



**REPORT ON
THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM STUDY VISIT
TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

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On 21-23 May 2008, the European Youth Forum (YFJ) conducted a Youth Work Development study visit to the Czech Republic. The study visit was organised as a part of the YFJ country-by-country approach to the Central European region that is one of the priority regions in the work of the YFJ. The study visits are usually undertaken by the YFJ Bureau and Secretariat members who meet with youth NGOs, the local and national authorities in charge of youth, and other actors involved in, or responsible for, youth work and youth policy development in the given country (donors, foundations, development agencies, international organisations, etc.). The purpose and goal of the visits is to learn as much as possible about the level of youth work and youth policy in the country; to refresh existing and to establish new contacts; and to identify ways in which the YFJ can support the efforts of youth NGOs in the country in order to improve and develop the status of youth work, youth policy and young people in general.

In Central Europe these countries include the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland: up to date, only one country, Slovakia, has developed a national youth council that is a member of the YFJ; in the Czech Republic, while a national youth council with a long history exists, it is not, however, a part of the YFJ membership.

The aims of the study visit in May 2008 were derived from the following needs, identified in order for the YFJ to work on strengthening youth work and youth policy in Central Europe:

Needs:

- To gather information on the status of young people in the country, and on the state of Youth NGOs and the level of their development and mutual cooperation;
- To meet the national youth platform, ČRDM, and its members, and determine its relations with Youth NGOs and state authorities and other civil society actors;
- To learn about relations between national and local authorities and young people and Youth NGOs, and the state of national and local youth policy;
- To identify the needs of young people in the country, the main challenges facing them, and their interests;
- To identify ways in which the YFJ can contribute to the strengthening of youth work and youth policy in the Czech Republic and of the work of Youth NGOs;
- To gather information on the state structures in charge of youth, both on the national and local levels;
- To learn about the relationships and ways of cooperation between youth and the state, at the national and local levels;
- To meet other civil society actors involved in youth work in the country.

The main aim of the study visit was hence to find out as much information as possible on:

- the general situation of youth in the country
- the situation of youth organisations
- youth policy and youth work in the Czech Republic
- The status of young people and their main needs and challenges
- state/youth relations both at the national and local levels
- the status of the National Youth Council and relevant recent developments.

In addition, the study visit sought to:

- assess relations between youth organisations and public authorities;

- assess the level of coordination and cooperation among Youth NGOs on the national and local levels;
- learn about relations between Youth NGOs and the state and local authorities and the level of co-management with the state and the current legislation on youth in force in the country.
- share YFJ knowledge on youth work development (YWD), including on capacity building, training, national youth policy (NYP), etc.

The study visit was conducted by Monika Novosadova, Bureau Member responsible for Education and Youth Work Development in Central Europe, Tim Schrock, responsible for Youth Policy in Europe, the EU White Paper on Youth and the Open Method of Coordination, Participation and the EU Youth in Action Programme, and Vera Pasyukova, YFJ Policy Officer for Youth Work Development and Training.

Besides particular information obtained from public sources during the preparation stage, this report is based solely on the information collected during this study visit, including from the different actors with whom the YFJ met; therefore, while the report aims to give as clear a picture as possible, it cannot be taken as a comprehensive presentation of the situation in the field of youth work and policy in the Czech Republic. The report can be used as a tool for Non-Governmental Youth Organisations and state authorities in the Czech Republic and by Youth NGOs and institutions involved in youth policy in Europe, with a focus on the Central European region.

Background

Having joined the EU in 2004, the Czech Republic is one of its 27 Member States. The vast majority of the inhabitants of the Czech Republic are Czechs. With the inclusion of Moravians (3.7%) and Silesians (0.1%), they collectively comprise 94.2% of the national population. Significant minorities also include the Slovaks, Poles, Vietnamese, Germans, and Roma people. The Czech Republic is a pluralist multi-party parliamentary, representative democracy, where the Prime Minister is the head of government. The Parliament is bicameral, with the Chamber of Deputies (Czech: Poslanecká sněmovna) and the Senate.

The Czech Republic is a member of the Visegrád Group, also called the Visegrád Four or V4, which is an alliance of four Central European states - the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia - for the purposes of cooperation and furthering their European integration. The Czech Republic is also a member of NATO and the OECD.

In order to obtain the most comprehensive information within the timeframe of the three-day study visit, the YFJ identified several youth policy and youth work stakeholders with whom to meet. However, due to the time constraints, it was not possible to meet with all these stakeholders, though all were contacted.

The Czech Republic has a population of 10 403 100 (data at 31 March 2008)¹, out of which approximately 13,2% are young people between 15-24 years old². There is no precise definition of who is considered a young person, though the age criminal responsibility is

¹ <http://www.czso.cz/eng/redakce.nsf/i/population>

² http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/PGP_PRD_CAT_PREREL/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2007/PGE_CAT_PREREL_YEAR_2007_MONTH_03/3-23032007-EN-AP.PDF

set at 18, and due to the EU Youth in Action programme, an age limit of 26 can be found as a reference. Moreover, there is no separation between youth and children within different policies.

I. Youth NGOs in the Czech Republic

The Czech NGO sector is quite developed: by March 2007, there were 65,020 NGOs in total³.

- civil associations - 59222
- benevolent public associations - 1369
- legal church entities, providing social, health, educational and cultural services - 4429

Of the total number of NGOs, 1976 work with children and youth. In the regions, for example, in South Bohemia, it was noted that there are more associations working *with* youth than actual youth and children associations as such. Here it should be mentioned that an association is considered to be a children and youth association if more than 70% of its members are under 18 years old.

In addition, there are a large number of schooling institutions dealing with leisure time education (Statistics 2006 - 2007):

Leisure time centres: 297

Number of pupils in regular activity - 220340

After-school care centres: 3992

Number of pupils in regular activity - 221827

School clubs: 447

Number of pupils in regular activity - 24443

In total 6704 institutions and organisations work with children and youth in the Czech Republic.

It should be mentioned that the out of school education/leisure time education centres are one of the specificities of the Czech Republic. The system of such education has a ground in a strong existing framework, and tradition. Such centres exist in regions, sub-regions, towns, and small villages - comprising 299 centres in total.

In relation to the out of school education and the leisure activity centres, there is a problem of confusion and misunderstanding regarding the concept of Non-Formal Education. When it comes to Non-Formal Education (NFE), the legal framework created a confusion over terminology. Even though the European perspective of NFE is gaining strength, many state bodies at both the national and regional level, institutions established by the state, and some NGOs, understand NFE as 'hobby education'. Moreover, more confusion occurs when translation of the term is undertaken from English.

³ The statistical data obtained at the meeting with the National Agency on Youth in Action programme.

There are two types of state organisations at the national and regional levels that have little to do with NFE but do a great job with regards to leisure time activities - the houses of youth or school establishments. One of the biggest houses of youth can be found in South Bohemia.

NATIONAL LEVEL

National youth council ČRDM

The Czech Republic has a national youth platform - Česká rada dětí a mládeže - ČRDM (Czech Council of Children and Youth) which was established in June 1998. ČRDM is the national youth council in the Czech Republic. It is currently composed of 95 non-governmental children and youth organisations - the organisations range from very small to the biggest in the Czech Republic; 6 regional youth councils are members of ČRDM as well.

ČRDM has developed a close relationship with the Department of Youth within the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, and the Department of Foreign Affairs, and is taking an active role in communicating on policy issues. Within the structure of ČRDM there are a number of working groups: an international commission; a commission on statutes; an organizing committee for Bambiriada⁴; a group focused on NFE and its recognition; a group focused on the programmes of the European Social Funds; an advisory board; a media centre; a coordinating group of regional youth councils; and a group focused on the future of Bambiriada. The number and the topics of the working groups are based on proposals and discussions during the General Assembly of ČRDM.

The biggest working group is centred on state issues. The group's task is to monitor the situation on the political level and lobby for ČRDM's interests. Currently, ČRDM is working on cooperating in the preparation of a new civic law. ČRDM was involved in preventing the introduction of a law on the support of youth, which evolved into a short, demanding and restrictive document for youth workers. ČRDM is also working on a law on volunteering, as well as being involved in monitoring and contributing to the processes of other laws that are not directly connected to youth NGOs, though which could influence their work. For instance, environmental legislation on water prescribing what is allowed when outdoor activities are run, especially in summer camps.

ČRDM is also fighting for an increase in support from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports; the same amount of money is currently allocated, annually, with an increase in line with inflation, leaving the real amount unchanged. Another focus is lobby work to raise funds for the renovation of the old socialist youth properties. As in the concluded contracts which were transferred to the NGOs, no business/profit activities are allowed, and no self-maintaining activities are possible.

Another topic on which ČRDM is working, and which has roots in the All Different All Equal Campaign, concerns sexual abuse in youth organisations, as there is a need to change the current negative image created in the media of these organisations and of youth leaders.

In April, elections were held within ČRDM, and a change of statutes was discussed; as this is not a priority, none were introduced. In general, ČRDM management stated that there is satisfaction with the current statutes. It should be mentioned that there is a proportional

⁴ Bambiriada - an annual nationwide event aimed at displaying the children and youth associations and leisure-time centers.

voting system in place within the national youth platform, so large organisations have more power in decision making than smaller ones; these have, in certain cases, gathered together in alliances in order to get one vote. Another discussion on the statutes concerned the issue of who could be a direct member of ČRDM: currently, supra regional organisations are members of ČRDM. A proposal was made to allow membership by organisations which have either 1) a minimum of at least 300 members, or 2) organisations with national/European influence. As an outcome, this will change the character of the openness of the membership of the organisation. Other proposals were made, on the membership of regional youth councils - and on their number of votes and their role.

ČRDM has a long term strategy of work, with priorities established for each year.

As for the capacity building of its membership, ČRDM conducts courses and the activities of other organisations may also be used. There is a budget for members of member organisations to follow such courses. ČRDM also supports the educational activities of its member organisations.

ČRDM works not only on issues of importance to youth organisations, but also on those of importance to young people in general. For instance, lobby work is presently being conducted on gambling addiction, and on the issue of lowering the age of the legal responsibility (which is currently 18).

ČRDM was involved in the Council of Europe youth campaign 'All Different, All Equal', which enabled it to develop contacts with social NGOs and organize activities for children of refugees.

With regards to whether the needs of young people are discussed amongst the membership, ČRDM indicated that each organisation sees different problems and tackles them in a different way.

Member organisations of the YFJ membership.

During the study visit, the YFJ delegation met with organisations which are members of YFJ International Non-Governmental Youth Organisation Member Organisations; some of the organisations are also members of the national youth council, ČRDM. The organisations were asked to provide information on the state of Czech youth policy; their involvement in the policy process; and their assessment of the needs of and challenges facing youth organisations. The variety of opinions and the understanding of the state of the youth sector across the organisations also greatly differed.

According to the youth organisations with whom the YFJ met, since 1991 there have been attempts to push for a youth law, however, five years ago the bill was withdrawn from the government by the Minister of Education and since then, there have been no developments. These organisations highlighted the sentiment that the policy, and even a large strategy to reach young people in the country, was missing. Moreover, the negative impact of the absence of such a law is also reflected through the fact that it looks like volunteers are working in the social sphere, although thousands of volunteers in organisations are not really taken into account.

However, it was mentioned that work in that direction is being done through the working groups within ČRD M; however, of those present in meetings with the YFJ, not many are actually involved in this process.

It was noted that there is a general need to support youth and children organisations at the national level and improve relevant communication.

As for involvement in the process of youth policy work, several organisations mentioned that they are not part of such a process and are focused on their own issues, or have more of a focus on the European agenda (a number of YFJ Member Organisations have head offices in the Czech Republic).

When asked about needs assessment, respondents indicated that marketing skills; lobbying; fund raising and the management of volunteers; working with sponsors; NFE methods; and the training of young people are among those skills most urgently needed. Further issues raised included international cooperation, relationships with state institutions, communication, possibilities for the promotion of youth to 'semi-political' and political bodies.

Among the challenges, the language barrier of local groups was mentioned, as well as awareness of European level processes.

The work of the Czech National Agency for the Youth in Action programme was estimated as the most effective body.

When asked about participation within the organisations, the approach to participation was being addressed very differently, as were the issues of education and training of members - both dependent upon the character of organisation.

One of the questions raised by the YFJ related to the situation with young people running activities and whether the organisations have an age limit. In certain organisations, the leaders are older and there is no conflict in having both young and old leaders; in others there are age limits in place (up to 29-30 years).

However, for instance, it was mentioned that in relation to higher education students in the Czech Republic, people aged up to 26 years old are still considered to be children, whereas while reaching this age, people lose access to social and health insurance support, and student and public transport discounts.

Concerning membership and work with the national youth platform, several organisations are members of ČRD M. Their opinions on the work of the national youth platform differed. Some organisations have a larger say within the platform, while others raised concerns on the openness and on participation within the organisation. The issue of changing the situation regarding this was raised, though according to some organisations there was not enough power to push such proposals through.

As for issues that are currently being put forward for discussion, these include the real process of participation of young people on the national level and work on youth policy with young people. It was mentioned that there is not a cross-sector and integrated youth policy. ČRD M as a structure is, as stated by a representative of the Scouts, effectively used by big organisations such as the Scouts and the Young Firemen, especially in representing organized youth towards the state. It was mentioned that it is good to have a national

platform and the work of ČRDM on legal counselling and insurance is very useful and helpful. Some organisations simply use such services, and are not very involved in the work of the platform as such, or not even aware of what the organisation is doing.

When asked about the work being done with minorities and disadvantaged young people, it turned out that many organisations are working with disadvantaged youth.

REGIONAL LEVEL

Regional youth councils

While visiting the regions of South Moravia and South Bohemia, the YFJ delegation had a chance to talk more to the representatives of the regional youth council of South Moravia but had time constraints for meeting with the representative of South Bohemia. It should be mentioned that the YFJ did not meet any members of both regional youth councils, only elected representatives.

It should be mentioned that the Ministry supports regional platforms; however this is just by gentlemen's agreement. The Ministry wants to pass this responsibility to the regional level, but the regional level authorities are not ready to take this on yet. A platform of regional youth councils is currently being created, and a meeting of regional youth was conducted within the Ministry.

The situation in the two regions significantly differs. In South Bohemia, where the regional youth council was created at the same time as the regional government was established, the cooperation between the two actors is very close; however, in South Moravia, attempts by the regional youth councils to build such a relationship and get involved in youth policy issues have not been successful and communication with the authorities is difficult.

A good relationship has developed between the leisure activity centres and the regional youth councils, which in the South Moravian case is based also on a good personal relationship.

Both regional youth councils have about the same number of member organisations, 18 organisations representing in total 28,000 young people in South Moravia and 15 member organisations representing about 11,000 people in South Bohemia.

The YFJ noticed that there is a great need for capacity building and for the issue of the participation and involvement of young people to be addressed. However, the meetings with regional youth councils also showed that the needs of the councils differ greatly depending on each case; similarly, the council's own understanding of the challenges they are facing and how they should be tackled.

Referring to the voting system exercised by the national youth council, it was found that the South Moravian regional youth council also bases its decision-making process on a proportional voting system (for each 250 people the organisation gets 1 vote, eg Young Firemen have 33 votes because of the number of individual members); however, the council is considering changing the system used.

As for the membership and the age limit of youth representation of the organisations, the regional youth council of South Bohemia for instance unites both associations of children

and youth, and associations working with children and youth: which also reflects the statutes of the national youth platform in full. The only relevant criteria which appears in the statutes is that member organisations must work with young people. No individual membership is possible. No age limit is stated.

II. Youth and the State

NATIONAL LEVEL

The ministry in charge of youth issues is the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Since December 2007, Mgr. Ondřej Liška has held the office of Minister of Education of the Czech Republic, following the resignation of the previous Minister, who held the for eight months. The organisational structure of the Department for Youth Affairs at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic was changed in January 2007. There are two new sections within the Department: the “Section for Prevention of Social Negatives” and the “Support Section for After-School Education of Roma Children and Youth”. The Department for Youth Affairs is now staffed by sixteen employees including the Head and the Secretary.

The final version of the state policy on youth in the Czech Republic for the years 2007-2013 was adopted in June 2007; the document was submitted for comment by external bodies, and is currently available⁵. In the adopted youth policy document, nineteen areas are listed in which specific goals have been defined by different ministries. Two-year action plans have also been drafted: the plan for 2008-2010 has been adopted and a governmental resolution was passed for its implementation.

The Ministry considers it important to have a dialogue with youth organisations. The government meets once in two years to deal with youth policy issues, however, before this was only discussed once every five years. The regional authorities draw up their own plans based on the national youth policy conception.

The national youth council, ČRDM, took part in developing the current policy and takes an active part in its implementation. In general, the Ministry has a systematic cooperation with the national youth council; ČRDM is also represented in several bodies of the Ministry.

As part of the governmental restructuring programme to transfer responsibility, the Ministry is a top level body in charge of youth issues, whereas this responsibility was in the governmental office before. There is an advisory body to the Ministry - the Youth Chamber - where relevant youth issues are presented for discussion and further transferred to the respective bodies. The members of the Chamber are various NGOs including ČRDM and the representatives of the school facilities of leisure education. Moreover, besides the Youth Chamber, another structure - the Governmental Council on NGOs, in which ČRDM is also present - exists.

The Ministry is currently very concerned with the upcoming Czech Presidency of the EU, and is busy with relevant preparations.

⁵ <http://www.msmt.cz/youth-1/state-youth-policy-conception-for-the-years-2007-2013>

With regards to the support of youth organisations, including funding schemes, schemes are in place for 2007-2010, as well as for other periods. NGOs can apply and submit their projects. For the current year (2008) 220 million Czech crowns are allocated. Other grant schemes include - prevention of socio-pathological disorders; support for work with national minorities and the Roma population; environmental education; etc. Different ministries offer grant schemes to which youth NGOs can apply.

The Department of Youth runs regular seminars on how to apply for grants, and information on application procedures is provided on the respective websites.

Concerning research on youth issues, the National Institute of Children and Youth (NIDM), which is directly managed by the Ministry, conducts this. The main target groups for their work are youth NGOs. NIDM also provides consultations concerning applications for financial schemes and on working together with the Department of Youth.

When it comes to the estimates of young people's participation in youth organisations, it is very tricky to rely on numbers in this respect. The Ministry is in contact with about 600-700 organisations as such; there are several thousand organisations, however, the Ministry deals with those that specify in their statutes that they work only with children and youth. Sports organisations are not taken into account. The estimate is that there are about 220 000 members of youth organisations. The figures could of course be higher if events such as summer camps are considered. There are about 230 000 children involved in the regular work of school facilities leisure activities.

Last year (2007), 90 000 children took part in summer camps. About 2,2 million children were involved in activities of the organisations referred to. The overall estimate of the Ministry is that about 1/3 of youth and children are regularly organized/involved. Another 1/3 take part on an ad hoc basis. There is a noticeable trend towards less organized, more ad hoc involvement.

REGIONAL LEVEL

During the study visit, the YFJ delegation had an opportunity to visit two regions of the Czech Republic - South Bohemia and South Moravia - and meet the regional authorities.

In general, the regional level has full discretion in defining its work on children and youth, basing this on national level documents and priorities; however, implementation is up to the regional authority.

The two regions showed a very different approach to youth policy and youth work.

South Moravia, Brno

In South Moravia, within the regional authority, the department of prevention of socio-pathological disorders and leisure activities is in charge of all activities towards youth and the leisure time of young people. The regional authorities adopted the same organisational structure as the Ministry of Education, with departments for youth, for sport and for education.

Work with regards to leisure time activities is twofold: a) activities towards NGOs, b) activities by houses for children and youth - leisure centres. There are 34 such centres in

South Moravia - the largest number in the Czech Republic. Twenty-seven of them are directly established by the regional authority; there are numerous local centres and they tend to be established under the municipalities.

There are NGO grant schemes in place (about 200 000 EUR or 5 million crowns allocated). At first, the money was provided for activities, however, now there is an option that the local associations should be supported by local municipalities. The regional authorities are supporting investment activities - such as the reconstruction of camp sites, or the provision of equipment for club rooms. On this, consultation was also held with the South Moravian youth council. In general, it is not always easy to find money for such operational costs.

In the last three years, the grant schemes for secondary schools were announced - Into the World! - to support the activities of secondary school students, such as long term exchanges, or events in which students are to use another language.

The department of prevention and leisure activities is also responsible for sports, environmental education, and preventive activities - drug prevention and criminality prevention, and socio-pathological behaviour.

There are no schemes for NGOs to get administrative funds, though there are specific topic related grant schemes; the regional authority deals with the investments operations and can support specific requests. Usually there is a topic announced for the grants to be applied for, the municipalities provide the opportunity for their realization. The financial support of the regional authority is open for all organisations, both those working with young people or those run by young people, receive priority.

The South Moravian authority does not have a regional level conception of youth policy, and bases its work on this field on the document produced by the Ministry. However, the regional authority has much room for the implementation of the policies in the region, all the activities are budgeted from the region and the priorities are also defined by the region.

There is no structural communication with youth organisations. Moreover, there is no separation of youth policy and child policy, as they are perceived as one - starting from the national level.

It was mentioned that the organisations mostly work with children, as they are the main target group.

Regarding support for youth workers, the regional authority has, for two years now, been trying to press for schemes for the education of youth workers, however they have not yet succeeded. Usually, education is provided by large organisations according to their programmes. The regional authority provides small organisations that are not able to organise such programmes themselves, as those are supported neither by state nor regions.

The South Moravian region has cooperation with the Lower Austrian region and with one region in Serbia when it comes to international and cross-border cooperation. However, the authority is not very aware of the EU Committee of Regions and the work done in this respect. There is some interregional cooperation in the area of youth. A number of NGOs are participating through the Youth in Action programme.

As for the main challenges that the regional authority sees, these are connected to education and transition to the labour market. The South Moravian region is facing a demographic problem - an ageing population, with young people having the possibility to study and work abroad, etc. The South Moravian region has a very high migration ratio. However, South Moravia is a very innovative region, and the level of education is high, and investments are being attracted.

In relation to immigration, the question on integration was raised. The Ministry tries to emphasise multicultural education and work with minorities. The regional authority has its own grants to support minorities, there is one person working with national minorities and the foreign department with asylum seekers and foreigners. The Roma issue is also tackled.

When asked about their vision on a three year perspective, the regional authority stated that the leisure time policy is a self administrative one, and a lot depends on the October 2008 regional elections, however, no substantial changes should be expected. As for international cooperation, besides the current existing cooperation, there is no other, e.g. not with other Visegrad countries.

South Bohemia, Ceske Budejovice

According to law, the regional government is a public body and it has two parts of work - individual (independent) and transferred; as for the individual part - this concerns running the activities, which are directed by elected bodies of the government. A very typical structure is when a youth and sports department is within the education department.

For the central level, there are instructions that direct the work. The South Bohemian regional authority bases its work on three policy papers - a paper concerning sport activities; a conceptual strategy for the support and development of youth work, focused on NGOs; and a paper on support for governmental structures created by the state or regional government.

Since the government approved a very concrete regional strategy where the most important tasks are the services to organisations of both an NGO and governmental nature, it is much easier to work. Moreover, as it was for the first strategy created in 2005, the strategy was developed in cooperation with the regional youth council, the house of youth and children and different NGOs, ensuring that the needs of young people were assessed. Research conducted by NIDM was also used, as well as the SWOT analysis and brainstorming provided by the houses of youth. In comparison to the sports field, where national legislation on sports exists, the work on youth strategy was more difficult as the national conception was still being awaited. The Czech Republic is the last country not to have a law on youth.

The regional funding system is different from the central one, and also in the amount of funding available; however, each year funding is gradually increasing - which is also due to the approved conception.

When it comes to funds for administrative support, it was stated that this is really difficult to secure, and that it is much easier for the activities of organisations to be funded. One of the reasons for this is that politicians do not consider the work of youth organisations as effective, hence, there are few funds to be invested in facilities and equipment.

There is good cooperation between the authority and the regional youth council, with even technical issues being discussed with the youth council.

It was mentioned that technical problems are still being encountered. Besides that, one more challenge concerns human resources, as older people that had worked with young people have now left the system, and there is a lack of young leaders. The reason for this is twofold, according to the regional authority - money and the recognition of voluntary work are severely affecting motivation.

In comparison to the situation with Upper Austria and the Lower Bavaria regions, which are the regions with which South Bohemia cooperates most, the situation in the Czech Republic is not that bad, especially when it comes to out of school activities. However, it was mentioned that it is not always easy to find partners for cross-border cooperation.

The regional authority has plans to update the policy papers on youth, and a consultation procedure is duly foreseen to be launched.

With regards to topics related to the European agenda, the challenge is participation in general: at the central level work on such topics is being undertaken, e.g. through youth parliaments, however, at the regional level it is harder to attract people to participate.

Student councils and school parliaments are working. The regional authority is very open to support any initiative, however, it underlines that the initiative has to come from young people as well.

Information about the regional opportunities, funding, and partners can be found on the regional authority website.

One of the specificities of the Czech Republic is the out of school education system as mentioned already. In South Bohemia, the YFJ delegation had an opportunity to meet a representative of the house of children and youth. In most cases, the activities run by the houses are called non-formal education. The South Bohemian house of children and youth is considered to be the biggest in the Czech Republic. The target group of their activities are children and youth of 5-26 years old. The leisure time activities are divided into different departments - the ones of most interest are on sports, dance, music and arts. Work is financed from the regional funds and central ones through regional government, and certain funds are collected from the children themselves. Additional funding is received through grant applications to authorities at different levels. There are more than 200 different activities taking place, with about 2400 people participating. Nowadays, there are more high schools and university students among the participants, comprising about 40% of the total. Besides the regular activities, there are temporary activities, such as seminars, discussions, presentations; or other options for education, e.g. cooperation with the Faculty of Biology at the local University.

A third direction is the support of talented youth. For instance, in South Bohemia forty very talented young people were chosen to be awarded support. There are a number of competitions conducted at different levels. In 2007, there were 115 of them, 80 of which were run on the pan-national level - meaning the same in each of the regions - the rest were decided by each region itself.

There are also other activities organized - a variety of summer camps are held, as well as events closer to towns (in which participants are accommodated at home however, the event is held in the countryside).

In general, the number of children participating in different activities is very good. There are nine full-time professional workers, working from 07.00 - 22.00 each day, and 115 external workers, many of whom have worked in the field for more than five years already. Many are also voluntary workers. Some more things that they deal with include the facilities and equipment for youth work.

It was admitted that there are less youth associations than associations working with youth, but the former organisations have more members. There is an ambiguity when it comes to sports and youth, as there is a tendency to describe the work of sports organisations as youth work, although they only undertake sports. Moreover, there is also a division between those who run activities throughout the year, and those undertaking temporary activities. To make a database of all these associations is not possible.

IV. Other organisations

META⁶

META is an NGO working on the integration of young migrants. The main aim of the association is to support the self-development of young migrants, mostly in the field of education. META provides counselling and information on education (from elementary to high school), as well as working on individual plans for each client, for instance, in language education. Moreover, META also works with schools, providing them with support on how to work with foreign children in the classroom, through seminars. The idea for the organisation came out of work in the centre for refugees, as there was no entity focused on education - and more specifically, for young people who wanted to continue their education. All the staff of META are qualified social workers, and META works only with legal migrants and asylum seekers.

In general the number of asylum seekers in the Czech Republic is not big, 300,000 in 2007, and now rising to about 400,000.

META has 70-80 long term clients. Among them are people from about 30 different countries such as the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Mongolia, Sudan, Nigeria, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory coast), Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia. There are very few Vietnamese though the community in the Czech Republic is very large. It is very rare to have anyone from EU countries, as many of them have programmes of international cooperation.

So far META has not cooperated with youth organisations working with migrants or on the same issues. META cooperates with NIDM, and provides migrant counselling in universities as well. META was part of the national coordinating committee for the ADAE campaign.

In terms of planning, META is looking to develop methodology for children which they could then use afterwards: for this an expert group will be created, and partner schools will be identified in order to implement a pilot project. Moreover, as part of META's strategic aims, the organisation is planning to work more on cooperation with other organisations,

⁶ <http://www.meta-os.cz/pic/Default.aspx?culture=en>

and international organisations, and learn from best and worst practice. In addition, META is working on preparation of changes for law on foreigners and asylum law.

Council of Europe Information Office

The Information Office provides general information on the Council of Europe, there is a library available in the office. Moreover, translation work is done on documents targeting the general public. It is mostly leaflets and press-releases are translated, which are also published at the webpage. Overall, there are about 2,000 visitors of the page per month.

Moreover, the application forms for the Council of Europe Court of Human Rights are distributed here. Furthermore, different seminars are organized.

The CoE office enjoys good cooperation with JEF and SVOD⁷ - the association for education for democracy and citizenship. Unfortunately, this year, no budget was foreseen for any such activities.

Knowledge on the Council of Europe is not widespread amongst Czech people, and people easily confuse the Council of Europe and the European Union; when it comes to documents, it should be noted that EU documents are binding whereas for the Council of Europe it is not the case. Even in the state structures the confusion is encountered.

The Council of Europe Charter on local and regional cooperation is not promoted in the country.

UNHCR

UNHCR does not work directly with young people - only in a general context. The office in the Czech Republic is rather small with three members of staff only. The scope of activities comprises support of local NGOs, including subcontracting some things to them - legal and advisory services - protection for people who are in need.

UNHCR pays special attention to vulnerable groups, refugees, children beyond 18 years, children without parental care - even though the numbers are not high in the Czech Republic.

UNHCR also works on issues of separated children, education and access to education. UNHCR has a long term reservation towards the Czech legislation in this respect. Other reservations concern the Czech language courses for children, there are systematic shortcomings of entrance exams to secondary schools and universities.

Moreover, the approach of the Ministry of education to multicultural education is unfortunately putting both multicultural education and the support for language minorities - which are two separate fields - under one grant programme.

In general, in the field of integration there is not one single counterpart identified; responsibility is rather spread out among different departments of different ministries: so there is not one fixed counterpoint for the issue. With a new Deputy Minister for Women and Equality (at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) things have become a bit easier, but the division of labour within the Ministry of Education is still made according to the level of the education system - i.e. the Department for primary education, etc. However,

⁷ <http://www.svod-cz.info/>

the unit for equal opportunities stays aside, so this probably should not be that separated. UNHCR does not really work with the Ministry of Labour. With the Ministry of Internal Affairs that deals with integration, they do not have much in common.

UNHCR maintains statistics on refugees, which can be found on their website⁸ On 1 January 2007, the number of refugees was 1,878 people.

UNHCR has a number of partner NGOs to which several services are subcontracted. They maintain two long terms contracts with organisations in Prague and Brno. There were 5 more NGO partners for which cooperation has been held for several years in a row. Due to budget constraints, UNHCR in the Czech Republic has had to drop some projects and decided to stick to two current ones for which regular monthly coordination meetings are run and daily communication is held. However, there are additional *ad hoc* contracts for *ad hoc* projects. One of the examples is META. There is no system of open tenders but a network of NGOs with which UNHCR cooperates.

UNHCR does not work on minorities' issues, but work on the prevention of migration to other EU Member States. UNHCR is also commissioning research on different topics, public polls on refugees to find out what is the opinion and knowledge of general public. Similar research and polls are conducted by the Czech Institute for Research (CVU).

The promotion of the work of UNHCR: general information on UNHCR is spread through press-releases, translated into Czech. Activities are covered through the media, in case the event is worth publicity, efforts are made to inform governmental bodies and authorities.

UNHCR also runs training for judges, for the Ministry of the Interior. A number of training courses were organised for teachers and social workers, and books were produced for university educated social workers.

UNHCR does lobby work for legislative changes.

When it comes to work with politicians, the Czech Republic is no different to any other EU Member State, preferring to come up with stricter solutions and tightening policies. UNHCR succeeds in a number of cases by creating an informal consortium, working with the constitutional court, and the ombudsman.

The general attitude towards foreigners in the country is the same no matter of the political orientation of parties. Public polls showed that the attitudes are not that bad, however, intolerance is seen.

There is no antidiscrimination legislation in place - the Czech Republic is the last country in the EU not to have it.

Roma issues are not given much publicity. There are NGOs dealing with Roma youth and the education of Roma youth in particular. The assistance is mostly given in primary schools, however there are questions on its efficiency. ;

UNHCR supported the creation of a refugees association, which continues to function and does reflects well on national policies, organizing cultural events, public awareness activities; organising readings, performances, etc.

⁸ <http://www.unhcr.cz/uprchlicr/?cid=82>

National Agency of the Youth in Action Programme and National Institute for Children and Youth (NIDM)

According to the statistics provided by the National Agency, in 2007 there were 534 projects submitted to the Youth in Action programme (YiA), out of which 240 were awarded grants. Most applications were refused on technical grounds. Among the priorities and topics of the projects submitted, most projects focused on the participation of young people. However, it should be noted that this topic was mentioned by organisations themselves and does not necessarily mean that the projects correspond fully to this theme. In total, 4,521 young people took part in different YiA projects in 2007. Out of the overall number, MEDA participants constituted most participants from Neighbouring Partner Countries (with SEE in second place and EECA in third by numbers).

There is a decrease in the possibilities for supporting projects, however, the interest towards the programme is growing.

Certainly, the statistics split by region are very different, since some regions are always more active - such as South Moravia or Prague. The National Agency uses regional coordinators to promote the programme. The imbalance between the regions is a traditional problem, though it is not only an issue for NGOs, but a general problem of participation in certain regions. Regions are not equal in numbers and size which also leads to this imbalance. Another issue concerns the regional youth councils, as it takes time for them to get established and start performing their task fully. The National Institute for children and youth is one of the actors facilitating the regional youth council meetings.

As for the profile of organisations applying for the YiA programme, there are all kinds of organisations from small to big and a discrepancy is not felt. It is also difficult to estimate how many informal groups there are among the applicants. The NA provides support for organisations on the procedures for submitting proper applications and compliance with the formal criteria whenever it is possible to be done; in the case of applications submitted close to the deadline there is less room for support.

There has been progress seen in the quality of applications under some 'Actions', such as the EVS: currently there are more hosting organisations in the Czech Republic in comparison to the situation of four years ago.

Youth participation is one of the most important criteria that the National Agency applies; however, through the applications it is not always possible to find out whether the activities are run by young people themselves, information on that could be obtained through regional coordinators.

When it comes to Non-Formal Education, it is difficult to say how much of it is there in place. The European perspective of NFE is strengthening. However, many institutions established by state and some NGOs understand NFE as a hobby education. Moreover, more confusion comes when translation from English is done.

There are two types of state organisations on national and regional level that has little to do with NFE but do a great job in the sense of leisure time activities - the houses of youth and children (leisure time establishments with different courses and activities) or school establishments.

There is also a problem of legislative norms, as the out-of-school education is considered to be professionally higher (as there is a legal framework for it, which recognises it), so the salaries will be higher for free time educators as soon as there is clear definition.

The reason why leisure time centres exist has roots in good framework and traditions. They exist in regions, sub regions, towns, and small villages - 299 centres in total.

There are 1,800 contracted professionals working in these centres; 10,000 external workers engage several times a week, tens of thousands of others. For NIDM these centres of leisure time activities are the most reliable and important partners.

The research on young people and their needs is conducted by NIDM; they also have a department on NFE. Currently NIDM concentrates on the nationally important themes or specific projects.

NIDM is also providing education and training for managers of leisure activities centres on organisational managements, economics, law, marketing, etc. These are three-year courses. There is also education and training provided on different subjects for people interested in running clubs and chief leaders of summer camps. There are 25-26 big organisations that have certification to provide training for camp chief leaders that are officially recognized.

Since 2005, NIDM is also responsible for a national register of research on children and youth - a national database on the research done so far⁹.

Several researches were undertaken on the needs of young people - in 2006 on people with less opportunities, another one on the topical problems of youth in general in the Czech Republic.

The registrar also serves as a tool to monitor the youth policy.

As for international cooperation with Visegrad countries, there is a good cooperation between the National Agencies, however, not so much between NGOs.

Conclusions and recommendations

In general, the study visit has shown that youth work and the NGO sector in the Czech Republic is quite developed, though it has its own specificities. Besides the well-developed system of the schooling institutions that deal mostly with children and teenagers and their out of school and hobby activities, there is a relatively big number of organisations working with young people. However, due to the lack of data and the observations on the reality of youth participation and leadership in the organisations, it is hard to estimate the numbers of youth-led organisations. Nevertheless, the organisations working with young people are operating on the national, regional and local levels. There is a national youth council established and the regional youth councils are being gradually set up and developing. The discrepancies with the level of development of the Czech Republic regions could also be seen in the level of activity of youth organisations in the regions. As a recommendation for both youth organisations and associations working with young people, more attention has to be given to the issue of youth participation and involvement into decision making processes and more opportunities should be created for youth

⁹ www.vyzkum-mladez.cz/

participation which in some cases could lead to a rethinking of the structures in place. For this, for instance, the [Revised European Charter for the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life](#)¹⁰ and Recommendation Rec(2006)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on citizenship and participation of young people in public life¹¹ could be more actively used.

There is a good cooperation established among the youth policy actors - the Ministry in charge, the national youth council and the research institute. The youth policy concept, which was worked upon in consultation with the national youth council, is an important factor in further developing youth work. The implementation of the concept should not only be limited to the national level, but have a solid impact on the regional and local youth work and youth policy development, hence, encouraging authorities in charge and youth organisations to build partnerships.

From discussions with various actors it appeared that the youth policy already developed puts a stronger emphasis on the development and support of organisations and institutions working with children and youth than on young people directly. This might also be caused by the fact that children and youth are perceived as one group and there are different definitions of who are children and youth according to the needs of the different actors. Youth policy seems to be understood as policy towards children and youth, in which the abovementioned actors therefore play a crucial role. That is also seen within the organisations, which were met during the study visit - very few of them had young people as their specific target group.

ČRDM, as the national youth council, has a long history of work and quite a big scope of membership. Notwithstanding the achievements in the building of cooperation with the Ministry and a lot of work being done on the legislation, more attention could be given to the capacity building of the member organisations of the platform as well as equal access and rights in the decision-making process within the organisation that could foster more participation and ownership and hence strengthen the council as such.

The recognition of youth work and non-formal education is another important issue for the Czech Republic to be given more attention by all the actors involved. Encouraging international cooperation between actors at the European level will most probably gradually clear confusion over the understanding of the concept of NFE. The adoption of legislation clarifying the status of voluntary work could significantly ease and facilitate youth work.

The European Youth Forum strongly encourages its Member Organisations to develop closer cooperation with youth organisations in the country, and support them in integrating the Czech Republic youth sector into European youth work and policy development processes. The European Youth Forum also calls on enhanced support to youth work and youth policy in the Czech Republic from international institutions active and present in the country.

¹⁰[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CHARTE/JEUNES&Sector=secCongress&Language=lanEnglish&BackColorInternet=1EB1E9&BackColorIntranet=FFCD4F&BackColorLogged=FFC679)

Ref=CHARTE/JEUNES&Sector=secCongress&Language=lanEnglish&BackColorInternet=1EB1E9&BackColorIntranet=FFCD4F&BackColorLogged=FFC679

¹¹[https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1055689&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75)

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Finally, the European Youth Forum would like to thank all those met with during the study visit for their valuable input; the YFJ remains dedicated to supporting the development of youth work and youth policy in the Czech Republic.