experience them through their education by taking part in decision-making processes of their community. Informal or non-formal learning is a key tool to work with underrepresented groups and providing them with new opportunities. Engaging with young people starts at the local level but it can be brought up to all levels: young people must have a voice in the decision that affect their future.



Cyberbullying and discrimination online is particularly worrying: consumers and citizens must be protected online in an efficient way. The EU has to work with Internet providers in order to ensure that an illegal and offensive content is effectively taken down and stays down. Inclusion, education and ethics must be the 3 pillars of dealing with these issues.

Gürkan Akçaer, Director, System and Generation Association, Eurodesk Multiplier, Turkey

"Imagine: Migrant journeys from Syria to Europe" is a strategical board game that allows players to experience the journeys of migrants fleeing the war in Syria and Afghanistan. The players of the game face the dangers, sacrifices and difficult choices similar to what these refugees face when they make these journeys. The emphasis of the game is on planning, gathering and putting together pieces of information and planning the next move towards Europe. The main goal of the project is to raise awareness of the migration from Middle East to Europe by letting people experience the journeys that migrants make when they flee from the war in Syria. The idea behind this interactive board game is to get players to understand what a migrant has to go through in order to get to Europe. The project initiator, System&Generation Association and their Swedish partners, bMECTE hope that players will sympathise with migrants via this game in the rise of unprecedented negative trends such as xenophobia and radicalism. S&G in partnership with bMECTE has produced 2,000 copies of the board game and hope to disseminate them to as many places as possible such as local and international high schools, youth organisations and NGOs, in order to invite as many young people as possible to play the

game. The project is still ongoing and, via social media and press, their aim is to reach more than 100,000 people. More than 600 youngsters in high schools and youth centres in Turkey, Sweden and other countries in the EU played the board game and got to know the current situation with migration. As the game is still played in various places, more and more young people are educated about the situation.



Responding to questions from the audience, Gürkan explained that in Turkey, there are school classes interested in these activities. There the students play for 2 hours and if they want, they can play even at home with their families. S&G is sending this game to the Eurodesk Network members, international partners and interested parties. In the youth centres, they are working with Syrian kids, with the help of EVS volunteers.



Currently in Sweden, 90 games have been sent and distributed to students, youth centres and libraries. They have French, Arabic and Turkish versions. The game is being distributed for free. They have VR version in development, a webpage, and a Facebook page. Facebook: IMAGINE: migrant journeys www.systemandgeneration.com

Manel Sánchez, Director of the European Youth Card Association (EYCA)

The European Youth Card Association (EYCA) is a non-profit organisation representing 38 youth card organisations in 36 countries across Europe. All the members are committed to promoting youth mobility and active citizenship to more than 6 million cardholders. EYCA has one-member organisation in every country/territory where it is represented; this member develops the youth card and provides young people access to discounts and benefits in the fields of mobility, accommodation, culture, services and products (more than 60,000 discounts are available). EYCA member organisations are NGOs and private foundations, as well as state and public institutions and social benefit enterprises. EYCA develops many other programmes such as internships, scholarships, education and mobility projects. It reaches all kinds of young people, not only organised people or students.


The Card can be a good tool to make sure that everybody that is arriving to a new country can integrate in the community. All the refugees get the European Youth Card for free, so they are like any other young person in that country and have access to the services. They also promote youth card with people at risk, like asylum seekers, and try to integrate them into the community through the card.

Responding to a question from the audience, Manel explained that according to the country, the system differs. For example, in Spain, the card is developed by regional autonomies. All the discounts can be found on the European youth card website but, for example, for Germany it is not yet well developed because it is a new member.



Tamara Gojkovic, Secretary General, Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YEU)

Created in 1991, Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YEU) works to promote peace, understanding and cooperation between young people of the world, in a spirit of respect for human rights. It uses non-formal education methods to increase tolerance and awareness



between young people from different countries, cultures and traditions. Using a global education dimension and intercultural learning activities, they promote a greater level of comprehension and active citizenship through the development of quality youth exchanges, seminars, conventions, meetings, study visits, training courses, and the production of non-formal education resources. Exchanging leads to understanding.

Emerging challenges like marginalisation or radicalisation need to be countered by mobility processes that help knowing each other, because exchanges lead to a better understanding of differences. They try to create space for that: meeting through youth exchanges to know each other better. By working at local level, they understand that it is very difficult to reach young people that never leave their hometown and only speak one language. One needs to convince them that they should be using mobility opportunities and to overcome their fear. YEU made a

simulation game in Greece consisting of having young people going through obstacles that migrants face. After this process, they felt more empathy towards those who came to their communities.

“Excuse me, is this hate yours?” is a one-year project where 28 young people from conflict or post-conflict countries met to speak about peace. It was difficult at the beginning, because people from Armenia and Azerbaijan or from Russia and Ukraine could not get along, but then they visited a Croatian city destroyed in 1991 and they realised what hate can do. At the end of the process, they combined their experiences in a theatre play about intercultural exchange and love.

The audience commented on the fact that many young people are losing patience and confidence: local activists really need support. It is important to reconnect with the local level, because this is where everything starts.

PANEL 2


YOUTH INFORMATION: ENGAGING MORE YOUNG PEOPLE IN EU POLICIES

Audrey Frith (EURODESK) stressed that more and more studies are available on the impact of learning mobility especially in terms of competence development and employability. But what we see, is that not all young people benefit from it. A clear obstacle relates to the lack of information as many are not aware of the various opportunities offered to them or are simply not interested. In our digital societies, of course, all the opportunities are online, available to anyone looking for it. But not all young people are considering mobility as an opportunity for them and do not see the benefit of it, some have never left their neighbourhood. If we want mobility to become the norm not the exception in order to improve the life prospects of any young person, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, we shall really assess the way we communicate around mobility and adapt a genuine European youth information strategy.

Gaffar Rampage, Communication Manager, Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

One of ESN main responsibilities is encouraging people to experience interaction with other cultures. In 2014, they came up with the project "Mov'in Europe" with the aim of promoting mobility. To attract young people, they spent a lot in communication campaigns and on sexy promotional materials, based on things that have a value. Information cannot be pushed to young people anymore. They are trying to create value. ESN organises fairs at universities, tells students about funding opportunities and programmes, and make sure students can meet ESN members and share their experiences. Almost over 200 fairs were organised all across Europe. Another way to reach out to young people is the project "Erasmus in Schools" where international students studying abroad visit local schools and give lessons about their country, culture and traditions to create cultural awareness among local students and fight stereotypes. A recent ESN survey, published in January 2017, found that mobility triggers mobility.





**Katarzyna Kurzeja, Youth Information Officer,
Letterkenny Youth Information Centre, Eurodesk
multiplier, Ireland**

The Letterkenny Youth Information Centre mainly operates at local level based on a face to face approach. They need to provide information making sure that it is understandable and adapted to the needs of the local area. The information given is not raw but it is adapted. In order to be able to outreach, the centre is part of different networks such as Eurodesk. She suggested to emphasise the role of the face to face element and information dissemination. Relationship-oriented support is the core of youth work in order to make sure that young people really understand what we are talking about.

**Celine Dawans, Eurodyssee Coordinator,
Assembly of European Regions**

Eurodyssee is a mobility programme that has been around for 30 years and represents 400 young people experiencing mobility. Eurodyssee a programme focusing on quality because the numbers are not so big as other European programmes but it is quite satisfactory for the regions and young people. The quality of the matching is essential, young people can get experience in a field that is relevant for them. They are in a win-win situation, because they meet the needs of the company, the region and the young person. They offer internships to young people with a degree (also non-university degree), that can last between 4 and 6 months in another European country, including a language course. The programme is managed by the region, bringing a lot of flexibility.

It is useful to channel the programme to the needs of the regions. The matching for instance differs from region to region. For example, in Catalonia they tried to diversify the companies that work with Eurodyssee, because Catalonia hosts multinational companies, public organisations, NGOs. In Puglia, they tried to diversify the target of young people benefiting from the programme. Umbria tries to fight social inclusion, so they target young people in rural areas, from minority backgrounds, all those might not be the first audience of people receiving mobility information. In France, Grenoble tries to diversify geographically, so it is not in one city but many local areas. There are different ways in which they are diversifying their approach.

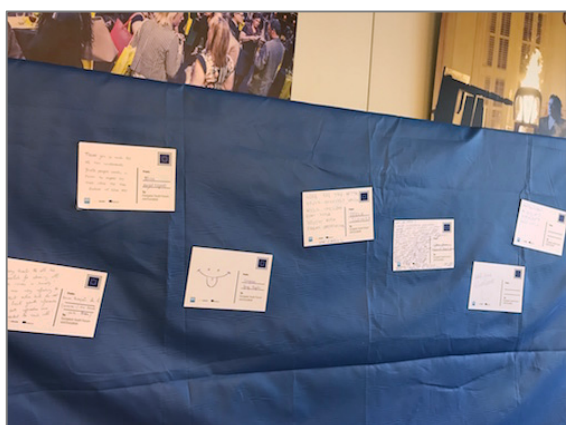
Answering to a question on the presence of Cyprus in the Eurodyssee programme, Céline explained that this reflects one of the main barriers of the programme: 30 participating regions are indeed not a lot. However, the work that started has been fruitful because Cyprus has joined the programme this year in January. Young people pushed and lobbied to have the programme in Cyprus: more people from other regions should also push for their region to join.

**Alicia Medina, Eurodyssee Trainee at Eurodesk
Brussels Link, Spain**

With a journalistic background, Alicia worked in Spain in an audio-visual company for 3 years, but she could not go further professionally so she decided to quit everything and search for an opportunity abroad. Most of the programmes found were targeting university students or up to 25 years old, and she was 26, but then a friend told her about the Eurodyssee programme, so

she signed up and after 3 weeks she was selected for a traineeship at Eurodesk Brussels Link in Brussels. According to her, the programme was very supportive as it provided her with accommodation and a grant; otherwise it would have been very difficult for her to live in Brussels. She stressed the importance of paid internships, all internships should be remunerated. The Eurodyssee programme helped her to change her career path.

In Spain, Alicia started a company when she was 25 years old with 2 partners, they were entrepreneurs expecting to receive a lot of help as there were many programmes boosting entrepreneurship. But none of them was tackling their main obstacle that was the tax system. Indeed, small entrepreneurs have to pay a minimum tax every month even if they do not earn money; this was not economically viable and very stressful for them. On the other side, she was well aware that if she was present at the seminar that was due to the public education system and the scholarship that had allowed her to go on a mobility and live such an experience.



Graeme Robertson, Business Manager, European Youth Portal, Unit for Youth, Volunteer, Solidarity and Traineeships Office, DG EAC, European Commission

The European Commission is one of the major cross-border funders of mobility for young people, millions of young people have taken advantage of Erasmus+, through youth exchanges and voluntary placements. The programme has evolved, now it is focusing on providing opportunities for young people with fewer opportunities. For many young people with fewer opportunities going for a one-year placement is not easy, so the European Commission is developing short-term placements (for example in the EVS). They can also go with a group of friends so they feel more comfortable. They are also working on virtual mobility: young people can access the exchange of culture and ideas without actually having to move physically.

In terms of recent policy developments, the EU has launched the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) which gives new opportunities to young people; the first young ESC has already been sent on a placement. The new EU strategy should come out in January 2019, this year is the year of listening with a set of consultations and speaking with stakeholders. But the national governments are the ones that ultimately need to agree because they are the ones that need to transform this strategy into regional and local level activities.

Answering a question regarding the lack of mobility in Europe and the administrative burdens related to it; Graeme answered that indeed social security aspects need to be harmonised. We are trying to tackle that and the EU Youth strategy should help in that respect.



PANEL 3

YOUTH INFORMATION: ENGAGING MORE YOUNG PEOPLE IN EU POLICIES

Una Clarke (European Youth Forum) open the discussion by stressing that as we can see from the decreasing participation rates in elections at all levels, young people are increasingly marginalised in traditional political processes, and do not feel represented in political institutions. At EU level, the Structured Dialogue aims to give a chance to young people to be directly involved into policy making. How to make sure young people are informed about such processes and are empowered to take an active role in shaping the future of Europe?

Allan Päll, General Secretary, European Youth Forum

Right now in the world, we have more than 500 million terabytes of written knowledge that is growing exponentially. Trying to grab the attention of young people is becoming more complex and we are dealing with a raise in populism and fake news, so it is very important to focus on people-to-people organisation and quality channels of communication. We thought that Internet was a very interesting tool to engage young people, but in the last years we have learnt all the dangers that have come with it as well, there are no simple solutions.

With this context of fake news, we do not have enough time to double check the source, so we have to focus on people-to-people interaction. We have to build quality channels, we are fighting for it. Young people voices are often marginalised. We need strong organisations of young people and real interactions. There is a lot of work to do so that youth organisation have the capacity to do that.

The main role of the media is to hold decision-makers accountable, but there are fewer and fewer papers that can invest in that investigative journalism. We have to include critical thinking in

the schools, but the trends go against that, focusing on standardised tests.

Answering a question from the audience, Allan commented that when it comes to diversity, we need to measure it and showcase it, but there are other challenges, trying to bring people to European conversation is very difficult. For example, in terms of disability, if you want to bring a group of young people to an event, they need interpretation, and sometimes we lack the resources to accommodate their needs.

Jacob Kornbeck, Policy officer, DG EAC, European Commission

The Structured dialogue is a unique tool to consult wide audiences, it is not just the regular European conferences. It is not enough that you are quick on your smartphone, you need media literacy skills to reach information, this is where youth information has a crucial role to play. In the Malta conference, an eye-opening moment was when the northern Europeans realised that they had been wrong on their assumptions, through an electronic system to distribute information. The Maltese youth information workers said that youngsters are interested and are prepared to travel to youth offices, because it is not only

technical information they need. It is important to continue to give resources to young people in person.

Answering a comment from the audience, Jacob stressed that organisations such as the European Youth Forum, Eurodesk and EYCA have been around for about 30 years and legacy plays a role. The media has to listen to established organisations.



Klaus Loeffler, Head of unit, European Youth Event, European Parliament

EYE2018 is the third edition of the European Youth Event for and by young people, will be back in 2018 from 1st to 2nd June in Strasbourg, France. Once again, the European Parliament will open its doors to more than 8,000 people aged

between 16 and 30 from any EU member State or another European country. They will have the unique opportunity to make their voices heard and to come up with innovative ideas for the future of Europe. Participants will get the chance to discuss them with political decision-makers and inspiring personalities on the European stage. EYE2018 will include a wide range of activities in English, French and German run under the motto "The plan is to fan this spark into a flame." (Hamilton, My Shot). EYE participants will be able to register as a group, with a minimum of 10 participants, from October to December 2017. Those who cannot make it to Strasbourg will still be able to debate the five main themes of the event online and take part in competitions on social media before and during the event.

Answering a question from the audience, Klaus stressed that there are formats like young people presenting their ideas to the parliament: it is a new way and we should go ahead with that. Young people are often frustration and we try to show them that we really want to listen to them.

Miriam Teuma, Chief Executive Officer, Agenzija Zghazagh, board member of ERYICA

We do not believe that one size fits all, because Europe is very diverse, you must test what works in your local context. Throughout these years, we have focused on numbers rather than on the dialogue itself. We need to focus on qualitative aspects rather than quantity. This is to be remembered when we are thinking of proposals for the EU Strategy. We have to come up with other methodologies, we have forgotten what dialogue is.