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"Analysis of Member States' and acceding countries' replies to the
Commission questionnaire on a greater understanding and knowledge of
youth"

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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING PAPER

**Analysis of Member States' and acceding countries' replies to the Commission
questionnaire on a greater understanding and knowledge of youth**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Procedural and political background

The Commission White Paper “A new impetus for European Youth”, adopted in November 2001¹, identifies several priorities for action in the youth field amongst which participation, information, voluntary activities and a better knowledge and understanding of youth. In its Resolution of 27 June 2002 setting a new framework for co-operation in the youth field², the Council called for an open method of co-ordination to be applied to the above priorities and gave mandate to the Commission to draft common objectives for those priorities on the basis of reports on the situation in all Member States.

In accordance with its mandate, and on the basis of questionnaires sent to the Member States and candidate countries, the Commission first drafted reports and proposed common objectives for participation by and information of young people. These common objectives were presented to the Council on 11 April 2003. In its Resolution of 25 November 2003³, the Council adopted those proposed common objectives.

Pursuant to this same mandate, and as it has done for participation and information, the Commission drew up questionnaires in consultation with the Member States and the European Youth Forum for the two following priorities i.e. voluntary activities and a greater knowledge and understanding of youth. These questionnaires were sent to the Member States, acceding countries and candidate countries. Both questionnaires were drawn up using the same approach as for the questionnaires on participation and information, with the same general structure, thereby first gathering basic information, then outlining the current policy with examples of best practice, and, finally, describing the expectations at European level. Countries were also asked to specify the channels used nationally for consulting young people.

While the way in which the questions were handled differed from one country to another depending on the national situation of youth policy and activities in favour of a better knowledge and understanding of young people, the replies in terms of information supplied, ideas, proposals and examples of good practice put forward provided a fertile and interesting basis for reflection.

The purpose of this report is to present a synoptic analysis of the replies given by the Member States and the acceding countries to the questionnaire on a greater understanding and knowledge of youth, which will serve as a basis for proposing common objectives in that area for adoption by the Council.

¹ COM (2001) 681 final

² OJ C 168, 13.07.2002

³ Council Resolution of 25 November 2003 on common objectives for participation and information for young people, OJ C295, p. 9.

For the purpose of this analysis, the present report purports to describe, as a first step, the situation with regards to a greater knowledge and understanding of young people such as acknowledged by the Member States and acceding countries. To this end this analysis report will first of all depict the extent of the knowledge existing in the youth field in the different Member States and acceding countries, also mentioning the way in which such knowledge is consolidated and disseminated. It will then go on describing how such knowledge is organised, supported and further developed in the Member States and acceding countries.

After concluding on this first point, this analysis report will describe the challenges identified by the Member States and acceding countries for a better knowledge and understanding of youth, at national as well as at European level, giving examples of good practices for each of the identified challenges.

1.2. Consultation of young people and other actors for the purposes of the questionnaire

The Member States and acceding countries used various channels for consulting young people and other actors when preparing their replies to the questionnaire on a greater knowledge and understanding of youth.

In some cases, this was done formally by addressing the questionnaire to various youth representative organisations (National Youth Councils, Regional Youth Councils, Youth Parliaments, etc.) as well as to researchers and/or research institutes.

In others, the authorities responsible for youth affairs set up ad hoc national consultation bodies bringing together representatives of youth organisations with young people who were not members of organisations.

In certain countries, specific consultation events were organised such as conferences, seminars, discussion forums, etc.

Specific Internet sites were sometimes also set up to provide young people with information on the questionnaire and to ask their opinion, especially those who were not members of organisations.

In most cases consultation did not only involve young people but also other government departments with a link to the youth field, regional and local administrative bodies responsible for youth, experts, researchers, research bodies (Institutes, Universities, foundations...), as well as other actors working in the field (youth centres, town councils, youth services, national agencies for the YOUTH programme, etc.).

In some countries however, National Youth Councils reported that consultation took place in an unsatisfying way or did not take place at all.

1.3. Basic considerations

- A knowledge area is called for *generally* in current political debates.

The sustainability of policies is reliant on their ability to respond to the realities they wish to address. Only in this way will policies be adhered to, improve the lives of citizens and create greater confidence in the results and in the institutions that deliver them.

In order to meet the needs and expectations of citizens, EU and national policies are to be based on the best available knowledge and understanding of such needs and expectations.

A greater knowledge and understanding can be gained through developing a culture of consultation and dialogue. This in itself can trigger active citizenship and involve all actors in helping shape society.

This knowledge base can also be achieved and deepened through efficient qualitative and quantitative research activities and the convergence of their results at national and EU level. Research moreover offers the capacity to bring together the complexities and differential experiences in particular related to those Europeans who are hard to reach through conventional consultation and dialogue. It further affords an opportunity for reflection on current trends and future needs, thereby providing valuable elements for prospective knowledge based policies.

Sustainable policies, more accurately aimed at the realities of peoples lives through a greater knowledge and understanding of their needs and expectations, will in turn enable citizens to develop their full potential and to contribute in making Europe “the world’s most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy”⁴. Policy based on evidence will necessarily also contribute to the development of greater social cohesion as well as of mutual understanding and trust.

A knowledge based approach to policy making is particularly relevant and useful when dealing with rapidly evolving realities, such as the situation of younger generations in Europe.

- A knowledge area is called for more *specifically* within the youth field

Young people are not a static group and their desires, expectations and values have evolved constantly in the past years. Though fewer in number, young people are now staying “young” longer. The proportion of young people in the European population has been in decline since the end of the 1960’s and young people are entering adulthood later and later. Their demands and means of expression have also evolved. Initiatives and career paths have become increasingly individualised.

And yet, their desire to change the world is still as pressing as ever. They simply do not necessarily opt for the traditional methods of participation. Young people are somewhat mistrustful of the institutions and of traditional democratic mechanisms. Young people and politicians have lost touch with each other and

⁴ Presidency Conclusions, Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 May 2000.

it is high time to restore dialogue if the youth are to play their full role as responsible and committed citizens.

Against this background, coherent and qualitative knowledge, based on a dialogue between the various relevant actors in the field, is essential for timely, efficient and sustainable youth policies for the European Union.

It is all the more essential at a stage where Member States have adopted common objectives on themes such as participation and information of young people and are designing implementation policies. Such a knowledge approach will also become indispensable for further priorities identified within the White Paper on Youth on which Member States have already started to debate as well as for themes Member States will identify as priorities in the future. In that sense, developing a better knowledge and understanding of youth supports the new co-operation framework set up as a follow up of the White Paper on youth.

Existing partnerships and instruments developed at European level shall of course support and supplement the efforts undertaken by the Member States at national level. Such combined efforts will enable to better exploit national as well as European programmes, not only because they may directly serve as tools for gaining a greater knowledge and understanding of young people, but also because effective and timely policies in the youth field will lead to concrete actions by or in favour of young people, likely to be supported by national and/or European programmes.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION BY THE MEMBER STATES AND ACCEDING COUNTRIES

2.1. A knowledge area in the youth field

2.1.1. Existing knowledge on specific themes which are of interest to the youth field

- A big diversity of studies are and have been undertaken in most Member States and acceding countries, in particular in those where wide responsibility for youth policies and youth research is granted at regional or even at local level. These studies span various academic disciplines - such as sociology, political science, anthropology, psychology, educational research, law, media, ethics & values, economics and health - and thus cover a large spectrum of policy domains.

In some countries such studies are often not specifically focussed on youth even if they include information of interest to the youth field. A number of countries however conduct studies specifically aimed at gaining a better knowledge of young people.

The more specific themes on which studies and a deeper reflection have been undertaken in the youth field are the following: participation & disengagement, information, voluntary activities, autonomy, education & training, transition from education to employment, life long learning, fight against discrimination, social inclusion, marginalisation, employment, health, living conditions & well

fare, becoming an adult & linked transitions, crime, violence, new media, culture, environment, leisure & free time.

When it comes to themes on which Member States and acceding countries would further wish to concentrate in the future, the following themes are mostly listed: participation, information, voluntary activities, autonomy, fight against discrimination, social inclusion, employment, environment, health, non-formal learning, education & training, leisure time activities, the link between generations, life conditions and globalisation. There was generally a strong strain towards themes that consider young people as a resource and not as a problem.

- Official statistics also exist in most Member States and acceding countries. Statistical studies are mainly undertaken by public bodies on a regular and ongoing basis. For some countries, such statistics prove useful for formulating, applying, monitoring and evaluating youth policies and/or programmes. In a big majority of countries, such statistics are however rarely focussed on young people specifically. Sometimes age brackets are created but with no further specific analysis. A few countries that have set-up specific national institutes for youth have developed specific statistical data on young people.

- Most Member States recognise that this very big diversity of information is a rather positive element as such since it reflects the independence and productivity of research. They however acknowledge that such dispersion makes it difficult to get a constant and precise overview of existing knowledge on youth. There might be gaps that should be identified and filled and overlaps that should disappear. Updating is also a difficult exercise with such a profusion of multi-thematic studies.

Dispersion of studies is less striking in some very small countries where visibility of existing knowledge is rather high due to the few existing actors in the field. However such countries still call for more exchanges and visibility of what exists in other countries.

A number of countries amongst the acceding States regret the absence of long term programmes or approach, which makes the whole knowledge area of young people dependant on sporadic financing of their Ministries responsible for youth.

Even countries with a longer tradition of organised youth research call for more co-ordination. However even if there is a demand to give greater direction to youth research, flexibility is mainly valued as a positive aspect because it generates a multiplicity and diversity of subjects.

2.1.2. *Existing means for compilation and dissemination of knowledge*

- Certain countries, mainly for economic reasons, publish some information on young people but not in a systematic or structured way. They have no reports or other means of compilation specific to the youth field.

Many countries however systematically publish the outcome of the studies undertaken in the youth field. Some countries even publish regular series on certain topics of interest to the youth field, such as the Spanish quarterly youth survey for example. Others publish more general periodic reports on youth research, i.e. the Dutch National Youth Monitor. Additionally youth related reports in other policy domains are regularly published, in particular in the field of educational research, labour market, social inclusion.

A few countries, like Germany, are compelled to submit reports on young people as part of their national procedures, such as for parliamentary sessions for example.

Many countries firmly express their intention to summarise existing research results, seminar reports, conference papers etc... even though they have not managed to do so to date. Even countries that have largely developed their activities in the youth field and set-up means for disseminating knowledge on youth insist on the fact that dissemination could be improved

- Certain countries use such tools as the internet for publication and have developed portals specific to youth research.

The same countries also feed their research results into databases. Such databases are mostly common to all social sciences. Only a minority of countries have developed specific youth databases but they stress the difficulty of keeping such data updated. Some countries are currently taking steps to set up such databases specific to the youth field.

- Most Member States also underline that the available knowledge is often costly, which renders it unaffordable to certain actors.

They further stress that such knowledge is not always presented in a user-friendly way which makes access to such knowledge difficult, especially for young people with disabilities.

2.2. Organisation, support and further development of knowledge in the youth field

2.2.1. Existing structures and main actors for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth

- There is a range of structures and actors in the Member States and acceding countries that contribute to a better understanding and knowledge of youth. This is often considered as a positive aspect by the Member States since it favours independence of research structures.

In most countries, the following categories can be evidenced:

- Universities: scientific research

In a large majority of Member States research in the youth field is undertaken within Universities or other academic institutions or centres. In a few small

countries, Universities are even the unique source of information in the youth field.

A minority of countries with a long tradition of youth research have developed specific Youth Research Societies which promote interdisciplinary youth research. In Finland for example, a youth research Society was founded in 1987 which organises national and international seminars, keeps a register on youth researchers, publishes the Finnish Journal of Youth Research as well as a series of other publications in the field. It currently conducts its own research activities through the Youth Research Network.

It is generally very difficult to take the census of the exact number of researchers working in the youth field. Even in countries with a long experience of youth research, there is no form of registration of youth researchers. Moreover, not all countries have specialist researchers for youth. In most countries, depending on the themes of the study, this or the other department/expert will indeed intervene. Here again competencies span from psychology to sociology not forgetting other departments such as economy, education, medical science, criminology.

- Public and semi-public bodies: policy oriented research

National or local authorities responsible for youth sometimes undertake studies or draft reports.

Certain countries, through their National Youth Councils, have created permanent “Youth Observatories” as a tool for analysing social inequalities and for encouraging debate and reflection. In a similar way, some other countries have set up study centres on the situation of youth which develop research together with the Ministry responsible for Youth affairs (e.g. the Spanish INJUVE, the Dutch Interdepartmental Commission on Youth Studies –CJP-, the Luxembourg Centre d’études sur la situation des jeunes en Europe, the German Jugendinstitut; the Cypriot Research Centre for children and young people, the Danish Centre for Youth Research, the Austrian Institut für Jugendforschung). Their task is amongst others to gain on going knowledge of what affects young people and to draw up surveys, studies and reports on youth and ensure their dissemination in order to facilitate the formulation of youth policy.

- Other organisations active in the youth field

In some large countries, studies are also undertaken in the voluntary sector.

In most countries, NGO’s, National Youth Councils, youth organisations and voluntary associations have however rather developed extensive field knowledge of youth. This source of knowledge is considered by the Member States and acceding countries as highly valuable because of its practical nature. They stress that such field knowledge should be further developed and better disseminated.

- Other bodies not specific to the youth field:

Private or public companies outside the youth field also undertake research for their own purposes (e.g. radio, television, transport, housing or employment companies). For commercial reasons, some private companies also finance market surveys. The dissemination of such information is however often very poor except in some countries where multinationals sometimes finance and publish regular studies on opinions, habits, and values of young people (e.g. the Shell-Study published in Germany since 1952).

– Institutions for statistics

Official statistic offices and planning agencies exist in most countries but they are mostly not specialised in youth issues.

- Involvement of young people and young researchers

Generally, young people are involved more in qualitative than in quantitative research. University post graduate or PhD students are the most involved in research.

In some countries, young people participate through NGO's and youth Council activities and debates and take part in special activities inviting them to participate in the implementation of strategic programmes.

In certain countries a methodology has been developed to involve young people directly in the research process. In the Netherlands for example, an Internet panel administered by young people has been established to that end.

A little number of countries however indicate that there is no real involvement of young people except at European and international level.

Most countries reckon that involvement of young researchers is a priority.

- As for funding, research in the youth field is in most countries lead through public funding in favour of universities, foundations or other research bodies, be it at national, regional or local level. In many countries there is however no specific funding for youth research. The budget for such activities is often shared with the whole social science field.

In certain cases, NGO's also grant funding for research, as well as other foundations, charities and non profit organisations. In some countries research can also be privately funded by multinationals and/or banks.

2.2.2. *Legal bases for structures and activities leading to a better understanding and knowledge of youth*

- Legal bases for promoting activities for a better knowledge and understanding of youth

In most countries there are no legal bases for promoting structures and activities leading to a better understanding and knowledge of youth. When legal rules

exist, they are usually not specifically designed for the youth field, but apply to scientific research as a whole.

A few countries have however developed specific legal basis for youth policy which include sections on funding for specific youth support centres, institutes and youth councils. Such texts sometimes also expressly provide for the drawing up, publication and dissemination of surveys, studies and reports on youth.

A number of countries have drafted policy documents which underline the importance of research in the youth field. Such documents have however no power of law and are sometimes ignored.

Certain acceding countries like Lithuania mentioned that they were in the process of drafting legislation on Youth Policy to be adopted in the near future. Such legislation would address the issue of a better knowledge and understanding of young people.

- Guidelines for accompanying activities leading to a better knowledge and understanding of youth

In most Member States and acceding countries there are no guidelines whatsoever for accompanying activities leading to a better knowledge and understanding of youth.

In some countries, researchers or research bodies are members of research societies and adhere to their guidelines on research. On the governmental level, some countries indicated that various provisions and memoranda existed that applied to specific departments involved in youth policy.

A number of Universities have also set up ethics committees which regulate research activities.

2.2.3. *Existing methods to ensure quality and comparability of knowledge in the youth field*

- Methodologies to gain a greater knowledge and understanding of youth

The range and diversity of research methods are impressive. They encompass biographical and ethnographical methods, qualitative case studies and quantitative surveys, data collection, opinion polls, comparative intercultural approaches, secondary analysis of data and replicate studies.

Longitudinal research is appreciated by most Member States and acceding countries since it gives a better picture of the evolution of trends and values. Consulted countries nevertheless stress that such research could be further developed. A few countries do however not rely on longitudinal research and have developed only immediate and short term research.

Some countries distinguish different approaches. For example “youth seen from the adult’s point of view” under which research is carried out from the perspective of problems encountered by youth supervisors, youth workers and

politicians amongst others. Under that approach, youth research is often inspired by a socially committed and policy oriented demand e.g. a demand for prevention, a demand for the social integration of young people in society etc.. Opinion polls are frequently used to that end.

Another approach considers youth as a subject of research which entails a sociological, participatory, research approach. Young people express their needs, expectations in forums, consultative commissions, discussion methodologies, chat rooms or through questionnaires. It entails a commitment to recognising the competence of young people to act.

- Common understanding

Member States stress the difficulty of developing common definitions and understanding of concepts and themes relevant to the youth field amongst the various actors in the field. Even within the same country, definitions vary according to the departments concerned (e.g. sociology or psychology department). Too often a totally different vocabulary is used.

When it comes to defining “youth”, a distinction between children and young people is often made but not always. Even in the same country, “youth” is not systematically related to the same age bracket.

- Quality of knowledge

A number of methods are used to ensure quality of research. They vary according to the approach adopted.

Many countries use steering groups, public and scientific debates or peer reviews to monitor research and guarantee its quality. Others pay special attention to the selection of the body involved in research and accompany such selection by specific requirements (reliability, credibility, previous relevant experience...) and assessment by a supportive team.

Often however such methods are not specific to the youth field. The United Kingdom has for example set up specialist professional analytical and research teams within government for social research to define guidelines etc.. http://www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/SSMU.asp. In the same way, France has set up a “laboratoire d’Analyse Secondaire et de Methodes Appliquées à la Sociologie”.

In other consulted countries, due to the fragmented character of research in the youth field, every research institute is currently responsible for the quality of its own research.

Some countries admit the absence of methods and the poor quality of research due to lack of funding. Even countries with a long history of quality research stress that there are always challenges around quality.

It is interesting to note that a few countries have regretted the media driven nature of information and its lack of independence.

- Methods for evaluating results

Some Member States have developed indicators for the wider social field or have hired professional analysts within their government. Such indicators are however seldom youth specific and analysts are often trained in the wider social science field. Small Member States stress that limited numbers in their countries do not allow them to develop representative indicators.

2.2.4. *Interaction between the various actors in the youth field for a greater knowledge and understanding of youth*

- Dialogue, exchange and networks between the various actors in the youth field

As mentioned under point 2.2.1., some countries have established specific institutes whose task is to oversee the youth knowledge area and to inform governments on ongoing activities and outcomes. This is however rather a one way governmental information process than a two ways dialogue.

Other consulted countries underline that they have organised, on a temporary bases, extensive dialogue in the form of working groups for precise purposes, e.g. when designing national Policy Programmes. This enabled them to make better use of the potential expertise of field workers and to pass it on to policy makers when mapping out policies for a particular period.

Some countries have however developed many permanent networks, such as networks between universities, groups of researchers and experts or government departments. Such networks are however not always youth related and even when they are, they seldom bring together various actors in the field.

A minority of countries have however developed youth specific networks linking representatives of all major stakeholders in the youth field. A few of these countries, such as Finland, have even developed a nationally co-ordinated network between various actors in the youth field and call for connecting such a network to its equivalent in other countries. Such specific youth research networks sometimes also exist on the regional level e.g. between certain Nordic countries.

Most countries also organise dialogue between researchers and public administration through conferences, seminars and workshops.

Consulted countries generally underline that visibility of existing networks as well as communication and dialogue between various actors in the youth field could be improved.

A minority of countries even indicate that policy makers pay limited attention to research findings beyond that which has been commissioned directly by government and that youth researchers have been ineffective and sometimes unwilling, to communicate their findings to policy makers in a meaningful and helpful way.

- Interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach

Some countries underline the lack of contacts and communication between different academic and/or policy departments. This entails poor coordination between the various current research projects and research results.

Some countries like Spain have however set-up ongoing inter-ministerial research co-ordination activities or conduct trans-sectoral “X-rays” of youth. Germany has likewise set up on-going inter-ministerial co-ordination of research activities as well as a biannual information exchange system between national and regional levels (“länder”) on youth subjects, including youth research.

Others have good inter-university and intra-university department networks, each department having its own network circuit. However even countries with a long research and interdepartmental co-operation tradition indicate that different departments are likely to tackle issues differently and that there is scope to further develop national co-ordination of activities between various fields of research for a better understanding of youth.

2.3. Conclusion

Most Member States and acceding countries have stressed the scattered nature of information concerning youth, acknowledging the sometimes poor understanding decision makers have of young people. They also highlighted the lack of qualitative and quantitative methods specific to the youth field and underlined that co-ordination and dialogue between the various actors in the field could be improved.

They acknowledge that, as a consequence, the available knowledge on young people is often not in phase with the concrete needs of policy makers, actors in the youth field and young people themselves.

3. CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY THE MEMBER STATES AND ACCEDING COUNTRIES

3.1. Overall goal

As a result of the above acknowledgements, Member States generally recognise that for effective, timely and sustainable policy making in the youth field, developing a coherent and qualitative knowledge of young people based on exchange, dialogue and networks between all relevant stakeholders in the field is of paramount importance. They recognise that this should be done using channels at all appropriate levels – i.e. also at local and regional level – ensuring however that coherence and visibility of knowledge at national level is maintained.

To achieve this overall goal Member States and acceding countries have generally highlighted the following challenges, entailing action not only at national but also at European level:

3.2. Challenges for achieving the overall goal

3.2.1. *Coherent and updated knowledge in priority areas of the youth field and access to such knowledge*

Key Points:

- Member States and acceding countries generally call for the creation of a coherent knowledge area in the youth field.
- They have quoted participation, information and voluntary activities as being priorities specific to the youth field on which they first wish to concentrate
- They have additionally proposed autonomy, non-formal learning, fight against discrimination, education & training, employment, transition from education to employment, social inclusion and health as being further themes on which they would like to deepen their knowledge
- Member States also recognise that knowledge on such themes must be supplemented, updated and made accessible.
- Instruments existing or being developed at European level should be exploited to supplement the efforts undertaken by the Member States.

- Proposed actions at national level

Member States and acceding countries generally call for the creation of a coherent area of knowledge in the youth field to fight dispersion and waste of resources, fill gaps, avoid overlaps and duplication and ensure availability of updated information. They recognise that such knowledge would help them in their efforts to design timely, efficient and sustainable policies, geared to young peoples' needs and expectations, and adapted to changes in trends and values. To that end, such knowledge must however encompass the different realities and situations of young people.

Member States and acceding countries however admit that it is neither workable nor desirable to try to cover all potential knowledge areas in the youth field but that stress should first be laid on themes currently considered by Member States and acceding countries as directly relevant for youth work and policy making in the youth field.

A majority of Members States have quoted participation, information and voluntary activities as being priorities specific to the youth field on which they wish to further concentrate since they have undertaken to develop policies in

these areas when adopting the open method of co-ordination in the youth field on 27 June 2002⁵.

A number of countries have already undertaken quite some research work and studies on these themes and reckon that gaps might eventually not be too numerous.

Member States and acceding countries have additionally proposed autonomy, non-formal learning, fight against discrimination, education & training, employment, transition from education to employment, social inclusion, Europeanization in a more global world and health as being further themes on which they have also started discussions and on which they would like to deepen their knowledge. Some of these themes are not specific to the youth field. They constitute more horizontal priorities, common to other policies, but which are of direct relevance to the youth field.

Certain acceding countries have also identified the improvement of living conditions of young people, the creation of equal opportunities and the analysis of lifestyles as major priorities.

Some consulted countries call for national research programmes specific to the youth field to be established, expressly providing for studies on determined themes to be undertaken within a certain period of time. Even if they agree that research programmes constitute valuable tools for a better knowledge and understanding of youth, some other countries insist on the fact that such programmes ought to be flexible in order to adapt to new political priorities emerging through evolution of trends, values and needs. In their opinion, the choice of themes must allow for some adaptations to be made.

The fact that regional and local needs and aspects have to be covered by activities leading to a greater knowledge and understanding of youth is frequently underlined even if it is also recognised that this makes it more difficult to get a comprehensive overview on ongoing actions.

Member States and acceding countries further stress that besides identifying knowledge on certain specific themes, corresponding research bodies or experts more specifically dealing with those themes need to be identified. In their opinion, this would - amongst other advantages - facilitate networking.

Identifying existing knowledge on priority themes is only a first step. In order for such knowledge to be coherent, it is necessary to determine where the gaps lie and how they can be filled using all available sources.

To this end, all actors in the field - not forgetting NGO's, youth associations and young people that do not belong to any structure and/or that are disadvantaged - are to be considered as a source of knowledge that ought to be exploited. A highly valuable component of youth related knowledge is indeed the practical

⁵ Council Resolution of 27 June 2002, regarding the framework of European co-operation in the youth field, OJ C 168, p.2.

knowledge achieved through field work. Member States also stress that knowledge must be taken into account at all levels i.e. including the local and regional levels.

Member States all agree that such supplemented knowledge shall then have to be regularly updated in the most cost-effective way and made easily accessible and at low cost. To this end, compilation of knowledge must be undertaken and disseminated in the largest possible way through paper and electronic means.

Most Member States and acceding countries deem it essential to develop national databases, Internet platforms as well as publish regular reports, bulletins and analysis on studies specific to the youth field. This is to their opinion all the more important in certain countries where research results are not systematically published.

They further stress the importance of structuring data when compiling it, for example underlining local and regional aspects. Compilation and structure will give a holistic perspective of the situation of young people and therefore enable a better understanding and knowledge of their needs and expectations.

Some countries have stressed the importance for published information not being pre-analysed for administrative purposes for example, and have insisted on the fact that all studies should be made available in their original form to all interested parties.

A majority of Member States and acceding countries finally insist on the importance for the published information to be “user-friendly” i.e. likely to be understood by all actors in the field and especially by disadvantaged young people.

- Good practices

There are a variety of good practices in the Member States and in the acceding countries for developing, compiling and disseminating knowledge in the youth field.

As for paper and IT compilation:

- Some Member States like Finland have developed specific Youth Research Journals and databases.
- In the same way, many countries publish regular reports on youth such as for example the quarterly youth survey published in Spain since 2001, which aims to collect information on young peoples’ opinions and attitudes.
- Sweden has established a Centre for Child and Youth Research and regularly publishes research reports about youth. e.g. “locus” journal.
- Malta published a National Report on Youth Policy in 2003

- The Netherlands has a specific National Youth Monitor, which provides a regular overview of the state of the art concerning youth in the Netherlands, with regard to certain themes. An overview of youth policy in these areas is currently in development
- In Scotland, the Scottish Youth Council for voluntary organisations is establishing a database which will not only list available research but also list organisations that have researchers as part of their core staff.
- Estonia is, since 2003, developing a project called “Youth in Estonia” which aims at gathering relevant statistical data and information about young people and organizing them in a website

As for specific youth research structures:

- Luxembourg, has set-up a specific Youth Research Centre called The “Centre d’Etudes sur la situation des jeunes en Europe” (CESIJE) which undertakes research within a precise framework developed in co-operation with the Ministry of family/Youth. The CESIJE is networked with academic institutions, which will form the future University of Luxembourg.
- Belgium has set-up a similar Youth Research Platform - JOP - which develops initiatives such as the creation of a bibliographic database and the drawing-up of regular synthesis of existing research.
- Germany has set up a specific internet portal for a better knowledge and understanding of youth: www.jugendforschung.de .
- Slovenia is planning to establish a research and documentation centre on youth research.
- The Czech Republic is also setting up a research centre within the Child and Youth Institute aiming at developing a national register of research on young people.
- Slovakia is planning to set-up a National Youth Institute which will be carrying out representative research in the youth field.
- The Danish Centre for Youth Research is a Danish research structure specific to the youth field. The centre is independent and based on an association with members coming from central institutions (among them six ministries), organizations (among them the Danish Youth Council) and enterprises in Denmark, which thus play a part in ensuring that research is in contact with environments. Members take part in prioritising the research activities, discuss new initiatives and are involved in a number of arrangements that illustrate the situation and problem of young people.

– Other examples are the Youth Board of Cyprus, the Austrian Institute for Youth Research, the National Youth Institute in Hungary and the Estonian Youth Institute (www.eni.ee).

- Member States' expectations at European level

Since the moment “youth” became an area of reflection for policy makers, Member States have expressed their desire to have access to regularly updated data on young people and their needs, common trends in youth policy at European level, and possible strategic options.

Some countries go further and call for the creation of a European Research Programme in the youth field defining common thematic priorities and key areas in the youth field. In their opinion, a European study and research programme, linked to national strategies and activities, should be created in order to monitor the application of the open method of co-ordination in all its thematic priorities.

Other countries however deem that due to the various socio-cultural contexts within Member States, research themes are best identified at the local and national level. They rather call for consolidation and dissemination of already existing and ongoing research and deny the need for a comprehensive European programme at this stage.

They however acknowledge that some themes such as participation, information and voluntary activities constitute a hard core on which co-operation at European level is already well advanced within the Open Method of Co-ordination. They thus recognize that it would make sense for Member States to further concentrate on developing a better knowledge and understanding of youth on these themes in order to help them design effective, timely and sustainable policies. In that sense the better knowledge and understanding of young people priority builds on the existing and fully supports the Open Method of co-ordination.

As for the other themes identified by a vast majority of Member States as being of common importance, most Member States are willing to agree that their relevance should be discussed between the various stakeholders in the field i.e. researchers or research bodies, policy makers, youth representatives, youth workers/organisations and young people themselves, meeting at European level.

Besides dealing with the issue of the relevance of a European Research Programme in the youth field, many Member States have called for a better use to be made of instruments existing at European level such as Eurobarometer surveys for example, stressing that such studies ought to be more regular. They also indicated that Eurostat data should be better exploited as well as the existing and the future research framework programme. In that respect, they suggested that the results of research undertaken under the 7th thematic research priority “Citizens and Governance in a knowledge based society” of the 6th Framework programme could, for example, be analysed in order to identify information relevant to selected priority themes specific to the youth field. They further added that qualitative and prospective research on certain aspects of

priority themes identified in the youth field could also be undertaken under the 7th thematic research priority of the 6th Framework programme.

Member States and acceding countries have moreover suggested to organise compilation, dissemination and publication of knowledge on youth at European level by further developing the “European Virtual Knowledge Centre” (youth policy database), which is currently being set up in the framework of the partnership agreement signed between the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

The current YOUTH programme and the future generation of programme should support study projects for a better knowledge and understanding of young people, in particular by involving young people in research activities and facilitating dissemination of the results of such studies. To their mind the YOUTH programme should also promote mobility of young researchers and support exchanges and dialogue between diverse actors in the field. The core of the programme should however be focused on support of young people’s activities.

3.2.2. *Quality of knowledge in the youth field*

Key points:

- Member States and acceding countries recognise that to be relevant, knowledge relating to young people must be of high quality.
- They agree that to that end a common understanding must be developed as well as qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools and methods.
- They indicate that such a reflection on a common understanding of themes and on evaluation methods should also be undertaken at European level, as far as certain identified priority themes are concerned.
- They stress that education and training of researchers – especially the young - must be improved.

- Proposed actions at national level

Member States and acceding countries recognise that to be relevant, it is essential that knowledge relating to young people is of high quality, comparable and geared to the expectations and needs of all actors in the youth field.

To ensure such quality, Member States and acceding countries recognise that adequate tools and methods specific to the youth field must further be developed. Even Member States with a long tradition of quality research recognise that there are always challenges about quality, reliability and validity of research.

Better definitions of key concepts of importance to the youth field should be developed, taking into account however the fact that youth is not only a biological age but also an institutional, cultural, social and emotional age

category, and that its borderlines to childhood and adulthood are unsteady and vary greatly between different societies.

Some Member States and acceding countries also point out the importance of promoting longitudinal research in order to get a better picture of the evolution of trends and values and to measure the effect of generation for certain works.

Other Member States and acceding countries underline that to ensure validity of knowledge, media driven information must be avoided. For controlling ethical aspects of research external experts could be involved.

To ensure quality of information, many Members States suggest improving education and training of researchers – especially the young - developing knowledge in the youth field, for example by facilitating the exchange of experience and practice, by supporting their mobility and by improving their language and inter-cultural skills i.e. their capacity of empathy in order to grasp the meaning of concepts in other cultures.

As for evaluating results, some Member States admit that they only have very poor qualitative evaluation methods and indicators to exploit and compare results. They recognize the necessity of drafting a series of reliable youth policy impact evaluation indicators (both quantitative and qualitative) making it possible to monitor the effect of the actions undertaken on the every day life of young people.

Some Member States have indicated that such evaluation of youth policy should be done in a participative way, through dialogue, not forgetting an interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach.

Other consulted countries insist on the importance of identifying obstacles in comparability and encouraging methods to overcome such obstacles. They indicated that means enabling comparison of research outcomes on certain specific topics between various European regions with similar experiences and developments would be particularly welcome. This point of view is also supported by researchers.

- Good practices

Very few countries use tools and methods specific to the youth field. Most countries have indeed developed tools common to all social science thematics. Examples of good practices specific to the youth field are consequently very weak:

- In Germany, an ongoing exchange of experiences and information on research outcomes and methods between scientific, political and field actors as well as a comprehensive monitoring at all levels makes it easier to evaluate instruments and tools and to measure impact of youth policy.
- Austria expects new approaches in research through a recently decided intensified cooperation of the scientific community, and in particular by

establishing an umbrella organisation for research, technology and innovation.

- In the United-Kingdom, certain departments such as the department for Education and Skills have a 14-19 Research Advisory Panel, comprising academics and representatives of the department. There is also an analysis of evidence of the extent to which policy goals are met for the biannual Treasury Spending review and formal evaluations using quantitative and qualitative methods to assess whether their programmes and services are effective for young people.
- In Finland, relevance and reliability of research results are being evaluated with established academic practices. The Finnish Journal of Youth Research is a scientific journal of youth research in which studies are evaluated.

- Member States' expectations at European level

Due to the methodological variety within the Member States, many countries stress the importance of common youth indicators for transparent, coherent and comparable knowledge on youth. Some Member States even call for the development of a standardised European methodology for youth research.

Others however consider that a common methodology should only be developed for the priority themes defined under the Open Method of Co-ordination – such as participation, information, voluntary activities and autonomy. For those priorities most countries indeed indicate that a set of common definitions would be welcomed for more efficient co-operation. To this end, a core content should be agreed upon for those themes taking into consideration the concrete realities of young people these words cover. For participation, stress should for example be laid on the fact that young people nowadays participate in a different way, using fora for expression that differ from those traditionally identified.

Most consulted countries mention the Commission's partnership with the Council of Europe as being an adequate forum for discussion on common understanding of concepts and common methodology.

Member States and acceding countries generally recognise that there are tools for undertaking statistical surveys at European level. The quality and relevance of statistical data for the youth field should however be enhanced and such information should be exploited by the youth field in a more efficient way.

Some consulted countries also call for adequate indicators to be developed for assessing the European YOUTH programme's multiplying effect and impact on issues such as the change in attitude and values of young people having participated in one of its actions.

3.2.3. *Cooperation between the various actors*

Key points:

- Member States and acceding countries reckon that permanent networks including representatives of all actors active in the youth field should be developed at national level in order to trigger dialogue.
- They add that there should be a certain visibility at national level of such networks.
- Those networks should also be co-ordinated at European level.
- They further stress the importance of enhancing cross-sectoral dialogue between policy makers and researchers active in different areas of youth policy.

- Proposed actions at national level

A large majority of Member States and acceding countries reckon that permanent networks including representatives of all actors active in the youth field should be developed at local, regional and national level.

To their opinion, national networks would more specifically achieve giving a greater visibility to knowledge in the youth field. They would also constitute adequate fora for discussions on common themes of interest, on common methods and definitions as well as on future trends that must be explored for efficient, timely and sustainable policy making in the youth field. Such national networks would moreover facilitate exchanges of good practice in the field.

Some countries stress the importance of setting-up national co-ordination bodies, platforms or “houses” to ensure visibility and efficient functioning of such networks. To their mind, such national co-ordination would also facilitate networking at European level and with existing regional networks – i.a. the Nordic network

Member States stress that at all times, close links need to be maintained between policy makers and researchers through steering and advisory groups in order to gain more time for evidence to play a role in informing the political process. The consulted countries also underline the importance of ensuring that such dialogue includes youth organisations, the representative structures of young people and young people who are not members of organisations, especially disadvantaged young people. This is indeed essential in order to better identify their needs and expectations.

Many countries also stress that the important cross-sectoral gap i.e. the absence of dialogue and co-ordination between researchers and policy makers active in different areas of interest to youth policy (e.g. sociology, education, psychology, employment, criminology...) should be overcome. To their opinion, the absence of cross-sectoral dialogue leads to a fragmented picture of youth. The result of

this departmental focus is that research conclusions are drawn in relation to only one policy domain when the influences on attitudes and behaviour may well derive from other unexplored sources.

Many countries mention that a good way for getting people from different scientific or political backgrounds together would be to organise seminars, conferences or meetings (“market places”) on the elaboration of policies and on the discussion of research results for topics which are of common interest. Many Members States however recognise that some parties never attend seminars and conferences and that ways should be found to increase participation.

- Good practices

Most countries have developed networks or other means for getting parties to dialogue and exchange. Here are some examples:

- The United Kingdom set up a Research, Policy and Practice Forum on Young people (RP&PFYP) which brings together researchers, policy makers and practitioners for creative and constructive dialogue. It organises two annual seminars.
- Greece is envisaging the creation of a permanent research network on youth issues throughout the country, with the participation of Non Governmental Youth Organizations, bodies in public sector and actors representing young people.
- In France, one can quote the creation of concertation commissions for the reports of the Commissariat Général du Plan, which were an occasion for dialogue between policy makers, researchers and young people.
- In Ireland, the *National Youth Work Development Plan* is an example of good practice in that it involved *widespread consultation* with all interested parties (including young people, youth workers and organisations, other interested groups), was based on a *comprehensive research programme* encompassing both *qualitative and quantitative* methods, and attempted to *reflect the findings* of the consultations and research in its main provisions.
- Finland has set up a Youth Research Network co-operating with the Advisory Council of Youth affairs. This network produces research with relevance to youth policy that can be used as a support in the decision-making process.
- Spain is studying the possibility of setting up at national level a technical co-ordination committee for collaboration between INJUVE and autonomous communities and will also constitute a debating forum on issues affecting the development of research in the youth field.
- A protocol of co-operation is to be signed in February 2004 between Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. It foresees a large youth research

conference seminar in Riga. The aim of the Conference is to exchange experience in the field of youth research and to create a network of young youth researches in Baltic Sea States.

- In the Netherlands, the Interdepartmental Commission on Youth studies (CJP) a forum which operates under the Minister for Youth Policy, assembles relevant knowledge from various channels in order to facilitate the formulation of youth policy making.
- The Netherlands also implemented Zicht op Jeugd ('View on youth'), a recently completed interdepartmental research programme. It brought together interdisciplinary and trans-sectoral knowledge with regard to current issues in youth policy, such as participation, social divisions, high-risk behaviour, social integration and cohesion, crime and violence. The results have been discussed in public by professionals, young people and politicians.
- The Nordic Youth Co-operation Committee: This regional committee is responsible for co-ordination of Nordic youth research, and for this particular work it has appointed a research co-ordinator. It is composed of members of the national Nordic governments and of members of the national youth councils. <http://www.alli.fi/nyri/index.htm>.
- Denmark has just begun implementing an annual national youth conference hosted by the Minister of Education and organized in cooperation with the Danish Youth Council and possibly other ministries. The idea is to create an annual meeting between relevant actors in the youth field in Denmark in order to have an open dialog on a specific youth related topic. Youth researchers will be a natural part of the relevant actors.
- In Germany, there is a central body ("Standing conference for youth work and youth welfare services" AGJ) which co-ordinates an institutional network of all actors in the youth field (policy makers, administration, research). This is in addition to the German Youth Institute which is specifically funded for research and for observatory purposes. Furthermore the Federal Advisory Committee on Youth matters (Bundesjugendkuratorium) organises a well developed dialogue between practitioners, policy makers and researchers.
- Scotland is in the process of establishing a "Dialogue Youth Network" which could play a key part in facilitating networking and dialogue between various players.

- Member States' expectations at European level

A very small minority of countries call for a European Observatory for Youth Research to be set up.

Most Member States however think that no new structure should be created but that one should further develop and exploit the existing networks, leading to an observatory *system*, instead of a new body. Some countries even stress that a low bureaucratic model for networking should be chosen, i.e. via an e-mail and website system, or a youth research portal.

Member States generally suggest that on the basis of more visible national networks, the European Commission could develop a European Union Network of Youth Knowledge⁶ linking national networks and integrating representatives of all actors in the field – not only researchers. This European Network could also constitute an adequate forum for discussions on methods and future themes as well as for exchange of good practices.

Member States and acceding countries insist on the necessity to avoid overlaps at European level and to better organise co-operation with other existing networks at European and international level (i.e. Council of Europe, Nordic Youth Research Network, the Youth and Generations group of the European Sociological Association ESA, United Nations' networks, etc).

The consulted States add that the YOUTH programme should support networking activities for a better knowledge and understanding of young people and that the National Agencies should be involved in networking exercises.

4. CO-OPERATION AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

The open method of coordination, as set out in the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework for European cooperation in the youth field⁷, provides for common objectives to be defined and followed-up.

This procedure was already applied to the two first priorities of the White Paper on youth, participation and information, for which the Council adopted common objectives on the basis of the Commission's proposal⁸.

The priority of a greater understanding and knowledge of youth follows the same procedure. In the questionnaire, the Commission therefore asked the Member States and acceding countries to propose common objectives and to specify their expectations to the European level.

Based on the answers of the Member States and acceding countries which are presented in this analysis report, the Commission proposes common objectives for a greater understanding and knowledge of youth. The overall goal of these objectives is to develop a coherent, relevant and qualitative knowledge area in

⁶ The Network of Youth Researchers existing under the partnership agreement signed between the Commission and the Council of Europe could be a starting point for building this European Union Network of Youth Knowledge

⁷ See footnote 3

⁸ See page 4 of this analysis report for references

the youth field in Europe and anticipate future needs, through exchange, dialogue and networks.

The Commission informed the European Youth Forum, as well as a group of researchers and experts in the field, of its analysis of the Member States' and acceding countries' replies to its questionnaire and consulted them on the common objectives that it intended to propose, based on this analysis report.