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Erasmus+ Key Action 2 – Strategic Partnership in the field of Youth

Ending Poverty and Social exclusion

Young People's Key Messages

Young people in Europe aged 18 to 24 are more likely to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion than any other age group. To support the development and implementation of policies to end youth poverty, European countries need to create open, inclusive environments in which young people can be meaningfully involved and their views are listened to and acted upon. Historically, young people – to a large extent – have been excluded from decision making processes.

YES Forum and its members support vulnerable young people to turn their lives around, and work with them to create a culture of participation to make sure their voices are heard. Through the **Our life. Our Voice. Young People and Poverty** project, we demonstrated the great potential of young people to think creatively and develop innovative solutions.

Our Life. Our Voice listened to **young people's own experiences and perceptions of poverty**, in order to contribute with qualitative data to the wider debate on youth poverty – going beyond the numbers.

These recommendations on how to tackle youth poverty at the EU-level stem from our young participants' work. They are not exhaustive, but reflect the focus chosen by the young people while aligning as much as possible with their own words.



A holistic approach addressing the roots of poverty, not just the symptoms

The *Our Live. Our Voice* young participants specifically called for **a holistic, multi-level approach to tackle the origins of poverty**, and not just alleviate its consequences.

In their own words, 'Europe must take action to fight against poverty in all of its member states and to create equal living conditions'.

Example 1: **Fighting geographical isolation by making public transportation more affordable for the most disadvantaged.**

Voiced by the Finnish young participants, this recommendation urges policy leaders to develop policies to make public transportation affordable for all in order to reduce geographical isolation of disadvantaged groups. In their words, "there should also be a discount card for the unemployed, and a fair price for car license."

Example 2: **Access to electricity for everyone.**

Inadequate public infrastructure is a significant problem to whole categories of populations in certain Member states. Raised by the Romanian group, this issue affects Roma communities in Romania and prevents them from benefiting from basic infrastructure, which in turn makes it harder to get out of poverty. The Romanian example can be transposed to other Member states, where roads, public transportation and even basic public services are lacking in remote areas.



Free education should actually be free, and inclusive

Education, and the role of school in creating equal opportunities for all and thus preventing young people from falling into poverty, was an important focus for most of *Our Live. Our Voice* groups.

Many young participants raised the issue of the **hidden costs of education** in many European Member states even though education – up to a certain age – is supposed to be free. These hidden costs make it harder for children and young people from low-income families to get the most from their education, which in turn can disadvantage them in finding a job later on. To make education really free, the *Our Life. Our Voice* participants suggest:

Example 1: Schools should choose a simple, coloured uniform available with sew-on logos to make them more affordable.

A practical example comes from the English group who argue that in the UK, too often, families are expected to pay large amounts of money for uniforms which are only available from specialist suppliers. They also highlighted that buying school materials can also be a financial burden for the most deprived families.

Example 2: ‘Poverty proofing’ should be promoted as a model of good practice.

A first step to tackling the impact of poverty on school life is to make sure schools are aware of these barriers by checking, or ‘poverty proofing’, their ways of working, to make sure they don’t impact children in low-income families.

The young participants also raised the issue of the lack of inclusiveness in education systems, an issue that can further disadvantage children and young people from low-income families. To **create a learning environment equally inclusive for all children and young people**, our participants suggest:

Example 1: Creating a national educational tax for children between the ages of 7 and 14 not enrolled in school.

The Romanian participants developed this innovative idea - to place accountability on governments to ensure the full enrolment of children and young people in mandatory education. Governments should be fined if the percentage of children and young people enrolled in schools does not reach the expected level in local areas.

Example 2: All schools are staffed by caring teachers and are safe, inclusive and welcoming environments.

As expressed by the Italian group especially, in certain Member states school do not provide a caring and inclusive environment, due to the lack of inclusive practice which supports students who need extra support or who may have learning difficulties.



Fighting against stigma and discrimination

Finally, the *Our Life. Our Voice* young participants stressed another issue that should, according to them, be addressed as a priority: the **link between discrimination and poverty, as well as the stigma of poverty itself**.

To fight against these issues, they propose:

Example 1: Tackling poverty-related well-being issues without creating a new stigma on young people

Due to the specific situation in Finland, the young people focused on the relation between poverty and mental health. In order to tackle this issue, they suggest avoiding relying only on medication and therapy, branding people as “mentally ill”, but also increasing their access to positive activities. They call for greater financial support of youth centres and community based activities that are an important preventive work.

Example 2: Young people need role models

To find ways out of poverty and to tackle stigmatisation the German group highlighted the importance of role models. Having good role models enables young people to take advantage of the opportunities that do exist, to be aspirational and to reach their potential. It is not about heroes, rather people in the neighbourhood who have done the best they can with limited resources.



Project Details

Our Life. Our Voice. Young people and poverty (Grant Nr 2014-2-DE04-KA205-001641) is a two-year Strategic Partnership for Youth funded by the Erasmus+ programme, Key Action 2, and coordinated by the YES Forum.

From 2015 to 2017, groups of young people in 5 different EU countries – Finland, Germany, Italy, Romania and the United-Kingdom – worked together to explore young people’s experience of poverty and what it means for them to live in families struggling to make ends meet day to day.

The present document is a synthesis of the project’s 2nd Intellectual Output. For more information or to check our other Intellectual Outputs, please visit the project’s website (ourlifeourvoice.eu) or contact us directly.



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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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