



Republic of Bulgaria
ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

OPINION

on

"OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING THE YOUTH POLICY IN BULGARIA"

(own-initiative resolution)

Sofia, 2019

The President Board of ESC decided to develop an opinion on the topic "Opportunities for developing the youth policy in Bulgaria".

The opinion was assigned to the Labour, Incomes, Living Standards and Industrial Relations Commission (LILSIRC) and the Social Policy Commission (SPC). Mr. Plamen Dimitrov, Member of ESC of Group II - Trade Unions, Chairman of LILSIRC, was appointed rapporteur for the opinion. The draft opinion was discussed and adopted by the two commissions on 7 March 2019.

At its meeting on 10 April 2019 the Plenary Session adopted the opinion.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

EA - Employment Agency

TFEU - Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

EESC - European Economic and Social Committee

EC - European Commission

EU - European Union

ESC - Economic and Social Council

MYS - Ministry of Youth and Sports

MES - Ministry of Education and Science

CoM - Council of Ministers

MLSP - Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

NAPE - National Action Plan for Employment

UN - United Nations

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Economic and Social Council (ESC) welcomes the adopted in November 2018 a new European Union (EU) Youth Strategy for the period 2019-2027, the main focus of which is to give young people in Europe more rights in terms of decision-making, participation in the formulation and the implementation of EU policies¹.
2. In this regard, ESC considers that the creation of an EU Youth Coordinator within the European Commission (EC) will lead to: Strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation; developing and exchanging knowledge on youth issues within EC services; raising awareness of EU action in the field of youth policy; coordinated communication with young people.
3. ESC underlines the key importance of synchronizing the future National Youth Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2020-2030) with the new EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027. In this regard, ESC welcomes the action taken by the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) to develop the future strategy as well as to hold discussion meetings with young people from a number of regions in the country to hear the problems and challenges facing young people and their proposals for activities and initiatives at the local and the national level. At the same time, ESC makes the following recommendations regarding the future National Youth Strategy (2020-2030):
 - it should provide for regular and systematic research and analysis of the needs and interests of young people in partnership with youth organisations to implement the Strategy and update it;
 - it should focus on the active participation and engagement of young people and youth organizations in the process of youth policy-making and implementation;
 - it should apply a differentiated approach to the 15-29 age group, divided into three age subgroups: from 15 to 19 year olds; from 20 to 24 years and from 25 to 29 years in order to reflect the specific needs and problems, as well as the identification of the spheres of specific intervention;
 - it should include measures and actions aimed at investing in sustainability of the youth sector through transparent and workable funding programmes targeted at youth organisations and informal groups of young people. Within these programmes, funds should also be provided to support the building of the administrative capacity of youth organisations;
 - it should allow active and equal participation in the process of developing the Strategy, both of the social partners and youth organisations.
4. ESC stresses the need to implement an integrated approach to youth policy that brings together different areas of intervention covering complex and consistent

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - "Engaging, Connecting and Empowering Young People: A New EU Youth Strategy" [COM (2018) 269 final].

issues surrounding the development of each young person and ensuring the effective implementation and financial security of all planned actions and measures².

5. ESC notes that Bulgaria has a fundamental legislative framework for youth policy - The Youth Act, but it does not contain a sufficiently developed coordination mechanism and procedures for policy synchronization between different institutions and parties in the process as well as a mechanism to measure the achieved results.
6. ESC supports the model of involving young people in the process of making nationally significant decisions through the participation of representatives of youth organisations in the youth advisory bodies established, namely: the National Youth Advisory Council and the National Youth Council at the Minister of Youth and Sports. At the same time, ESC considers that legislative changes are needed regarding the implementation of youth policy at the regional and the local level, which will ensure the necessary financial resources for securing the regional and municipal youth plans.
7. In the context of the legally regulated opportunity to set up municipal advisory councils on youth issues to help mayors in municipal youth policies, ESC recommends the creation of municipal councils on youth issues in municipalities where they do not yet exist.
8. According to ESC, the preparation of the annual reports on youth and their timely adoption by the National Assembly within the deadlines foreseen by the Youth Act will help to take adequate and timely measures and actions to solve the problems and challenges facing young people.
9. ESC supports all efforts to bring education as a national priority and a tool for developing knowledge, skills and competencies among young people, which are the most valuable asset for the economic and social development of our country.
10. ESC stresses the need to upgrade the existing mechanism for validating knowledge, skills and competences gained informally by broadening their scope and including those acquired during volunteering.
11. ESC is confident that good quality, timely and age-oriented career guidance is a particularly important part of the transition from education to realization and has the potential to contribute to the reduction of structural unemployment at the regional level. Raising pupils' and parents' awareness of the demand for specialists with specific professional qualifications will attract young people to professions of strategic importance for our country and will provide a career perspective and opportunities for increasing education.
12. In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, ESC emphasizes the need to continue national efforts on innovation in the field of education and the digitization of the learning process as well as urgent action to develop a National Strategy for Basic Digital Learning.
13. ESC notes that the introduction of new technologies increases the likelihood of structural unemployment among the young population due to the substitution effect

² ESC Resolution on "Integrated Policy for Young People in Bulgaria".

and the automation of a number of activities. In this regard, ESC has called for urgent adoption by the Bulgarian government of Bulgaria's National Strategy for Bulgaria's participation in Industry 4.0, focusing on young people and ensuring quality and sustainable employment in the conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

14. In line with the recommendations of the Council of Europe³, ESC has called for recognition of the importance of the "youth worker" profession and the need to invest in staff training, including those working in government structures, alongside youth organizations.
15. ESC appreciates the encouragement and creation of youth spaces by municipalities and/or youth organizations, informal interest groups and youth workers in order to effectively exploit the leisure time of young people and their inclusion in the lives of their local communities. According to ESC, youth spaces, apart from the material base, should also have human resources with proven experience in working with young people and be created and managed with the participation of informal groups, youth organizations and youth workers.
16. ESC acknowledges the low trust of young people in public institutions and mechanisms and therefore encourages institutions to provide greater transparency in youth policy-making and implementation processes by informing young people in a timely manner about national, regional and local processes affecting them.
17. ESC recommends to increase the participation of young people and youth organizations by involving them in the decision-making processes at all levels - consultation, development, formulation, implementation, monitoring, accountability. Inclusion should also be encouraged through appropriate training programmes to increase the capacity of young people, youth organisations and representatives of the institutions.
18. ESC sees volunteering as an important factor for the development of young people in Bulgaria, social inclusion, active citizenship and the development of society in a broader sense. In this respect, recognition of volunteer work, knowledge and skills acquired during volunteering is of particular importance for the development of volunteering.
19. Taking into account the wide range of issues affecting young people in Bulgaria, ESC is convinced of the need for a new vision on youth policy that brings together and integrates all objectives, resources, institutions and measures for young people and ensures the achievement of lasting positive and significant results in the long run.

II. EUROPEAN CONTEXT OF YOUTH POLICY

³ Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to the Council of Europe CM / Rec (2017) 4 on youth work.

1. The ESC emphasizes the fact that, globally, young people aged 15-24 are the largest generation and account for approximately 1.8 billion people. At the same time, according to Eurostat (2018)⁴, Europe is an increasingly ageing continent and the average age for the European Union is 42.8 years. In this respect, the EU and Member States are well aware of the need for a policy that is directly geared to young people and their full realization in society.
2. ESC draws attention to the fact that the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) already underlined the role of the EU in the implementation of education, sport and youth policies that provide opportunities for young people to develop and promote cooperation and the exchange of good practices.
3. ESC notes that young people and their interests as a target group in European politics have been gaining more importance since the 1990s, but at the same time ESC found that the EU youth budget funds are a modest part of the total expenses of the Union.
4. However, ESC notes that there is currently no commonly accepted definition at the European and the international level of the notion of "youth" in terms of the age limit of the group.
5. The first steps toward the development of specific policies directly addressing the needs of young people are outlined in the Commission's White Paper of 21 November 2001 entitled "A New Impetus for European Youth"⁵. It identified the need for targeted youth development policies by creating opportunities for participation in public life, raising awareness of processes in Europe, promoting volunteering, and deepening research into the needs of young people in the EU. At the same time, recommendations to Member States promote cross-sectoral policy-making, active cooperation and the exchange of good practices.
6. Based on the 2002 White Paper The Council of the European Union (the Council) established a Framework for European Cooperation on Youth⁶, and in 2005 the renewal of this framework followed the Lisbon objectives for growth and jobs and the European Youth Pact. It should also be noted that at the end of the same year the Council adopted a resolution 'Responding to the concerns of young people in Europe - implementing the European Pact for Youth and promoting active citizenship' calling on the Commission and the Member States to develop a structured dialogue between young people, youth organizations and institutions, together with experts and other stakeholders⁷. The first cycle of this process was launched in 2010 within the framework of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU.
 - 6.1. ESC observes that this process follows the logic of the rotating principle of presidency of the EU Council and is managed by a European Steering Committee for Structured Dialogue⁸, including representatives of the European Commission and the

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Population_structure_and_ageing

⁵ European Commission White Paper, A New Impetus for European Youth, COM(2001) 681 final.

⁶ The EU Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 (OJ C 168, 13.7.2002) establishes a Framework for European cooperation in the youth field.

⁷ OJ C 292, 24.11.2005.

⁸ European Steering Committee for Structured Dialogue.

European Youth Forum, representatives of the National Youth Councils, National Agencies and Ministries, responsible for youth in the three countries concerned. The Committee sets a separate topic for each 18-month cycle and provides three phases in relation to the chosen topic: consultation; drafting proposals; making recommendations. The results of youth policy have been summarised and presented at three European youth conferences held in presiding states in order of their rotation. At the same time, at the national level, the process is managed by national working groups of different composition depending on the regulatory framework.

- 6.2. ESC is pleased to note that with the expiry of the EU Strategic Framework for Youth Cooperation 2010-2018 the trio presiding over the EU (Estonia, Bulgaria and Romania) in the 6th cycle of the Structural Dialogue set a topic with a broad focus on the needs of young people in Europe: "Young people in Europe, what's next?". As a result of the consultations held in April 2018 during the Bulgarian Presidency and the collected opinions of more than 50,000 young people from all over Europe at the European Youth Conference in Sofia, eleven European youth goals were addressed, dealing with the challenges facing young people and leading to measures to solve them⁹.
7. In the process of developing the Europe 2020 Strategy, the EC has proposed measures to promote young people's full participation in education, employment and society. At the same time, the Council Conclusions of 16 November 2007 on the implementation of a horizontal approach to youth policy notes that since 2009 the EC will present an EU report on youth every three years¹⁰.
8. The First EU Strategy for Young People for the period 2010-2018 has as a main objective to improve their situation by building opportunities for education, realization in the labour market, active citizenship and social inclusion.
9. In the context of the upcoming summit in Sibiu in May 2019, the European Commission has put forward concrete initiatives that contribute to the process of strengthening the EU¹¹. ESC welcomes the EC's long-term vision of investing in young people and youth organizations, building on existing initiatives and programmes¹² and developing new ones to provide opportunities for a more active role for young people in the European project¹³.
10. In response to the call by the European Council in early 2018 the EC presented a first package of measures¹⁴ addressing key competences, digital skills, as well as common

⁹ <http://www.youthgoals.eu/>

¹⁰ OJ C 282, 24.11.2007

¹¹ In line with the European Commission's proposal, the European Council decided to hold a European Summit in Sibiu, Romania in May 2019. The aim is to review developments in the areas outlined in the Leadership Program and to prepare the future of The European Union with 27 Member States.

¹² The Youth Guarantee; the Youth Employment Initiative; the December 2016 initiative for investment for young people; the new European Skills Program; the Skills Initiative and the European Quality Framework for Apprenticeship.

¹³ Communication from the Commission COM (2018) 268 - Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies.

¹⁴ The Commission presented a Digital Agenda for Action (COM (2018) 22), a proposal for a Council Recommendation on the promotion of common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of

values and inclusive education. The next step was the presentation of a second set of initiatives, including a proposal on "Building a stronger Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies". It brings together several initiatives in the field of youth, culture, education and training policies which aim to improve Europe's competitiveness and make it even more inclusive and cohesive.

11. ESC welcomed the adoption in November 2018 a new EU Youth Strategy for the period 2019-2027, which focuses on strengthening and empowering young people in Europe to take greater part in decision-making, the creation and implementation of EU policies¹⁵. The document is part of the EU's third framework, which focuses on the young population in Europe.
 - 11.1. The new Strategy proposes three key aspects of youth policies:
 - ENGAGEMENT: promoting the participation of young people in democratic life;
 - CONNECTION: bringing together young people across the EU and beyond in order to promote volunteer engagement, learning mobility, solidarity and intercultural understanding;
 - EMPOWERMENT: support for the empowerment of young people through quality, innovation and recognition of youth work.
 - 11.2. ESC supports the transformation of the existing Structured Dialogue process into the new EU Youth Dialogue and shares the EC's view of the need for wider scope of the process and reaching more beneficiaries.
 - 11.3. At the same time, ESC recommends that the EU youth policy be included in the European Semester process with a view to highlighting the results, above all, in cross-sectoral policies.
 - 11.4. ESC welcomes the consolidation of the European Youth Portal as a single digital access gate for young people, but considers that particular attention should be paid to the accessibility of this portal through the free internet.
 - 11.5. ESC supports the EC's proposal for the development of national youth action plans and the need for a stronger link between funding and national action plans.
 - 11.6. At the same time, ESC is concerned that the newly adopted EU Strategy gives partial solutions to sectoral policies such as social policy, education, labour market, healthcare, transport, etc.
 - 11.7. ESC recommends providing more financial resources at the national level to implement youth policies.
12. According to ESC, EU funding mechanisms and programmes targeting young people are of fundamental importance for achieving the strategic objectives of the Union.

teaching (COM (2018) 23) and a proposal for a Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (COM (2018) 24). In addition, in April 2018, the Commission also presented communications on disinformation (COM (2018) 236) and Artificial Intelligence (COM (2018) 237).

¹⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - "Engaging, Connecting and Empowering Young People: A New EU Youth Strategy" [COM (2018) 269 final].

- 12.1. Historically, it is worth mentioning the restructuring of the Erasmus programme in 2014 and its merger with several other EU financial mechanisms covering youth, education, training and sports activities (Erasmus Mundus, Youth in Action, Lifelong Learning Programme, Tempus, etc.). The new framework for the period 2021 - 2027 envisages the division of Erasmus + into three key areas/activities: mobility; cooperation and innovation to exchange good practice; support for policy reforms.
- 12.2. ESC supports the actions envisaged in the New Skills for Europe Programme and underlines the importance of their implementation at the national level¹⁶.
- 12.3. ESC takes into account the contribution of the European Voluntary Service as an EC programme, closely aimed at promoting volunteering among young people aged 17-30 who provide opportunities for young people to participate in volunteer exchanges in the EU Member States in connection with a specific project¹⁷.
- 12.4. ESC welcomes the creation of a "European Solidarity Corps" as a new EU initiative launched in 2019 with a focus on organizing exchanges for volunteering, internship or work¹⁸. The programme provides for young people to be involved in various volunteer / internship projects and the main change to programmes such as Erasmus and European Voluntary Service is the possibility of exchanges not only at EU level but also within Member States. Such an opportunity creates, on the one hand, a space for development and upgrading in youth organisations and, on the other hand, greater accessibility for young people.
- 12.5. ESC is pleased to note that, as a result of the active advocacy campaign at the level of the EU and Member States in the proposed Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 the EC is planning to increase funding under the new Erasmus + programme 2021-2027, which will help more young people to take advantage of opportunities for internship, educational mobility and training within the EU and Programme Countries.

III. YOUTH POLICY IN BULGARIA

1. ESC notes with concern that according to Eurostat data from the census in 2011 young people aged 15-29 made up over 1.3 million or about 17% of the total population in Bulgaria, whereas in 2017 this contingent of young people declined to about 1.1 million persons.
2. ESC notes that the basic legislative framework for youth policy in Bulgaria is the Youth Act, according to which "young people" are those aged between 15 and 29 years. Along with this law, the National Youth Strategy (2010-2020) is being implemented, which is in compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, the basic laws and normative acts and with national strategic documents such as: The Programme for Development of Education, Science and Youth Policies

¹⁶ New Skills Agenda for Europe

¹⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:c11602c>

¹⁸ https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en

(2009-2013), the Updated Employment Strategy (2012-2020), the National Integrated Plan for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (2006-2009), the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2008-2013), the Updated National Strategy on the Demographic Development in the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2030), the National Strategy for the Child (2008-2018), the National Concept for the Social Economy, the National Implementation Plan for the European Youth Guarantee for 2014-2020 etc.

3. ESC supports the nine strategic objectives of the current National Youth Strategy, namely: promoting the economic activity and career development of young people; improving the access to information and quality services; promoting healthy lifestyles; prevention of the social exclusion of young disadvantaged people; development of youth volunteering; increasing civic activity; development of young people in small settlements and rural areas; developing intercultural and international dialogue; raising the role of young people in crime prevention.
4. ESC draws attention to the fact that, under the Youth Act and outlined strategic objectives in the National Youth Strategy, the Ministry of Youth and Sports is the leading institution in the implementation and coordination of national youth policies. ESC appreciates the efforts of the Council of Ministers to prepare the Annual Reports on Youth that summarize the policies and measures implemented by the responsible institutions in pursuance of the objectives of the state policy on youth and calls for their timely adoption by the National Assembly within the statutory time periods.
5. ESC notes that despite the broad scope of the Youth Act, it does not specify a clear coordination mechanism and procedures for policy synchronization between the different institutions and countries in the process in areas outside the competence of the Ministry of Youth and Sports.
6. At the same time, ESC welcomes the fact that Bulgaria has a National Working Group on Structured Dialogue, which is chaired by the National Youth Forum as the National Youth Council of Bulgaria and includes the representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Employment Agency and youth organizations.
7. ESC is pleased to note the positive results from the implementation of the National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (2014-2020), which provides that every young person has the opportunity to receive a good quality job offer, continuing education, apprenticeship or internship for 4 months after being unemployed or leaving the education system.
8. ESC expresses a positive attitude towards the acting Coordination Council within the National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan 2014-2020, which coordinates and monitors the implementation of the Plan and includes representatives of the responsible institutions, the social partners, youth organizations and National Association of Municipalities in Bulgaria.
9. ESC appreciates the efforts of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in the implementation of the National Programme "Activation of inactive persons", within

which the "Youth Mediator" was created as part of the municipal administration in order to encourage the employment of young people and fight against unemployment. The primary target group for youth mediators is the young people in the NEET's group - young people who are not in education, employment, or training.

IV. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE YOUTH POLICY IN BULGARIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NEW EUROPEAN YOUTH STRATEGY

1. ESC welcomes the fact that the new European Youth Strategy will "pursue the drive to improve the outlook for all young people regardless of their background or social status"¹⁹, "More action is needed to make the EU youth policy and the programme Erasmus + "really inclusive"²⁰. This is a strong sign of the EC's intentions to provide better conditions for young people and to shape modern European societies. ESC reminds that the goal of youth policy is "to provide young people with opportunities and expertise to support their successful integration in society and to be active and responsible members of society as well as an active force of change"²¹.
2. ESC stresses that young people are an extremely valuable human resource with enormous potential and talent and at the same time "more than ever, young people need sustainability and ability to adapt to these challenges"²². In this regard, ESC welcomes EC's Communication, based on the idea that young people are an asset which, through the acquisition of the necessary skills, should contribute to prosperous, democratic and cohesive societies in Europe and beyond.
3. ESC welcomes the implementation of a multisectoral policy for young people set out in the National Youth Strategy (2010-2020), sharing the notion that the responsibility of government policy for youth development should not be confined to a single institution or structure, or within a single sector, and therefore considers it essential to achieve the necessary coordination that is in line with the main challenges facing young people.
4. ESC recalls that as early as 2008 a consensus was reached at the European level on the need for a reinforced multisectoral approach in the context of the European Parliament Declaration on empowering young people.

¹⁹ Communication from the Commission "Engaging, Linking and Empowering Young People: A New EU Youth Strategy", p. 4.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe I on 21 January 2015, Access of Young People from Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods to Social Rights, p.25; <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168066671e>

²² EC Communication "Engaging, Linking and Empowering Young People: A New EU Youth Strategy", <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2018:0269:FIN:BG : PDF>

5. ESC is convinced of the need for a new vision for youth policy that will ensure lasting long-term positive results by pooling resources and integrating all the main goals and measures with regard to young people at the national level.
6. ESC has repeatedly stated in its acts²³ that the integrated approach will be most effective in delivering results in other areas such as health care and child protection, the development of an educated young generation, decent work, reconciliation of personal and professional life, as well as the regulation of migration processes.
7. ESC believes that integrated policy should have mechanisms and tools that take into account the successes of other European countries in addressing the problems encountered by young people.
8. ESC welcomes the government's initiative to prioritize "The future of Europe and young people - economic growth and social cohesion" during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, but also calls on the Bulgarian authorities to recognize this priority as a leading and permanent priority.
9. In the context of developing the next National Youth Strategy, ESC focuses on the following areas of youth policy: access to quality education and lifelong learning; employment, quality jobs and entrepreneurship; youth participation and volunteering.

V. YOUTH POLICY SPHERES IN BULGARIA

1. Access to quality education and lifelong learning
 - 1.1. As early as in 2007 ESC proposed that education should be a national priority and acknowledges in this regard the positive changes in education policy following the adoption of the Preschool and School Education Act in 2015²⁴.
 - 1.2. ESC draws attention to the data from a Eurobarometer survey of January 2018²⁵ according to which the majority of young people believe that education and skills should be a top priority of the EU, next ranks the importance of protecting the environment and combating climate change, followed by employment and migration management and integration of refugees.
 - 1.3. ESC maintains the principle that support for quality inclusive education and lifelong learning will help to build a stronger and more promising young generation that will respond successfully to the emerging challenges in the coming decades. In this context, ESC draws attention to the need to discuss measures to upgrade skills and qualifications in education at all levels and in training / qualification systems to help people to be responsive to the dynamic development of technology and skills.

²³ Resolution of ESC "Integrated policy for young people in Bulgaria", resolution of ESC "Realization of young people on the labour market"

²⁴ Opinion on the draft National Reform Program of the Republic of Bulgaria (2006 - 2009) "For higher growth and more jobs" – 2007.

²⁵ Eurobarometer survey 455, January 2018.

- 1.4. ESC insists that the implementation of the statutory right to education for each child should be guaranteed by specific obligations of state institutions and the family²⁶.
- 1.5. In a number of its acts²⁷ dedicated to early school leaving, ESC has recommended discussing options for building an international system between Member States to track the movement of children accompanying their migrant families within the EU. Labour migration covers a significant part of European citizens and it is therefore important to monitor and guarantee the educational needs of their children. ESC is concerned that without such a register children will fall into the category of "uncovered by the education system" or "early school leavers" and suggests that a solution should be found at the European level.
- 1.6. According to ESC, career guidance has a key role to play in linking education and professional realization in the labour market. ESC believes that raising students and parents' awareness of the demand for specialists with a specific professional qualification will attract young people to professions of strategic importance for our country and provide a career perspective and opportunities for increasing education.
- 1.7. ESC stresses the need to continue efforts for innovation in the field of education and the digitization of learning in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- 1.8. According to ESC, increasing the role of science and higher education and securing the funding required by the state and businesses are important factors in making higher education institutions an integral centre of education, science, research, innovation and entrepreneurship. Significant attention should be paid to the development of cooperation between education and training institutions as well as between the research sector and businesses. For ESC, however, the role of the human factor in the development of education and science remains crucial, requiring far more serious measures to improve the social status and motivation of those employed in these two areas, and to solve a number of problems for young researchers, including by discussing the idea of creating a campus for academics and a more adequate social package for teachers / professors and their families²⁸.
- 1.9. The penetration of new technologies is increasingly changing the labour market and the future depends on the type, quality and level of education of young people. In this regard, ESC considers it necessary to take proactive policies in education and workplace training to provide the new skills required by the digital economy. It is essential to increase investment in skills, to promote lifelong learning, with a particular focus on enhancing digital and ICT skills for everyone.

²⁶ The ESC defended this position during the European debate on the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2016.

²⁷ Opinion "Policies to Limit Early School Leaving"; Resolution on the "Draft Strategy for Prevention and Reduction of Early School Leaving (2013-2020)"; Resolution "Measures and actions to reduce the share of early school leavers"; Analysis "Early School Leaving"; Resolution "Early School Leaving - Problems and Possible Solutions"

²⁸ Opinion of ESC on "The Educational System in Bulgaria - Problems and Necessary Reforms".

- 1.10. ESC is pleased to note that the new European Youth Strategy (2019-2027) emphasizes the recognition of non-formal learning, which improves the employability and entrepreneurial skills of young people.
- 1.11. ESC draws attention to its recommendation to open individual training accounts to accumulate resources (financial resources, training hours, etc.) from different sources - the state, the employer, the employee, for training and the career development in particular a developed under an especially designed and statutorily regulated mechanism²⁹.
- 1.12. ESC points out that the various surveys reveal the lack of understanding on part of young people who have completed secondary or tertiary education regarding employment and social security, as well as their unconscious vulnerability in terms of involving them in informal practices. Therefore, ESC recommends in the secondary and tertiary educational programmes to include topics about labour, social security and health insurance rights³⁰.
- 1.12.1. Informing young people about their rights at the workplace early would contribute to the formation of an adequate and responsible position when an employer proposes irregular employment or potential violations of labour law. On the one hand, this will guarantee to them social security and, on the other hand, easier access to the labour market, because by recognizing the acquired professional experience in legal employment, they will have a competitive advantage in securing the next job over young people working in the informal economy .
- 1.12.2. ESC believes that young people need to be aware of social security and health insurance benefits in different situations - working in the formal as opposed to the informal economy, so they can compare, evaluate and realize the benefits for themselves and their future development and develop genuine motivation to pursue formal employment. In this regard, ESC supports the My First Job initiative, which provides for the inclusion in secondary education topics related to labour, social security and health insurance rights in order to familiarize young people with their rights at the workplace and to increase their sensitivity to unregulated employment and violations of labour law.
- 1.12.3. According to ESC, the state and the social partners must also offer and promote alternative forms of training on the issues of labour, social security and health insurance rights (through digital platforms, mobile applications, etc.) targeted at young people.

2. Employment, quality jobs and entrepreneurship

²⁹ ESC Resolution on "Actions in Support of Young People and Combating Youth Unemployment in Bulgaria" 2013.

³⁰ ESC Opinion on "Limiting and Preventing the Informal Economy in Bulgaria as an Opportunity for Stimulating Growth and Employment".

- 2.1. ESC is convinced that the principle of solidarity between generations, or the so-called a social contract is essential to building modern society and its social systems, especially when it faces the challenges of negative demographic trends. In this regard, ESC highlights the group of young people and the group of adults among the most vulnerable groups threatened by unemployment, poverty, social exclusion.
- 2.2. ESC does not share the view that there is a conflict of interest and competition between these two groups on the labour market. On the contrary, the position of ESC is that the concept of solidarity and the search for the useful connections between generations should be developed between these two large groups of people. The exchange of experience, know-how and new intergenerational skills, according to ESC, can be a successful mechanism for a better balance of the labour market as well as meeting the challenges our society faces as a result of the dynamic processes of digitization and the future of labour.
- 2.3. ESC has repeatedly found that urgent measures are needed to combat youth unemployment and promote the integration of young people into the labour market. Unemployment rates among young people aged 15-24 were always higher than those between those aged 24-65, given that the past global economic crisis hit hard the young generation, particularly those entering the labour market for the first time. According to Eurostat data for Bulgaria, the unemployment rate for both age groups declined after 2013, but unfortunately the unemployment coefficient for the youth group is still higher than that of the rest of the population.
- 2.4. ESC points out that in terms of the labour market, young people are more often placed in a vulnerable situation. They face multiple challenges both in their position as employees and in the position of self-employed. Unlike older workers, young people are much more likely to fall into precarious employment.
- 2.5. ESC emphasizes the need to solve the problems of young people, including those of disadvantaged groups as well as the need for the implementation of specific measures aimed at removing barriers to employment. First, the measures should include a clear addressing of the hindering factors, as well as concrete proposals to young persons of alternative options for education, training, internship or employment.
- 2.6. ESC has repeatedly stressed that for young persons one of the main risks in their transition from the education system to the labour realization is the shortage of vacancies, the lack of professional experience and the qualification required by the employer. According to ESC, the National Employment Action Plan for 2019 identifies the main employment problems related to today's economic development - they have not only structural but also local character, they are individualized and require non-standard approaches to tackle, but this makes it difficult to achieve a mass effect.
- 2.7. In its opinion³¹, ESC warned of the extremely serious problem related to the discrepancy between the demand and supply of educational, professional and qualification competencies, which however qualifies as "a defect and a problem of

³¹ ESC Resolution on "The Realisation of Young People on the Labour Market".

the regulations - strategic and operational, and of the functioning of the structures operating on the labour markets and performing mediation between the demand and supply of labour"³². Nevertheless, ESC hopes that this problem can be overcome by introducing a systematic approach to forecasting labour needs and applying a relevant methodology.

- 2.8. According to ESC, the discrepancy between the educational attainment and the lack of sufficient job openings for young people are the main challenges to young people's employment. In this connection, career development and lifelong learning are needed to overcome the difficulties of finding a job, even by well-educated young people. Also, coordination between the responsible institutions, providers and users of career guidance services and timely and adequate education reforms are crucial. Last but not least, young people face the challenge of reconciling work and family life³³.
- 2.9. ESC draws attention to the fact that the decisions of young people to develop their careers are based mainly on subjective ideas, parental and family expectations and dominant public stereotypes rather than on an informed and motivated choice. Therefore, ESC believes that a very important element of the transition "education - work realization" is the timely and good quality career guidance that is age-appropriate³⁴.
- 2.10. ESC fully supports the proposed measures to encourage employers to hire young people to work included in the Employment Promotion Act, as well as the legalization of traineeships and their remuneration as a work done by the young person (adopted by the Council of Ministers amendments to the National Employment Action Plan³⁵).
- 2.11. ESC supports the need for intergenerational dialogue to bring together and exchange experiences, knowledge and skills, and recommends that employers should be offered mentoring programmes among students, students and young people who have recently graduated.
- 2.12. ESC considers another suggestion to create a "pathway" for young persons "from education to realization", covering the whole process of the school education, the acquisition of qualification and the traineeship, to the start of the first job. An important factor in the successful development of such a path is the adequate assessment and reporting of the qualities and qualifications of jobseekers as well as the needs and requirements of employers³⁶.

³² Opinion of ESC "Current Issues and Policies of the Labour Market".

³³ Resolution on "Actions to Support Young People and Combat Youth Unemployment in Bulgaria" - 2013; Resolution on "Realizing Young People on the Labour Market" - 2015; Resolution on the "Commission Communication - Annual Growth Survey for 2016"; Resolution on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Towards Recovery and Creation of Jobs – 2012.

³⁴ ESC Resolution on "The Realisation of Young People on the Labour Market".

³⁵ Decision of the Council of Ministers № 539 of 12.09.2013 Amending and supplementing the National The National Employment Action Plan for 2013 adopted by the decision under item 43 of Protocol No. 47 of the Council of Ministers Meeting of 19 December 2012 , as amended by Council of Ministers Decision No 224 of 2013.

³⁶ ESC Resolution on "The Realisation of Young People on the Labour Market".

- 2.13. ESC welcomes the deployment of the National Implementation Plan for the European Youth Guarantee, which provides for every young person aged 15-24 incl. to receive a good job offer, continue education, apprenticeship or internship within 4 months after being out of work or leaving the formal education system. Although the plan includes measures for young people aged under 29, the ESC once again draws attention to the need to take more measures at the national level for young people aged 25-29 who find it difficult to find a job corresponding to their education.
- 2.14. ESC assesses the European Youth Guarantee as a successful initiative to improve the transition from education to employment as it provides for the identification of young people not in employment, education or training and asks for their inclusion in individually selected measures. ESC draws attention to the fact that, within the framework of the 2015 initiative a network of youth mediators was set up in Bulgaria to connect with young people who are not in employment, education or training in their immediate environment - and to mobilise them³⁷. ESC restates that the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in Bulgaria in combination with educational and activation measures will help to reduce the number of young people from the so-called NEET group³⁸, an indicator by which our country is still lagging behind the rest of the EU Member States.
- 2.15. ESC again proposes to carefully analyse the achievements of various youth organizations that have achieved concrete results with regard to prevention and reintegration of early school leaving, activation of NEETs and a reduction in the number of unemployed youths as a whole. Therefore, ESC insists on the wider popularization and dissemination of good practices and examples at the national and the regional level, which will have a positive impact both on the current participants in youth initiatives and on the attraction of future ones³⁹.
- 2.16. ESC recommends enriching the youth employment toolkit, examining the experiences, successes and shortcomings of measures for young people in different Member States. ESC considers that when designing and planning policies and measures on the labour market, it is necessary to clearly identify the operational and specific objectives that will help to track the scope, results and effects of the implementation of the measures. This model can also be implemented with respect to the measures and activities included in the National Reform Programme.
- 2.17. ESC found that the introduction of new technologies increases the probability of structural unemployment among the young population due to the substitution effect and the automation of a number of activities. According to the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, the professions that are most likely to be endangered by digitization are: administrative staff, clerks working in the wholesale and retail trade, transport and logistics, as well as workers performing routine activities in manufacturing and construction, some aspects of financial services, translators, taxi drivers, individual consultancy services, etc. In this context, many young people will face the risk of finding alternative employment in the future.

³⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=bg>

³⁸ Young people who do not work, do not study and are not involved in training.

³⁹ ESC Resolution on "Actions in Support of Young People and Combating Youth Unemployment in Bulgaria".

- 2.18. In this regard, ESC called for urgent adoption by the Bulgarian government of Bulgaria's National Strategy for Bulgaria's participation in Industry 4.0, in which the emphasis will be placed on young people and the guarantee of quality and sustainable employment under the conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- 2.19. ESC stresses that digital skills are at the moment important in the workplace, as virtually every occupation requires the use of information and communication technologies to perform certain tasks. At the same time, there are significant differences between Member States in the ability of young people to use digital technologies. That is why ESC is very worried by Eurostat data, according to which only one in four or five young persons in Bulgaria has a complete digital competence⁴⁰.
- 2.20. In this context, ESC shares the view that education - from kindergarten and school to university - is the first step in the process of adapting to digitization, and recommends strengthening the link between companies, science areas and schools in order to better and adequately prepare the workforce for the labour market and the future.
- 2.21. ESC considers it necessary to develop active policies in support of labour market transition of workers displaced by digitization and automation.
- 2.22. The ESC is pleased to note the inclusion of "youth worker" in the List of posts in the National Classification of Occupations and Positions, as well as the regulation of the term "youth worker" in the Youth Act. For ESC, these legislative changes are a clear and visible sign of political responsibility at the national level for the development and future of young people.
- 2.23. ESC also emphasizes that young people should be seen not only as workers but also as entrepreneurs who create added value.

3. Youth participation and volunteering

- 3.1. ESC stresses that in Bulgaria there are good practices in the field of youth empowerment at the international level, such as the programme "Bulgarian Youth Delegate to the UN", in which two young delegates are selected to represent Bulgaria during the General Assembly of the United Nations and the sessions of Third Committee. The programme is implemented by the UN in Bulgaria as a non-governmental organization in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. With a view to promoting youth empowerment, ESC considers that such initiatives need to be supported and communicated better to the public as good practices.
- 3.2. In line with the Revised Charter on the Participation of Young People in the Life of Municipalities, ESC defines young people as a resource capable of supporting the development of active civil society and highlights the benefits of involving young people at every stage of the decision-making process in order to improve the quality and performance of youth policies.
- 3.3. ESC considers that the formation of an active civic position and the participation of young people in the public life of the settlement, in which they are

⁴⁰ Eurostat [isoc_sk_dskl_i], data extracted on 24/01/2018.

studying and seek their realisation, need to be carried out in active cooperation with local and national authorities.

- 3.4. ESC also recommends the full involvement of youth organizations in setting up a legal framework concerning young people, as well as in the implementation of youth policies at the local, regional and national level, which principles are enshrined in the EU's third framework for youth policies and supported by the EESC.
- 3.5. ESC recognizes the need for state support to build administrative and financial capacity in youth organizations as dynamic structures that bring together young people based on their interests and needs. There is also a need to encourage the creation of networks of youth organizations.
- 3.6. ESC also recommends encouraging the creation of youth spaces by municipalities and/or youth organizations, informal interest groups and youth workers in order to put to good use the leisure time of young people and involve them in the lives of their local communities. According to ESC, youth spaces, apart from the material base, should also have human capital with proven expertise of working with young people. They should be created and managed with the help of informal groups, youth organizations and youth workers.
- 3.7. ESC acknowledges the low trust of young people in public institutions and mechanisms and therefore encourages the institutions to provide greater transparency in the processes of youth policy-making and implementation by informing young people in a timely manner about the processes at the national, regional and local levels.
- 3.8. ESC believes that youth leaders are a building block of an active democratic society and youth organizations are an environment for developing effective leadership skills and civic competences.
- 3.9. ESC recalls that, according to the survey "Public attitudes of young people in ten municipalities in the country"⁴¹, youth activity and youth inclusion vary from one region to another, which can be explained by the lack of a structured approach in the work of local and national authorities and creating a unified standard of quality for youth policies.
- 3.10. According to ESC, it is necessary to introduce a unified definition of the term "youth inclusion" among the participants in the process. ESC shares the view that involving young people in policy-making processes builds a culture of participation and helps develop a democratic and prosperous society.
- 3.11. ESC recommends to increase the participation of young people and youth organizations by involving them in the decision-making processes at all levels - consultation, development, formulation, implementation, monitoring, accountability. Inclusion should also be encouraged through appropriate training programmes to increase the capacity of young people, youth organisations and representatives of the institutions.

⁴¹ National Youth Forum and AFIS Sociological Agency from 2015.

- 3.12. Similarly, local and national institutions should recognize youth organizations as a key partner in youth policy-making, and encourage the creation of structures and mechanisms for their participation, such as the Municipal Youth Advisory Councils. ESC also takes into account the need to involve representatives of youth organizations as an equal partner in bodies at the national and local level dealing with youth policy.
- 3.13. ESC sees volunteering as an important factor for the development of young people in Bulgaria, social inclusion, active citizenship and the development of society in a broader sense. ESC believes that volunteering is a vital dimension of social and democratic life, and advocates building a clear vision of the future of volunteering in Bulgaria.
- 3.14. ESC recognizes that in order to protect the interests of all parties in the process and to guarantee the rights of young people to participate in volunteering, a legal framework with clear regulation of the concepts of "Volunteering", "Volunteer", "Voluntary Organization" etc., complying with the standards established in Europe. The legal framework should also be in line with the Youth Act, the Child Protection Act and other laws directly related to the legal framework on volunteering.
- 3.15. ESC believes that youth organizations should be recognized as a driver of volunteering in Bulgaria. At the same time, young people and youth organizations should be involved in the process of planning, implementing and evaluating voluntary activities as a precondition for acquiring specific skills and competences, many of which have positive impact on the development of young people's public leadership.
- 3.16. ESC recommends that volunteering should be promoted by the institutions by creating a targeted communication strategy directed to young people. For ESCs, the recognition of volunteer work, knowledge and skills acquired during volunteering is of particular importance for the development of volunteering.
- 3.17. In this respect, more active interaction with business and encouraging the support of volunteer organizations and initiatives as well as partnerships with the youth sector are needed to enhance the quality of volunteering and to recognize the acquired knowledge, skills and competences.

(signed)

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PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL