

Young people in the European Community

European File

The European Community of Ten comprises some 270 million inhabitants, 60 million of whom are less than 15 years of age. Some 54 million young people attend school or university and today's youngsters live in a world which is not always rosy. On top of traditional problems (money, school, parental relations, etc.) come new difficulties: two-fifths of the Community's unemployed are under 25 years of age. As an average, unemployment in the Community affects 6% of the working population, but this includes 11% of persons under 25 years old. In some countries the figures are even higher.

According to a survey carried out for the European Commission in April 1979, two-thirds of Europeans see a new-born baby as an act of confidence in the future and take the view that maternity and paternity give fullest expression to the development of the human being. But the situation of families and, particularly, large families, frequently leaves a lot to be desired. One parent in five has been or is likely to be forced to cut short its child's education, often for financial reasons. Two parents out of every three find they spend an insufficient amount of time with their children: they wish the working day to be shortened or reduced in other ways, as well as greater flexibility in their working hours. 42% of Europeans see their future as being uncertain enough to make them hesitate about having children. 54% of them think that today's society does not take enough account of the needs of children. Two out of every three persons between the ages of 15 and 24 think the same.

A mutual and natural interest

The problems of young people are crucially important to the Community:

- young people constitute a large part of the population and determine the future in all areas;
- the European Treaties do not only deal with economic objectives: they aim to consolidate peace, bring nations closer together and improve living and working conditions. It is evident that these objectives are of interest to young people and that special action must be undertaken in this direction.

The Commission and the European Parliament have always attached great importance to involving young people in the construction of Europe and, in particular, to informing them about European activities. In 1969, at The Hague Summit, the Community's Heads of State or Government agreed on a similar position. Today, the Community is obliged to develop its action in this area for two additional reasons:

- the current economic and social crisis particularly affects young people;
- Europe, which is gradually forming around a common directly-elected Parliament, concerns young people in their role as citizens.

In this context, the Community must help young people:

- to enter working life and adapt to a changing society, particularly by improving vocational guidance as well as general and occupational schooling;
- to play a useful role in society and fully develop their personal capabilities, particularly when they belong to a group which is handicapped socially, culturally or physically;
- by creating a better quality of life, which implies action in the areas of health, environmental and consumer protection;
- to know more about other countries to discover the wealth of other traditions and other cultures so as to be better prepared for their role as European citizens.

Action against youth unemployment

Changing from the schoolroom to the workshop is never easy: a new environment, a gulf between the education received in school and the requirements of industry. And these problems increase in times of economic crisis, particularly for the least-qualified youngsters who have neither taken courses nor apprenticeships after the period of compulsory education. In 1976, therefore, Community ministers gave priority to improving the transition from school to working life, and the momentum has not been lost.

- To help schools prepare young people better for working life, the Community encourages the study of common problems ('second chance' education, links between education and regional policy, etc.) and encourages information exchanges (seminars, study visits, etc.). It subsidizes and coordinates some thirty pilot projects involving several hundred educational establishments. These projects which try out new experimental solutions and aid the development of national policies, are subject to continuous evaluation. Amongst the areas dealt with are the difficulties encountered by women (inadequate or insufficient education often accounts for the particularly high level of female unemployment), the situation of certain disadvantaged groups such as migrant and handicapped workers, the problems posed by unmotivated or insufficiently trained youngsters, educational and vocational guidance, teacher training, etc.
- Faced with the growing problem of unemployment, the resources which the European Social Fund can mobilize in favour of young people have been doubled since 1978. In 1980, the Fund was able to allocate to young people 39% of its total resources:
 - 289.7 million ECU¹ have been allocated in subsidies for training programmes: occupational training for semi-skilled jobs, pre-training for those who could go on to further study, etc. In addition to vocational training the Fund has been used for projects to benefit young people under 20 years seeking their first job, girls and young women, the inhabitants of the least-developed regions and high-unemployment zones, young people out of work for more than six months. Overall, the aid granted in 1980 benefited some 320 000 young people;
 - 110.7 million ECU have been used to finance new types of aid introduced in 1979. The objectives are to encourage employers to take on young people, to support job-creation community-service projects (social or cultural services, environmental protection, etc.). Preference has been given to programmes which lead to the creation of skilled and permanent jobs as well as those which help the worst-off regions. Actions approved in 1980 concerned 409 000 young people.

The link between education and working life is the subject of other initiatives. The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training in Berlin is studying the modernization of training methods as well as the social and material status of young people. The European Commission has also initiated discussions with the Education Ministers on ways of strengthening cooperation between the educational and employment sectors. It has produced a special report on 'sandwich' programmes which combine work with educational courses. This presupposes, of course, that links are expanded between educational systems, methods and contents on the one hand and the work environment on the other. The Commission wishes to give its support to such approaches. It is also concerned with the repercussions of new technologies and, in particular, data-processing on education: which subject areas they affect, for which types of training they can be employed, and which types of study, methods and materials should be used.

¹ 1 ECU (European Currency Unit) = about £0.54 or Ir. £0.69 (at exchange rates current on 15 January 1981).
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Equal opportunity for all

In the social as in the educational areas, the Community is actively working to ensure equal opportunity for all young Europeans. Right from pre-school education (which was the subject of a seminar held in Sèvres in May 1979) to the start of working life, it endeavours to promote equality between girls and boys and to help under-privileged groups to overcome the particular difficulties they face.

- *Girls:* Community legislation backs the principle of equality between the sexes over vocational training and employment, but in education and vocational guidance, young women often face prejudice over the respective roles of the two sexes. Girls pursue vocational or technical studies less often than boys and do not take their studies as far, all too often directing themselves towards jobs which are regarded as suitable for women. These are usually less well paid and have a high risk of unemployment. Faced with this situation:
 - the Council of Education Ministers in 1980 drew attention to the need to eliminate stereotyped images of the roles of the two sexes in educational material, to encourage young women to consider a wider range of professions, and to make teachers and those responsible for vocational guidance more aware of these problems. It is planned to study at the Community level the impact of co-education, ways of countering traditional prejudices, methods of making girls more aware of vocational opportunities open to them;
 - right from the project selection stage, the European Social Fund has given priority to programmes aimed at training young women seeking work in areas where women are traditionally under-represented or in new branches of activity open to both sexes.
- *Migrant workers:* the Community encompasses more than 2 million young migrants aged less than 18 years. Community rules guarantee the family of the migrant worker the right to live with him in the country where he is employed, the right to social security (including family allowances), the right for their youngsters to receive education and vocational training under the same conditions as for nationals (particularly for study grants). These texts are, however, insufficient. Firstly because they do not cover migrants from countries outside the Community. Secondly because the young migrants, at the crossroads of two cultures, encounter both at school and in access to jobs, concrete adaptation problems which require special attention. For this reason:
 - Community countries have undertaken to better inform migrants on study and training opportunities available to them. In addition, a 1977 European directive deals with the organization of initial teaching in the language of the host country, the organization of the teaching of the maternal language and culture of origin, specialized training of teachers working with young migrants;

- to promote national activities, the Community supports — in the framework of its educational programmes — a series of studies and pilot projects aimed at improving reception and teaching methods: lessons in the local language and integration into the local environment, teaching of the maternal language and culture, teacher training, etc.;
 - the European Social Fund also subsidizes pilot projects to help young migrants integrate in their new environment whilst preserving their cultural identity. The Fund also finances numerous courses which in 1980 have helped some 90 000 young migrants start school. The training of teachers and social workers has also benefited from this support as have social integration and vocational guidance programmes for migrants and their families.
- *The handicapped*: ranging from the blind to the mentally retarded, 5 to 9% of Europeans are handicapped to some degree or other. Since 1974 the Community has been involved in vocational readaptation of these people and offers subsidies from the European Social Fund.

Such readaptation, however, is often only possible if the situation of the handicapped is taken into consideration at school or even before. It is both a question of keeping a close watch on certain specific groups and integrating them as much as possible in the normal school system, so that they do not feel excluded from society. 1981, the Year of the Handicapped, should be marked by numerous initiatives from the Community in favour of young handicapped people: preparation of teaching action programme; studies and seminars on pre-school and school education as well as on entering working life.

- *Orphans*: in the coal and steel sectors, the Community has utilized its special powers to launch a series of social programmes. As a result, some one thousand children of workers who have died due to accidents at work or through occupational illnesses, benefit each year from study grants accorded by the Paul Finet Foundation.
- *The poor*: millions of Europeans still live in poverty. The Community has, however, launched an anti-poverty programme which, though modest in scope, at least enables it to support a series of imaginative projects. A number of these are centred around the problems of young people who from birth suffer malnutrition, or bad housing and sanitation, or chaotic or non-existent education: these include family day centres; preventive social/medical care; coordination of medical, social and educational assistance; support for voluntary organizations working, for example, in the area of pre-school education and who organize solidarity amongst the most impoverished of the 'fourth world'.

A better quality of life

Young people are particularly sensitive to the ideal of a better quality of life. The Community is developing major environmental and consumer protection programmes and

actions in the health area have recently been added. In many cases, these initiatives directly affect young people.

- Health:* the Community subsidizes research projects which monitor child births as well as congenital abnormalities. In addition, the Health Ministers of member countries have decided to launch an experimental educational programme and jointly study the problems of smoking amongst young people.
- Consumers and the environment:* the European Commission has just presented a draft directive on toy safety which aims to reduce the risk of cuts, burns, electrocution, poisoning, etc. European study programmes and seminars have been organized covering topics such as advertising aimed at children, and making youngsters under 14 years more aware of their environment. Finally, two European networks of pilot schools have been organized to encourage from a very early age innovative educational experiments on consumer and environmental problems.

Long live Europe

As electors or future electors of the European Parliament, young people must be helped to understand in more concrete terms and in greater depth the realities of the Europe which already considerably influences our everyday life.

- Teaching about the real nature of Europe must first of all be intensified.
 - At the initiative of Mr Gerhard Kreyszig, German member of the European Parliament, a fund was set up in 1959 to promote information on the Community and to provide a European dimension to the education of young people. The Kreyszig Fund, whose budget stood at 1.4 million ECU in 1980, enables the European Commission to support information activities organized by various associations at the European, national or regional levels. These activities affect young people by way of their own teaching organizations as well as through the schools where teaching organizations make their members more aware of Community matters and the European aspects of their teaching;
 - In 1976, the countries of the European Community decided to give a 'European dimension to the experience of pupils and teachers in primary and secondary schools'. And in 1980, the Council of Education Ministers expressed its interest in measures to encourage the study in school of Community problems in their geographical, historical and political contexts. It is planned that the European Commission, which already collaborates with school radio and television, will encourage the development of educational material and teacher training as well as the exchange of information and experiences.
 - At the level of higher education, the Community supports numerous European documentation centres as well as European study institutes created by the universities. In addition, Community countries have set up a university postgraduate

institute in Florence working on the historical, economic, legal and socio-political aspects of European problems.

- Europeans should learn one of the six official languages of the Community in addition to their mother tongue not only for professional reasons but also for better understanding of other nationalities. The Education Ministers came out in favour of promoting the teaching of European languages both in school and during preparation for working life. Methods envisaged are the encouragement of new techniques, the inclusion of language teaching in apprenticeships, special measures in favour of less gifted or less motivated children, etc.
- Exchange programmes between children of Community countries should be stepped up. Since 1964, young workers between the ages of 18 and 28 years have been able to obtain European grants for study courses lasting between three weeks and six months in neighbouring countries in order to extend their training and personal contacts. Some one thousand youngsters should benefit from such assistance in 1981. In higher education, the European Commission has contributed to the preparation of some 170 transnational study programmes affecting over 300 universities which aim to enable young people to carry out part of their studies in other member countries. Also to help those who must or who want to study in other countries, the Commission has published teaching guides for higher and secondary education in Europe and is preparing a new one for teachers and youth exchange organizations. The Commission has, in addition, introduced proposals:
 - to promote exchanges of secondary-school students ensuring that the most needy also benefit: children of poor families, handicapped youngsters, inhabitants of the outlying areas of the Community and countries whose language is less widely used, pupils studying technical or vocational subjects;
 - facilitating the admission in higher education of students from other member countries whilst eliminating quantitative restrictions and financial or administrative discriminations, by creating study grants and making progress towards the academic recognition of diplomas and study periods. Member States have already decided to harmonize or to simplify certain requirements. In particular, during their first two terms of study, students from other member countries are not required to pay fees, etc., which are higher than those paid by nationals.



The Community does not work in a vacuum. The Community needs the views and opinions of young people to be able to understand their expectations and respond to them in the best way possible. This is why it tries to develop a dialogue with them by intensifying its information activities as well as its cooperation with the European Community's Youth Forum. Created in 1978, this Forum brings together various youth organizations.

Its activities show that it is interested in all sectors of Community activity even if, at first sight, European youth does not seem to be a direct or immediate beneficiary. There is a very simple reason for this: decisions taken today at the European level in areas such as cooperation and development, industry or research, contribute to the shape of the world tomorrow which will — as always — belong to the young people of today. For this reason, Europe is of importance for young people ■

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Institutions of the Community.

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