



European Youth Forum Policy Paper

Guiding Principles on Common Objectives for Participation and Information

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Source

The European Youth Forum is the European Platform of more than 90 National Youth Councils (NYCs) and International Non-governmental Youth Organisations (INGYOs) in Europe. It aims to empower young people to participate actively in the shaping of Europe and the society in which they live. Working for the interests of all young people in Europe, we are the representative body of our members and as such act as their intermediary in contacts with the institutions and partners in the youth field.

Introduction

The European Youth Forum welcomes the Council Resolution on European Co-operation in the Field of Youth¹ as a response to the European Commission White Paper: *A New Impetus for European Youth*².

The Council Resolution represents the consensus of all of the Member States on how the youth policy field should be developed in the future. There are four priority areas for youth policy outlined in the Resolution: participation, information, voluntary work and greater understanding. On the procedure for the development of youth policy in Europe, two important aspects are mentioned: the Open Method of Co-ordination and horizontal aspects.

Within the Open Method of Co-ordination, the process has started with the first two priority areas, participation and information. Questionnaires have been distributed to the Member States, who are consulting young people and youth organisations "as they deem appropriate" on the questions asked. On the basis of the answers to these questionnaires, a synthesis report will be prepared for each priority, identifying examples of best practice and innovative approaches, which are of common interest to the Member States. Then after consultation with the European Youth Forum, the Commission will present drafts to the Council for common objectives for the Member States on participation and information.

The European Youth Forum calls upon the Council to adopt concrete and ambitious common objectives in order to fully assess the development of youth policy in Europe. In this context, the European Youth Forum has elaborated its policies on youth participation and youth Information by presenting guiding principles for these areas.

The European Youth Forum would like to stress the importance of the national authorities and the European Commission making the answers to the questionnaires public to the national youth structures all over Europe. One of the conclusions from the consultation process on the White Paper was that young people wanted transparency and influence. A European Youth Policy should be built on openness and transparency.

¹ Council Resolution on European Co-operation in the Field of Youth, Official Journal C 168/2 of 13 July 2002 or http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2002/c_168/c_16820020713en00020005.pdf

² European Commission White Paper: *A New Impetus for European Youth*.
http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/youth/publ/fl_youth_en.pdf

Furthermore, we recommend that the European Youth Forum be included earlier in the next steps of the Open Method of Co-ordination. We therefore emphasise the importance of the European Youth Forum being a partner, in co-operation with the European Commission, in formulating and drafting the questionnaires on voluntary work and greater understanding on youth.

We find it of the utmost importance that the European Youth Forum is involved in the whole process of the Open Method of Co-ordination at the European level.

The European Youth Forum welcomes the ambition to have common objectives on participation and information. These are very important areas of relevance to young people. However, they cannot function alone and therefore need to be part of a coherent national youth policy.

Common objectives on participation and information

1. Participation

Active participation of young people in society is a prerequisite for learning about democracy. Participation, however, is more than a learning process or than gaining new skills. Real participation has to involve young people's views being valued and young people having a real say in decisions and actions that affect them. Facilitating participation and motivating young people to participate more actively in society would help to ensure their continuing involvement throughout their lives as well as preventing alienation at an early age. A high level of participation of young people in society needs to be ensured through their involvement in decision-making at the local, regional, national and European level as well as at the global level. Policies to promote participation need to be backed up by support at all levels.

Guiding principles

- Youth structures should be led by young people themselves. Young people are in the best position to represent and promote the interests of young people. The authorities should support youth structures and ensure their autonomous functioning.
- The vital role of youth organisations as vehicles in promoting the full involvement of young people as citizens should be fully recognised. Establishing a legal basis for their activities where voluntary work is recognised would contribute to youth participation at all levels in society.
- Youth policy should be developed in co-operation with young people and in accordance with their needs at all levels through integrated action and policy co-ordination. The involvement of youth concerns all areas of relevance to youth, not just youth policy.
- The consultation of young people should be based on institutional provisions that guarantee their efficient involvement in the decision-making process.
- As full members of society, young people need to have the possibility to participate in the political debate. In order to facilitate it, governments have to remove legal barriers and give the voting right and the right to be elected at the age of 16.
- The local level represents the first level of government that young people come into contact with, and the active participation of young people at this level is crucial to engaging youth in their own communities. The recommendations of the European

Charter of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life³ should be used as a standard guideline.

- Youth participation should generally start as early as possible, e.g. in youth organisations and in schools. For the participation of students, citizenship education should also be promoted in schools.
- To ensure the full participation of all young people, standards of equal opportunity should be guaranteed, rejecting any kind of discrimination.

2. Information

Participation cannot be separated from the provision of information to young people, the latter being a prerequisite for the participation of young people and therefore an instrument for the development of active citizenship.

Guiding principles

- Young people need to be involved in the design, content and the setting-up of communication tools.
- Coherent strategies should be developed for the presentation and distribution of information to young people. The strategies should be decentralised and adapted to specific local situations.
- Access to information must be free and based on the principle of equal opportunities.
- The contents of the information have to be unrelated to any specific political interests, worded in a neutral and objective manner, be factual and correspond to young people's expectations and needs.
- The information needs to be presented in a language that appeals to young people.
- The educational system must be adapted so as to enable young people to easily access a variety of information sources and to equip young people with the skills to identify an appropriate selection for their needs.

³ European Charter of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life. Charter included in Resolution 237 of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, Council of Europe, adopted on 19 March 1992. <http://www.coe.fr/cplre/eng/etxt/echartejeunes.htm> The Charter is currently being revised.