

NATIONAL YOUTH PLAN: OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Document by the Ministry for Youth Policies and Sport

INDEX

The institutional framework

The National Youth Plan

- A) Introductory remarks
- B) the contribution of youth policies to the national economic development
- C) Courses of action
 - facilitating access by young people to employment
 - developing and making good use of the skills and training of young people
 - facilitating access to housing by young people
 - bridging the digital divide
 - fostering creativity and the consumption of cultural merit goods
 - expanding participation and representation
 - stimulating inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue
 - combating youth malaise
 - drafting the Annual Report on Youth
 - facilitating access by young people to the practice of sport

THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Ministry for Youth Policies and Sport (*Pogas*) was instituted for the first time by Prime Minister Prodi's government in May 2006, implementing a policy to place it on a par with the other Youth and Sports Ministries that exist in virtually every European Union country.

Decree-Law No 181 of 18 May 2006 (published in the *Official Gazette* No. 114 of 18 May 2006, enacted as Law No. 233 of 17 July 2006) was issued by the Council of Ministers vesting the new ministry mainly with "*a) performing central government functions in relation to sport, and b) policy-making and coordination functions regarding youth policies*".

Under a subsequent Prime Ministerial Decree (DPCM) of 15 June 2006, "*the policy-making functions and the coordination of all initiatives, including legislation and regulation, on matters relating to youth and sport*" were delegated to the Minister without portfolio for youth policies and sport. More specifically, with regard to youth policies, and without prejudice to the statutory powers vested in individual ministers, the Minister is responsible for:

"a) coordinating government activities to guarantee the implementation of policies for

youth in every sphere, including economics, taxation, work, education and culture, also by coordinating programmes financed by the European Union;

b) coordinating government action in the matter of international youth exchange schemes;

c) performing, jointly with the Minister for Social Solidarity, the policy-making functions and oversight of the Italian National Agency for the Community Youth Programme." The Minister also participates in the work of the National Youth Forum.

With regard to sport, the ministerial remit comprises:

"a) proposing, coordinating and implementing legislative, regulatory, administrative and cultural initiatives relating to sport;

b) managing relations with intergovernmental agencies and institutions responsible for sport, particularly with the European Union, the Council of Europe, UNESCO and WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency);

c) managing relations with sports entities and other parties working in the sports sphere;

d) preventing doping and violence in sport falling within the ministerial remit;

e) exercising oversight over the Italian National Olympics Committee (CONI) and, jointly with the Minister for Culture in relation to areas within their respective jurisdiction, oversight over and policy-making for the Institute for Sports Credit."

Together with the offices working directly with the Minister, in early January 2007, the Department for Youth Policies and Sport began its work, under a Departmental Head and two Directors-General responsible, respectively, for Youth Policies and Sports, and for ancillary functions (Resources and Organisation). The remit given to the ministry is to build up a light, streamlined and versatile coordination structure adequate to its tasks. Two of the three executives are women.

Even though this is a Ministry without Portfolio, the first few months of activity have also been useful for identifying and establishing several channels of funding needed to perform its institutional activities and tasks. Law No 248 of 4 August 2006 enacting "*Urgent measures for economic recovery*" instituted the **National Fund for Youth Policies**, with an initial capital endowment provided under the recent Budget Law for the three-year period 2007-2009. As from 1 January 2007 the Fund will therefore be in receipt of €130 million annually.

The fact of attending the meetings of the Inter-Departmental Economic Planning Committee (CIPE) and cooperating with the Ministry for Economic Development ensures that the ministry is able to identify Funds specifically intended for youth policies and

sports in conjunction with local government authorities, mainly using the instrument of **Framework Programme Agreements (APQs)** with the Regional governments (*already initialled in July with the Puglia region, while the agreements with Lazio, Marche, Trentino, Campania, Piedmont and Friuli are currently being defined*), and **Local Youth Plans with Municipal Authorities** (*a First Agreement, initialled in December 2006 with the ANCI-Iter Municipalities network will fund 27 Local Plans in 27 municipalities belonging to 16 regions on an experimental basis*).

THE NATIONAL YOUTH PLAN

A) INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Having these resources available therefore makes it possible to implement a **National Youth Plan** laying down specific courses of action. For the Economic and Financial Planning Document 2007-2011 specifically states that *"the government is committed to embarking on a fully-fledged National Youth Plan to achieve the objectives of providing access to homes, jobs, business, credit and culture"*.

Constant dialogue with young people is an obligation and a methodological practice for the design, drafting, implementation and monitoring of the Plan. Wide-ranging consultations during the first six months in the life and work of the ministry have made it possible to more fully understand and better organise the activities that must be set out in the Plan, and have given a clearer understanding of the fact that the most appropriate way of approaching our youth is to view them mainly as a resource.

For it should be borne in mind that, apart from the courses of action set out in the National Youth Plan, which are illustrated in this document, everything the government has planned to rejuvenate the country, and which will characterise the revival in 2007 of its institutional and political initiatives, will have to be strengthened and form part of all the major reforms of Italy's economic and social structure currently in progress, ranging from pensions reform to the reform of the labour market and the civil service.

The permanent driving force behind all three priority areas of intervention, as in every other in which the government and Parliament will be pushing through reforms, is the irreversible acknowledgement of the proper place that the talents, merits, capabilities and strength of the younger generations must be given, so that young people are the main element in transforming the country. Rejuvenating Italy entails placing its future on a more solid and equitable basis, unleashing the country's potential and making it more dynamic and competitive.

To achieve this, it is equally important for the revival of the Italian economy and production to be underpinned by a visible increase in public resources for the Higher Education and Research system, after addressing and resolving the difficult problem of rebalancing the budget and bringing Italy back permanently within the European

parameters.

To do this, there must be a sharp break with the way public investment in Higher Education and Research has been viewed in the historical past, but also in the recent past, and priority must be given to use recuperated tax revenues for these purposes.

These introductory remarks to the overall scenario of the government's activities show that many of the measures and proposals in the National Youth Plan refer to matters falling within the jurisdiction of other ministries. What must be borne in mind, however, is the overall organic character which the government intends to give an interdepartmental National Plan to give an impetus to the potential of young Italians in every sphere.

Considering the ambitious character of this objective, the whole government has to work as a team, to design and above all implement it, tasking the Minister for Youth Policies with policy-making and coordinating with the other ministries whose remit also involves youth.

All these proposals are held together by the idea that young people occupy a central place. Conditions must be created that will enable young people to become the protagonists of their own advancement, growth and future, experiencing autonomy and responsibility as they move towards adulthood. It is this focus that turns measures and initiatives into a fully-fledged policy for young people, with unity and meaning, identifying both the purposes and the preconditions for every specific proposal.

The National Youth Plan is the instrument that will be used to build up a cross-cutting, organic and consistent approach to youth policies. It aims in particular at achieving the following:

- *facilitating access by young people to employment*
- *developing and enhancing the skills of young people*
- *facilitating access by young people to a home and to credit*
- *bridging the digital divide*
- *promoting creativity and encouraging the consumption of cultural and 'merit' goods*
- *encouraging the representation and participation of young people in public life*
- *fostering interfaith and intercultural dialogue*
- *combating youth malaise*
- *drafting the Annual Youth Report*

For each of these courses of action identified in the National Youth Plan, the 2007 Budget Law has already begun laying solid foundations which must be taken into

account.

B) THE CONTRIBUTION OF YOUTH POLICIES TO NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The National Youth Policy aims in particular at reaffirming the central position of young people in Italian national growth policies. The timing and the conditions for achieving these objectives are very closely linked, firstly, to the specific local situations to which they refer and to the conditions for achieving the economic development of the areas concerned, and secondly, to the effectiveness of the linkages and synergies which the activities can create between different places and different areas of jurisdiction.

In this connection, it is all the more necessary to exploit the value of the youth resources present in the less developed areas where there is a more serious gap between young people and employment opportunities, and where public intervention must narrow the wider gap between the demand and the supply of opportunities and high quality services for young people.

At the present time many instruments are available to implement projects set out in the National Youth Plan. However, we believe that the best way to improve the effectiveness of the work of the Ministry for Youth Policies and Sport is for its activities to be integrated horizontally with those of other government departments, and above all of the other institutional players at different tiers of local government.

Institutional co-operation is therefore essential for the pursuit of the objectives indicated, to exploit existing positive experiences and to confer an overall organic character on youth policies, to stand as a concrete benchmark for the Regional governments, local institutions and the various central government entities involved, which also entails using the Framework Programme Agreements (APQs) which have already been mentioned.

There is no doubt that the APQs are the most appropriate instruments for planning actions, by identifying the priority areas in which the actions are to take place, allocating the funding, and encouraging young people to demonstrate their planning/design skills and creativity. To support and integrate the work in progress for the drafting and conclusion of APQs, this ministry intends simultaneously to embark on activities that will contribute to the design of more specific instruments for action connected with the implementation of the National Strategic Framework (QSN) 2007-2013.

For it is obvious that the strategic thrusts of the National Youth Plan are amply consistent with the QSN's *macro objectives* and *priorities*, and above all that our youth are a resource of excellence to be activated in our development policies. The existence of this new Ministry therefore provides an opportunity to pursue the coordination and systematic organisation of the measures, adopting a perspective of structuring and

consolidating policies for the younger generations.

More specifically: it is planned:

- to identify a wide range of specific objectives and areas of intervention within the strategic guidelines adopted by the ministry that can express the strategy of the QSN, thereby enhancing and enriching the objectives and thematic priorities, also in terms of supporting and making good use of the value of the younger sections of the population;
- to set up "Awareness-building and Discussion Panels" with institutional parties at the various national, regional and local tiers, to jointly identify synergistic courses of action to be implemented in a wide-ranging and systematic manner;
- to identify *major projects*, national and international, for gradual implementation, that are able to pursue the broader European cohesion objectives, drawing on the potential of the younger generations;
- to implement actions to strengthen and enhance the design capacity and cross-cutting systemic assistance and support activities for the benefit of the Regional and Municipal authorities, and the other institutions involved in planning and implementing the Framework Programme Agreements regarding youth and sports policies.

C) COURSES OF ACTION

Facilitating access by young people to employment

The first major objective of the Plan is to facilitate access to the jobs market by young people, by easing the present level of job insecurity and removing the bottlenecks that are preventing them from entering the professions.

The educational and training measures which are dealt with below cannot be implemented without a careful analysis of the fraught relationship between young people and the world of work.

Italy has the lowest youth employment levels in Europe. This was recalled by the Governor of the Bank of Italy, Draghi, in his Annual Report: the Italian employment rate among young people between 20 and 29 years of age, is 10% below the European average.

Priority must therefore be given to removing the marginal character and weakness of the labour market with respect to young people, particularly young women, who are *de facto* victims of discrimination in this regard.

All the measures issued by the government since it came to power (including the measures to combat undocumented labour set out in article 36-bis of Decree 223/2006, commonly known as the "Visco-Bersani Decree", and the Call Centres Circular of 14

June 2006) have been designed to achieve this, and in particular **the measures in the 2007 Budget Law**, which contains a comprehensive set of measures constituting an organic action to address employment and social security, to reduce the present levels of job insecurity.

The following may be mentioned in particular:

- The **'tax wedge'** measure, designed and implemented not only to reduce labour costs but also to encourage recourse to stable forms of employment;
- the **employment stabilisation** measures, to encourage the co.co.co and co.co.pro ("pseudo-employment") contracts to be converted to full employment contracts under agreements between the social partners (the "Stabilisation Fund"). This measure provides in particular that if a worker is recruited under a full employment agreement, the employer pays a special supplementary contribution to the INPS special fund, supplemented by public funds in the maximum amount of the contribution due for regular employees;
- the full set of the measures **to stabilise employment** in the civil service;
- bringing forward to January 2007 the **start-up of the supplementary social security scheme**, using accrued severance pay provisions;
- **increasing to 23% the social security contributions payable by "pseudo-employed workers"** who have no other form of social security to increase their pension entitlement, with **sickness benefit entitlement** paid by INPS, and **parental leave benefits**;
- the **Inter-generational Solidarity Pact** under which employees aged 55 and above may volunteer to convert their labour contract into a part-time contract, and young job-seekers or unemployed people are simultaneously recruited under part-time labour contracts.

It is from this starting point, and with this same spirit, that the Ministry for Youth Policies and Sport intends to continue its valuable institutional co-operation with the Ministry of Labour as part of the overall effort being deployed by the government – also by drawing up a *Cooperation Plan*, which is currently in progress – whose most immediate policy objectives will be to begin discussions to **amend pensions legislation** – scheduled for spring 2007 – and to **reform Law No. 30** governing the labour market.

It should also be recalled that the Ministry for Youth Policies played an active part in assisting the Ministry of Justice with the drafting of the **Bill for the Reform of the Liberal Professions**. Its contribution was designed to help frame a modern and unambiguous reform plan to liberalise and improve the professions for the benefit of consumers, and above all to open up the professions to thousands of young graduates who sometimes find it possible to break through the barriers put in place to prevent them from gaining access.

The key principles of the law are to guarantee transparent access by young people to the liberal professions based on merit, with:

- an apprenticeship or tutelage period which can also be completed abroad from the final stage in their degree courses, which must be equitably remunerated;

- a nationwide State examination based on an impartial and uniform evaluation;
- professionals, even belonging to different professions, able to work in partnership, which could prove useful, particularly for young people just beginning their professional life;
- professional Associations/Orders being given the function of checking qualifications and ensuring the professional updating of their members, by – inter alia – organising supplementary trainee schemes and helping to place young deserving candidates in straightened circumstances with professional partnerships;
- professional Associations/Orders being required to give young professionals executive posts within the Association/Order, and introducing the principle of temporary elective posts.

Lastly, similarly to is proposed in the field of education and vocational training, the **network of job counselling facilities** must also be improved. A first major step has already been taken with the conclusion of the Framework Agreement between the Minister for Youth Policies and Sport and ANCI – initialled in October 2006 – **to institute the National Coordination of Informagiovani**, designed to increase the present number and spread them more widely throughout the country, to create a structured national network and a central-level entity to provide services and high quality information and advice to guide young people and help them find employment.

Developing and making good use of the skills and training of young people

It is essential to develop and make good use of young people's skills by supporting school and higher education courses, and in more general terms, Research.

In Italy, the value of academic qualifications is declining. According to Eurostat data, the unemployment rate among young people aged between 20 and 29 years is 24% for graduates, 13% for secondary school leavers, and 10% for people with an elementary school education. This situation is totally different in the rest of Europe, where 9.3% of the unemployed are graduates, 14% have secondary school qualifications, and 20% have elementary school education.

In order to fully implement the provisions of article 34 of the Constitution one other instrument is to increase the number of **scholarships and study grants**, or at all events to **provide financial support for education and training**, particularly in scientific subjects, and to promote a specific Programme to support advanced studies by providing scholarships, grants and soft loans to enable young undergraduates or postgraduate students to cover their maintenance costs without placing an excessive burden on their families. As already happens in other countries, particularly in the English-speaking countries and Northern Europe, by offering credit facilities Italy must demonstrate to young people that it has placed a wager on them, and is investing in their future.

The Minister for Youth Policies has devoted the past few months to this, and by spring 2007 expects to be able to conclude a major agreement with the Italian banking system under a **Protocol of Understanding with the Italian Banking Association (ABI)**. The purpose of this Protocol is to "*facilitate and support the advancement of young people*", by identifying streamlined and simplified procedures and subsidised access to loans for education and training, in the form of:

- student loans (of up to €3,000) **to pay university taxes**, for students aged between 18 and 30;
- student loans (of up to €30,000) **to take a Master's degree**, for graduates aged between 23 and 35.

This Protocol should be seen as the first result of co-operation with ABI, which will be further pursued in order to extend these facilities to other areas, including the provision of support for creativity, territorial mobility, and young entrepreneurs.

It is important to increase the **territorial mobility** of young Italian students, mainly within Italy. The 2007 Budget Law has already provided tax benefits in this regard, offering a 19% deduction of **rental costs**, up to a maximum of €2,633, **incurred by students (or their families)** to take higher education courses outside their municipality of residence – that is, for degree courses at Universities in a municipality other than their own and least 100 km distant, and at all events in a different Province, provided that the apartment is in the same municipality as the University or a bordering municipality.

And while on the subject of mobility, the **Erasmus Programme** (and similar programmes) is becoming increasingly popular with young Europeans, and across the years it has proven to be one of the main instruments for fostering mutual understanding between the young citizens of the Union. However, the possibilities for further developing the Programme in Italy are still limited, and must be expanded.

2007 will see the 20th Anniversary of the Erasmus Programme, and as part of the celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome the Ministry is planning to hold an "**Erasmus Day**" in May 2007, to be used as the framework within which to debate proposals for giving a further impetus to this exchange programme. For example, ideas will be discussed to further incorporate scholarships and study grants for Italian students taking part in the Programme and provide support for Italian universities to enable them to organise English language courses. These measures are designed to increase the demand for exchange schemes by foreign universities.

Facilitating access to housing by young people

The problems that young people encounter, particularly in large cities, when looking for economically priced accommodation, to purchase or to rent, are already well-known. The government has put in place an Interdepartmental Panel at the Ministry for

the Implementation of the Programme, which is currently identifying all the instruments needed to remove the obstacles faced by the younger generations to purchase or rent a home. The measure dealing with housing difficulties approved by parliament in February 2007 explicitly provides that a National Housing Plan should be presented.

The main approach to be taken – following the best practices already developed by certain local authorities, such as the Rome City Council – is to make it easier for young people aged up to 35, particularly “pseudo-employees”, to acquire home loans by providing them with appropriate guarantees or by subsidising mortgage payments or rents.

The aforementioned Protocol of Understanding to be signed by the Minister for Youth Policies and ABI provides a third type of soft loan for university students aged between 18 and 30 in the form of **grants to pay the deposit on a home and rental brokerage fees**.

Once this objective has been achieved, in addition to the tax reliefs for renting houses by university students studying away from home, the specific task of the government's Housing Panel must be to **extend the facilities to all young people to enable them to take out loans for rented accommodation, but also to purchase their first home**.

With regard to rented accommodation, the government is currently working on the idea of levying a single 20% tax rate on income from renting student accommodation, provided that this is accompanied by similar tax benefits for young people renting an apartment. As far as the purchase of a first home is concerned, the Ministry for Youth Policies is ready to work with other government departments and to commit part of the resources available to provide the guarantees requested, so that the banking system can provide subsidised mortgages for young workers in non-permanent employment and young couples.

These measures entail a huge amount of resources, not only to extend the sphere the rights of the younger population, but also by reference to the "Keynesian" locomotive effect on the whole of the national economy – from the point of view of triggering the cycle of private consumption – of introducing instruments to help young Italians leave their parental homes early, and if possible with a smile on their face, and with a greater sense of security.

According to Istat (2003 data) 3,852,442 young unmarried people aged between 25 and 34 were still living with a parent (about 60% males). According to Istat, over the next three years, 1,905,374 young people would "probably" be leaving their parents' homes and 555,969 would "certainly" be leaving their homes. Young married couples living with their family or their in-laws were excluded from this estimate, and so the figures are probably an underestimate.

What would happen, in terms of purchases of durable goods, if some of these young people had the chance to set up a home of their own?

We have worked out the figures for furnishing a small apartment with a kitchen, bathroom, one bedroom and one sitting room with tables, chairs, beds, mattresses, a refrigerator, household linen, and various household appliances. Based on an estimate of average prices, and then averaging out the various combinations, we have calculated the cost person of just under €5,000.

If all the young people who have declared their intention to leave their parents' homes "certainly" were to do so, purchases of durables would be worth at the least €2.5 billion. If we were also to include those who declared that they would "probably" leave their parental homes, we could add a further €9 billion to this figure.

But if we were to work on the basis of all the young people living with their parents today – regardless of their declared intentions – expenditure on durable goods would be in the range of €906 million (if only 5% were to leave home) and as much as €18 billion (in the impossible event that 100% were to leave).

Bridging the digital divide

Another course of action in the National Youth Plan is facilitating access by young people to the Information Society by narrowing the digital divide (software, hardware, broadband and Internet access) and extending their right to culture.

It is essential today for young people's education to give them increasingly more highly developed and sophisticated computer skills. And, increasingly, the possession of computer skills and computer literacy is becoming a new yardstick for evaluating new forms of social exclusion, creating the digital divide.

There are countries like Iceland and Sweden in which 98% of all students use the Internet at least once a week, whereas only two-thirds of Italian students are habitual Internet-users and 19% of them have never used it at all. Furthermore, "computer illiteracy" is costing Italy almost €19 billion a year, calculated as the production time wasted by employees in the workplace trying to solve computer problems because of inadequate computer literacy.

The state of "computer illiteracy" which affects a substantial proportion of the Italian population (59%) – including young people – must be remedied, partly because they often unnecessarily consume technologies, and because of the non-use or under-use of technologies which would have a huge potential if properly used, and lastly, because there is a tendency for them to be attracted by less intelligent, not to say dangerous, Internet activities. It is alarming to read, for example, that gaming and online betting is widespread among young people and children.

We must therefore implement activities that have already been implemented in recent years such as *"Fly with the Internet"* (designed for 16-year-olds and currently being financed with resources of €17 million) or *"A cappuccino for a PC"* (which was suspended in June 2006 when the funding ran out) by increasing the funds available and broadening the field of application for the purchase of hardware and software and the acquisition of skills and, in more general terms, spreading the computer culture more widely in Italy. The Ministry for Technological Innovation and the Ministry of Communications are the main authorities involved.

Instruments that might be used to get young people to increasingly practise good computer skills could also include offering soft loans to young people **to subscribe to broadband links** and, in more general terms, to acquire computer skills, and **developing and increasing connectivity and public access points to the Internet** through the network of public libraries, for example, or through the Lotto gaming shops, which is already quite widespread and uses the fast broadband links.

Lastly, in order to direct and foster the well-informed use of the Internet and computer technologies, campaigns should be planned and run specifically for young people, using non-academic language that young people can readily understand. The ministry is already committed to this – also through its participation in the communications working group at the *Law and Order Panel* at the Ministry of Education – to promote information campaigns by joint agreement with video-games manufacturers and distributors.

Promoting creativity, socialisation and fostering the consumption of cultural merit goods

The Ministry for Youth Policies believes that support should also be given to training and developing cultural skills in young people through extramural studies, providing instruments along the lines of the **"Youth Charter"** (for young people aged between 18 and 30 years) giving them ease of access to cultural goods under agreements with the cultural community and the local authorities.

What has been done so far suggests that it would be appropriate to extend these instruments to include "merit" consumer goods linked, for example, to territorial mobility or the practice of sport.

To promote youth creativity, not only in the arts but in every area of material culture, the idea driving all the work that has been performed so far by the Ministry for Youth Policies is that taxation measures are a tool which will have a substantial impact on youth creativity.

For thought is currently being given to a comprehensive system of tax reliefs and

benefits for artistic and creative young people and those who support their work, including the idea that Italy could be transformed into *Cultural Hub*, a true tax haven – not for tax evaders, but for young people endowed with powerful creative vitality. Then there are instruments to encourage large national companies to develop forms of patronage specifically targeted at creative young people.

The 2007 Budget Law already contained two major provisions in this respect:

a) for young people under 35 years of age, it has raised the **amount of expenses that can be deduced on a lump-sum basis from taxable income from creative work**, industrial patents and processes, formulae and information relating to prior industrial, commercial and scientific experiences from 25% to 40%. This measure is an acknowledgement that young people incur higher costs connected with highly creative activities, and at the same time recognises their cultural enrichment function;

b) small and medium musical production companies (the "*indies*") can benefit from a **tax credit to cover production, development, digitalisation and promotional costs for recordings and musical videos for the first or second works of new artists**.

With regard to the specific activities being promoted by the Ministry for Youth Policies to support the creativity of young people, at the beginning of January 2007 the first "*Young ideas are changing Italy*" Competition was launched.

The purpose of this Competition is to promote and support over the coming years the design skills and creative flair of young people by providing grants up to a maximum of €35,000 for a certain number of innovative projects. In other words, the intention is to award the best design ideas in the following thematic areas:

- a) technological innovation
- b) social utility and civil commitment
- c) sustainable development
- d) the management of urban and local services to improve the quality of life of young people.

Young people aged between 18 and 35, organised in informal work groups of a minimum of four young people, may submit their proposals for projects by mid-April 2007. The enrolment forms and the rules of the competition can be downloaded from the website www.pogas.it.

In order to meet the need for **venues where young people can gather and socialise**, the Ministry intends to institute a specific project with all the parties involved in one capacity or another, and in particular with the State Property Agency and local authorities.

For the recent Budget Law gave the State Property Agency the task of **activating a process to make good use of public buildings**, identified jointly with the local authorities. One of the priorities for selecting the buildings is the possibility of using

them for "social, cultural, sports, and recreational functions, and for educational activities and promoting solidarity actions and supporting youth and equal opportunities policies".

In order to find new facilities and premises for sociocultural activities, the same Budget Law empowers the Minister of Education **to encourage the full enjoyment of school buildings and facilities (including gyms)** also outside normal school hours, for students, their parents and young people and adults in general, when laying down the basic criteria for allocating funds to schools to broaden the offering of subjects and disciplines. The other purpose of this measure is to provide a wider range of facilities and amenities for youth associations.

Facilitating and extending the participation and representation of young people in public life

The rich and varied world of youth associations comprises more than 50 nationwide organisations and a host of local groups, and constitutes a real locomotive force in civil society in all its forms and with all its different features. The time has come to pay greater attention to this world and, in more general terms, opportunities for participation in public life and democratic representation must be extended to all young people. For it is essential for the involvement of young people to include those who are not members of youth associations and organised political movements.

It is therefore essential to use and make good use of the instruments available at European level. In March 2005 the European Council adopted the **European Pact for Youth** whose main purpose is to improve education and training, mobility, employment and the social integration of young Europeans, while at the same time helping to reconcile family life and working life.

With the establishment of the Ministry for Youth Policies, all these policies finally have a strategic interlocutor in Italy that can boost Italy's position in gaining access to Community resources which, for the **"Youth in Action" Programme** alone, amounts to about €800 million for the period 2007-2013. One of the main objectives of the "Youth in Action" Programme is to promote active citizenship among young people through five specific actions: youth for Europe, European voluntary service, youth in the world, youth support systems, and support for European co-operation in the youth sector.

In this regard, the work of the **National Youth Agency** acquires strategic importance. Under a special provision adopted in December 2006 (*which is being enacted by Parliament at the time this document is being written*) the Agency has been given powers to enable it to operate more consistently with the most recent Community and domestic legislative and institutional developments regarding youth policies. The task of the Agency will be to demonstrate a management capability that is commensurate with the volume of Community funding it will be required to manage. The Agency plays a vital role in supporting the beneficiaries of the Youth Programme during the

preparation, implementation, evaluation and management of the project. Policy-making and oversight functions over the Agency will be performed jointly by the Ministry for Youth Policies and the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

One of the main priorities identified by the European Commission in the **White Paper on Youth Policy in 2001** was to extend participation in the civil life of the community and in the system of representative democracy, and to provide information to foster the advancement of young people as active and responsible citizens.

It is therefore essential to add to the issue of participation the question of representation. Italy is the only country in Europe which does not yet have a full institutional structure for the **national representation of the younger generation**. This situation must be remedied as soon as possible by putting in place the **National Youth Council** – for which provision is already made in a number of bills, including one requested by a popular referendum – which will provide a forum for representing the various different situations in Italy and making it possible for Italian youth to be present on the European Youth Forum, the European Union's consultative body.

The Ministry for Youth Policies naturally intends to work in this direction by exploiting the main experiences that already exist – beginning with the National Youth Forum – and encouraging the dissemination of forms of participation at the local level.

Various local authorities have created Regional Youth Consultations or Youth Forums which are important experiences and examples of best practice that deserve to be examined when setting up the National Youth Council, because it must be geared to addressing the wide range of different regional situations.

It was precisely to collect experiences and proposals regarding representation that, on 27 February 2007, the ministry organised the **First National Meeting of Youth Consultations** working locally, to examine and compare the active representation experiences that have been put in place by the local authorities and to establish pathways leading as soon as possible to the establishment of the National Youth Council.

The issue of rejuvenating the country also includes laying down new rules for political representation which must be addressed immediately in the debate on electoral reform. The lowering of the age of voters and candidates for election (also considering that the European average age of election candidates is around 20) is now one of the priorities on the government's agenda, to be accompanied by other specific measures (green quotas) both for central government and for the bylaws of political parties, to give the younger generation easier access to the places where national decisions are taken.

Encouraging interfaith and inter-cultural dialogue

To anticipate and find open, participatory and democratic ways of resolving – actual and potential – social, cultural and religious conflicts linked to the twin issue of the increasing numbers of Italian nationals and immigrants practising other religions, and encouraging policies for integration and the promotion of constitutional rights, in December 2006 the Ministry of Youth Policies and the Ministry of Home Affairs jointly established a **Youth Consultation for Religious and Cultural Pluralism**, which has already begun working.

The purpose of this Consultation is to encourage young people to play a leading part in building up models of dialogue and tolerance between Italy's different religions, faiths and cultures.

The first results of their work, which has since been formalised by the government's provision of a permanent debating forum, is evidence of the extraordinary possibilities of pursuing this dialogue further, driven by the instinctive and innate ability of young people to supersede hardened, prejudiced and schematic ideas, and to debate concrete issues, primarily defining the features of a modern concept of citizenship.

Through this Consultation, the intention is to contribute towards building up a multi-cultural and multi-faith integration model which will enable it to avoid repeating the errors that other countries have committed, but, on the contrary, to find a model of its own, which is consistent with the deep-seated and most specific features of our constitutional heritage.

The Consultation was instituted under a single Decree signed jointly by both ministers to emphasise the integration of the remits of these two ministries. It will be housed in the offices of the Minister for Youth Policies, and will be accountable for its work to the two ministries which instituted it.

In particular, at the request of these ministries, it will co-operate by elaborating opinions and proposals, and will also convene workshops and seminars, organising events and publishing documents and doing everything appropriate to facilitate and underpin multi-cultural and multi-faith integration policies.

The Consultation will also place itself at the disposal of the government to implement domestic projects (for example, educating school children in harmonious living and multiculturalism) and to facilitate international bilateral and multilateral exchanges with other countries including the Mediterranean and Middle East, and especially with countries that are trying to rebuild their institutional, democratic, social and civil fabric (Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon) also thanks to Italian government financial support.

Since the Consultation is a consultative, and not a representative, body its membership has been hand-picked by the ministers on the basis of their members'

cultural and social experiences and individual educational backgrounds. This has eliminated the thorny issue of faith-based representation in a State structure.

There are 15 members of the Consultation, young men and women aged between 20 and 30 belonging to 10 different faiths and denominations in our country (the Catholic Church, the Waldensian Church, the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Jewish Communities, Islam, the Italian Buddhists' Union, Soka Gakkai, and the Orthodox Christian Church), and FGEI (Federation of Young Italian Evangelicals).

The decree also contains an article which provides that, *"if necessary other advisers may join these members of the Consultation who stand for different cultural and religious realities"*.

It is worthwhile noting, lastly, UNICRI (United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute), which recently chaired the Task Force for policies to integrate second-generation immigrants established by the UN Secretary General in September 2006, has offered its cooperation for this project. This further emphasises the intention of the present government to act on specific issues, in harmony and in co-operation with the international organisations.

Combating youth malaise. Developing a law and order culture.

There is a broad grey area which ensnares some of our young people, in Italy as elsewhere in Europe, in negative situations (some talk about a feeling of emptiness, bewilderment, loneliness and a poor quality of life) and even cases of real distress and suffering (we only have to think of eating disorders), and self-harming conduct.

Suicide is the second cause of death among young people after road accidents. Those most at risk of substance dependency and multiple forms of dependency and even deviant behaviour, are males aged between 15 and 24, but there is now an increase among teenage girls. In 2005, Italy had 27,000 people in prison, just over 45% of whom were aged between 18 and 34. Other young people, accounting for approximately one-tenth of total prisoners, are offered alternative punishments to imprisonment. That same year 21,600 minors were reported as having committed crimes.

Furthermore, it would appear that a wide band of Italian teenagers are suffering increasingly from a sense of malaise leading to glaring forms of aggression or self-destruction. One only has to think of the growth in teenage bullying, for example, more typically among young males, and in the number of cases of serious eating disorders, which are more common among teenage girls and young women.

And it is precisely for the benefit of that more fragile section of the younger population, who are more vulnerable than any other to the risk of malaise, that, jointly

with the other ministries with competence in this matter, the Ministry for Youth Policies is committed to supporting active and pro-active psycho-social prevention policies, which many entities are now implementing at the local level. For the ministry is contributing actively to the Panels promoted by the Ministries closely involved in this sphere (Health, Social Policies, Education) which specifically deal with the issue of encouraging healthy lifestyles, and forms of dependency and instruments to encourage young people to acquire a culture of law and order.

What characterises the position of the ministry in all these areas of work, and in general regarding these particular issues, is its refusal to adopt a purely educational or top-down approach which rejects the need to listen to the reasons why young people suffer from different forms of malaise, and to their languages and their proposals; on the contrary, it seeks to apply models for action based on giving young people a sense of self-responsibility, and providing responsible information about them.

It is thanks to this approach that the National Manifesto for the Self-regulation of the Italian Fashion Industry was signed in December 2006 to combat anorexia, promoted by the Ministry for Youth Policies, and initialled with the National Chamber of Italian Fashion and AltaRoma, as a tangible and commonly agreed signal that eating disorders must be combated, offering pluralist, healthy and positive aesthetic models to the younger generations, who are more inclined towards emulation.

Drafting the Annual Youth Report

It is not easy to reconstruct any one single and dynamic picture of the world of youth based on the statistical and social economic information in the way it is presently organised. For this reason, the ministry is currently working on a **White Paper on Youth** to be used as the analytical and diagnostic basis for the National Plan of Action for Youth, and the Annual Report on the Condition of Youth in Italy, which will closely monitor the implementation of the Plan and its effects.

The ministry intends to draw up this Annual Report with the co-operation of all the structures and parties engaged on public and private research in this area, even though they may focus on partial aspects and take a necessarily sectoral approach.

Facilitating access to the practice of sport by young people

There is no doubt that sport is an inclusive activity and encourages participation in social life, and the acceptance of differences and limitations. The natural catchment area for this ministry must therefore necessarily be the world of amateur and youth sport. Some 20 million Italians (20% of the population) practice sport on a continuous basis, including 3 million young people aged between 8 and 18 years. Two-thirds of all teenagers between 11 and 14 practice sport once or several times a week.

The ministry's first act was therefore to identify and create a forum for working and holding discussions with all the agencies and parties involved in this field, beginning with CONI, - the Italian National Olympics Committee - and the Paralympic Movement, Federations, and sports promotion entities and the Regional authorities. It is called the **National Sports Panel**, which is already coming forward with proposals, answers and solutions. The natural interlocutors of this new ministry are the millions of people who practise sport, and sports enthusiasts, with the aim of laying down policies to promote sport as a vital part of the structure of the Italian welfare system. For the main reason for instituting the ministry was to bridge a number of historical gaps in relations between sport and the school, and sport and health policies.

It is by virtue of these considerations that the ministry has begun working on an initial series of activities to attribute the rightful social value to the money which families spend privately so that their children can practise sport. For example, the Budget Law has introduced a tax relief measure under which 19% of the cost of enrolling children aged between 5 and 18 with gyms, sports clubs and swimming pools, up to a maximum of €210, may be deducted from their taxable income.

In essence, this measure brings sport out of the realm of playing games and recreation alone, making it **an integral part of a modern welfare system**, designed to spread healthy lifestyles among the youngest children. For we cannot fail to be concerned by the fact that over the past two years there has been a constant decline in the regular practice of sport among young people between 11 and 17 years of age, and even the occasional practice of sport has now given way to a sedentary lifestyle. Another great source of concern is the constant increase in child obesity: between 1994 and 1999 there has been a 25% increase in the numbers of obese people. Today, 4 million Italians are obese, and one in five children. Obesity is costing the National Health Service €22.8 billion every year, mostly on hospital care.

At the same time, sport must constitute an essential part of public policies based on integration, cohesion and social inclusion, and must therefore develop powerful synergies with the education and vocational training system. To this end, the ministry is working with the Ministry of Education on an experimental schools project to **promote physical education in primary and secondary schools**.

Appropriations of €6,600,000 have therefore been made by the Ministry of Education for projects relating to sport and pre-sport physical exercise in primary and secondary schools. There is also a second experimental project that began in February 2007 in primary schools in the Provinces and metropolitan areas of 32 towns and cities, with an *ad hoc* appropriation of €900,000. This is therefore additional to the previous funding. This trial project is seen as a further means of combating dropping out and school malaise. The aim is to broaden the offering of training courses and gradually reduce the dropout rate. It is an experiment designed to meet the need for a concrete response to the indications laid down at the European level in Recommendation (2003)6

of the Committee of Ministers to member states “on improving physical education and sport for children and young people in all European countries” .

These are the measures and the elements which must lead us to the full and complete acknowledgement of the social value of practising sport, even to envisaging the possibility of enshrining this value in the Italian Constitution.

Rome, 27 February 2007