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UEAPME Position Paper on the Commission Communication on European Policies Concerning Youth

Introduction

In its communication “Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe – implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship” from 30 May 2005, the European Commission outlined its proposal for a youth dimension. This followed the adoption of the European Pact for Youth by the Spring 2005 European Council, as part of the revised Lisbon Strategy. In particular the Commission communication:

- sets out how the Pact can be put into operation,
- defines the priorities of the Youth OMC,
- addresses a youth dimension in other policies,
- lists relevant European programmes and
- examines how to further involve young people in the political process.

General Comments

UEAPME agrees with the Commission's statement that “integrating young people in society and working life, and making better use of their potential, are essential for ensuring a return to sustained and sustainable growth in Europe.”

The European organization for crafts, small and medium size enterprises welcomes the Commission's approach not to start a process of its own, but to integrate the youth dimension into the existing guidelines, programs and report activities, and to link it to an intergenerational approach. This was already clearly stated by the European Social Partners in their Contribution from of 22.3.2005, where they recalled past, current and future activities concerning young people, such as a joint declaration and/or awareness raising campaigns with a view to promoting young people's interest in science and technology as part of their joint work programme¹. Initiatives concerning young people are especially important in the context of the demographic change. However, as UEAPME has expressed earlier, these must be set in the framework of an intergenerational and life cycle approach.²

More Generally, UEAPME would have liked to see more analysis from the Commission on this issue, because so far there is a general lack of detailed analysis of the situation of young people. Not all young people are in the same situation, and this variety of situations should have been better highlighted.

¹ http://www.ueapme.com/docs/joint_position/Joint%20PP%202005/Youth_Joint_En.doc

² http://www.ueapme.com/docs/pos_papers/2005/DemographicChange.doc

Specific Comments

Measures for the employment, integration and social advancement of young people

UEAPME supports the labour market and education related goals of the youth pact. Additionally, it has to be pointed out that companies are more eager to integrate young people into the labour force if schools better equip young people with basic or advanced skills and know how adapted to the labour market needs.

The Guideline on the promotion of a life-cycle approach to work (which includes, inter alia a renewed endeavour to build employment pathways for young people and reducing youth unemployment, as well as resolute action to eliminate gender gaps in employment, unemployment and pay) is particularly important. Therefore, building employment pathways needs to correspond with attractive education and training offers for young people. An apprenticeship is a future career choice to be made and therefore has to be open to career development.

Measures for education, training and mobility

Europe's craft, small and medium size enterprises welcome the inclusion of education and training into the guidelines of the youth strategy, as this recognizes the link between training and employment. We deem it important that the needs of the labour market are well reflected in the education schemes and curricula. An additional study on how to make work more attractive to young people, especially in SMEs and Skilled Crafts would be useful.

However, we are concerned that the idea of having a specific Youthpass for Young people in addition to the Europass will only make things less transparent, add more administrative burdens and complicate the whole matter even more instead of bringing any added value. If there is currently the need to highlight specific youth related aspects, this should better be done, by making sure that the Europass considers all aspects of work and is suited for young people as well. More consistency is needed, and not another new tool.

The aim of the Commission to improve foreign language competence, in order for more young Europeans taking part in the knowledge society and in European and global mobility, is recognized and welcomed. However young people are not a homogenous group, therefore it has to be made sure that all types of young people will benefit from this and not only those who speak already various languages as part of their education. The knowledge of languages is crucial to increase mobility of young workers, however, often those who would need it most, namely apprentices and young people in their initial vocational education and training, and other young people not part of the higher educational route are often left out. Furthermore, although we recognize the importance of science and technology for economic activity, it is also important to focus on traditional crafts professions, because especially in these professions that there is a huge demand for young people to work and a low uptake of these offers.

Reducing the number of school leavers is an important goal. Additionally, it is also important to reduce the number of drop-outs of VET programs, because a completed

initial VET qualification (ie. Apprenticeship with a skilled worker's examination) is the fundamental basis for employment and for further training and life long learning.

UEAPME favours the aim to improve access to vocational education and training, including apprenticeships and entrepreneurship training and is looking forward to the planned Commission's communication on entrepreneurship education and learning. Additionally it is important to increase the attractiveness of vocational training (especially in Skilled Crafts), not only the access to training places. Furthermore, there should be a strong focus on practical-orientated training, tailored to business needs.

UEAPME support initiatives to increase the mobility of workers and therefore strongly welcomes the European Year of mobility for workers and the foreseen special initiatives for young people entering the job market as part of it. The link between mobility and education and training is crucial. The new European "Integrated Program for lifelong learning" as well as other mobility programs and initiatives should set a strong priority on promoting vocational education and training and mobility in VET as well as vocational orientation. In this context the pilot project for an Erasmus style programme for apprentices in order to increase the mobility of young people in their initial vocational education and training period is an important step and should be fully integrated into the Commission's lifelong learning Programme.

The initiative of the Commission to adapt its information portals EURES (European job mobility portal), and PLOTEUS (portal for learning opportunities in Europe) in order to take better account of the needs of young people is welcomed. These European information portals should be complementing national employment services in the Member States, which should continue with their efforts towards unemployed young people.

Furthermore, UEAPME calls upon the European Commission to better integrate specific actions for young people in employment, education and training, into the next programming of the structural funds.

Measures for reconciliation of family life and working life

Reconciling work and family life is a joint challenge for public authorities, social partners and enterprises, and can only reach a satisfying solution if all work together. The European Social Partner organisations have concluded a Framework of Actions on Gender Equality, where the issue of reconciling work and family life is one of the main priorities.³

Including the Youth dimension in other policies

UEAPME supports the approach of streamlining the youth issue into all social and employment areas and welcomes EU initiatives such as in non-discrimination campaign and health issues, and other planned initiatives in this area, which take the youth dimension into account.

³ http://www.ueapme.com/docs/joint_position/Joint%20PP%202005/GenderEquality_Joint_En.doc

Conclusion

UEAPME generally welcomes the Commission's communication on European Policies concerning Youth. We support the Commission's aim for an integrated policy approach to young people, which has to be in line with the Lisbon strategy. An integrated approach is the right way of dealing with this issue. UEAPME welcomes the Open Method of coordination for Youth, and sees it as a suitable way of dealing with this issue at European level.

We are hoping that the Commission will take the needs of all types of young people into account, in particular young people coming from a vocational education and training background, when carrying out its initiatives. European crafts, small and medium size enterprises recognize the value of streamlining the youth dimension and including it in other relevant policies.

Brussels, 5 October 2005