



***Investing in youth for tomorrow's Europe:  
policies for youth autonomy and perspectives for the European Social Fund***

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**"Towards combined actions for youth policies in the new programming period 2014-2020: the proposal of the regions"**

According to statistical projections, 2013 will be another year of recession, or at least, stagnation, for the European economy. Therefore, we must act in order to achieve two main objectives: the maintenance of social cohesion and the promotion of regional development.

2013 is also the final year of the most recent period of economic and social cohesion programming (2007-2013). This is why 2013 will be a crucial year for the definition of both the financial framework and the community/EU regulations for 2014-2020.

In this period, we will have the opportunity to effectively address and influence the EU's strategic choices in terms of finance and investments.

In line with Europe 2020's objectives, we agree that it is necessary to use effective and efficient tools to invest in a number of priorities and to facilitate the integration of policies and resources.

In order to boost economic growth, strengthen systems of production, and develop human capital, funding for social cohesion policies is needed today more than ever.

For this reason, we are most concerned with:

- the absence of a European budget agreement for 2014-2020 during the European Council meeting of November 22, 2012
- the risk of a budget reduction for cohesion policies from 2014-2020
- certain countries' attacks on regional policies in an attempt to discredit cohesion policies
- the delay in the disbursement of programming funds

We are confident that a budget agreement will be reached shortly. We hope that adequate resources will be allocated to support cohesion policies, taking into account both the needs of Member States and the individual regions.

We believe that the ESF needs adequate resources in order to:

- sustain human capital
- promote employment

- enhance citizens' skills
- protect vulnerable people, including youth, women, and workers employed at struggling businesses

Today we are here to talk about youth. Overall, young people, more than others, face challenges in a number of different areas:

- Youth are often frustrated and humiliated since it is difficult to find work, and the jobs they do find often offer low salaries, which do not allow for autonomy and self-sufficiency.
- Youth also have difficulty finding affordable housing, which makes it challenging for them to plan for their future. This subsequently causes young people to live with their families of origin for longer periods of time, which ultimately adds to their disappointment and disillusionment, and results in an overall lack of autonomy.

Youth are the future, and will contribute to the future of Europe. For this reason, it is our responsibility and our civic and moral duty, to implement policies and tools that can help develop their autonomy and protect their dignity.

Public policies should address all of the transitions that young people confront. We believe it is necessary to adopt long-term strategies in order to prevent the factors that generate vulnerability among youth.

We must make every possible effort to foster young people's entrance and permanence in the labour market. This is why we have to encourage lifelong learning, skill development, vocational education/refresher courses, and professionalism.

The education/training systems in our countries and regions could not be more diverse. This is primarily because of the vast differences between institutional and regional systems. However, a complete homogenization of educational systems across the EU is probably too ambitious and improbable an expectation.

It is occasions such as this one that foster opportunities to identify and share methods and operational proposals that are particularly effective. These can then be transferred into other contexts and implemented, in particular, in the next program phase (2014-2020) in order to adequately and holistically confront the youth question.

It is, in fact, our goal to consistently suggest additional intervention plans in a European context to cope with emergencies. With regard to youth employment, combining supranational and community efforts is the only way to generate an effective response.

This is why the European regions, which are at the centre of community programming and cohesion policies, must work with conviction to identify a shared path to success.

We hope that from today on we can work together to systematize methods, operational proposals, and various regional initiatives into a single document. Beginning with the ideas and proposals generated during this workshop and remaining as a working document constantly in progress, it could serve as a tool to benefit the Commission, various European institutions, and, most of all, the regions in the Union. This document, and the collaboration required to create it, could play a crucial part in future community fund programming development, especially that of the ESF, which today has a fundamental role in confronting the problem of youth unemployment.