



Policy Document

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DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRATIC YOUTH ORGANISATIONS FROM AN ALL EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

One of the main goals of the European Youth Forum is to promote the active participation of young people from all European countries in the realisation of a common Europe, to engage them in shaping it, based on the values of human rights, democracy and mutual understanding. The European Youth Forum considers that youth organisations are one of the main vehicles through which young people can channel their energy, ideas, and enthusiasm or frustration, so as, to contribute to the development of civil society. Full recognition of the European Youth Forum as a all-European youth organisation by all of our institutional partners remains a key priority.

Within the European Youth Forum as an organisation, the maintenance of an all European approach means ensuring that the perspective of all parts of Europe are reflected within our work. As each national youth council and international non-governmental youth organisation is different from the other, it can also be said that, the perspective, priorities and reality of non-European Union countries are different from those inside the European Union. Therefore the European Youth Forum should be aware of and sensitive to this in its approach to its work.

While acknowledging these differences, the Youth Forum remains committed to a Europe in which all of its young people enjoy the same opportunities and prospects.

It should also be recognised that there are different ways of organising at European level as well as other levels, the European Youth Forum should also be sensitive and open to these new ways of democratic organising. The new realities and different needs challenge the Youth Forum and its member organisations to integrate this diversity and to enter into a mutual learning process.

However before we begin to discuss and address the challenge of the development of democratic youth organisations there is a need to define the conditions needed for such development. The European Youth Forum and its member organisations have a responsibility to fight for these conditions and support developing youth organisations in their struggle to achieve them.

Conditions needed for development of democratic youth structures

Democracy and human rights

- **Pluralism - respect for difference in society**
- **Equality - equal possibilities for establishment and operation of the organisation**
- **Autonomy-freedom for youth organisations to function free from external influence**

⇒ Definition of Democratic Youth Organisations

Democratic youth organisation should be open and accessible to all young people under the same conditions and on a voluntary basis. They should be places where members are encouraged and have the right :

- **to put forward their own ideas and opinions, and be sure that they will be taken into consideration and be able :**
- **to take on roles and responsibilities**
- **to influence both within the organisation and towards external bodies**
- **to personally develop, with opportunities for continuous learning and development**
- **to participate in the decision making process**
- **to have respect for difference**
- **to have elections, appoint representatives, and have a body which controls that representation, and ensures accountability**
- **to have access to information**
- **to strive for gender balance, if appropriate**
- **to control the finances of the organisation**

As mentioned above one of the main roles of European Youth Forum is to fight for good and democratic conditions for development of democratic youth organisations in Europe. Not forgetting the fact that though the European Youth Forum is a European organisation, it also contributes to a wider global co-operation when it comes to promoting youth rights and participation. This is mainly achieved through networking - providing support, facilitating contacts and influencing policy developments in such a way as to ensure a democratic space for youth organisation outside of Europe.

Development of Democratic Youth Organisations in the European Youth Forum

This area of work of the European Youth Forum addresses the development needs of existing members and our out-reach programme to support the development of youth work in new democracies and new kinds of youth organisations on European level concerning them being our new partners.

Existing members

The European Youth Forum is and should be a vanguard in promoting the role of young people and youth organisations in democratic development. It is a platform of a very diverse nature and the needs and expectations of our members differ greatly (having in mind both kinds of membership the NYCs and INGYOs). The variety of approach towards member organisations should reflect their diversity and level of needs and expectations.

The role of the European Youth Forum in order to help to the development of existing members is to :

- develop means of identifying and fulfilling the needs of member organisations and helping to realise the tools to fulfil them.
- ensure that all member organisations are regarded equally and consideration should be given to all proposals made by them.
- ensure information is received by all of them so that all can contribute to the achievement of our common goals
- help them in the areas in which they need most support i.e youth legislation or recognition
- stimulating the awareness of young people
- lobby for the recognition and validation of the work of youth organisations at national and international level
- encourage constant consultations between national authorities and EU and CoE bodies on youth policy development
- provide a space for dialogue

- help to overcome the structural and practical obstacles which prevent the development of democratic organisations.
- lobby governments to modify legislation which does not recognise or validate youth organisations
- carry out and assist in organising of educational activities, training courses and seminars
- promote two way co-operation between member organisations
- develop and prepare common policy towards different European institutions in order to strengthen the voice and needs of young people
- use the diversity of membership to provide a platform where member organisations can find new contacts and information about different youth organisations in Europe in order to develop their membership
- full recognition of newer partners as fully equal partners

Because European Youth Forum is a common platform for the National Youth Councils and International Non-governmental Youth Organisations it has the task of creating an entity in which both kinds of membership can profit equally from its existence. Similarly, it should recognise the fundamental importance of the grassroots organisations that make up their membership.

New Partners

In the past there have been policy passed and strategies developed to outreach to youth organisations in the countries of the new member states of the Council of Europe. The investment in time and resources by all those actors involved has been rewarded with the developments which have taken place, and continue to take place. This programme of outreach is still needed as we continue to stretch the borders of European youth work.

However this is not the only kind of out-reach which requires our special attention. This is also a time where youth organisations in other parts of Europe face many challenges to their existence.

At the same time, and if we pick an important moment or event which should cause us to widen our focus then that would be the Council of Europe Campaign Against Racism, Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia and Intolerance, European Youth

Week and the follow-up which has since taken place. These events have had a very positive influence on the emergence of networks of different groups of minority young people.

Development of youth organisations and youth councils not in membership

Outreach to countries which are only at an early stage of developing their civil society remains a priority for the European Youth Forum. To date this outreach strategy has consisted of various kinds of support: information exchange, study visits and training courses, involvement in Youth Directorate programme and European Union initiatives. All of these actions in themselves have contributed to the development of youth work in these targeted countries, they have also facilitated contacts and co-operation for our own members in search of new partners. According to the survey carried out of membership needs this continues to be a priority.

European Networks

Having a high profile in the activities of the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe has enabled and should continue to enable the European Youth Forum to have contact with groups/organisations which were previously unknown to them. It will also allow the European Youth Forum to build-up a better picture of the number, type and size of minority organisations and those working with these issues, that exist.

Therefore the European Youth Forum should:

- promote co-operation initiatives between young people from different parts of Europe via their member organisations in order to better understand different regional and cultural realities.
- be pro-active in seeking out new European partnerships by expand its outreach strategy to youth councils, and new European youth networks with which it is already beginning to co-operate.
- continue to facilitate member organisations access to potential partners in countries where they do not have members

- continue to offer places at its training courses, seminars and conferences to targeted non-member youth organisations, possibly adding a new perspective to an issue and facilitating networking. e.g. sharing knowledge and insights on NGO development.
- addressing the needs of these potential members through the kind of activities we offer in the future
- national youth councils in membership should be encouraged to implement a similar out reach programme at national or local level as a means of making themselves more accessible.
- act in order to improve the representation of minorities, particularly young women from minorities, at European level. Thereby encouraging member organisations to address the imbalance, if they are not doing so already. Existing structures should aim to reflect those they serve.
- continue to give anti-racism work a high priority within its programme of activity.
- address issues related to minorities in all the Forum's areas of work.
- act in a way to insure the co-ordination and development of future networks and activities, as well as, co-ordinating anti-racist training for the staff and member organisations. Links should be strengthened with the Minority Youth organisations such as those working with young people particularly concerned by issues such as disability, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity.
- to improve and maintain an understanding of minority issues, and those issues of young people who feel marginalised
- NYCs and INGYOs should be encouraged to raise awareness about issues concerning minorities.
- to continue to provide space where young people from minority groups can share and exchange experiences, gain skills etc.

The development of democratic youth organisations is a top priority for the Youth Forum, and should be reflected in all sectors of its work. In addition to this cross-sector approach, it is essential that a body should exist within the European Youth Forum in order to guarantee the implementation of policy and actions which can ensure the development of democratic youth organisations from an all European Perspective, and advise the Bureau on this field of work.