



# Structured Dialogue **from A to Z**

▶ toolkit for  
**International Youth NGOs**



# INTRODUCTION

This Publication represents the joint effort of several Youth Non-Governmental Organisations (YNGOs), which provides in detail, all the necessary information on what is Structured Dialogue, how young people can get involved in it, several tips on how to make this process participatory and efficient, and the most important, it gathers the experience of organisations which have been involved in the process for many years. This toolkit is meant for individuals as well as NGOs, and other receivers who are interested in the Process itself. Nowadays, Structured Dialogue is boosting young people's involvement in the democratic process at local, regional and European levels. So far, it has provided the opportunity for thousands of young people to develop a sense of engagement in the public life, and to speak louder about issues of great importance for them.

Additionally, it is important to state that this publication would not have been possible to create without the support of a Microgrant for INGYOs projects for Structured Dialogue from the European Youth Forum.

*Enjoy!*



## WHAT IS THE STRUCTURED DIALOGUE?

The structured dialogue is an instrument to ensure that the opinion of young people is taken into account, when defining youth-related policies of the European Union. To achieve this, the structured dialogue brings together young people and policy-makers across the EU to jointly discuss and feed into youth policy at national and European level.

Moreover, the structured dialogue involves consultations with young people and youth organisations at all levels in the EU Member States, and at EU level during the EU Youth Conferences organised by each EU Presidency country. The structured dialogue is implemented in work cycles of 18 months that have a common overall thematic priority and are divided into three rounds of consultations (one for each presidency).

The themes and topics for discussion are decided at European level by EU Youth Ministers, whereas a committee of the current trio of EU Presidency countries, the European Commission, and the European Youth Forum is responsible for coordinating the process and deciding upon sets of questions to be asked to young people across Europe twice a year. These questions are then used as the basis for national consultations in each EU country, which are organised by National Working Groups, which in most cases are led by youth councils

and include other youth organisations and stakeholders. Some international youth organisations conduct consultations with their members and give feedback on the questions as well.

## HISTORY OF STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

The Structured Dialogue is the result of the A New Impetus for European Youth (White paper, 2001) and a sequence of the European Youth Pact (2005). Those documents emphasize the importance to consult young people on policy fields that affect them directly.

In 2005, a European Union Council Resolution invited the European Commission and the Member States to develop a Structured Dialogue with young people and youth organizations, experts on youth issues and public decision makers.

The biggest boost for its implementation happened with the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), adopted in 2009 through the Council Resolution that recognizes young people as key actors in society that should be considered as an important resource. Therefore, it is there mentioned the importance to defend their right to be involved and participate on the elaboration of policies that affect them, through a permanent structured dialogue between decision makers, young people and youth organizations.

Thus, the European Cooperation in the Youth field was established:

**General Aims:**

- To create equal opportunities for young people on Education and on the labour market;
- To promote active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity among young people.

**8 Domains of Action:**

- Education and Training
- Employment and Entrepreneurship
- Social and Well-Being
- Participation
- Volunteering
- Social Inclusion
- Youth and the World & Creativity and Innovation

So far, there have been two full cycles of the Structured Dialogue. The first involved the Presidency countries of Spain, Belgium and Hungary, and focused on youth employment. The second cycle included Cyprus, Denmark and Poland, and chose the topic of youth participation in democratic life.

The third cycle of Structured Dialogue is currently in progress, with the trio of EU Presidency Countries of Ireland, Lithuania and Greece. The overall theme for this cycle is "Social Inclusion", and every six months, a consultation will build upon the results of the previous one.

## Structured Dialogue cycle I – “Youth Employment”

<b>Presidency of Hungary – 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2011 to the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2011</b>	EU Youth Conference, Gödöllő and Budapest – 2 <sup>nd</sup> to the 4 <sup>th</sup> of March 2011
<b>Presidency of Belgium – 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2010 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2010</b>	EU Youth Conference, Leuven – 2 <sup>nd</sup> to the 4 <sup>th</sup> of September 2010
<b>Presidency of Spain – 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2010 to the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2010</b>	EU Youth Conference, Jerez – 13 <sup>th</sup> to the 15 <sup>th</sup> of April 2010

Furthermore, at the end of this 18 month cycle of Structured Dialogue, the Council of the European Union adopted a Council Resolution, highlighting the major recommendations from the process.

The Council Resolution document can be downloaded here: <http://goo.gl/LQMc18>

## Structured Dialogue cycle II – “Youth participation in democratic life in Europe”

The second cycle of the Structured Dialogue focused on the over-arching thematic priority of “Youth participation in democratic life in Europe”, with each of the Presidency countries deciding on their own specific priorities.

The timetable for the three phases of the second cycle of Structured Dialogue was:

<b>Presidency of Cyprus – 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2012 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2012 – “Youth Participation and social inclusion, with an emphasis on the young people with migrant background”</b>	EU Youth Conference, Nicosia – 11 <sup>th</sup> to the 13 <sup>th</sup> of September 2012
<b>Presidency of Denmark – 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2012 to the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2012 – “Participation: creativity and innovation”</b>	EU Youth Conference, Sorø – 18 <sup>th</sup> to the 21 <sup>st</sup> of March 2012
<b>Presidency of Poland – 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2011 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2011 – “Mobility of and cooperation between young people from the EU and EU neighbouring countries”</b>	EU Youth Conference, Warsaw – 5 <sup>th</sup> to the 7 <sup>th</sup> of September 2011

The Council Resolution document can be downloaded here <http://goo.gl/FmYD7V>

## **Structured Dialogue cycle III – “Social Inclusion”**

The third cycle of the Structured Dialogue is currently underway. The thematic priority for this cycle is the “social inclusion of young people across Europe.”

The timetable for the three phases of the Structured Dialogue:

<b>Presidency of Ireland – 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2013 to the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2013</b>	EU Youth Conference, Dublin – 11 <sup>th</sup> to the 13 <sup>th</sup> of March 2013
<b>Presidency of Lithuania – 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2013 to the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2013</b>	<b>EU Youth Conference, Vilnius – 9<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013</b>
<b>Presidency of Greece – 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2014 to the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2014</b>	EU Youth Conference, Thessaloniki – 9 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> March 2014

During the current and 3rd cycle, along the European Youth Week, the European Commission organized, together with the European Youth Forum a Review Confer-

ence to evaluate the Structured Dialogue process since the very beginning until now. During that conference, all the different stakeholders, ratified the fact that INGYOs should be officially recognized as actors in the process and included officially at all levels. This is indeed great news for all the INGYOs in Europe, as from now on, we will be playing a much more important role in the Structured Dialogue process.

## THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM

Throughout each step of this process, the European Youth Forum ensured that the voice of young people and youth organisations were accounted for. Indeed, the Youth Forum is active in the preparation, running and monitoring of the process at EU level, from deciding upon the questions that guide the dialogue in the EU Member States – together with the other stakeholders leading the process at EU level – to collecting the results of the consultations as background for the Youth Conference. Moreover, it also takes part in the joint discussions at the Conference and pushes the EU policy-makers in the youth field, the Commission and the Council of the EU, to follow-up on the recommendations, with concrete political decisions and actions. The European Youth Forum is committed to improve and further develop the process in order to involve young people even closer in shaping policies that directly affect them.

## HOW ARE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED (IN COMPARISON TO NATIONAL LEVEL YOUTH COUNCILS)?

The role of INGYO is different from the one of NYCs in the process, especially since originally, the structured dialogue was envisaged as a process of dialogue at Member State level. However, the role of INGYO has grown a lot, from having no role during the first cycle to being invited to contribute to the process in the second cycle and strengthening their involvement now, the aim of the third cycle.

So far, INGYO have mainly submitted their inputs based on their own Policy Papers and strategies concerning the topic of the guiding questions. Recently though, many INGYO are exploring the option of having consultations with young people - members and non-members of their INGYO - to bring the dialogue at the grassroots of their organisations. For INGYO, "consultations" is understood more in the sense of consulting a diversity of young people, although consulting authorities is not excluded: for example, there are INGYO that have held seminars or conferences on the topic of Social Inclusion, to which they invited Eurofound or Commission or MEPs etc. and thus, they have joint outcomes from discussions with youth and authorities.

## WHAT DOES AN IYNGO NEED TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN JOINING STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

As explained in the previous chapter, joining the structured dialogue process has many benefits for IYNGOs. However, IYNGOs need to be aware about the resources that this additional activity requires, especially in terms of time and human resources.

There is a considerable flow of emails and information coming from the European Youth Forum and from other IYNGOs who communicate through a mailing list. The European Youth Forum sends the set of questions for each cycle, the Call for IYNGOs participants to the EU Youth conferences, the compilation of reports received, the follow up of each EU Youth conference and the policy outcomes, updates on the work of the European Steering Committee, relations with the European Commission, the Trio Presidency, the European Economic and Social Committee. IYNGOs might have meetings to discuss together the outcomes of the questionnaire or the overall role of IYNGOs in structured dialogue.

All these information takes time to be processed and passed on to the larger network of each IYNGO.

**In particular, the most time consuming tasks are:**

- Setting up the consultations within the IYNGO, especially translating the questions in a language that is easily understood by your target group and/or choosing the questions to address to your target. Consultations can be online, face to face or both. In every case they require quite some preparation;
- Compiling the answers to the questions to be then sent to the European Youth Forum.

Although the two tasks mentioned above are the most evident and are also very precise on their timing (2 months before the beginning of the cycle, 2 months after the beginning of the cycle), there are some other tasks that are ongoing. Therefore, although the SD process has its peaks with these 2 main deadlines, in order to effectively be part of the process, the SD needs continuous monitoring:

- Reminders need to be sent regarding consultations, including articles in the newsletter, on the IYNGO website and posts on Fb/twitter;
- The reports, outcomes of EU Youth conferences and policy outcomes need to be given visibility.

IYNGOs should also offer trainings or specific easy-to-use information on structured dialogue for their key volunteers, in order to better spread the message within the network. One of the hardest challenges of the SD is to communicate effectively about it, since it might sound very complicated to the volunteers. IYNGOs should also foresee to invest time for brainstorming, planning and evaluating how their IYNGO takes part in the SD, come

up with innovative consultation methods, and share and learn from other IYNGOs or National Working Groups.

If consultations start to be complex and need funding, IYNGOs should also start considering to apply for funding from the European Commission, under the KA3 of the Erasmus+ programme.

In order to fulfill all these tasks, IYNGOs might need to set up a structured dialogue taskforce/working group formed by volunteers, board members, staff members – according to the governance structure of the IYNGO. When setting up this group, the responsibilities and duration of the term should be made clear, together with the definition of a working method and storage of information/documents- ex emails, file sharing...

Ideally, a representative from this SD working group should apply to attend the EU Youth conferences. This can be clearly recognition for the effort put in steering the process, especially if this task is given to a volunteer. However, spots for IYNGOs representatives at EU Youth Conferences are limited, therefore the participation to these cannot be given as sure and be the only form of recognition/motivation for steering the SD process for the IYNGO.

## HOW TO RUN CONSULTATIONS?

There are many ways in which you can successfully run

the consultation and create a dialogue. Each organisation does it differently, depending on their membership. Also, everyone evolves and gets more experienced in a process, so don't be scared to change the method of how you approach it. First of all, you need to consider all the options that you have. You can consult youth online and offline and you can combine them. The same applies to your members.

## **Online consultations**

Consulting your members online means that you will collect the answers for the consultation via emails or various social media. You preferably want your members to consult young people on the questions which are in the consultation and therefore, you need to provide them with the consultation.

### **You have few options for how to do it:**

#### **1) Send it as it is**

Send the consultation as it is to your members with a sufficient time for them to work on it

#### **2) Adapt questions.**

Questions are written using a certain terminology and language which might be difficult to understand. Therefore, you can adapt/translate the questions so they make sense to your membership and so that they can answer

the questions properly and correctly.

### **3) Choose questions**

a) Each organisation work has a different expertise, different target group and different membership. Therefore, not all the questions might be relevant to you and it might not be beneficial both, for the process and for you to answer these questions. Therefore, you may focus only on the ones which are relevant.

b) You do the same but you can give your members the opportunity to answer all the questions because they might be able to create a dialogue with young people in that field.

### **4) Pre answer questions**

Answer the questions based on your political documents, political platform or a manifesto that your membership legalized.

## **Offline tools**

Apart from collecting the inputs via internet, you (and your members) can carry on using face-to-face actions. Discussion on the topics, workshops, events, researches and all that, are a valid ways of bringing an added value to the process. Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Maybe you have already done something like this in the past and you have reports and outcomes which can be used. Feel free to recycle them if you find them valuable and useful

(as long as they are not outdated or no longer valid). After your answers are ready, make sure you fill in all the necessary information which you are asked for in the form, and send it to the European Youth Forum on time. Do not forget there is a word limit for each answer!

## TIPS

### **a) Explain the terminology and realities**

If you think that some of the terms might not be clear, make them clear! Add links and references so whoever wants to answer it, can find out more about what, for example NEETS or entrepreneurship mean. Do not take for granted that everyone knows what it is just because you do.

### **b) Explain the process in each round.**

Just because you know what Structured dialogue is and why it is important to take part, it doesn't mean that everyone else does. Make sure that you provide an explanation when asking people for contribution. For example, prepare a document, video, page on your website dedicated to structured dialogue and INGYO's which you can easily use in every phase.

### **c) Explain the topic**

In order to contextualize the consultation and preferably in an attractive way (eg. <http://goo.gl/Ox9Uf>) so your members and young people get interested.

## **AEGEE best practices!**

Trying to include the Structured Dialogue in our everyday activities, events and conferences:

- Workshops about Structured Dialogue in our regional meetings and General Assemblies;
- Online surveys translated into the different languages (and only including the questions which are relevant for our Network - modifying the survey);
- Google Hangout/Skype discussions with interested participants in our Network;
- Asking expressly our thematic working groups to develop positions on the topics of the Presidency (Working Groups) or including references from our approved Policy Papers in our documents towards the Structured Dialogue.

## **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO GET INVOLVED IN THE STRUCTURED DIALOGUE?**

Youth organisations like AEGEE, YEU, WOSM, EFIL, EEE-YFU, OBESSU and all the others have a vital role to play in the Structured Dialogue, as they speak on behalf of a great number of young people.

Structured dialogue aims at addressing all young people, including those with fewer opportunities or not formally organised. Hence, youth organisations are invited to try and reach out beyond their members, and to involve an

even larger diversity of young people.

INGYOs defend youth participation in the democratic processes, and we believe that it is important that young people are able to share their needs with the decision-makers.

Getting involved in the structured dialogue is a way for us to make our voice heard, but also to contribute by giving concrete recommendations, and concrete input to the Council of ministers. Young people often complain that there is no space for them to make suggestions to the decision-makers, or to influence the decisions which are being taken. Hence, the Structured Dialogue gives a 'structured' space for this, on topics which have been preliminarily chosen, but still, which definitely matters for young people. Therefore, this is a chance that young people need to grab and to use at its fullest.

## WHAT CAN IYNGOS BRING TO THE PROCESS?

1. INGYOs add a true European dimension and a unique European perspective, to the process and the topics discussed, as they work on transnational and cross-border issues and reflect the interests of large groups of young people concerned with these matters, acting in a complementary way to the national perspectives reflected by National Working Groups.

2. They offer a European-wide perspective, beyond the EU, as their membership often exceeds the borders of the member states of the European Union. This can be

especially relevant on certain topics discussed in the structured dialogue.

3. INGYOs highlight and channel the perspectives of specific groups of young people or on topics related to young people who aren't usually heard or which inputs don't easily emerge.

4. INGYOs work on a transnational level and run transnational projects, therefore have a good overview of the best practices at European level or in an intercultural context. Best practices and projects which work beyond national realities can be easily adapted in different national contexts.

5. INGYOs are affected directly by European level policies in their everyday work and activities, therefore they have the right to have a say on them by engaging in a direct dialogue with policy makers.

6. INGYOs have added value disseminating information and results of the Structured Dialogue, as they have a broader (international) outreach (also beyond the borders of the European Union).

## WHAT IS THE RESULT?

The results of the consultations are compiled into background documents for EU Youth Conferences, where youth representatives and policy makers have the opportunity to work together and present a joint message to the EU. The EU Youth Conferences take place twice a year and are hosted by the country that holds the EU

Presidency. The Presidency country will usually promote the recommendations of its EU Youth Conference and present them to the Council of the European Union. Council then reflects them in its Resolutions and Conclusions which are adopted by EU Ministers responsible for youth.

The conference recommendations are also used by the European Commission when working on its youth policy development

## WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THE STRUCTURE DIALOGUE?

The impact of this process in young people depends on the implementation of the political outcomes by the Member States, through concrete measures and the involvement/ commitment of youth representatives on attending and actively participating on the European discussion and on the national working group.

The SD has been getting some visible results on the political decision on the European Level. As an example of these results, for the period of 2012-2013 the European Commission provided more funds to increase the number of projects through the Youth In Action Programme, and the number of participants from the 6 neighbour countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Byelorussia, Georgia, Moldavia, Ukraine).

On the Denmark Presidency the discussion was focused

on youth innovation and creativity, and participation on the elections, therefore the conclusions of the Council (approved by the Youth Ministries of the 27 Member States) reflect most of the youth recommendations of the European Conference in Sorø (March 2011). The same happened in Nicosia on the last phase of this cycle, where most of the recommendations were taken into account on the conclusions of the Member States representatives.

The global results of the 18 months of SD on Youth Participation between young people and decision makers were taken into consideration on the Council Resolution at the end of the cycle.

### **As an example of the results included:**

- Extend the Structure Dialogue to all young people;
- Recognition of the youth work and youth organizations as a way to develop skills and competences for youth;
- Supporting youth participation in decision processes at all levels;
- Increase the support for all youth activities focused on intercultural dialogue and participation of young people in the EU and third countries.

## SOME NUMBERS OF YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Presidency of Poland (July-December 2011):  
2 000 young people

Presidency of Denmark (January – June 2012):  
20 000 young people

Presidency of Cyprus (July – December 2012):  
12 000 young people

Presidency of Ireland (January – June 2013):  
11 000 young people

Presidency of Lithuania (July – December 2013)  
20 000 young people

## WHY IS YOUR ORGANIZATION INVOLVED?

### **EFIL - European Federation for Intercultural Learning (it's a Federation of AFS Organisations in Europe)**

- To offer AFS volunteers the opportunity of being active European Citizens and voice their opinions on relevant EU policies that have a direct impact on them as young people and the work of their organisation.
- To ensure that the opinion of EFIL and its volunteers is taken into account in defining youth-related policies of the European Union.

### **Active – Sobriety, Friendship and Peace's Participation in the Structured Dialogue process**

In line with the other activities carried out through its political work, Active – Sobriety, Friendship and Peace also participates in the Structured Dialogue process. We see the Structured Dialogue process as a significant step towards ensuring better dialogue between young people and the policy makers. Feeding young people's views into the creation of policies at national and European level, confirming that young people are indeed the solution to the challenges of today's societies.

Through participating in the Structured Dialogue process, Active – Sobriety, Friendship and Peace ensures

that the views of its members are taken into account when creating the youth-related policies in the EU. At the same time, as an INGYO, we value what this process provides – a forum for a joint and continuous reflection on the priorities and needed steps for an improved cooperation in the youth field in the EU, among a variety of actors and stakeholders.

With the further development of the Structured Dialogue process, we look forward to even more measurable and direct policy impact of the views of young people in EU policy making, as well as a variety of ways to further use the outcomes of the Structured Dialogue consultations.

## Erasmus Student Network

- To allow young people to stand for their rights and propose the best solutions for their needs;
- To allow international students and young people in general to take active part into the decision making process through a proper dialogue between them and the policy makers, in order to assure a good and proper higher education system within EU.

The consultation process behind the dialogue between youth representatives and policy makers, allows young people to share and disseminate best practices that may serve as an example to follow; this is the case of ESN “Erasmus in Schools - EiS-”, a project that was mentioned in the final report of the second phase of the third cycle

as a “good practice initiative for the promotion and motivation of young people from early stages to participate in training and learning opportunities abroad”.

## **EMSA Europe - European Medical Students' Association**

Involvement in the Structured Dialogue has been a big step forward in the European Medical Students' Association (EMSA) in terms of contribution to the European initiatives and focus on the general population.

Performing mainly in the health field and preventive education, EMSA could this time provide a medical perspective in the discussions on unequal social opportunities for youth and the rights of minorities, as well as trans-border care for patients of different backgrounds.

Bearing in mind that the role of EMSA is to represent a large group of young people in the European Union and beyond, we were honoured to be asked for the input from a medical angle. However, a great added value was also the opportunity to meet, exchange thoughts and merge forces with all other NGOs working in this area, often much better oriented in the field of social inclusion, the needs of minority groups and youth empowerment than the EMSA expertise reaches alone.

This definitely helps us to see better which the problems

of the young people are today and which arguments to use in order to defend the rights and well-being of our future patients, as members of various social systems.

## EEE-YFU- European Educational Exchanges Youth For Understanding

EEE-YFU believes that Structured Dialogue provides young people with a great chance to make their voice heard also on the European level. As an umbrella organisation of European Youth for Understanding organisations providing long-term high school stays abroad, we gather many volunteers who have experience from more than one European culture. Through their activities they make it possible to deepen intercultural understanding, mutual respect and to reinforce social responsibility within young Europeans. Structured dialogue enables them to promote these values within the youth policies and build a better Europe for us all.

## Youth For Exchange and Understanding International

YEU International brings added contribution and values to consultations in Structured Dialogue process, since YEU MOs work at local, national, regional and international level in different regions, also outside the EU, and

are not necessarily linked to National Youth Councils (NYC) which are already involved in national consultations by EU member states.

The only way we can improve the process is by making our suggestions real, visible and our voice heard.

## **OBESSU- Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions**

- As the only voice of School Students in Europe, we want to ensure that our members get to express their expertise on a given topic in the process;
- OBESSU wants to ensure that school students are present when the youth policies are being created in the European Union;
- As the only voice of School Students in Europe, we feel the responsibility to ensure that our members get to express their expertise on a given topic in the process;
- We want to bring European youth policies closer to our members and our members closer to the European youth policies.

## **WOSM - World Organization of the Scout Movement**

WOSM represents the National Scout Organisations all over Europe. For us, participating in the Structured Di-



dialogue is an important opportunity to work all together to increase European citizenship, ownership of European cooperation in the youth field and youth participation at all levels. As an International Youth NGO we have the unique opportunity to work on the Structured Dialogue themes in international groups, at our big events, like the Roverway, that gathers more than 12,000 young Europeans every 4 years or our yearly international events for Rovers (age 16-22).





Realized by YEU in partnership with

OBESSU, EFIL, AEGEE, EMSA, ACTIVE, WOSM, ESN and EEE-YFU



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