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from: General Secretariat of the Council  
to: Permanent Representatives Committee / Council

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Subject: Engaging young people to release their potential  
- *Policy debate*  
*(Public debate pursuant to Article 8(2) CRP [proposed by the Presidency])*

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Following consultation of the Youth Working Party, the Presidency has drawn up the attached discussion paper as a basis for the policy debate on the above subject at the EYCS Council meeting on 11 May 2012.

## Discussion Paper

# Engaging young people to release their potential

### Background

*Renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010 – 2018)*

The overall objectives of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010 – 2018) are:

- (i) to create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market as well as
- (ii) to promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people.

The main fields of action that should be taken include education and training, employment and entrepreneurship, participation as well as creativity and culture.

*European Council conclusions of 8 – 9 December 2011*

“While structural reforms must be vigorously pursued, targeted measures are urgently needed at both national and European level for the most vulnerable groups, in particular the young unemployed. Enhanced activation policies should be complemented by efforts to upgrade skills, notably by adjusting education and training systems to labour market needs.”

“More than 23 million people are unemployed in Europe today. Unless we can improve our growth rates, unemployment will remain high. We need to keep people in work and create new jobs, including in the "green economy". This means taking concrete action to overcome the "skills mismatch" and the "geographic mismatch". It also means reforming labour markets and addressing the cost of labour in relation to productivity. This is mainly a matter for the Member States, which need to develop and implement comprehensive initiatives on employment, education and skills.”

### **The challenge**

The European Union is facing the impending risk of “a lost generation”, as the youth unemployment rate continues to increase. Today, more than 20% (5 million) of 15 – 24 year olds on the EU labour market are unemployed. 28 % of these young people are long-term unemployed.

Alongside the urgent need to offer immediate support for those young people suffering from the impact of the crisis, it is crucial to prevent youth unemployment by equipping young people with skills relevant to the labour market or to becoming an entrepreneur. The renewed framework calls for greater cooperation between youth policies and relevant policy areas, including education, employment and social inclusion. The cross-sectoral approach is particularly relevant when discussing how to reduce the current high youth unemployment rate and how to release the potential of young people. It is furthermore an approach supported via the Council conclusions on fostering the creative and innovative potential of young people.

Employability is neither the sole aim nor the only benefit of non-formal and informal learning, but the acquisition of relevant competences and skills through non-formal and informal learning can be viewed as a valuable contribution to the European and national debates on how to ensure that even more young people gain access to education and the labour market. For instance, active participation can help young people keep their life perspective and motivation in times of crisis as well as improve resilience, and the validation of non-formal and informal learning can help highlight the broader competences of young people, many of which may well extend beyond their formal qualifications.

The Danish Presidency would - with the debate at Council - like to strengthen the cross-sectoral approach and to broaden the debate on possible solutions to youth unemployment by including non-formal and informal learning sectors – sectors which have sometimes been overlooked in European debates.

In light of the above, Ministers are invited to consider the following questions:

- 1. In the field of non-formal and informal learning, what policy tools are Member States considering to help reduce the high youth unemployment rate?***
  
- 2. How can the non-formal and informal learning sector be used to stimulate creativity and innovation among young people not in employment, education or training and prevent them from being marginalised from society?***