



An Alliance for Youth

Concept paper: development of and prospects for an independent youth policy

I. Independent youth policy – an alliance for youth

Aims and objectives:

- strengthen prospects for the future and foster optimism
- increase social recognition for young people
- optimally co-ordinate the promotion, support and assistance of all of actors
- provide fairer access to starting opportunities for young people as they embark on the youth phase; counteract socially-induced (educational) disadvantages
- develop the individual potential of all young people
- allow young people greater participation in society
- create spaces and time for young people to have new experiences and explore their creativity

Over the last few years, the youth phase of life in Germany has been undergoing profound structural changes. Against the background of the current challenges faced by young people growing up in Germany such as:

- demographic change,
- the increasing demands in terms of knowledge and competence induced by globalism,
- the acceleration and compression of educational biographies, combined with a stricter temporal regulation of young people's daily life, and
- the progressive heterogenisation of the youth phase,

youth policy, and indeed any policy for young people, must do its utmost to provide this target group with the best possible and most apposite conditions to manage the diverse and constantly changing youth phase of life.

Independent youth policy is directed to all young people and sees itself as a socially relevant future-oriented type of policy.

Independent youth policy places the youth phase in all of its diversity of individual life worlds, needs and capabilities at the centre of attention. Alongside family policy and the expansion of early childhood opportunities, political responsibility for the life situation of youths must be increased. Good family policy, and the strengthening of early childhood education and care, constitute framework conditions which advance independent youth policy. The latter aims to ensure that the commitment of all of the players who support and promote young people achieves optimum results for Germany's youth. Young people should be provided with the most equal 'starting opportunities' possible for leading a responsible and self-determined life and the aim is to create a climate of recognition and respect for the achievements of and the commitment shown by young people.

An independent youth policy which is understood in this way and correspondingly structured should be visible in an **Alliance for Youth**. In the medium term, the Alliance should be founded jointly with representatives of business, the media, science, the child and youth welfare services, as well as the formal education system and the young people themselves. The Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and its political management is to assume the role of 'youth advocate'.

Steps on the way to an 'Alliance for Youth'

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| 1. Clustering of all of the youth policy activities pursued by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth | (by end 2012) |
| 2. Setting up an 'Alliance for Youth' centre | (Beginning 2012) |
| 3. Theme-based expert fora
Starting at the end of 2011 – Recognition of commitment and validation of non-formal education | (by the end of the legislative period) |
| 4. Expert fora to improve youth policy structures
- youth welfare services planning, local alliances, local child and youth reporting, prize for the most youth-friendly municipality - | (by the end of legislative period) |
| 5. Commissioning a review of youth policy framework conditions in the German Social Code (Book VIII) | (by end of legislative period) |
| 6. Further development of the Federal Government's Child and Youth Plan transforming it into a control mechanism of independent youth policy | (18 th legislative period) |
| 7. Involvement of young people / eParticipation | (by end of legislative period) |
| 8. International co-operation (peer-learning) | (by end of legislative period) |
| 9. Inter-sectoral alliance for youth
Recognition and respect for young people in society | (18 th legislative period) |

II. Point of departure

Independent youth policy takes account of the signals from policy makers and the expert community.

In the future, child and family policy will be supplemented by a central, socially-relevant area of future policy: 'independent youth policy'

For some 25 years now, we have been funding a youth policy which is no longer seen as a problem and crisis policy but as a socially relevant future policy which has all young people – not only the so-called problem groups – in its sights.

- Violence, delinquency, addiction, health problems, disadvantages and poor integration are important youth policy topics. Alongside these themes, greater attention needs to be paid to the interests and needs of all youth, including so-called 'normal' young people.
- In 2009, the Federal Advisory Committee on Youth Problems concluded that: "where youth policy topics are discussed at all, in the public or the political arena, it almost exclusively has to do with specific problem areas involving individual groups of adolescents". "Economic, political and social upheavals have long since reached the youth phase of the life course and given rise to new political challenges; however, youth policy continues to languish in the sidelines".
- The EU's Youth Strategy 2010-2018 calls on Member States to further develop youth policy as a multi-sectoral and cross-cutting policy. Its aims are equal opportunity, integration and youth volunteering: "It is of vital importance to enable all young women and men to make the best of their potential. This requires not only investing in youth (...), but also empowering youth (...) to contribute to the sustainable development of society (...). It also calls for greater co-operation between youth policies and relevant policy areas (...)." (EU 2009/C 311/01)
- Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, calls for child-mainstreaming: "In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." (For the purpose of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is every human below the age of 18 years).
- During the 2009 German national election campaign, the major parties advocated giving more weight to matters of youth policy. The coalition treaty explicitly supports and promotes an independent youth policy which allows for the participation of young people and which develops and maximises their potential (Rn. 3135 ff.).

The function of an independent youth policy is – despite the obtaining wide-ranging **responsibilities** – to direct the focus of the political debate towards the current and future challenges surrounding young people growing up and the opportunities and support systems needed in this area.

In this sense, independent youth policy is structured, from the very outset, in a dialogical and participatory manner.

In developing an independent youth policy, the division of powers among the Federal Government, the Laender and the municipalities, as well as the division of responsibilities at ministerial level must perforce be taken into account at these levels.

A dialogue must be initiated with all protagonists – the institutions and the youths themselves. At the beginning of 2011, the first expert talks were already held between the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and child and youth welfare experts from the federal level. The result was a consensus on the need to develop an independent youth policy, the basic procedure and proposed themes. In additional fora, the circles will need to be expanded to involve further players in the drafting of an independent youth policy so as to arrive at as broad a consensus as possible.

The **perspectives of the young people** themselves are to be taken into consideration, systematically and in a participatory manner. The Alliance for Youth must use and make available instruments which are able to effectively support this goal (e.g. eParticipation).

One of the key elements of all policy which deals with young people is taking young peoples' perspectives and interests seriously into account. The only way for an independent youth policy to do justice to itself is by ensuring good and ongoing youth participation at all levels. At the same time, a bridge should be forged from the NAP process (National Action Plan 'For a Child-friendly Germany 2005-2010' (NAP)) to independent youth policy. Above all, the results of the youth participation efforts within the NAP process need to be taken up.

III. The life situations of young people and their implications for an independent youth policy

The **typical challenges** of youth, and their institutional equivalents in the form of educational opportunities, support systems and socially regulated status passages, form the focal point of an independent youth policy.

For **special problem situations** it will still be the task of youth policy to ensure the increased availability of institutional opportunities to provide assistance in times of crises, promote and support learning processes, and facilitate re-integration.

Youth policy nowadays is no longer facing a homogenous youth phase, but a multiplicity of lifestyles and perspectives, as well as biographical, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

It is generally recognised that the youth phase in Germany is undergoing a process of radical **structural change**. The beginning and the end of this age phase are becoming increasingly hazy:

- many behavioural patterns and attitudes which are typical of youth are emerging at an earlier age. According to the 2010 Shell Study, "early entry into puberty means that, already among ten to twelve year olds, the peer group (takes on) a decisive role in questions relating to lifestyle – including leisure and media orientation – and to important elements of value orientation and life perspectives";
- the criteria for entering adulthood which was valid in the Federal Republic of Germany well into the Seventies (moving out of the parental home, achieving financial independence, marriage, starting a family), have evidently lost significance and are being spread out over an increasingly extended period of time.

However, despite this heterogeneity, as in the past, all young people must accomplish a series of comparable **developmental tasks** (e.g. the development of a stable personal identity and individual autonomy, development of a consciousness in the sense of being a responsible citizen in a democratic and pluralistic state based on the rule of law) and individual **status passages** (e.g. mandatory school attendance, completing some form of training, attaining financial independence).

All young people face these demands. However, special problem situations arise when young people are no longer able to keep pace and risk being left behind. Excessive pressure on young people and unfavourable framework conditions lead to forms of temporary withdrawal from society, a flight into alternative worlds, deviant behaviour, delinquency and other forms of problem behaviour. In such cases, special assistance must be provided.

IV. Thematic priorities

Fair chances for young people

Increased requirements in shorter periods (of time)

Perspectives and optimism for the future

1. Fair chances for young people

Youth policy must exert a **preventive and a corrective action** if all young people are to have fair starting opportunities.

Young people have varying **starting opportunities**. The prerequisite for a successful youth policy which creates fair chances is a corresponding policy to provide early opportunities in childhood. A young person's starting chances are, first and foremost, determined by their parental home and their social environment. In this context, educational marginalisation, social opportunities and migrant background play as important a role as personal character and still prevalent gender role conceptions.

2. Increased demands in increasingly shorter periods (of time)

Young people need greater **room for manoeuvre and more time** for themselves. The Shell Study also called for "accepted periods of downtime" for young people. It is up to youth policy to create the corresponding framework conditions for young people to be able to use their development potential.

As a result of **globalisation**, the demands relating to the acquisition of knowledge and skills are on the rise. Young people are called upon to learn more in less time and to navigate new challenges under simultaneously fragile framework conditions. Young people today are being stressed in new ways and are subject to high expectations and time pressures which are the result, inter alia, of the introduction of G8, Bachelor and Masters study courses and all-day schooling.

The **new media** – at the very forefront the internet – are becoming a key factor in growing up as a young person in today's world. These media increasingly determine the way in which young people interact with friends and with the outside world and how they organise their leisure time; they also affect the type and the civility of communication and will continue to establish themselves, increasingly, as important instruments of social commitment and political participation.

Alongside the demands placed on them by schooling, young people wish to be active in society and to further their personal development based on their own interests and strengths. Effective **time management** in day-to-day life (school, extra curricular commitments, leisure) is difficult, with time slots becoming increasingly smaller. In addition to structured opportunities, young people need time for personal development. They have to grapple with themselves, their physical and psycho-social development and, at the same time, find their place in the community of their peers. Young people need space: not only in society, so that they can be heard and can share in the decision-making, but also real spaces in their immediate environment.

The acceleration and densification of educational biographies and the complex demands they face in dealing with daily life, affect all young people. The problems increase exponentially for young people from educationally marginalised backgrounds. In such cases, special assistance must be made available.

3. Perspectives and optimism for the future

Youth policy must **start early** to create generational justice, to open up perspectives and organise transitions.

Owing to **demographic change** the social benchmarks of the youth phase are once more in a state of flux.

In 2008, the Federal Institute for Population Research observed: "there (will) predominantly be a decrease in the number of children and young people under the age of 20. Today we have more than 16 million persons in this age-group. In 2020, it will be less than 14 million. By 2050, the number will drop further to approximately 10.5 or 11.5 million". It is also noteworthy that not only is the proportion of young people in the total population dropping; at the same time, the proportion of young people with a migrant background in the same age-group is set to rise.

The **transition to professional life** is, at the same time, far more marked by uncertainty.

"On the whole, it would seem that it has become more difficult for many young people to successfully and actively plan and organise their entry into professional life. Even a good education and excellent training are less and less able to guarantee the sought-after security in their employment biography".

Demographic trends and progressive globalisation are leading to contradictory developments which make young people insecure. Not only are the demands on them during the youth phase rising; so, too, are their concerns about having a secure future.

To have a good youth phase, young people need to be optimistic about their ability to handle the future. This concerns primarily their prospects of finding a training place and a job; it also encompasses the certainty of being able to start a family and to grow up in a society and environment worth living in.

V. Strategic benchmarks

Examining youth policy framework conditions

Inclusion of young people / eParticipation

International co-operation (peer learning)

Activities within the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

Specifying organisational structures at the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,

Women and Youth

Outlook: Recognition of and respect for young people in society

An independent youth policy will pick up on young people's interests, be sensitive to them and will make the following aspects the starting point of its policy:

- giving consideration to the diverse nature of young people's life situations and problems as well as their concerns while paying attention to all young people,
- the need for support, inclusion and recognition,
- the need for time and space.

Consequently, it must scrutinise the institutional opportunities in education, funding, support, assistance and supervision in the light of these aspects.

An **Alliance for Youth** which is understood in this way, and seeks to organise itself correspondingly, cannot be organised in a top-down fashion. It will have to pursue a dialogue with all actors – including, as far as possible, young people themselves as the subjects of youth policy action. It is one of the tasks incumbent on the Federal Government for which the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth bears the main responsibility.

Youth policy as an empowerment and participatory policy will first have to carve out a place for itself in the political arena, interacting with the actors responsible. Special efforts need to be undertaken to develop cross-sectoral youth policy co-operation. This means that independent youth policy must be designed to cover a relatively long period of time extending beyond the current legislative period.

Policy for young people is organised at federal level, in particular by the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Federal Ministry of Health and others. In the long-term, the goals of an independent youth policy can only be achieved if the latter becomes a joint topic pursued by all of the federal ministries. The Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth's role and function would be that of a lobbyist – an advocate for youth policy – which also seeks to win over partners for an independent youth policy.

Preparatory steps are necessary in establishing a cross-sectoral independent youth policy. Firstly, a consensus would have to be found between the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and its direct co-operation partners in youth policy, on the scope which an independent youth policy will need to have. At the ministerial level, tools will have to be developed and tried before additional themes/ministries can be taken on board.

School as an example:

School policy can already be singled out as an important area.

School is a young person's living space. School occupies most of young people's time and is also the place where almost all young people can be reached.

In this area, not only the Federal Ministry of Education and Research but also the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany need to be approached.

It might become imperative to draw up a catalogue of requirements for the organisation of schooling and daily school routine, calling for greater involvement and co-determination of youth in all aspects of day-to-day school life as well as a further opening of school as a living space for the youth phases of life. To this end, it is conceivable that other actors can be included in responsibly organising day-to-day school life and the school space, and can be brought to commit themselves correspondingly.

Within the framework of developing an independent youth policy, the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth will be introducing the following measures and activities together with its co-operation partners.

1. Examination of youth policy framework conditions

From 2012 onwards, the intention is to examine whether and, if necessary, which **framework conditions at federal level** could be improved through the Social Code Book VIII with the needs and requirements of youth policy in mind.

Demands from youth welfare experts include: the creation of a legal right to individual social benefits and to a needs-oriented infrastructure, the addressing of interface problems and the depillarisation of youth welfare structures.

In addition, a number of technical talks will be conducted and expert fora organised to jointly identify the essential topics and develop the proposed measures together with different co-operation partners from political, business, media and child and youth welfare circles.

The protagonists at the municipal and Land level are highly motivated to work together with the Federal Government in this area of policy. A number of concrete points lend themselves to **strengthening youth policy at the municipal level.**

- **Example: Revitalisation of youth welfare committees**

Youth welfare committees pursuant to Section 71, Social Code Book VIII provide a good basis on which to organise youth policy at the local level in such a way as to pay attention to all youth life situations. However, they are seldom used well even though, in principle, the statutory framework conditions make it possible.

Some municipalities already possess very good concepts which encompass both an expansion of the tasks and a widening of the circle of protagonists.

In this instance, the rudiments of networking must be kept in mind and a serious inclusion of young people (both organised and 'perfectly ordinary' youth) must be guaranteed.

- **Example: Better control through youth welfare planning**

Municipal youth welfare planning pursuant to Section 80, Social Code Book VIII also provides, in principle, a good control instrument at local level. Here, too, it is important to examine and optimise the application possibilities and control mechanisms.

- **Example: Local alliances**

In addition to optimising the existing instruments, it would be possible to create local alliance structures. In the latter case, existing network structures should be built on as municipalities often already have solid structures (such as local alliances for education or for family which already address a number of key youth policy issues and involve the key protagonists) in place. The creation of parallel structures should be avoided.

- **Example: Introduction of child and youth reporting at municipal level**

Regular reporting does not only uncover needs and give visibility to measures and activities; it also contributes to the development of indicators which are helpful in the planning process. Moreover, it facilitates an opening towards other areas of policy.

More specifically, young people should be encouraged to regularly reflect on the youth policy situation, from their perspective, against the background of their daily experiences and make suggestions for improvement on the ground. The absolute prerequisite for the effectiveness of such reporting is that the suggestions are taken seriously and implemented as far as possible on target.

It will be necessary to examine which framework conditions (in particular Social Code Book VIII) could be optimised to support youth policy developments on the ground. To this end, a **technical discourse** could be held with the relevant co-operation partners (in this case particularly with the Youth and Social Service Association, the German Association for Public and Private Welfare and the central associations of the local authorities) as early as the third quarter of 2011. This can be followed by holding **expert fora with the municipalities** (for example best-practice presentations and peer-learning fora on quality development).

A **prize for the most youth-friendly municipality in Germany** 'Place of the Future' could be awarded as an incentive; it could be accompanied by prize money for use in implementing local measures.

In addition to structural questions, **theme-oriented technical questions** will also be discussed.

Example: Recognition of commitment and validation of non-formal education

A first important topic in this context is social recognition for commitment shown by young people and the validation of non-formal education.

In the context of non-school education, youth work and other youth welfare measures, young people acquire skills which complement their education or training and strengthen their personality. The skills learned within this framework (such as social skills) play an important role in social co-existence and increasingly in the professional context.

As a result, precisely educationally marginalised young people could thus have access to education and employment opportunities which would otherwise be out of their reach.

In order to strengthen the role of non-formal education, it is necessary to prove which skills are being acquired. The intention is to have Germany's qualifications framework – analogous to the requirements of the results-oriented European Qualifications Framework – envisage possibilities of also taking skills learned in non-formal settings into account. It is incumbent upon independent youth policy to lead the way in helping to shape this.

Within the framework of the Federal Government-Länder co-operation to implement the EU's Youth Strategy, one of the priority topics is how to make non-formal education more visible and recognised. This process will be included as a component of independent youth policy.

2. Inclusion of young people / eParticipation

In developing independent youth policy, the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth seeks to have an exchange with young people themselves. At the same time, a bridge is being built, in the process, to the National Action Plan 'Towards a child-friendly Germany 2005-2010'. Above all, the results of the NAP's youth participation process need to be taken up. The agencies responsible for youth work at federal level will be included as protagonists of independent youth policy and will be called upon to make their own contribution by means of active youth participation beyond membership boundaries.

The **internet** presents the opportunity to increase the participation of young people (**eParticipation**) in shaping political processes, both in quantitative and in qualitative terms. However, this potential has so far been used inadequately. Thus far, young people are hardly represented as a target group in existing eParticipation projects. Opportunities which target young people directly are often insufficiently taken up by youths. Moreover, it appears that the existing opportunities hardly reach those groups of young people who are often under-represented and disadvantaged 'offline' as well.

Building on the corresponding recommendations for action put forward by **Dialog Internet**, a Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth project has been designed to research and systematise the existing web-based participation processes at national, regional and local level as well as in youth leagues and initiatives and, where appropriate, initiate their further development jointly with partners. In 2013, it could then be possible to implement a number of thematically oriented eParticipation pilot projects together with partners at local, regional and federal level.

Structural elements for a long-term participation platform for young people at federal level (which can also be used within the framework of subsequent inter-sectoral co-operation) should be designed under the umbrella of 'Dialog Internet' and the Alliance for Youth.

The planning steps for the inclusion of young people will already begin in the summer of 2011 together with the German Federal Youth Council and other responsible agencies at federal level.

3. International Co-operation (peer-learning)

The further development of the concept of an independent youth policy, through multilateral exchange of experience with EU states which are also taking an inter-sectoral approach to implementation, is being supported within the framework of the EU's Youth Strategy.

The **EU's peer-learning process** comprises a series of events beginning with a national context analysis. The individual challenges, the existing approaches and their deficits are identified so as to be able to elaborate concrete proposals for the further refinement of policy. Since, as a rule, the transfer of policy structures and concepts from one state to another is rarely possible, the experience and insights of the different partners are used to create one's own solutions.

This involves learning – in a long-term peer-learning process – not only from other EU Member States with long-standing experience with a specific youth policy (such as Sweden or Finland); it also means joining with them to further develop the debate on a modern youth policy and pushing it ahead at European level.

Example: Sweden

Sweden pursues the cross-sectoral youth policy approach which focuses on the life situation of young people based on indicators.

Under the supervision of the ministry responsible for youth, the various policies for young people in Sweden (education, employment, health etc.) are aligned with jointly agreed targets and sensibly coordinated with one another.

Compared with Germany, young people in Sweden enjoy a high degree of social recognition.

4. Outlook: Recognition and respect for young people in society

A distorted picture of young people, which does not correspond to reality, is often presented nowadays in the public sphere and in the media. It is generally violent incidents and so-called 'binge drinking' which make the headlines, but not the activities of young people or the commitment that many young people show towards society or to topics that will shape the future.

The image of young people in Germany should be upgraded. To this end, influence must be brought to bear on the image and the status of young people in public. The many examples of young people participating, for example, in the Voluntary Social Year and the Voluntary Ecological Year, in associations or cultural activities must be given public acknowledgement and recognition.

To achieve this, broad support is necessary from all societal forces and opinion leaders. These partners can be sought and found in:

- the media,
- business and
- foundations

and together they must espouse the following slogan:

"Strong Youth make for a Strong Future"

These activities should also be combined in the Alliance for Youth.

The end of 2012 could be a good time to approach such partners.