



Resilient Youth!



A focus on strengthening Europe's Children and Youth

Key messages:

- Resilient Youth should be defined as a societal challenge or mission of the new Framework Programme 9 for Research and Innovation (FP9)
- For real impact and useful contributions to a healthy, inclusive, and secure society for our children and future generations, we need an integrated and cross-sectoral approach
- Solving societal challenges calls for evidence-based responses, interventions and prevention strategies to the many risks and threats faced by children and youth
- Encourage child and youth participation in FP9-projects where appropriate

Introduction:

A more stable society with Resilient Youth

Most children develop well and find their way in society without major problems. But many do not. Developmental differences are caused by the interplay of children's disposition and the environment in which they are raised. Prenatal threats, illness or abuse can result in sub-optimal child and youth development, which has severe consequences in adult life.

Such sub-optimal development negatively contributes to many of the societal challenges Europe faces. When children and youth are not able to participate in society, feel excluded and are not given the opportunity to develop their own strengths, unfavourable effects like unemployment, multi-problem families or addictions could easily aggravate these societal challenges.

This position paper argues that we need to recognize that our children and youth deserve every chance to develop and thrive and become constructive, engaged citizens, contributing to society. In other words: to become **Resilient Youth!**



Make it a mission

Defining Resilient Youth as one of the societal challenges or missions for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP9), enables us to:

- **provide** a healthy, inclusive, and secure Europe for the current and future generations;
- **significantly contribute** to the goals formulated in (at least) seven of the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030;
- **be aware** that children and youth can be powerful catalysts for positive change in Europe;
- **complement and strengthen** other EU child and youth initiatives such as Erasmus+, the Youth Employment Initiative, the European Youth Strategy, the EU Skills Agenda and Education and Training 2020.



It pays to invest in Resilient Youth

There are many compelling arguments to join (governmental) forces, bundle our (academic) knowledge and (business) investments around the theme 'Resilient Youth'. Growing evidence from experts in disciplines as diverse as neuroscience, epidemiology, genetics and epigenetics, healthcare, economics and social sciences shows that investing in children and families results in overall improvement. It pays to invest in resilient youth: it improves health and education outcomes in adulthood, it makes for higher income, less crime and reduced welfare spending.

Economist and Nobel laureate James Heckman identifies four big benefits of investing in child and youth development¹:

1. It can prevent the achievement gap.
2. It can improve health outcomes.
3. It can boost earnings.
4. It makes dollars and sense.

¹ <http://heckmanequation.org/content/4-big-benefits-investing-early-childhood-development>

Figures: 20 percent 'cause' 80 percent of societal costs

Heckman's editorial about a recent New Zealand cohort-study (a four-decade-long birth cohort study to test child-to-adult prediction) in Nature Human Behaviour-magazine says: "[This] study now shows that 20% of the population accounts for 60–80% of several adult social ills. Outcomes for this group can be accurately predicted from as early as age 3 years, using a small set of indicators of disadvantage. This finding supports policies that target children from disadvantaged families." To name a few examples from this study: 22% of the cohort accounted for 40% of excess obese kilograms; 54% of cigarettes smoked; 66% of welfare benefits; and 81% of criminal convictions.²

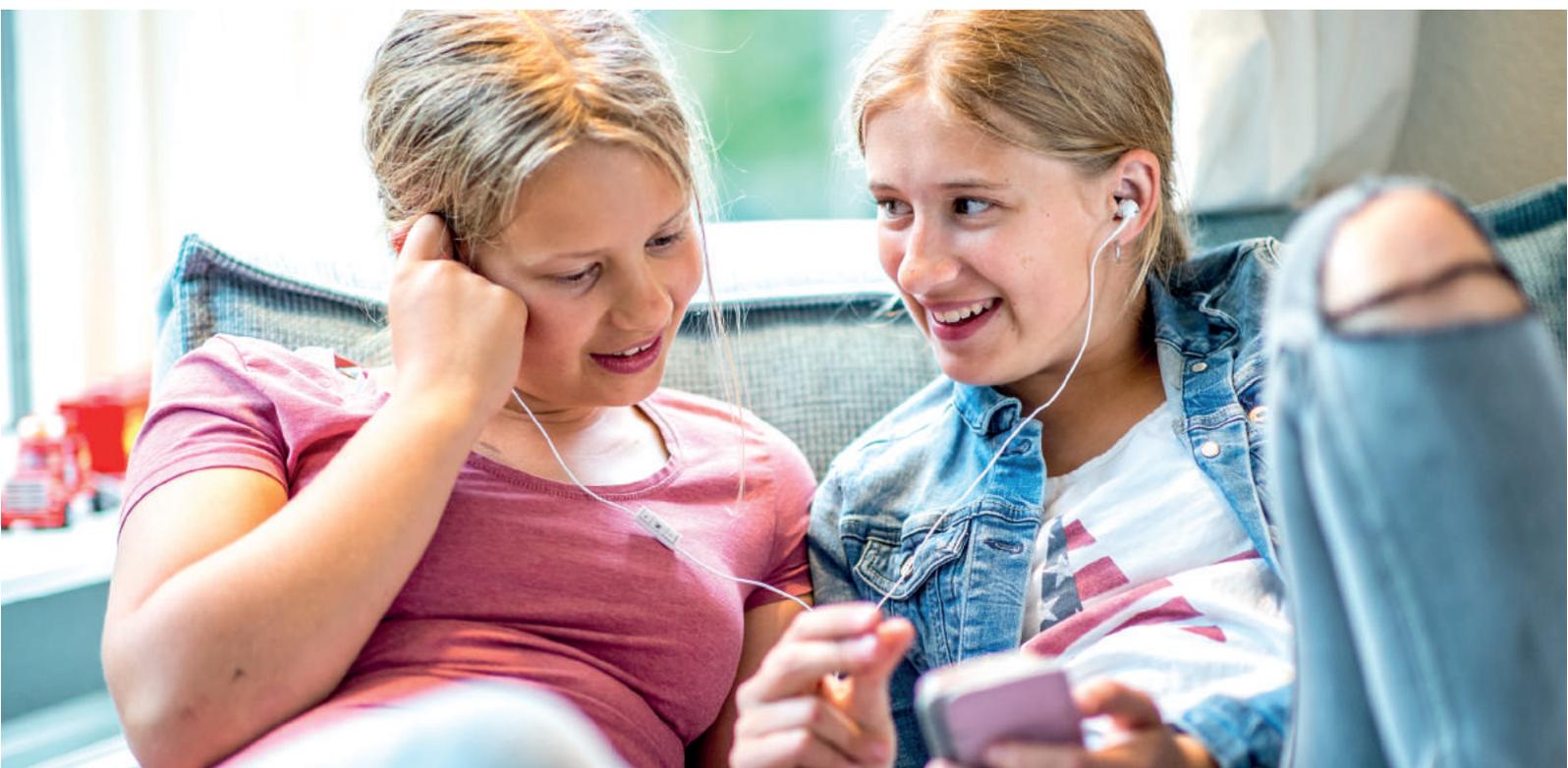
For figures closer to home, take into account this UK-calculation of long term excess societal costs of child abuse – the numbers are about 11 million people aged 18-65, whose misfortunes in their childhood and youth cost society over 8 billion euros.

Exposure rates and annual costs of child maltreatment adjusted for demographic

Type of abuse	Exposure rates	Costs in mln per year
Emotional	25%	€ 637
Psychological	13 %	€ 364
Physical	9%	€ 275
Sexual	7%	€ 196
Any abuse	32%	€ 757
Multiple abuse	7%	€ 495



² Caspi, A. et al. Childhood forecasting of a small segment of the population with large economic burden. *Nat. Hum. Behav.* 1, 0005 (2016).



Children and Youth should go together in FP9

In EU policy a distinction is made between child policy and youth policy. We strongly feel that these two policy areas should not be separated. We cannot understand youth if we do not acknowledge their prior development as children. Therefore we call upon the European Commission to integrate these two areas in the development of FP9.

How children and youth (from conception to early adulthood) develop is in part determined by their environment, be it the local environment or the wider culture in which they are raised – parents, peer groups, schools, clubs, the media and other institutions, physical and digital neighbourhoods, and societal factors.

However, how children develop is also affected by biological factors, such as their genotype. To gain true understanding of child and youth development, we need to recognize the continuous and intricate interplay between various environmental and genetic factors. This recognition necessitates the integration of expertise in a broad range of research areas.

True interdisciplinarity is vital

Child and youth development is an area in which true interdisciplinarity is vital in order to answer complex research questions and improve the understanding of pressing societal challenges. For this, we need a participative, cross-sectoral and integrated approach. As such we share the vision written in a League of European Research Universities (LERU) paper, recognising interdisciplinarity as a powerful driver of knowledge creation, scientific progress and innovation.³

We welcome the fact that Horizon 2020 has provided unprecedented support to interdisciplinary research. We would like to see this focus also in FP9, and strengthen it by, for example, making sure that funding is effectively allocated to truly interdisciplinary research projects and by creating specific interdisciplinary research opportunities with earmarked funds.

³ http://www.leru.org/files/publications/Interdisciplinarity_and_the_21st_century_research-intensive_university.pdf

Towards 2030: Resilient Youth and UN Sustainable Development Goals

The EU is committed to implementing – internally and globally – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the linked Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Investing in child and youth development significantly contributes to this agenda: childhood development is specifically mentioned in SDG Target 4.2, which states that by 2030 countries should ‘ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education’.

But SDG commitments to children and youth are much broader than this education-focused target. Strengthening childhood development is key to achieving at least seven

of the SDGs: on poverty, hunger, health (including child mortality), education, gender, water and sanitation and inequality.

Also several other SDGs, notably ‘responsible consumption and production’ and ‘peace, justice and strong institutions’, critically depend on Resilient Youth: sufficient self-regulatory skills should have been acquired at a young age. Research on child and youth development is pivotal in achieving these SDGs. It encourages international cooperation, thus fitting very well within the vision for European research and innovation to be ‘Open to the world’.



Conclusion: For resilient Europeans, invest in children and youth

We should listen to what children and youth themselves want and need, in order to develop and reach their full potential. To achieve the mission of Resilient Youth, collaboration with sectors outside of academia – such as business, governments, schools and other non-state actors – is crucial, and thus to be encouraged in all possible ways. So, where possible and appropriate, children and youth actively participating should be considered in FP9-initiatives developed under the mission of Resilient Youth.

Let us not underestimate the fact that our children and youth can be powerful catalysts for positive change and contributors of innovative solutions to Europe's problems now and in the future. If we invest now, 2030 could be the start of an era of positive payback: healthier children and adolescents, better education for many more than the privileged ones, young parents well prepared for child rearing, and the right approach and timing to intervene when necessary. We could be part of establishing thriving societies – which are usually steady economies too.





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