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introduction

Nowadays Youth Information is a recognized part of youth work in many European Countries and in some of them looks back at a history of 40 years. In those 40 years we have seen a lot of changes in Youth Information Work adapting to developments in society in general and the living conditions of young people in particular.

A lot of professional development has taken place within the field of Generalist Youth Information on local and regional level as well as within national structures and European networks over those four decades. Also the recognition on European Level has been achieved to a large extent leading to the Recommendation N° (90) 7 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 1990 and the integration of Youth Information as one of the priorities in the White Paper on Youth launched by the European Commission in 2001.

Furthermore the Youth Information Field has worked on exchange of best practice and experience, created support-structures and

training opportunities and discussed common principles and ethics.

During the last three years ERYICA as well as the Council of Europe have been approached by several organisations, policy makers and motivated young people who want to create a Youth Information Service in their local area, region or country. In response to these requests the partners have decided to create this Youth Information Starters Kit for those interested organisations, youth workers, policy makers and young people themselves in countries where Youth Information still does not exist or is at its very starting point.

This Starters Kit will give a first insight in what Youth Information is, the underlying working principles and missions, how to start creating Youth Information Services and some practical information on what the different European structures have to offer to those who want to step into the world of Youth Information.



interview Chinonyerem Anthony (Spain)

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"Discovering the Youth Emancipation Office"

Chinonyerem Anthony is a nigerian boy. He's 19 years old and he came to Europe two years ago. He tells the story of his life: "i came to Europe like every other foreigner" basically in search of "greener pasture".

How did you know about us?

Well...first, when i came to Spain, i lived in Malaga. By then i was under aged. i studied Secondary there. When i was 18 years old i had to go away because i couldn't find any job after finish to study. i had a friend in Nigeria whose brother is living in Mallorca. Her girlfriend is from Poland.

i decided to go to Mallorca and i started to live with them. This girl knew this office, so she helped me to locate it because first i didn't know what to do or how i could start to find a job. When i came to Youth information Office i asked about what kind of services they have and i was very amazed because i didn't know that young people have all this resources here. For example when i was in Malaga i couldn't find an Office like this. Now i know that they also have them but nobody told me about it before!

How could we help you from Emancipation Office?

They could help me to look for a job. i logged in their work website. Since then i've been trying to apply for different jobs and i could get my first interview here in Palma many days ago. They also helped me to make a good CV, and how to prepare a job interview. They were involved on my personal situation from the first moment, trying to understand me.

What do you think about resources of Youth Emancipation Office?

i think technological resources of youth emancipation office are great. They even have a WiFi Zone, but i don't have a Portable PC. Despite this, they have different PC's for youth users, so i can surf by internet everyday in a comfortable way. i think this Office is made to create awareness to youth, basically on their right to achieve a particular purpose, mostly information on work, health, and other things that help us in normal life. i'm trying to come everyday and i read newspapers.

in fact my experience with Youth information Office is great: you need to find good and kind professionals, especially when you're having a hard time, and i found it here. Now i just want to find a job that allows me to keep living here. i want to keep studying if it's possible, and be happy just like other boys.

Chinonyerem Anthony

Why Youth information?

In an article in Forum 21 on the “all different-all equal” European Youth Campaign, Ralf René Weingärtner, Director of the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe, remarked that “Accession and Inclusion – this is, in a nutshell, what all policy with and for young people is about.”¹

This is also the common starting point for youth information: being a service for young people which helps them to take their own autonomous decisions and realise their aspirations in the way that best suits their abilities and possibilities.

The basic idea behind the development of generalist youth information services and structures has always been the right of young people to have access to comprehensive, accurate and balanced information that responds to their needs and questions and is designed for them, thus being customised and easily understood.

The right to information has been recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and Recommendation No. (90) 7 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. These documents and the intentions expressed in them have always been and still are important points of reference for youth information at local, regional, national and European level.

➔ Becoming independent...

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Young people are in a phase of their lives which is characterised by the transition from childhood to becoming adults who are responsible for their own decisions and are independent from their families, schools and other institutions. This is a challenging period as such. In a relatively short time, they have to take a lot of important decisions which may determine their whole future.

Choosing a suitable education, finding their first jobs and own accommodation and having to deal with money on their own, as well as with their first loves, sexual experiences and the sometimes painful but necessary separation from their homes and families, are only some of the challenges young people have to cope with. All this happens at a time in their lives when they are still in the process of finding out who they are and how they are going to define their own identities and lifestyles. This is already a lot to deal with even if they are not faced with further complications such as coming from a disadvantaged background, failing at school or not being able to find jobs for one reason or another, or getting into difficulties with, e.g. drugs, alcohol or violence.

Many young people go through this period without problems with the help of their families, friends or teachers. However, in a society where stable biographies and life patterns are becoming less and less “normal” and more and more opportunities are opening up, but gaining a clear view of them is becoming more and more

complicated, those close to young people may face with questions which go beyond their own experiences.

Generalist youth information aims to support young people who need to take decisions by giving them access to the necessary information concerning their options and opportunities and the services and programmes available and helping them to evaluate and judge the information through various forms of intervention. Being based on a user-centred approach, youth information seeks to cover all subjects that are of relevance to young people and enable them to take their own properly informed decisions.

➔ Becoming part of society...

Youth information is based on the needs and questions of young people and primarily seeks to respond to them. Nevertheless, youth information also has a role in helping young people to find their place in society.

In addition to responding to the demands of young people, youth information has a clear role in prevention by actively promoting information about possibilities for spending their free time, alternatives for periods when they are not in employment or training and opportunities for taking part in projects and volunteering, as well as about issues such as mental and physical health.

Young people sometimes face long periods of free time, e.g. when unemployed or while waiting for the next level of education to start. Knowing about various options on offer to keep themselves busy with enjoyable activities rather than hanging around on the streets adds to their well-being and integration.

Information is also a prerequisite for participation – only those young people who are well informed about their rights and duties as young persons and citizens and know how to use and fulfil them can be active members of civil society. This, of course, goes beyond information about political systems and voting rights and covers all kinds of involvement in a democratic society, including associations, how to lobby for one’s own interests and personal involvement in projects and campaigns.

➔ Becoming information literates...

A new, additional role has emerged for youth information services in recent years as our society has been transformed into a so-called information or even knowledge society. New technologies are opening up access to all kinds of information to everybody – everybody who has the means and the abilities to use them.

We can see a widening gap between those young people who have the necessary equipment and the skills to use it and those who are excluded from these sources because they lack the hardware and/or the knowledge for searching for, finding and assessing information on the Internet.

Moreover, the amount of data available is increasing by the day and we all have to define strategies for dealing with the information

1. Ralf-René Weingärtner, article “All different – all equal 2006 European Youth Campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation” in Forum 21 – European Journal on Youth Policy, No. 5-6 – 3/2006.

Why Youth information?

overload. This is a challenge for experienced information workers, let alone young people who are only starting to find their way in their own lives.

Giving guidance on how to research, evaluate and assess information on the basis of it being both suited to the demand at hand and also reliable is an increasingly important function of youth information services. We also still have to ensure basic access to new technologies for young people, e.g. by providing free or low-cost Internet terminals for the visitors to our centres.

This can be achieved through a variety of approaches, starting with the way we organise our own online services, raising awareness of the issue in all our conversations with young people, e.g. by showing

them during counselling how we assess the information found online, and also through workshops and events dealing with the issue.

In conclusion, the generalist youth information in all its different forms and types which we will outline in this Starter Kit is designed to support young people on their way to becoming adults who are in a position to take responsibility for their own decisions and choices, are aware of their options and are able to build their lives in accordance with their opportunities and abilities, while being active members of civil society who can cope with the requirements of living in the so-called knowledge society.

Of course, youth information is not a stand-alone solution to all these challenges but, rather, one significant element in an overall youth policy aimed at accession and inclusion.



Interview Juha Alatalo (Finland)

"online youth information as a challenge"

Some distinctive features of Finnish youth information and counseling work have to do with the rural character of much of our country: a relative small number of inhabitants in towns, many young people living in scattered settlements with no youth service and also the long distance. This is one of the reasons why we are especially interested in developing local and regional online services and integrating those in our work.

We receive a large variety of questions on our local youth information service. These enquiries can cover all kinds of topics from finding work and having difficulties with the boyfriend to feeling depressed and looking for help. A single online contact with a young person might include several different questions. Of course this is very

challenging for us – we have to use our networks and professional skills to find the right answers for the youngsters.

Some online-questions we lately received were:

"Hi! i´m 14 years old and i am thinking where i could work to earn some pocket money. i will participate in a language course in London in summer 2010 and i need desperately money, the problem is where could i work?"

"Tell me... i moved to another city because of my studies. i meet my boyfriend only during the weekends. During the weekend he would like to spend his time rather with his friends than with me. When we meet he does not notice me at all. if i would like to talk to him, he only says that not now because i´m tired or then he just listens (maybe) when i talk, but i do not get any answers. And if i ask something he says i do not know. One day i asked him why do you want to date me. His answer was, i don´t know. And we have been dating soon, for 1,5 years. And i´m his first girlfriend."

"i have been depressed for several years and now i want to find some help. i read

on these web pages that young person can make an appointment... then it told about social workers and nurses' phone numbers, there were no number for 24/7 service... which number could i call and book an appointment? i wonder what might happen there? i just need to speak to someone, i am so anxious"

i think these examples show that online counseling is challenging. You have only the written information and it is not always possible to ask additional information from the questioner. Support from the other staff members is important to find out the main points. For example questions about legal issues are very sensitive. And you have to be even more careful how you formulate your answer. There is always the possibility that the young person will misinterpret it. Online-counseling is a very interesting and useful new task for Youth information especially in a country like ours as i have said before and to do it right it needs a lot of attention and training for the workers.

Juha Alatalo, 27, information advisor, Youth information and Counselling Centre Nappi in Finland

What is Youth information?

Youth information is a specialised form of youth work.¹ The first youth information centres were set up in the late 1960s in Western Europe following some significant changes in modern societies. They were a response to the demand of young people for a service giving reliable and accurate answers to issues they were concerned with in an informal and user-friendly atmosphere and setting.

Since then, youth information has developed rapidly in Europe and become a specific part of youth work in many countries, involving a big variety and range of forms of intervention and services for young people. The way youth information work is delivered in individual countries depends very much on the legislation concerning young people, the overall role of youth work and the other structures and facilities available for young people and those who work with and for them. Nevertheless, some essential tasks and principles are the same for all youth information centres and services.

Generalist youth information aims to cover all relevant subjects for young people – usually the areas covered are:

- Education
- Jobs and career
- Leisure time, sports and cultural activities
- Legislation relating to young people
- Housing
- Money issues
- Health issues
- Facilities and services for young people in the local area
- Holiday and travel
- Volunteering and European and international opportunities

This list is not exhaustive and may vary from centre to centre, depending on the other services that are available for young people in the respective area. The important thing is to find out the information needs of young people and provide an overview of all of them.

→ The basics...

The essential task of a youth information centre or service is to give reliable, up-to-date answers about a vast variety of topics in a customised, easily understood manner without prior appointment. Young people tend to act whenever a need arises and appointments would make it harder for them to consult our services. Young persons contacting youth information should know after the first contact what their next steps will be. In order to be able to fulfil this basic aim, youth information centres and services must perform several tasks:

Research and documentation

The basis of quality information services is a sound and reliable stock of information and documentation that enables the staff to respond quickly to the demands and needs expressed by the young

people contacting a youth information centre or service. Research and documentation are therefore essential:

- research and select information on a wide variety of topics relevant to young people,
- organise and maintain close contact with all different kinds of youth-related services,
- organise, classify and catalogue the information (on- and offline) in order to have quick access for the staff and the users,
- update the documentation and available information on a regular basis,
- ensure pluralism of sources and show the young people the different options they have.

Design and dissemination of information

The relevant information selected may be accurate and up-to-date but not easily understood by young people in the manner presented by the source of the information. Another role of youth information centres and services is therefore to design information products that meet the needs of the target group:

- “Translate” texts into a language that can be easily understood.
- Keep the information clear and offer different levels of detail for those who just want an initial insight and those who already have a closer interest in a specific topic.
- Organise the available information in a way that makes it easily accessible and clearly reflects the applied selection criteria.
- Create information products (leaflets, brochures, online services...) that are appealing to young people in language, design and format.
- Produce engaging material that attracts attention and encourages young people to develop an interest in certain issues.
- Design products for those young people who do not like or have difficulties with reading, e.g. digital stories, videos, podcasts, comics, games...
- Organise information evenings and events at which experts and/or experienced young people talk about certain topics.
- Organise and maintain networks with other relevant services, e.g. youth work, schools, and also disseminate the information products through them so as to reach those young people who would not contact a youth information centre or service of their own initiative.

Creating a welcoming atmosphere

One of the special features of youth information work is that we are usually contacted by individual young people of their own initiative and do not have the possibility of engaging with them on a regular basis and gradually building up trust. The first contact with the youth information centres or services is therefore essential:

- Create a friendly, informal and welcoming atmosphere (on- and offline).

1. See “Definition of main action fields of youth work” in the Study on “The socioeconomic scope of youth work” commissioned by the partnership and carried out by ISS – Institut für Sozialarbeit und Sozialpädagogik, 2007.

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- Make sure that the young persons have space to “nose around” if they first wish to explore on their own.
- Welcome young people when they enter the centres but do not force them to put their questions immediately.
- Make it visible and clear (on- and offline) that there is somebody available and willing to listen to them, e.g. by having staff present in the front office or by having a clear contact option on the websites.
- Use “fun” services like Internet access, ticket sales and so on so that young people enter the centres willingly.
- Make it clear that face-to-face interaction is the basis of your services but that young people are welcome to put their questions by all other means such as phone, email, skype, msn...

Information, orientation and referral

The young people contacting a youth information centre or service may have a clear question which can be answered immediately or they may have a more complex need or sometimes may not even know themselves exactly what they need. Youth information workers therefore have to be trained professionals who always bear in mind the overall aim of youth information in terms of equipping young people with what they need to take their own decisions:

- Show interest and take the young person and their request seriously.
- Find out through active listening what the young person’s needs and questions are.
- When the young person is clearly hiding some more complex issues behind a question, answer the initial inquiry first, giving the young person time to relax and build up trust.
- Guide him/her in the conversation to identify the question behind the question.
- Give the requested information in a clear and understandable way, tailored to the individual’s needs.
- Make sure the young person understands the information provided.
- Help the young person to assess the different options, leaving the decisions to him or her.
- When the young person’s questions need to be addressed by a more specialised service or institution, refer the young person to the required organisation as accurately as possible.
- When referring the young person to another service, explain what he/she can expect there and what will be asked of him/her, so as to reduce any doubts or uncertainty as far as possible.
- Suggest that they come back to explore other options if things do not work out with the organisation you are referring them to.

Counselling

Many youth information centres and services do also offer young people counselling. This service often depends on local needs and other facilities present in the area and may take different forms.

Whichever form is decided on, it is essential that the youth information centre or service respects the anonymity and confidentiality of the young people and operates only with specially trained staff.

- Train some or all of the staff in counselling so that it can be offered on a regular basis.
- Specialise in certain topics (e.g. money issues, European programmes, help with finding a job...), train staff for that purpose and include this in the services provided.
- Seek close co operation with specialised institutions and refer the young people to those partners.
- Offer space in the youth information centre or, e.g., on your Internet platform to experts from other areas (e.g. health issues, legal advice...) on a regular basis or at particular times.
- Run phone hotlines and/or chats with experts at particular times.
- Offer counselling in general or on specific topics in an online service, making sure that the staff are trained for this special form of counselling and that there is a network of experts who can be consulted.

Outreach

In recent years, the importance of outreach work has increased. Youth information centres and services see a clear need not only to provide information in a single, fixed location but also to bring it to young people in their own environments. This is done in many different ways:

- Being present at fairs, neighbourhood activities, festivals and other events with an information stand, often combined with interactive activities such as quizzes, games or workshops.
- Mobile units such as an information bus parked outside schools or youth centres.
- Information workshops on specific topics or explaining what youth information has to offer, in schools, youth clubs and for other interested groups.
- Organising information fairs and events in public places and inviting experts and partners to present their services.
- Seeking close co operation with youth work structures and designing materials especially for them which they can use as multipliers when working with their groups or individual young people.
- A relatively new form of outreach work involves some youth information providers making their services available through online social communities such as facebook, netlog and/or national or local networks.

Participation

Participation of young people in all stages of youth information work is becoming increasingly important as an underlying working principle. In any processes young people are involved in, it is important that responsibility for the quality of the end product remains with a trained youth information worker and both the young people involved and the workers are aware of their respective roles, responsibilities and limits. The young people must receive training and

What is Youth information?

guidance for all the tasks they are asked to perform. The reason for this is not only that the accuracy of the information must be ensured but also the fact that young people have a need and a right to operate in a clear framework. Participation in youth information work may take different forms and occur on all kinds of levels:

- Involving young people in finding out the needs of their peers, e.g. letting them design and conduct interviews.
- Letting young people themselves create content, e.g. writing texts about certain issues of interest to them and their peers or having blogs on your website.
- Training young people to give information and advice to their friends and peers, e.g. on a special phone line or in their everyday life.
- Training young people to give information on specific topics to their friends and peers, e.g. at school or in workshops.
- Involving young people who have experience with a specific issue (e.g. going abroad, finding a job...) in information events and letting them share their experience with other interested young people.
- Involving young people in the design and layout of a new youth information centre or service.
- Helping young people develop their own information channels, e.g. a radio show for girls, a forum on a specific issue,...
- Providing space in the centre for young people's own initiatives and projects and supporting them with information and advice, e.g. on possible funding or other resources for their ideas.
- Organising group activities, e.g. gathering the views of other young people on a particular subject through videos.

All the above are ways of delivering youth information to young people. The exact mix of services youth information offers depends on many factors such as local needs, the available resources of the youth information centre or service itself, other existing services and facilities for young people in the relevant area and the ideas, abilities and visions of the staff involved, as well as the demands and support of political and funding structures.

→ The extras...

Some centres or services also decide to offer additional services as well. This may be because of a desire to attract young people, a gap identified in the services for young people in the region or simply a feeling that such extra services would enrich the lives of the young people using them.

Examples of other services offered by youth information centres around Europe include:

- Selling tickets for concerts and/or other events in the area.
- Issuing national and/or European Youth Cards or other discount cards for young people and providing services and information for the cardholders.

- Acting as a local EURODESK partner and providing specialised information on European opportunities to young people and youth workers.
- Acting as the local or regional contact point for the Youth in Action programme and advising interested individuals, groups of young people and youth workers on how to apply for funding under the programme and/or functioning as a sending organisation for the European Voluntary Service (EVS).
- Operating a special service for young independent travellers and backpackers on a regular or seasonal basis and meeting their needs by issuing city information packs for young people, helping them to find cheap accommodation, providing lockers for their luggage and offering information in different languages.
- Offering additional health services, e.g. the possibility of taking a pregnancy test in co operation with a specialised service.
- Sharing premises with other forms of youth work for the purpose of synergy and easy access for disadvantaged young people (e.g. street corner workers having their office at the same address as the YIC).
- Helping young people find jobs not only by providing information but, e.g., by organising summer job fairs where they can enter directly into contact with potential employers or by offering individuals intensive job coaching.

There are no strict rules on the extra services which can be offered in a youth information centre as long as the needs of the target group are met and all other ordinary services mentioned above follow the principles of the European Youth Information Charter.



What is Youth information?



Interview Veronika E. (Austria)

"Going abroad"

My first experience in a group abroad took place a few weeks after my final exams. My sister told me about an international youth exchange in Lisbon. We spent some days together as a big group working on the theme of new members joining the European Union and everyone had to prepare a short presentation about their country. Our group taught the others how to dance the waltz. I was very excited after this because I discovered my affection for being a member of an international group. It was also good for my English skills and gave me more self-esteem.

When I was 19 I discovered workcamps. I went to the Youth Information Centre in Vienna because I knew that there was a lot of information material for youngsters. I spent half a day with one big folder with a lot of brochures and programs about voluntary work. That's

how I got to know about the SCI (Service Civil internationale) which gave me the motivation to experience one of the greatest times I had so far. My first workcamp was wonderful. I chose an environmental camp in Iceland, near Reykjavik, in a nature park. We renovated the house from the forest department where we lived and planted trees in the beautiful and magical landscape of Iceland. It was a good feeling to do something for environment and have fun at the same time. This workcamp influenced me because this was the first time that I travelled alone so far (north). I also learned how to take it easy because I had to change plane and the airline lost my backpack. I only got it back after almost one week and had to deal with that.

After that I participated in more international workcamps and trainings and these experiences encouraged me to decide to go on Erasmus. In August 2009 I went to a youth exchange as a leader of the Austrian group. I felt ready to discover such an exchange in another role. It has been a very nice experience for me to see that the whole meeting can be influenced by

suggestions and is flexible for improvements. I enjoyed to lead games and energizers and it has been a challenge to have this responsibility (because I had some problems with that in my daily life before). One good thing was that I wanted to overcome the shy side I sometimes have.

My favourite mail I get from the Youth Information Centre is their newsletter on Europe and international Mobility. It feels like Christmas every time I receive it, because it includes a lot of interesting offers for youngsters in Europe and most of them are almost for free. The youth exchanges and a training I participated in were announced in this newsletter. When I read it I get into the mood to travel a lot and meet young people from everywhere. So I see those possibilities as presents and opportunities to take as long as I fulfil the age limits and requirements.

Veronika E., 24 years, Vienna

How to set up youth information centres and services

When deciding to set up a youth information centre or service at local, regional or even national level, there are many factors to take into consideration. The following are some points which you should consider when starting your planning.

It is all about needs...

Finding out the needs of young people

Generalist youth information is based on a user-centred approach, so the first starting point is always the needs of the young people you wish to serve. One important aspect of your research is, of course, to ask young people themselves. As youth information also aims to close gaps in the information available and not to duplicate existing services, you will also have to determine the socio-cultural environment in which you will be setting up the youth information centre or service.

Some methods you may use to get an idea:

- Design a questionnaire and hand it out in schools, youth clubs, youth organisations and other places frequented by young people. Added value can be achieved if you are able to design the questionnaire together with young people and involve them by asking them to gather the views of their peers.
- Seek co operation with youth research institutions and ask them if they have relevant data concerning the issue you are addressing or to include in their surveys some sections about information needs (topics, ways the information should be presented and so on).
- Organise focus groups to discuss in greater depth with young people what their wishes and expectations are.
- Also interview people working for and with young people. They may give you hints on topics which young people themselves do not feel able to express directly.
- Research the services available for young people in the respective area and draw a map of the socio-cultural environment. Added value can be achieved if you ask young people themselves to draw the map – that may give quite a clear picture of what is important to them and/or of the services which they are or are not aware of.
- Use role models, creating two or more typical users of your service. Give them a name and a history and add articles and pictures which you come across that may apply to them and their profile.
- Bear in mind that there is no such thing as young people as a single, homogeneous category but different groups of young people with very varied needs – make sure that you consult people from different backgrounds and from various living conditions so that you really obtain a clear picture.

This list is not exhaustive, use your own and young people's creativity to find methods and ways to motivate as many young people as possible to give their opinions and feedback. Ultimately, there will also be a good deal of trial and error, which is part of the game.

Not only young people have needs...

When setting up a youth information centre or service, you will need financial and other support. It is therefore useful to find out not only about the needs of your target group but also about the needs of possible financial supporters and partners. Find out what benefit they derive from having such a service in their area.

- Talk to policy makers about their needs in terms of communication with young people and how youth information could support their youth policies.
- Involve people at policy and administration level in your research about the needs of young people – ask for their opinions.
- Ask youth workers and people working in specialised services for young people what kind of information material could help them in their work.
- Ask providers of services for young people what they would like to communicate to young people and make it clear to them that a youth information centre or service should not duplicate existing facilities but that one of its roles is to direct and refer young people to their services.
- Make it clear to them that youth information is a form of prevention.

Establish a network

Networking is an essential part of youth information work. Establishing and maintaining networks with all youth-related institutions and services, as well as with policy makers and the administrative tier concerned with youth issues, is the only way to keep track of things.

Youth information centres and services can use their networks not only to exchange the latest information and determine as accurately as possible where to refer the young people but also to develop new services together with partners, signal gaps in existing services for young people and, in general, lobby as a network for the interests and needs of the common target group.

Networks are based on the shared belief that what can be achieved together could not be achieved individually. Exchanges of information, knowledge and experience can only be done in a two-way system and with mutual understanding of differences among the partners. Networking therefore needs trust building and on-going communication among equal partners. The network partners must be aware both of the common goals and of the different needs and starting points of the players involved.

Although networks must be built in a co operative rather than hierarchical way to function best, there is always the need for somebody to take the lead concerning a particular topic, keep track of developments and structure the communication so that the partners involved can concentrate on their respective contributions to the common goal/project. This leading role can vary in networks over time depending on the activity at hand. Since youth information centres and services often co operate with different centres of competence and, as generalist information hubs, perform different roles from the

How to set up youth information centres and services

specialised institutions involved, they are often very well suited to take up this co ordination role.

Networks will not only be one of the basic foundations of the quality of the services you can offer to young people once the youth information centre or service is established, but can also be of crucial assistance when you are in the process of setting up your service by supporting the establishment of your centre or service vis-à-vis decision-makers and potential financial partners.

You should involve partners from all levels and youth-related organisations and institutions from the very beginning, ask their opinions, offer co operation and joint projects and invite them to contribute to the establishment of this new service for young people either formally, e.g. by being part of a planning group, or informally.

Establishing a network is a lengthy process that needs time and energy:

- Start by visiting relevant organisations and institutions and ask them to explain what they are doing.
- Explain what youth information is and signal your interest in co operation.
- Visit fairs, conferences and seminars in the youth field and stay for the social part of the events.
- Invite partners to a round table on a particular topic just for the purpose of exchanging experiences or planning a joint project.
- Be available when other partners need support for their projects even if you do not derive a clear benefit right away.

If you are in the lucky position of wanting to set up your youth information centre or service in a country where other youth information structures already exist or you are planning on setting up more than one centre, those partners are your closest and most important network. Actively seek close co operation with other youth information centres and services for the purpose of:

- Exchanges of experience and best practice,
- Joint information products (e.g. dividing topics and thus sharing the work),
- Job-shadowing and training opportunities for your staff,
- Development of common national quality criteria and measurements,
- Joint lobbying for youth information work,
- Joint public relations,
- National funding for joint projects.

→ Mission and services

A mission statement to guide you

The drafting of a mission statement will not only help you to clarify your project but will also be of use in selling your idea both to potential funders and to partners and young people themselves. Define the mission of your youth information centre and service based on:

- The identified information needs of young people,
- Your socio-cultural environment,
- The needs expressed by relevant partners in the youth field and youth policy,
- Your own vision and professional expertise,
- The principles and methods that define youth information.

A mix of services

Youth information can be delivered in many different ways and has developed a wide range of services. In the beginning, it will be of great importance to select from a mix of services that suits your local/regional/national situation and the resources you expect to have. It has proven to be more successful to start with a smaller range of services and build on the impact this has rather than trying to do everything at once.

It may therefore be useful to divide the services you wish to provide into two phases:

Phase 1 – the essentials: The core or priority services which the youth information centre or service will provide.

Phase 2 – the freestyle: Additional services which you wish to provide once the youth information centre or service is well established and resources so permit.

→ Legal status and funding

In order to perform its functions and tasks, a youth information centre or service needs a legal status, which, of course, is closely linked to the possible means of funding. The legal status of such a service will again largely depend on the laws and structures in terms of youth work and the overall role of, e.g., non-governmental associations in the relevant country.

Legal status

Currently, there are three different options for youth information centres and services here:

- being a separate non-governmental, not-for-profit association,
- being part of a non-governmental, not-for-profit association that offers different forms of youth work,
- being part of a public authority (national, regional or local).

All these forms are possible and all have advantages as well as disadvantages.

Being part of a public authority shows that a degree of importance is attached to youth information, and usually the funding is relatively stable; however, visiting official premises might be more difficult for young people.

Being part of a larger association handling youth work probably means that you can rely on some administrative functions being performed on a central level but might also mean that you have to

How to set up youth information centres and services

make sure that youth information stays a priority for the organisation hosting you.

Being an independent not-for-profit organisation probably gives you the most freedom in deciding the services you wish to provide but, of course, also means that you have to secure the necessary funding on your own.

The legal status you opt for will depend on the overall situation of youth work in your country and on your own background.

Funding

As mentioned above, the funding or financing of a youth information centre or service is very closely linked to the legal status chosen.

Currently, youth information centres are financed in the following ways in Europe:

- Youth information is part of programmes/activities run by central or regional government. In this case, the staff are often employed directly and the premises and necessary supplies are also paid for by the government.
- Youth information is part of activities on a community level and the staff are employed directly by the local authority which also supplies premises and other necessary resources.
- Youth information is provided by non-governmental not-for-profit associations which seek funding on a regular basis, including through projects. Very often, these associations are financed by different sources, e.g. regional government and the municipality the centre is located in, and have to seek additional funding from other sources.

In addition, in some European countries, the national ministry responsible for youth affairs finances national co ordination structures for youth information to ensure a consistent service throughout the country and permit as many synergies as possible.

As youth information is only successful when set up as an ongoing service, you should strive for the most stable funding you can secure – even if you use project funding to start up.

The fact that the main item of expenditure in a youth information centre or service is usually staff costs does not make your task easier. You will have to explain thoroughly in the budgets you are planning to hand in why this is the crucial factor for the success of your service.

In addition to public funding at local, regional or national level, you can look for other sources, especially when you need extra money for projects or innovative services. Seek out European funding (if you are in a country that is eligible for European programmes or in a pre-accession country) and the support of foundations and the private sector.

Location and staff

Where we are

Finding a suitable location for your youth information centre is usually one of the most difficult tasks, but it has a major influence on

the services you can provide and who will visit your centre. The amount of room you will need and the layout you will choose for the premises depend on the services you wish to offer.

A youth information centre should:

- be located in an area of town that is frequented by young people and/or easy accessible by public transport,
- be a shop-like office that is directly accessible from the street and is clearly identifiable as a youth information centre from the outside,
- have a reception area that includes:
 - space to display information material or folders,
 - a reception desk and/or desks for the youth information workers on duty,
 - tables and chairs to sit down and talk and/or consult material,
 - public Internet terminals and computers (e.g. to prepare CVs),
 - a photocopier that can also be used by the young people,
 - space to welcome groups,
- have one or more room(s) that can be used for staff meetings, work with groups, private interviews or counselling,
- be accessible for people with physical disabilities,
- have office space for the director and/or administration,
- have enough storage space for information material,
- be equipped with a kitchen and bathrooms.

Even if you cannot find a location that offers everything right from the start, the most important thing is to arrange the centre in a way that is attractive and informal enough for young people to make the critical first step of entering. The best way to achieve this is to involve young people from the outset in laying out and furnishing your youth information centre.

Who we are

A few European countries have formal education for youth information workers. Many youth information structures have organised national courses or individual training at local/regional level or make use of the training offered by ERYICA.

No matter how it is done, proper staff training is a crucial precondition for successful youth information work at all levels.

Skills and attitudes needed for youth information work:

- Interpersonal skills,
- Research, data processing and data management skills,
- Writing and basic design skills (to produce material suitable for the target group),
- Skills in communication and information technologies,
- Networking and communication skills (including basic PR),
- Skills in working with groups and presenting different topics to them,
- Administrative and self-management skills,

How to set up youth information centres and services

- Identifying and recording the needs of young people and transforming this knowledge into facilities and services,
- Awareness of youth information principles and theory and the ability to put them into practice,
- Awareness of the relevant legal context (professional codes, copyright, laws...),
- Interest in young people and their living conditions,
- Open-mindedness and curiosity,
- Flexibility and willingness to attend ongoing training.

These skills and attitudes can be seen as the essential requirements for performing youth information work. Whether a centre decides that all staff should be “all-rounders” or the tasks are divided and staff can specialise in some of the skills, depends on the resources available, the internal structure of the organisation and the mix of services that will be offered. In small centres, a single person may have to do everything on his/her own, meaning that not everything can be covered – at least not right from the start. In this case, concentrate on the skills you need whenever in direct contact with your young users, but do not forget that, e.g., networking and PR will be very important to ensure the continuation of your service.

Training

Usually youth information workers come from very varied professional backgrounds: youth work, social work, psychology and education are just some examples, as are librarianship and documentation management or journalism, and again it depends on the overall situation of youth work in the respective country. Nevertheless, you should provide them all with training on all aspects of the youth information you are offering in your centre – this can be done through:

- In-house training to share your knowledge and experience in youth information with new workers,
- Job-shadowing and exchanges of experience with workers in other youth information centres,
- Local/regional or national training courses organised with your youth information network,
- Asking ERYICA to organise basic or specialised training for your workers or network of youth information centres,
- Taking part in a “Train the Trainers” course organised by ERYICA at European level in the field of youth information and delivering the training in your country,
- Finding out if countries which, e.g., share the same language with you are providing specialised training and exploring the possibilities for your staff to participate in such training,
- Enabling your workers to attend training on different skills needed for youth information work, e.g. communication skills, using new technologies, methods for working with groups, etc., offered by training institutes as often as possible.

If it is not possible to staff your centre with employees or you decide for any other reason to work mainly with volunteers, bear in mind that they should also be trained in youth information skills and provide a professional service to the young people.

Quality and evaluation

When setting up a youth information centre or service, give consideration right from the start to how you will evaluate your work, define quality and maintain or even improve the quality of your services on a regular basis. You will need to do this not only to be able to respond in the most effective way to the changing needs of young people but also to prove to your funding and supporting partners that you are successful and are generating benefits for young people in the relevant area.

Keep track and react

When drawing up your plan for establishing a youth information centre or service, make sure to include right from the start some measures for keeping track of the questions you are confronted with as well as for finding out if young people are satisfied with your services.

Some ways to find out more:

- Keep statistical data on the questions you receive covering, e.g., the age and gender of the enquirers, the topics they are interested in, the means of communication (e.g. face to face, phone, online,...) they choose for contacting you on particular topics and so on.
- Analyse these data on a regular basis in your team.
- From time to time, ask the staff who are in daily contact with young people visiting your centre if they see new topics emerging or any other changes – their assessment of the situation can give very valuable indicators of new trends and changing contexts which are appearing among young people.
- Survey young people with questionnaires (if possible involving young people directly again) and do not forget that non-users may give you important information about services you are not providing but which young people would like.
- Use mystery shopping to find out about the actual way your services are delivered on a daily basis.

Do well and strive to do better

Youth information is based on a set of principles, and a wide range of theory and standards and criteria are now attached to it. This is your basis to start from and bear in mind all the way through setting up a new service for young people.

Take the time to go through the existing papers and theories and define some clear quality standards or criteria for your own situation and work. You can then use this not only as a basis for your work but also as an important part of your reporting and the legitimisation of your actions in relation to those who support your centre financially and on a political or administrative level.

Quality management is an ongoing process which needs continuous reviews and critical questioning. External input always offers added value here, so aim for discussion and joint developments, e.g. with your national youth information network and other relevant partners in youth work. Also get involved in the projects and conferences happening at European level, where you can both offer your own

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experiences and also benefit from those of colleagues facing similar challenges.

Learn from your European network

When thinking about starting up a new youth information centre or service in your area or country, you can draw on a wide range of experience and expertise in this field from all over Europe. It is always easier to understand a concept when you see it applied. Visiting existing youth information bodies in other countries has proven to be a source of inspiration for many. ERYICA (for more about ERYICA, see page 16) helps you to find partners which, e.g.,

operate in an environment similar to the one where you are planning to set something up, offer the services that you wish to implement and so on. ERYICA can put you in contact with the members concerned. You can contact them and ask for material, but the best way to learn is to go and see for yourself. You will be made most welcome. Also look into possible funding here, e.g. through the job-shadowing possibilities under the EU Youth in Action programme.

Once you have started, you can become a member of ERYICA or of the national body that is already a member and benefit from being part of a European network.



interview M.C. (The Netherlands)

"Taking young people seriously"

At one point i just didn't had a clue any more..... i could go nowhere. i slept in a cellar box of a friend.....

i had fled from the house before. When i was young, i was physical and sexual abused. Don't get me wrong, i love my mother, she has carried me for 9 months. But..... she is also a stranger for me. She never protected me against the abuse. Probably because she has to many problems herself. Anyway we did not level at at all and we didn't communicate. There were fights al the time. i just needed to get out of there. i had to go my own way and find a place where i was save. So i fled to a girlfriend. After a while we couldn 't get along with each other. That way i ended up living in a cellar box.

So i went to visit the "Jongerenloket"/ (front office for the department of social affairs of the city of Rotterdam for young people). /They could do not much for me but they gave me the address of the Youth information Centre (JIP) and i went there directly. The first time i was there i spend hours in that place. The people working there arranged a place to sleep for me for a couple of nights, but even more important they gave me hope that there were chances for me. Afterwards i should get a place in Pension Maaszicht /(youth care facilities for crisis interventions and guidances). / it was all arranged and than i found out that i could not go there because i had no iD card. i lost it or it was stolen i'm not complete sure any more. This meant i had to go to The Hague because i'm born there. i went there twice both times not succeeding to get an iD card. Then the people of the JIP started to make phone calls for me. They made me laugh when they told me that what they were doing they called themselves "professional abusing". And suddenly i could go there and pick up my iD card, amazing he?

So in the end i could move from sleeping on the couch of a girlfriend (another one) to Maaszicht where i now live and do get guidance. The guidance is something i need after all the things which happened in my live. Next steps? Go to school, finish it and find a great job!

in general i think young people are not taken serious. At the JIP this was totally different. They listened, took action and came up with solutions. it is very good to have an organisation who is there for young people because a lot of the organisations who should help youngsters are picking their nose and don't do shit for them. Another good thing is that you can just go there and your are helped on the spot, so at the moment you need it.

if the JIP would not have existed i would have to find another solution or being a drifter..... well i would have found something, but i'm really happy that the JIP helped me.

M.C. 19 years, Rotterdam

The European dimension of youth information

→ Council of Europe

At policy level, the Council of Europe has supported the ideas and principles of youth information from the very start. Recommendation No. (90) 7 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 1990 was an important step in recognition of this area of youth work. The Council of Europe has continued to focus on youth information ever since and, for example, joined with ERYICA in 2007 in holding a colloquy on the “Future of Youth Information in Europe”.

The Council of Europe also entered into a Partnership Agreement with ERYICA in 1997, thereby intensifying the co operation at European level. This partnership has provided a framework not only for the joint colloquy but also for studies on youth information in Europe and for training activities for youth information workers.

Apart from this co operation, the Council of Europe also has much else to offer that might be of interest to you: www.coe.int/youth.

European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy

Developed under the Council of Europe and European Commission partnership in the youth field, the virtual knowledge centre aims to be an easy access point to information and knowledge about the situation of young people in Europe. It offers information about topics that are relevant to young people in Europe and are addressed by European youth policies (e.g. also including youth information), as well as country information giving an overview of the situation regarding the respective topics in different European countries. In addition, you can search directly in two databases: one covering good practices in youth work and youth policy development and the other covering experts in different fields of youth related subjects. You can browse the library, which includes T-Kits, policy and research documents and other youth-related publications: www.youth-partnership.net.

Funding opportunities

The European Youth Foundation (EYF) was established in 1972 to provide financial support for European youth activities which serve the promotion of peace, understanding and co-operation in a spirit of respect for the Council of Europe’s fundamental values such as human rights, democracy, tolerance and solidarity. Activities financed by the EYF are divided into four categories:

- A) International youth meetings
- B) Youth activities other than meetings
- C) Administration of non-governmental youth organisations and networks
- D) Pilot projects

For detailed information about the criteria on who can apply and what is eligible, as well as for deadlines, please go to: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/fej/FEJ_presentation_EN.asp.

The Solidarity Fund for Youth Mobility was set up in co operation with the International Union of Railways and is intended to support the international mobility of disadvantaged young people. It can be used to cover rail travel by groups of young people from

disadvantaged backgrounds and/or economically underdeveloped areas who wish to attend international educational activities. For further details about this opportunity, please go to: <http://www.eyf.coe.int/fsmj/>.

Training opportunities

The Directorate of Youth and Sport (DYS) of the Council of Europe offers a wide range of opportunities when it comes to training within the youth sector. Training courses include topics such as working within international youth structures, European citizenship, youth training, human rights education and youth participation. Intercultural courses, including in Arabic, Russian or Turkish, are also provided. In addition to their own training programme, the European Youth Centres carry out a yearly programme of study sessions and other activities in co operation with non governmental and governmental youth partners. The youth sector of the Council of Europe’s website also includes background documents on quality in non-formal education and training and access to the DYS pool of trainers.

Have a look under “Education & Training” at: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/default_en.asp.

→ European Union

The European Commission in 2001 launched a White Paper called “A New Impetus for European Youth”, in which youth information is identified as one of four key priorities (along with participation, volunteering and knowing more about young people). Since then, member states have undertaken to co-operate in those areas through the so-called open method of co ordination. The White Paper identifies youth information as being closely linked to participation of young people in society and regards easy access to information, the quality of the information provided and the involvement of young people in the production of information as crucial points. Even though youth policies in Europe have moved on since 2001 and the European Union is currently preparing a new framework for co operation on youth policies in Europe, the White Paper remains an important reference point for the European youth information field, and the needs and ideas expressed in it are still valid.

European Youth Portal

The European Youth Portal was launched by the European Commission in 2004 to provide a platform with specialised information that is interesting for young European citizens. It is a multilingual information portal covering the topics of:

- Studying,
- Working,
- Volunteering/Exchanges,
- Your rights,
- Info on Europe,
- Portals for young people,
- Active citizenship,
- Travelling Europe

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through selected links with brief descriptions at European level and for all EU member states, plus Norway, Liechtenstein and Turkey. It also includes a news section, a discussion forum and regular polls. The content is updated and revised regularly by the EURODESK Network. <http://europa.eu/youth>.

Funding opportunities

The Youth in Action programme offers many possibilities for funding within the youth field in Europe. Especially interesting for youth information are probably the action lines which include support measures for youth workers or youth organisations and initiatives to increase the quality of our work, as well as the ones which support youth policy co operation at European level. Of course, however, all other actions ranging from youth exchanges and youth initiatives to the European Voluntary Service can also be included in activities undertaken by youth information centres and services. Find out more from your national agency or at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/youth/youth-in-action-programme>.

As youth information work covers an enormous range of topics from cultural activities for young people through to initiatives concerning youth unemployment and social inclusion, there may be further funding opportunities under other European programmes – you may be in a country that is eligible for those programmes or in a pre-accession country or you may find enough partners from inside and outside the European Union to apply for funding that is aimed at co operation with neighbouring or other countries.

The EURODESK database can give you an initial overview of the different funding programmes and opportunities available in Europe in terms of youth, training and education. Browse through using, e.g., the theme search and with a little patience and creativity you might discover a number of innovative possibilities.

<http://www.eurodesk.eu/edesk/SearchDb.do?go=4>.

Training opportunities

The SALTO Youth Resource Centres offer a variety of services in terms of training in the youth field in Europe, including a European Training Calendar, a database listing experienced trainers for different topics and a Toolbox for Training containing training methods, background information and training material.

<http://www.salto-youth.net/>.

ERYICA

ERYICA was established in 1986 when the need for co operation and exchanges on a European level had become very clear. Since then, the agency has expanded significantly and is now an umbrella organisation for generalist youth information and counselling, mainly representing national co ordination bodies from all over Europe. In 2009, ERYICA had 25 members and five affiliated and three co-operating organisations. It seeks to strengthen youth information in Europe through a variety of activities and services for its members:

Development of professional principles and supporting documents

- European Youth Information Charter (see page 19).
- Indicators for a national youth information policy (see page 21).
- Principles for online youth information.
- Report and background documents of the Colloquy on “Future of youth information in Europe” (see page 24).
- Support and expertise for the development of national standards and criteria for youth information.
- Exchanges of methods, best practice and experience
- Organisation of seminars, study visits and working groups.
- Fostering bilateral co operation, e.g. by establishing contacts between suitable partners.
- ERYICA Newsletter, four times a year.
- ERYICA website, including news from all levels and a co-operation and information platform for youth information workers.

Training of youth information workers

- Development of the training course “YIntro – stepping into youth information” for newcomers to the field and awarding of ERYICA certificates to all successful participants.
- Organisation of European “Train the Trainers” courses on the YIntro-module.
- Support for national or regional training through experienced trainers and material.
- The ERYICA Training Task Force is constantly developing additional training courses and material and can be contacted about all questions concerning training by all members.

Joint European projects and initiatives

- Infomobil: an information website for young people who wish to travel or spend some time in another European country, which gives first-hand information about, e.g. housing, travelling, studying, places to meet young people, things to do and so on, provided directly by the participating youth information structures and co ordinated and supported by ERYICA.
- European Youth Information Day: 17 April is the founding date of ERYICA and, since 2008, youth information centres and services have celebrated the day every year.
- Meet the Street: A European consultation project run by ERYICA in 2008 and 2009 to find out through peer-to-peer-interviews what is important for young Europeans when it comes to their own lives.
- Applying for funding for the further development of youth information in Europe on a centralised level, e.g. within the Youth in Action programme

Promoting youth information at European level

- Discussion and collaboration with the Council of Europe, e.g. in the Joint Council which runs the partnership agreement between the Council of Europe and ERYICA.
- Discussion and collaboration with the European Commission.

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- Discussion, collaboration, development of joint projects and drawing up of joint statements concerning youth information as part of the co operation between the four networks (for other networks, see below).
- Presenting youth information and its benefits at national events, conferences and for policy makers of all levels at the request of the respective members.

If you are interested in finding out more about generalist youth information in Europe and/or joining the ERYICA Network, go to: www.eryica.org.

→ EURODESK

EURODESK is a network specialised in providing information about European opportunities for young people, which is supported by the European Commission through the Youth in Action programme.

The information EURODESK provides includes funding opportunities for projects by, with or for young people, information about individual opportunities such as studying, working, volunteering and living in another country in Europe and support for the structured dialogue between the European Union and its young citizens.

EURODESK also creates and updates the information available on the European Youth Portal.

In many countries, EURODESK co operates closely with some or all the youth information structures. EURODESK can be both a valuable source of information in terms, e.g., of searching the database for possible funding for your projects and also a close co operation partner if European information is one of the topics you wish to offer to the young people consulting you. The level of co operation varies from country to country and ranges from simple exchanges of information through organising events and publishing material jointly to youth information centres becoming local EURODESK contact points.

You can contact the EURODESK European Office or your national partner through the contact button on the European EURODESK website: www.eurodesk.eu.

→ EYCA

EYCA is the European Youth Card Association, which brings together 62 youth card organisations in 41 European countries. EYCA seeks to promote youth mobility and information for young people in Europe by issuing youth cards and keeping all the young cardholders constantly up-to-date about various European topics.

In some European countries, youth information and the youth card are closely linked, sometimes even being run by the same organisation. In other countries, the two are run by two or more separate organisations. Nevertheless, co operation with the youth card system is always a topic for generalist youth information.

The co operation at local, regional or national level can vary widely, ranging from joint campaigns and joint information products to

issuing of the cards in the youth information centres and advising young people about the benefits the cards offer.

You can contact the European EYCA office and the national member(s) in your country through the EYCA website at www.eyca.org.

→ European Youth Forum

The European Youth Forum (YF) is an independent, democratic, youth-led platform representing 99 national youth councils and international youth organisations from across Europe. The YF is engaged in many different projects and discussions at policy level concerning the lives of young people in Europe and seeks to ensure that their voice is heard on all issues of relevance to them. The forum is therefore an important network partner for youth information in terms both of practical co operation and of common strategic goals. www.youthforum.org.



→ Interview Rebeka B. (Slovenia)

"Youth to youth telephone"

i got involved in Youth to youth phone because i wanted to help other young people. i know what i went through myself when i had problems. i've learned that the best person, who really understands a young population, is a young person itself and i believe that many young people feel the same.

Mentors at MiSSS thought me how to help someone who doesn't trust you at the beginning and how to talk to young people with problems. in MiSSS i feel understood and encouraged.

Rebeka B., 16 years, Ljubljana

European Youth information Charter

Adopted in Bratislava (Slovak Republic) on 19 November 2004 by the 15th General Assembly of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA).

→ Preamble

In complex societies and in an integrated Europe that offers many challenges and opportunities, access to information and the ability to analyse and use information is increasingly important for young Europeans. Youth information work can help them to achieve their aspirations and can promote their participation as active members of society. Information should be provided in ways that enlarge the choices available to young people, and that promote their autonomy and empowerment.

Respect for democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms implies the right of all young people to have access to complete, objective, understandable and reliable information on all their questions and needs. This right to information has been recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and in the Recommendation N° (90) 7 of the Council of Europe concerning information and counselling for young people in Europe. This right is also the basis for youth information activities undertaken by the European Union.

→ Introduction

Generalist youth information work covers all topics that interest young people, and can include a spectrum of activities: informing, counselling, advising, guiding, supporting, befriending, coaching and training, networking, and referral to specialised services. These activities may be delivered by youth information centres, or through youth information services in other structures, or using electronic and other media. The principles of this Charter are intended to apply to all forms of generalist youth information work. They constitute a basis for minimum standards and quality measures which should be established in each country as elements of a comprehensive, coherent and co-ordinated approach to youth information work, which is a part of youth policy.

→ Principles

The following principles constitute guidelines for generalist youth information work, which seeks to guarantee the right of young people to information:

1. Youth information centres and services shall be open to all young people without exception.
2. Youth information centres and services seek to guarantee the equality of access to information for all young people, regardless of their situation, origin, gender, religion, or social category. Special attention should be paid to disadvantaged groups and to young people with specific needs.
3. Youth information centres and services should be easily accessible, without any appointment being required. They should be attractive for young people, with a friendly atmosphere. The operating hours should meet the needs of young people.
4. The information available shall be based on the requests of young people and on their perceived information needs. It should cover all topics that could interest young people, and should evolve in order to cover new topics.
5. Each user shall be respected as an individual and the response to each question shall be personalised. This shall be done in a way that empowers users, promotes the exercise of their autonomy, and develops their capacity to analyse and use information.
6. Youth information services shall be free of charge.
7. Information is given in a way that respects both the privacy of users and their right not to reveal their identity.
8. Information is provided in a professional manner by staff trained for this purpose.
9. The information offered is complete, up-to-date, accurate, practical and user-friendly.
10. Every effort is made to ensure the objectivity of the information provided through the pluralism and verification of the sources used.
11. The information offered shall be independent of any religious, political, ideological or commercial influence.
12. Youth information centres and services shall strive to reach the largest possible number of young people, in ways that are effective and appropriate to different groups and needs, and by being creative and innovative in their choice of strategies, methods and tools.
13. Young people shall have the opportunity to participate, in appropriate ways, in different stages of youth information work, at local, regional, national and international levels. These can include, among others: identifying information needs, the preparation and delivery of information, managing and evaluating information services and projects and peer group activities.
14. Youth information centres and services shall co-operate with other youth services and structures, especially in their geographical area, and shall network with intermediaries and other bodies that work with young people.
15. Youth information centres and services shall help young people both to access information provided via modern information and communication technologies, and to develop their skills in using them.
16. Each source of funding for youth information work should not act in any way that prevents a youth information centre or service from applying all the principles of this Charter.

Principles for Online Youth information

*Approved by the 20th General Assembly of ERYICA
Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 05.12.2009*

Internet is a powerful source of information and communication, as well as an integrated part of the social environment of young people. Provision of generalist Youth Information and Counselling online, as well as orientation on the Internet are new tasks, which are complementary to existing Youth Information work.

In addition to the role of Youth Information, helping young people find the right information and take their own decisions, Online Youth Information supports them to maximise the benefits of the Internet and minimise its potential risks.

Online Youth Information is an integral part of Youth Information work and thus, shall comply to all the principles formulated in the European Youth Information Charter. As Online Youth Information has some specific characteristics, an additional set of guidelines is needed.

In order to ensure the quality of provided Online Youth Information services and to guarantee their added value and trustworthiness ERYICA, the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency adopted the following principles.

1. Online Youth Information shall be accurate, up to date and verified. The date when it was produced or updated shall be clearly mentioned.
2. The content shall be based on the needs of young people. Those needs have to be identified and evaluated in an ongoing process.
3. The content shall be a selection of relevant, free of charge information that provides an overview of different options available. The applied selection criteria must be made public and understandable.
4. Online Youth Information shall be understandable for young people and presented in an attractive way for them.
5. Online Youth Information services shall be operable for all, especially taking into account users and groups with specific needs.
6. When young people have the opportunity to ask a question online it shall be clear within which time limit they will receive an answer. The answer shall be tailor-made and it shall be clear who is providing it.
7. When young people are included in producing content, the accuracy of the final content shall stay the responsibility of the youth information organisation.
8. Encouraging young people to give feedback shall be an integrated part of the ongoing development of Online Youth Information services. The feedback shall be easy to submit. It must be then evaluated and used to adjust the content. Young people shall be made aware of how their feedback has impacted on the services.
9. The author and the purpose of the Online Youth Information shall be clear and visible. If content of third parties is used, the source is clearly indicated.
10. It must be clear to the users who the providers of the Youth Information service are and what their motivation is. Full contact information should be clearly displayed. Sources of financial support shall be transparently displayed.
11. Online Youth Information services should provide methods and guidance which help young people increase their information literacy and online competences.
12. Online Youth Information services shall inform and guide young people on how to act in a safe and responsible way in online environments.
13. Online Youth Information services shall be a safe environment for young people.
14. Online Youth Information respects and protects the privacy of the users and allows them to modify or delete their own published private data.
15. Online Youth Information services respect the copyright of third parties and are aware of their own.
16. Youth Information workers shall be competent on the use of online tools and have information literacy skills. They shall be aware of new developments, relevant law and keep themselves informed about trends and new online practices among young people.

indicators for a National Youth information Policy

(as adopted in Ljubljana on 24 November 2005 by the 16th ERYICA General Assembly)

Introduction

Youth information has become a key area of national and European youth policies. It is one of the four priority areas of work of the Common Objectives adopted in November 2003 by the European Union Member States, and it is the subject of the Council of Europe's 1990 Recommendation (90) 7 on Youth Information and Counselling, and of the European Youth Information Charter, which was updated and adopted on 19 November 2004 in Bratislava (Slovakia) by the 15th ERYICA General Assembly. In addition to the involvement of young Europeans in youth initiatives and projects, in youth clubs, and in youth organisations, youth information can play an important role in the development of their autonomy and in their non-formal education. As part of the Agency's work that aims to assist governments to develop quality youth information services, ERYICA member organisations have formulated the following indicators for a national youth information policy. These indicators, now adopted as an ERYICA policy statement by the ERYICA General Assembly, are proposed as guidelines for people in government departments and other official bodies responsible for youth policy, as well as for other persons who are interested in the development of youth information work.

Set of 12 indicators

INDICATOR 1: Governmental Role

Youth information should be considered by Governments to be an important task that is an integral part of its overall youth policy, for which it needs to develop a national policy (or strategy) that seeks to develop a comprehensive, coherent and co-ordinated approach to the provision of youth information services throughout its country, as recommended in the European Union's Common Objectives for Youth Information. Such an approach should include a recognition of the independence of youth information services in the accomplishment of their objectives, as well as the establishment of an appropriate national coordination or support unit.

INDICATOR 2: Youth Information Legislation

According to which level of government has the legal competence for youth policy in a country, the provision of youth information services should have a legal basis in the relevant youth legislation.

INDICATOR 3: Stable Funding and Staffing

In order to be able to provide their services on a professional and sustained basis, youth information services should be adequately funded and staffed, on the basis of an annual (or pluri-annual) work-plan and budget.

INDICATOR 4: Equal Access for All

Youth Information services, whether provided through youth information centres, through youth-related services in other structures, or via Internet or other media, should be accessible to all young

people. This implies a policy concerning the implantation of youth information centres, as well as measures to ensure physical access to services, and the use of various methods to reach groups or persons with special needs.

INDICATOR 5: Regional and Local Dimension

According to which level of government has the legal competence for youth policy in a country, the national youth information policy (or strategy) should have a regional and local dimension in order for youth information services to reach a maximum number of young people. Regional and local authorities should be actively involved in supporting the provision of youth information.

INDICATOR 6: Scientific Research and Expertise

A youth information policy (or strategy) should be based on a sound knowledge of the information needs and expectations of young people. This knowledge can be acquired by consulting young people (including by having them conduct the consultation), by consulting those who work with young people in the locality concerned, and by conducting scientific research on issues relating to youth information.

INDICATOR 7: Innovation

Youth information services must aim to improve constantly the quality of the information and counselling services that they provide to young people. This requires that a youth information policy (or strategy) should promote innovation, and should encourage reflection by youth information workers and by young people about how to develop creative ways of meeting established and new needs and challenges.

INDICATOR 8: Participation of Young People

Promoting the active participation of young people in youth information work should be an important element of a youth information policy (or strategy). Possibilities should be created for young people to participate directly and in a meaningful way at all levels of the youth information process, including in the management and evaluation of projects and services.

INDICATOR 9: Cross-Sectoral Co-operation

A comprehensive and coherent youth information policy will require consultations and cooperation between a wide range of actors, including governmental departments, official youth services, voluntary youth organisations and young people. A possible way to guarantee the necessary cross-sectoral co-operation is the establishment of a cross-sectoral committee or working-group, which has the tasks of developing, supporting, supervising and monitoring the implementation of the national youth information policy (or strategy).

INDICATOR 10: Quality of Services

A youth information policy (or strategy) should include measures to maintain and develop the quality of the youth information and counselling services provided to young people. These measures may be based on the European Youth Information Charter (2004)



indicators for a National Youth information Policy

that is widely accepted as a set of guidelines in many European countries, or on a similar national Charter. Such a charter serves as a basis for the definition of minimum standards and for developing methods of assessing the application of quality factors, which can lead to a recognised quality label for youth information services.

INDICATOR 11: Training

A priority component of a national youth information policy is support for the basic and continued training of youth information workers, since the presence of trained staff is a precondition for installing and maintaining a high level of quality in the youth information services offered to young people.

INDICATOR 12: Diversity in the Delivery of Information

Over the course of time, youth information work has undergone many evolutions. In recent years, it has integrated the use of modern

information and communication technologies in the management of data, and in the delivery of information. In particular, Internet offers new possibilities to facilitate the access of young people to information and counselling, and can be used to increase the media competence and social skills of young people. In spite of these developments, face-to-face contact remains an essential component of the information and counselling process that is requested by users and that can only be supplemented by modern technologies. In the future, youth information centres, information points and mobile services will continue to be an integral part of youth information work. In order to reach the largest possible public, and to meet the needs of specific groups, a youth information policy (or strategy) should enable youth information services to use a wide range of communication media and methods, including peer-involvement, outreach work, and cooperation with other structures (e.g. schools) and events which are frequented by young people.

Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on youth information

Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on youth information

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16 June 2010 at the 1088th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to:

- the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5);
- the Declaration and Action Plan adopted at the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Warsaw in May 2005;
- the results of the 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, held in October 2008 in Kyiv;
- its Resolution CM/Res(2008)23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe;
- the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201), opened for signature on 25 October 2007;
- its Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)5 on measures to protect children against harmful content and behaviour and to promote their active participation in the new information and communications environment;
- the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life;
- the resolution to foster the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in education systems in Europe, adopted at the 21st session of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education, held in Athens from 10 to 12 November 2003;
- its Recommendation Rec(2004)15 on electronic governance (“e-governance”);

Considering that:

- respect for democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms implies that young people have access to complete, objective, understandable and reliable information on all of their questions based on their specific needs;
- information and the ability of young people to assess and use it is a pre-requisite for their active participation in society and their responsible citizenship;
- young people are more and more involved in producing and publishing information using the possibilities offered through information and communication technologies;

Bearing in mind the challenges that young people face in finding relevant information, assessing it and then using it for their personal development, including:

- coping with an increasing amount of information;

- dealing with contradictory and ever-changing information;
- being aware of their responsibilities as “producers of information”;
- being aware of the risks involved in using information and communication technologies;
- protecting their personal data;
- having access to the necessary computer hardware and software applications and to the Internet;

Considering that the provision of face-to-face information, guidance and counselling is even more important today than for previous generations, due to the fact that social inclusion of young people is now a lengthier and more complex process;

Underlining the importance of continuous implementation of Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (90) 7 concerning information and counselling for young people in Europe, whilst also acknowledging the important progress and achievements made in the field of information and counselling for young people in the Council of Europe’s member states since 1990,

Recommends that the governments of the member states:

- consolidate and develop existing youth information and counselling services on the basis of Recommendation No. R (90) 7 on information and counselling for young people in Europe;
- foster and strengthen the generalist and multi-agency character of youth information and counselling services, as being complementary to specialised services for young people;
- ensure that young people have access to and benefit from information by adapting the many forms and channels of youth information to the needs of all young people at local, regional, national and European level;
- when developing youth policy, take into consideration the ever-changing information needs of young people, including by using the knowledge gathered through consultations carried out by grass-root organisations involved in youth information and counselling;
- foster the development of new working methods, varied approaches and innovative ways to use new forms of communication;
- encourage the participation of young people in developing youth information content, tools for delivery and policy development;
- promote the acquisition of competences by young people concerning the management of information, bearing in mind that:
 - information literacy should be part of non-formal, informal and formal education,
 - young people should learn to deal with information with a critical and self-determined approach,
 - young people should be able to create, produce and distribute information content in a responsible way;



Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)8 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on youth information

- h. increase awareness among young people as to the risks they face as consumers and creators of online information;
- i. raise the awareness of young people concerning the dissemination of their personal data when active in online social communities;
- j. recognise the need for quality standards for online youth information services and support quality initiatives in this context at all levels;
- k. raise the level of awareness and training of staff in charge of youth information regarding the new challenges of youth information work, and promote exchanges of experience and practice among key players;

- l. encourage the access of disadvantaged young people, including those with disabilities, to online information;

Instructs the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to transmit this recommendation to the governments of those States Parties to the European Cultural Convention (ETS No. 18) which are not members of the Council of Europe.

Recommendation No. R (90) 7 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States concerning information and counselling for young people in Europe

→ Council of Europe Committee of Ministers

Recommendation No. R (90) 7 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States concerning information and counselling for young people in Europe

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 February 1990 at the 434th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members;

Having regard to the relevant conclusions of the Conferences of European Ministers responsible for Youth (held in Strasbourg on 17-19 December 1985 and in Oslo on 11-12 April 1988);

Considering that young people have a right to full, comprehensible and reliable information, without reservations, and to counselling on all problems concerning them in all sectors, without exception, so that they may have complete freedom of choice, without any discrimination or ideological or other influence;

Considering that such comprehensive information and counselling from many points of view should help to promote young people's autonomy;

Considering that information and counselling are an important factor in increasing the mobility of young people, both individually and in groups, and that such mobility is essential to foster understanding and peace between peoples and to develop the feeling of being part of Europe,

I. Recommends that the governments of member states:

1. promote co-ordination at European level with due regard for democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms of a policy of information and counselling designed for and accessible to all young people; this entails, inter alia, collecting information at local, national and international levels, and making it available as widely as possible to youth;

2. foster and support the creation and/or development of appropriate information and counselling services which observe the following principles: the services should be versatile, the sources varied, and the replies to enquiries comprehensive; young people's right to anonymity should be respected and the information reliable; the service should be accessible to all without discrimination, should be of a noncommercial character and should promote young people's independence; to this end governments should:

- inform and counsel young people in accordance with their direct requests and specific needs;
- promote surveys appropriate to specific national circumstances and enabling comparative studies to be made at European level of young people's needs, and use the results

- of these surveys for constant adaptation of services and structures;
 - satisfy themselves as to the utmost reliability of services and the validity of information sources and circulation;
 - foster effective participation by young people in information and counselling activities intended for them;
 - recognise the complementary nature of, and foster co-operation between, information and counselling services and youth organisations, by bringing them together, for example, in statutory management bodies and in the preparation and circulation of information;
 - consult each other about issues relating to training for the staff of such services, with a view to giving them the skills required to perform the tasks which fall to them in the implementation of this recommendation;
 - promote exchanges of staff, particularly by means of fellowship programmes, comparison of the information techniques adopted by each service, and training periods spent in the appropriate services in the different countries;
 - strengthen their mutual co-operation, particularly as between neighbouring states with linguistic and cultural affinities, in matters of training, including advanced training, for the above-mentioned categories of staff, or foster such training in a Council of Europe context, especially through the European Youth Centre, provided that this does not imply the reduction of activities regularly organised by and for youth organisations;
3. support the introduction of new technologies in information and counselling services, in order to facilitate:

- young people's direct access to information and counselling on a self-service basis, via centres, services, the media and mobile carriers;
- the storage, updating, transfer, communication, publication and management of the product;
- data processing, data compatibility, the use and analysis of data at local, regional, national and international levels and the creation of a network of national data banks;

4. promote research at European level, both into information and counselling methods and techniques and into methods of evaluating such services, and foster the collection and exchange at European level of professional documentation on methods and techniques devised by practitioners and researchers;

5. support the development of a European network of information and counselling services for young people;

II. Instructs the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to draw the content of this recommendation

to the attention of the governments of states which are parties to the European Cultural Convention but are not members of the Council of Europe.

Further related documents

→ Council of Europe

Recommendation on Youth Mobility R(95)18 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 12.10.1995

http://youth-partnership.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Recognition/Recx95x18E_12_October_1995.pdf

Resolution on the Youth Policy of the Council of Europe Res (98) 6 adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16.4.1998

→ European Union

European Commission White Paper “A New Impetus for European Youth”, COM(2001) 681 final, 21.11.2001

http://youth-partnership.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/YP_development/Policy/EC_whitepaper_en.pdf

Proposed common objectives for the participation and information of young people, COM(2003) 184 in response to the Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European cooperation in the youth field

http://youth-partnership.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/YP_development/Policy/EC_whitepaper_en.pdf

Council Resolution on common objectives for participation by and information for young people, Official Journal C 295 of 05.12.2003

Council Resolution on implementing the common objectives for youth information, Official Journal C 141/3 of 24 June 2005

http://youth-partnership.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Citizenship/Policy/Res2005_C141_03.pdf

Communication from the Commission to the Council on European policies concerning youth participation and information. Follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth : Implementing the common objectives for participation by and information for young people in view of promoting their active European citizenship COM(2006) 417 final of 20.7.2006

→ The Youth Partnership between the Council of Europe and the Commission

Study “The socioeconomic scope of youth work in Europe” commissioned by the Partnership and carried out by the Institute for Social Work and Social Education (ISS), Germany, 2007

<http://youth-partnership.coe.int/youth-partnership/research/socio-economicscopeofwork.html>

→ Partnership Agreement between the Council of Europe and ERYICA

“Guidelines on how to create a Youth Information Centre”, December 2001

“Young people and their information needs in the context of the information society” by Neil Selwyn for the Council of Europe/ERYICA-Colloquy “The future of Youth Information in Europe”, Budapest, November 2007

“The development of Youth Information in Europe” by Alexandra Cangelosi for the Council of Europe/ERYICA-Colloquy “The future of Youth Information in Europe”, Budapest, November 2007

Final report on the Council of Europe/ERYICA-Colloquy on “The future of Youth Information in Europe”, Budapest, November 2007