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**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

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Subject: The role of youth policy and youth work with regards to migration -  
supporting intercultural awareness and the integration of migrants  
- *Presidency discussion paper*

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Following consultation of the Youth Working Party, the Presidency has drawn up the attached discussion paper as the basis for the policy debate at the EYCS Council meeting on 23-24 November 2015.

By way of preparation for the debate at Council, the Presidency has collected best practices from Member States and intends to distribute a compendium of the contributions received to all delegations well in advance of the Council meeting. In this way, Member States will be able to focus on the identification of synergies and European cooperation during the debate.

As well as making a main intervention (a list of speakers will be established in the customary way), Ministers will have an additional possibility to react during the debate to the interventions of others. A Minister wishing to react in this way should simply raise their flag (name plate) and they will be given the floor promptly. Such spontaneous "reactions", should not exceed 30 seconds in length and the overall time for each Minister (main intervention together with any reactions) should not exceed a total of three minutes.

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**Discussion Paper****for the policy debate at the EYCS Council of 23-24 November 2015 on****The role of youth policy and youth work with regards to migration -  
supporting intercultural awareness and the integration of migrants****State of play**

In the past months, we have witnessed migration flows into Europe reaching levels unseen since the end of WWII. According to Eurostat<sup>1</sup>, 81% of the 689,000 people who had formally applied for asylum in EU countries this year (through August) were younger than 35; more than half (55%) were aged 18 to 34. The European Union has to take up the challenge and find solutions to deal with this situation. The youth sector can have an essential role to play in this regard, accompanying young immigrants in their process of integration by fostering intercultural understanding between the local and immigrant populations.

**Integration and intercultural dialogue**

Cultural diversity in the European Union is built upon essential values such as tolerance and personal liberty. This cultural diversity is further increased by current migration flows to Europe consisting of citizens from a variety of different cultural backgrounds. In order to ensure successful integration of these newly arrived populations, it is essential to foster intercultural dialogue and understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data/database>

On the one hand, this interaction between different cultures will allow the recognition and strengthening of the different identities of all communities involved. In this respect, it is important to consider cultural and religious beliefs and practices as well. While religion may sometimes seem to drive a wedge between different communities, it can be a fundamental part of people's identity. An open-minded exchange on religious beliefs is therefore of fundamental importance.

On the other hand, successful intercultural dialogue not only takes into account the identities of all communities involved, but also helps to identify unifying elements of a common identity which can foster social cohesion and integration. The youth sector and youth policy are well situated to fulfil this task through their proximity to young people while developing effective actions and initiatives that support intercultural dialogue and understanding.

### **Youth work as an instrument**

Youth work takes place mostly in communities at the local level and represents an important instrument for integration and intercultural dialogue. Through different youth adapted methodologies of non-formal learning and peer learning, youth work is able to build bridges between young resident people and those with other cultural backgrounds. Inclusive youth work not only strengthens identities and awareness of one's own culture, but furthermore helps to develop competencies in the field of conflict prevention and resolution while building on partnerships with local communities and community-based key persons.

At the same time, youth work can also build bridges to local stakeholders such as local authorities, schools, youth organisations and sport organisations who represent important stakeholders in the social life of young people with a migrant background. These stakeholders should not only be partners within intercultural dialogue, but also reflect the intercultural openness of their structures, institutions and governance.

## **Inclusive youth work**

In order to further develop the intercultural mandate of the youth sector, youth policy has to make sure that youth work and non-formal learning institutions, methodologies and practices are structured in a way to address a diverse range of young people and learners from different cultural, language, religious and migrant backgrounds. In this sense, inclusive youth work is open to new cultural references, approaches and (mixed) interpretations.

Inclusive youth work also needs qualified youth workers, aware of effective ways to recognise and communicate the plurality of identity, culture and religious beliefs with a view to creating mutual understanding, acceptance and trust. Through the use of specific methodologies including activities related to different youth cultures (e.g. Breakdance, Skateboarding, Slam Poetry, DJ-ing, Digital Music Production, Comic and Graffiti, Visual Design), art performances and sport activities can generate a high level of emotional involvement from large numbers of people. By identifying and emphasising those cultural elements which are likely to foster mutual understanding, youth workers and community-based key persons have an important role in guiding young people towards mutual acceptance and respect.

Furthermore, the integration of knowledge about local cultural heritage in youth work activities can allow immigrants to embrace the cultures of their welcoming societies while giving them the opportunity to contribute elements from their native countries.

## **Online communication tools**

In the context of youth work, the youth sector also needs to identify and develop effective strategies to communicate with young people online. As a very large majority of young immigrants have access to social media and online communication, multilingual online communities can connect people rapidly and allow them to engage with society in fruitful ways. Language exchange partnerships for example, which can be established online, can promote integration effectively by engaging local and immigrant communities in of mutually beneficial cooperation.

## **Citizenship education**

Integration of young people with a migrant background can be facilitated by reinforced citizenship education in the context of formal education and non-formal learning, encouraging young people to reflect on common values from a young age. The youth sector can play an important role in the development and implementation of citizenship education programmes addressing young resident people and young migrants on an equal footing. The concept of citizenship thereby needs to be broadened towards the notion of cosmopolitan citizenship, moving the focus away from a particular culture or historic view to a forward looking citizenship concept that accommodates diverse cultures and beliefs and gives people from diverse cultural backgrounds the opportunity to participate in the political life of one society.

Finally, if the integration of a significant number of immigrants in Europe is to succeed, migrants need to be given a perspective allowing them to see a meaningful future. The present paper has highlighted that youth policy and youth work can play an important role in this regard by facilitating the integration of migrants through fostering intercultural dialogue in different ways. At the same time, cooperation with other sectors, including education, culture and sports may be essential to maximise the impact of youth work and create effective synergies.

## **Ministerial debate**

The Presidency would like to make further progress in identifying possible solutions and best practices in the youth sector on the issue of how to address the challenges raised by increased migration. In this context, Ministers are invited to reflect on the following questions:

- 1. Taking into account best practices previously submitted by Member States, what is the role of youth work at national, regional and local levels regarding the integration of young people with migrant backgrounds and what are the main challenges for youth work in this regard?**
- 2. With reference to the EU Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018 and the priority for youth policy to respond to the opportunities and challenges raised by migration, which initiatives should be taken at EU level? How can youth policy engage in fruitful cross-sectorial cooperation on this topic, especially with the education, culture and sports sectors?**

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