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Subject: Youth in external action
- Council conclusions (5 June 2020)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on youth in external action, approved by written procedure on 5 June 2020.

Youth in external action**Council conclusions**

1. The Council stresses that young people are important change makers and essential partners in the implementation of the European Consensus on Development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change and recognises their creative and innovative potentials and abilities. Investing in, and working with, by and for youth, is of paramount importance to build stronger, more legitimate, peaceful and democratic societies, where human rights and the rule of law are respected and where no one is left behind. The Council highlights the importance of ensuring the meaningful inclusion and active participation of youth at all levels of society, the economy and politics.
2. By 2030, the world's youth population aged 15-24 will have grown to nearly 1,3 billion; which corresponds to just over 15% of the projected total world population of 8,5 billion. Currently, over 60% of the world's youth live in the Asia-Pacific region. While the share of youth in that region is expected to decline, it is increasing in Sub-Saharan Africa; from 19% of the population in 2015, youth is expected to account for 42% in 2030 in that region. By 2055, the number of youth in Sub-Saharan Africa will have more than doubled. It is estimated that, within the next 15 years, some 375 million young African people will reach working age. The Council highlights that large generations of youth represent a valuable demographic dividend that has the potential to contribute to economic and social development.

3. The Council recognises that young generations are too often confronted with important challenges including poverty, socio-economic and political exclusion at all levels. Youth's potential is compromised by inadequate access to quality formal and non-formal learning, including technical and vocational education and training and distance learning, as well as insufficient and unequal access to quality health services, including mental health and sexual and reproductive health care services. Youth's potential is also hindered by early pregnancies, lack of decent work opportunities, low wages, and the consequences of climate change, conflict and instability, forced displacement, trafficking in human beings, human rights violations and abuses and shrinking democratic and civic spaces. These challenges are often compounded for young women and girls, as well as for youth with disabilities and all discriminated groups, such as LGBTI youth. The Council stresses that decent work and entrepreneurship opportunities for youth are key to lifting young people out of poverty or vulnerable employment, and provide youth with incentives to pursue opportunities locally.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic and the related exceptional measures' negative effects on the economy and employment are likely to have a severe impact on young people, especially youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many countries are confronted with the closure of educational institutions, from nursery school to university, and this disruption in access to education is likely to exacerbate the inadequacy of skillsets and the educational gap, including unequal access to distance learning among young people. The Council is particularly concerned by the secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on young women and girls, and how they will affect their longer term socioeconomic status, the fulfilment of their human rights and their future prospects, further increasing gender inequality. As in any crisis, young women and girls, including those with disabilities, are further affected by the lack of protection from sexual, gender-based and domestic violence, as well as a recrudescence of harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

5. The Council recognises the important and positive contribution of young people in efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. In line with UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018), the Council stresses the need to actively engage youth – without any discrimination – in efforts to build lasting peace, to contribute to justice and reconciliation and to counter violent extremism.
6. The Council also recalls that ensuring a healthy environment is paramount to attaining many Sustainable Development Goals. Climate change, biodiversity loss, air pollution and water scarcity represent major threats to the health and socio-economic development of youth, particularly in developing countries.
7. The Council calls upon the Commission and the High Representative, in cooperation with the Member States, within their respective mandates and competences, to work with, by and for youth in order to:
 - Enhance active global citizenship through strengthened global education, development education and awareness raising (DEAR) with youth including training, youth work activities and awareness-raising in human rights, sustainable development and good governance – and to support young people's active engagement in responding to global challenges and efforts to build democratic, peaceful, inclusive, equitable, tolerant, secure and sustainable societies across the world;
 - Support the inclusion of young people, and in particular young women and girls, and their participation in all efforts to prevent conflict, and build and sustain peace;
 - Promote the meaningful participation and engagement of all youth, without distinction or discrimination on any ground, in the political, social and economic decision-making processes that affect them and their future. The Council considers it important that the EU and its Member States effectively integrate the issue of youth and in particular young women and girls' empowerment, in policy and political dialogue with partner countries, to support young leaders and young human rights defenders, and to support inter-generational dialogue and initiatives;

- Support partner countries' efforts to address the secondary effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has on youth;
- Promote equitable access to inclusive quality education, including higher education, technical and vocational education and training, distance learning, and formal and non-formal learning;
- Increase investments in innovation in formal and non-formal education, distance learning, and vocational education and training, ensuring that it is inclusive and equitable to enhance employability for all young people, encourage open, free and secure access to digital technologies, services and connectivity and enhance the digital competences and literacy of youth in partner countries, with a view, inter alia, to closing the digital divide within and among countries;
- Strengthen exchanges between youth in EU and partner countries, including exchanges of good practices and building on existing programmes, such as ERASMUS+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps;
- Enhance the creation of decent jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities for all young people, including those with fewer opportunities, noting the fundamental role of the private sector and of improved investment and business environments, with particular attention to the youth skills shortage in Least Developed Countries and Sub-Saharan Africa;
- Strengthen the enjoyment of all human rights, including social and labour rights for youth, including by promoting living wages for the young and youth-friendly health care systems, and by supporting efforts to eradicate child labour and all forms of exploitation and abuse, including trafficking of human beings;

- Promote girls' and young women's empowerment and equal opportunities, notably by supporting efforts that contribute to: preventing and eliminating child, early and forced marriage and preventing early pregnancy, abolishing discriminatory regulations and practices, as well as all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services;
- Promote youth's access to healthier, more nutritious and more diverse diets as well as access to decent jobs, fair remuneration, property, microcredit and finance for entrepreneurship, with particular attention to young women and girls;
- Contribute to eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against young women and girls, gender stereotypes and negative social norms, notably by encouraging young men and boys to engage fully, as agents and beneficiaries of change;
- Address the gender and age specific needs and rights of the child and young persons, including those with special needs and disabilities, in fragile contexts, crisis and conflict situations, humanitarian emergencies, and in relation to migration and mobility, with special attention to protection, equitable access to health and to inclusive and quality education, access to nutritious and diverse food, as well as to the rehabilitation and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups and forces.
The potential damage that situations of conflict, fragility and crisis can have on the physical, mental and psychosocial condition of young people should also be addressed;

- Promote the meaningful participation of young people in the development and implementation of climate strategies.
8. Building on the above and the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, the Council invites the Commission, the High Representative and the Member States to devise, where appropriate, a coherent and comprehensive approach to youth in external action, one which seeks greater complementarity among all the relevant policies, programmes and instruments, and which ensures that youth is meaningfully involved in shaping EU policies and actions.
 9. The Council further invites the Commission, in cooperation with the High Representative and the Member States, to devise an action plan and to develop adequate toolkits to ensure that EU's external action contributes to the meaningful global engagement of youth at all levels in all regions.
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