Principles and objectives of a new youth policy

Our society needs the youth, their ideas, commitment and potential. And young people need the support and recognition of society in this decisive phase of their lives. Only if framework conditions are right, they will be able to live self-determined lives and look confidently ahead to their future. Therefore, policy makers and civil society have to bring the challenges and specific needs of young people in Germany into the focus of their debates. The development of a new youth policy is a process that aims at turning youth policy into a recognizable policy field with a distinguished conception of itself. Young people as well as representatives of politics and other fields of society are involved in this process.

A new youth policy shapes the future and opens up new prospects for society.
Youth is a decisive phase in life. Young people take essential steps towards independence; they develop an identity and morals; they search for a place within society and find themselves confronted with diverse expectations regarding learning and education. In this period of their lives young people gain important experience, try out various ways of life and decide about their future way of life. All young people have to face these challenges, even if their individual backgrounds and conditions differ very much.
For being able to deal with the typical age-related challenges, young people need to be confident that their future is viable. This implies prospective apprenticeships and jobs as well as the assurance that they are growing up in a society and into a future worth living in. Career prospects should be in line with personal interests and competencies, young people should be free to choose their way of life within the legal limits. However, “youth” is not only an individual phase of life; it also contributes to the development of society and its innovation.
A new youth policy focuses on the endeavour to ensure for all young people attractive prospects and opportunities for active participation within society. It means to provide support and counselling for adolescents and young adults in their search for orientation and when they try out various ways of living. Testing options is as much part of it as sudden changes and detours are.

A new youth policy perceives the phase of “youth” holistically.
A new youth policy means to counteract the isolated consideration of single aspects of “youth”. It establishes a holistic task shared by politics and society who determine young people’s life situations. Youth is more than just the transition from childhood to adulthood. By drafting a new youth policy, typical challenges and ambivalences of that age as well as their institutional counterparts (educational offers, support systems and socially regulated status changes) are being looked at. In doing so, the age of youth is perceived in two
ways: first of all, as an important phase in young people’s learning and educational biography and secondly as an age which has its very own meaning through the strongly present-focussed perspective young people have.

**A new youth policy is a policy for all young people.**
Youth policy has to take into account recurring challenges for all young people and it has to respect and promote heterogeneous life schemes and scripts. Special support has to be provided for young people who are not up to the challenges or who live in difficult situations.
Youth policy has to act preventive and balancing in order to enable equal opportunities for all young people through counselling services, promotion and the supply of support.

**A new youth policy focuses on the interests and needs of young people.**
The diversified challenges young people are facing represent the central issues of a new youth policy. The core question is how to strike a balance between the society’s expectations towards young people and their subjective needs. A new youth policy makes visible the potential and the opportunities which can be gained by society through a strong youth and keeps them in collective consciousness. For instance, the interests of young people have to be actively represented within the dialogue of generations and they must be supported in making their contribution to the coexistence of generations.
Beyond this, a new youth policy stands for a positive image of youth. The reputation of young people in Germany has to be enhanced. Too often young people are pictured as lacking orientation and failing. However, this reflection keenly distorts reality. A new youth policy turns against this one-sided way of stressing lacks and deficiencies. Its aim is to provide genuinely better acknowledgment of young people’s achievements and to provide the support and space they need in order to become responsible and socially competent personalities.

**A new youth policy promotes sustainable youth participation.**
With the existence of a new youth policy, young people become serious partners in the drafting of societal policies for the future. They are entitled to stand up for their interests and they are experts regarding their own concerns. Young people’s contributions to socio-political topics and developments are crucial; their perspectives and views cannot be replaced under any circumstances by those of adults. Young people want to have a say in the designing of their environment and their future. For everyone who deals with youth-related topics it is therefore a core requirement to take the views, interests and wishes of young people effectively into account. Suitable procedures and appropriate structures such as self-organizations and associations of young people are necessary.
Sustainable youth participation can uplift the new youth policy to become an exhilarant element of democracy.
A new youth policy calls for space.
Nowadays, young people are supposed to learn more within less amounts of time. They additionally have to cope with new challenges within fragile basic conditions. Achieving a good and self-determined time management in everyday life (school/training/studies, volunteering, family or leisure) has become more difficult; freely available time quotas are rare. However, young people need sufficient time for their personal development; one of their main tasks is to deal with their physical and psycho-social development and to find their individual place among their peers. Young people need accepted time off and more space to evolve, to appropriate their environment and to take part in shaping it.

A new youth policy is a common task.
In all processes shaping our society, the interests of young people have to be taken into account. A new youth policy requires combined efforts within the respective special departments as well as in a cross-sectoral way. A comprehensive, joint strategy of all relevant political fields is necessary, in particular within the fields of youth, education, social affairs, labour market, family, interior affairs, health, economics, consumer protection, transport, construction and urban development. This could include a so-called “youth check”, a testing of each and every measure regarding its impact on today’s and tomorrow’s youth, anchored as an integral part of all planning and development processes. A new youth policy is characterized by permanent cross-sectoral collaboration aiming at enhancing living conditions and the terms of education as well as developing opportunities for young people. For a more effective new youth policy, local, regional, national and European partners have to collaborate bindingly. Beyond this vertical cooperation, the individual partners have to assume their responsibility for specific tasks while taking into account the principles of subsidiarity concerning youth policy. The accountability of all spheres of society within the field of youth policy should become visible in an “Alliance for Youth”: In a broad confederation of all relevant groups and partners (young people, school, youth services and welfare, politics, civil society, religious communities, business, media, science) the idea of a new youth policy can be supported, and structures can be modifiedconcertedly for the benefit of young people.

A new youth policy promotes reforms.
One aspect of establishing a new youth policy is to further the development of existing youth policy frameworks. Legislation and legal claims have to be reviewed in order to see if they are suitable and effective for young people under present conditions and if they will remain so in future. This includes the solution of issues regarding relevant interfaces, the clarification of financial needs and responsibilities as well as the (re)positioning of funding instruments and programs. Particularly important in this context are the
strengthening and sharpening of the youth-related planning on different levels, the enhancement of youth reporting in support of knowledge-based decision-making processes as well as the strengthening of the youth service and welfare committees in their role as important instruments of participation.

**A new youth policy has a European dimension.**

A new youth policy with a purely national scope will not be able to offer viable long-term solutions. The living conditions of young people depend very much upon the European and global development and they are influenced by political decisions which are made on the EU-level or also by other states. European collaboration within the youth sector and debates of European experts may enrich national policies and practice. One element of the European dimension in a new youth policy is to achieve a better integration of European political strategies (in particular the EU youth strategy) into the debate on youth policy as well as into programmes and measures in Germany. European priorities and objectives have to be complemented, assessed, extended and specified in accordance with the claims of a new youth policy. Contributions to European youth policy made by the federal government must harmonize with the principles of this new youth policy in order to contribute to the development of a European policy sphere in which the conditions for growing up successfully are shaped conjoined and respectfully.