



NOTE FOR THE XLIX COSAC MEETING

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A European future for young citizens

Introduction

Europe's future success is heavily dependent on its young people, and their active participation in society and in the economy. The transition from youth can be difficult even in good times, but rarely in the modern era has it been as challenging as it is at present. Clearly, the youth unemployment crisis in Europe, with a youth unemployment rate at 23.5% in the EU27 and at 24.4% in the euro area in April¹, is preventing huge numbers of young people from such participation.

Ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to participate is an on-going challenge, and this is particularly the case for marginalised youth. Significant attention is beginning to be focused on tackling youth unemployment generally. In this session, discussion will focus on Europe's most marginalised young people, the barriers they face, and their vision for the future.

Marginalised Youth

Based on figures from the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), up to 20% of Europe's youth are from what might be considered marginalised or minority groups, e.g. from ethnic and religious minorities, LGBT persons, or persons with a disability.

Young people from marginalised groups across Europe can find it particularly challenging to participate fully in society and in economic life. While they may face the same general difficulties as their peers at present, they will often face specific challenges arising from discrimination related to their association with a marginalised group.

Anti-Discrimination

The Member States of the European Union have a long tradition of safeguarding fundamental rights. The European Union itself is based on the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

EU anti-discrimination law, of course, specifically entitles citizens to **equal treatment** in employment and training irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability or age; and to **legal protection** against direct and

¹ Eurostat, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-31052013-BP/EN/3-31052013-BP-EN.PDF



indirect discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin in education, social security, health care and access to goods and services.

The EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights brings together in a single document the fundamental rights protected in the EU. The Charter contains rights and freedoms under six titles: Dignity, Freedoms, Equality, Solidarity, Citizens' Rights, and Justice. It became legally binding across the EU with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. The EU institutions are required to respect the rights enshrined in the Charter, which also applies to EU Member States, but only when they implement EU law.

Experience

Notwithstanding these protections, many challenges prevent the delivery in practice of such rights. For example, according to the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)²:

- Some 80 million European Union citizens have a disability and often face barriers that prevent them from participating fully in the labour market and society at large.
- Ethnic and religious minorities across the EU continue to face racism, discrimination, verbal and physical violence, and exclusion. Many Roma in particular live in overwhelmingly poor conditions on the margins of society and face extreme levels of social exclusion.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons in the EU experience bias-motivated discrimination, violence and harassment in different areas of life, including employment, education, healthcare, housing and other services.

In addition, the FRA is clear that gender inequalities persist in today's society, and are often compounded by other forms of discrimination, preventing women from enjoying their full rights.

For consideration

The European institutions have dedicated 2013 as the European Year of Citizens. While there is a particular focus on citizens' rights and the exercise of those rights, the purpose of the year is also to stimulate a debate on, and to strengthen civil and democratic participation in EU policies, and for citizens to consider how they may wish to see their rights evolve in the Europe of the future.

In this context, and given the specific challenges facing marginalised young people in Europe, it is timely to give consideration to the barriers they face, and to hear their views on how Europe can deliver for them.

² EU Fundamental Rights Agency <http://fra.europa.eu/en/themes>