



**An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige**
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

**Report of the Department of Children
and Youth Affairs to the Oireachtas**

**Under Section 2 (5) of the European
Union (Scrutiny) Act 2002**

For the period January to June 2020

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The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) presents its eighteenth report to the Oireachtas under Section 2 (5) of the European Union (Scrutiny) Act, 2002.

1. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND WORK OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

As well as the Programme for Government and other national policy considerations, the Department also operates in an international framework, provided primarily through Ireland's membership of the United Nations, Council of Europe and the European Union.

One of the priority activities identified by the Department in its Statement of Strategy is to ensure that arrangements are in place to support the Department to meet its external obligations in relation to children and youth. The outputs from this priority activity include:

- Participation in international fora/networks relating to children.
- Active role in the development of EU youth policy, including Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps; through the EU Youth Working Group Party, and associated events, in support of the Council of Ministers for Education, Youth, Culture and Sport.
- Active role in the development of EU Youth research, policy and cross border peer collaboration through the Expert Group on Mobility of Young Volunteers and Cross-Border Solidarity.
- Participation in the EU Commission Thematic Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, which was established to develop a European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care.

Council Meetings During The Above Period

The Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council was due to be held on 19 May, 2020 but was cancelled due to COVID-19.

2. SUMMARY OF DRAFT EU LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Solidarity Corps programme and repealing [European Solidarity Corps Regulation] and Regulation (EU) No 375/2014

The Regulation concerns Phase 3 of the European Solidarity Corps. The European Solidarity Corps aims to enhance the engagement of young people and organisations in solidarity activities, which are of high quality and accessible to all young people. The proposal provides the legal framework for the European Solidarity Corps to offer opportunities for young people to engage in solidarity activities; which will contribute to addressing unmet societal needs, while enhancing young people's personal, educational, social, civic and professional development.

Léargas is the National Agency for the European Solidarity Corps. DCYA is the National Authority.

Member States are currently negotiating the amendments to the proposed Regulation with the European Parliament.

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing 'Erasmus': the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013

Erasmus+ is the European Union programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport. It provides funding and support for organisations to operate projects that encourage European exchange, co-operation and learning. Erasmus+ is funded by the European Union through the contributions of member states, including Ireland. Funding of almost €170 million has been allocated to Ireland for the duration of the programme. Erasmus+ funding is available to all sectors (or fields) of formal, informal and non-formal education. This includes schools, youth organisations, adult education groups, and vocational organisations.

Léargas is the National Agency for Erasmus+. DCYA and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) are the national authorities.

Member States are currently negotiating the amendments to the proposed Regulation with the European Parliament.

3. SUMMARY OF NON LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS

The Croatian Presidency looked at exploring and contributing to the opportunities for rural youth and more inclusive societies. As part of this effort, the Croatian Presidency hosted the EU Youth Conference, where they held discussions on the subject of "*Opportunities*

for Rural Youth - How to Ensure the Sustainability of Rural Communities across the EU?” in March 2020.

Due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministers Council in May 2020 was cancelled. The Croatian Presidency hosted an informal high-level videoconference of EU Ministers of Youth on 19 May, 2020 where views were exchanged on the impact of COVID-19 on the youth sector.

As the Council meeting was cancelled, the *Council Conclusions on Raising Opportunities for Young People in Rural and Remote Areas* were submitted for approval through written procedure and were adopted on the 25 May, 2020. Additionally, the *Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the Outcomes of the 7th Cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue* was submitted for approval through written procedure and was subsequently adopted on the 16 June, 2020. Ireland was supportive of both texts.

(B) Early Childhood Care and Education

Education and Training 2020 (ET2020) - Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care - Draft Work Programme

Education and Training 2020 (ET2020) is the European Commission’s strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. Within the framework of ET2020, a new mandate was given for an EU Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, to develop and implement a workplan between 2018 and 2020. DCYA is a member of the working group, with DES as an alternate member.

The overarching context for the working group is the EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, which was first drafted in 2014 and was formally adopted as an EU Council Recommendation in May 2019. The EU Quality Framework is based around 5 dimensions of quality and they are access, staff, curriculum, monitoring & evaluation, and governance & funding.

The 2018-2020 workplan focuses on two key themes: professionalisation and inclusion. Both themes are of high relevance to Ireland in the context of the commitments contained in “*First 5 - A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028*”; including amongst others, the development of a Workforce Development Plan, further development of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), and consideration of future extension of supports for inclusion within Early Learning and Care (ELC) services e.g. to other disadvantaged groups and/or development of a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) - type approach to funding.

Working group actions include Peer Learning Activities (PLAs). One of three PLAs was scheduled to take place in Dublin in March 2020 focusing on the combined themes of

professionalisation and inclusion, however, PLA was cancelled as a result of COVID-19. Alternative plans have yet to be agreed with the European Commission for an alternative date for the PLA.

European Semester process

The European Semester 2020 Country Report for Ireland [SWD (2020) 506 final] noted that “substantial progress” has been made in addressing the 2019 country-specific recommendation to increase access to affordable and quality childcare and noted that “some progress” has been made in addressing the 2019 country-specific recommendation to provide personalised active integration support and facilitate upskilling, in particular for vulnerable groups and people living in households with low work intensity.

(C) Child Guarantee

DCYA officials attended a conference on the preparatory actions taken for the Child Guarantee in Brussels on 17 February, 2020.

(D) Rights of the child

A DCYA official attended the 5th Joint Meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the Rights of the Child and the Informal Expert Group on the Protection of Children in Migration, in Berlin on 21 January, 2020.

4. SUMMARY OF FUTURE SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Under the German Presidency (July - December 2020), the theme is “Together for Europe’s recovery” and the youth themes will be based on the core priorities from the EU Youth Strategy, “*Engage, Connect, Empower*”. The German Presidency also launches the start of a new cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue: *Europe for YOUTH–YOUTH for Europe: Space for Democracy and Participation*.

The German Presidency intends to draft Council Conclusions on fostering democratic awareness and democratic engagement among young people in Europe as well as a Council Resolution on the “*European Youth Work Agenda*”. These will be developed at the Youth Working Party meetings where they will be discussed by Member States, and considered for adoption at the next Council of EU Youth Ministers, which will be held in November 2020.

In addition, the German Presidency plans to further negotiations and possibly reach a final adoption of future European Solidarity Corps legislation. The EU Youth Conference and Director General Conference will also be held in Berlin from the 1 – 6 October, 2020.

Portugal will hold the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the period from January to June 2021.