

Compendium of national youth information and counselling structures



European youth information
and counselling agency



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Foreword

Youth information and counselling services provide high quality information and guidance to young people and help them to make informed decisions in order to lead their lives constructively. These services also have a remarkable preventive function that constitutes a great added value to society. This has been recognised not only by the 28 countries in which these structures exist and that are members of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) but also young people themselves: as our recent survey shows, almost 90% of users are very or rather satisfied with such services and a very similar ratio would recommend them to their friends. More importantly, youth information centres are considered to be the most reliable source of information for their young users, who also prefer face-to-face contact – an important aspect to consider in the information overflow of the Internet era.

I hope that this publication will help stakeholders and decision makers become familiar with the concept of youth information work, recognise its distinctive characteristics and decide to set up or expand these services for the benefit of their young citizens.

Sanja Vuković-Čović

President
ERYICA

This document is at once about the past and the present of youth information: it displays in a short, concise and yet accurate manner the long road that led this practice from its visionary inception to being one of the most important and main pillars of youth policy in Europe. Youth information and counselling are mentioned and considered in many policy documents produced at European and national level, and all around Europe thousands of young people receive, each day, professional support and guidance in order to have more opportunities to make informed choices for a better life.

However, we hope that this compendium, which is the result of a great deal of work and the collaboration of many, will also serve as an inspiration and as a tool for the development of youth information and counselling, not only in those countries where this practice has not yet been developed and recognised, but also where youth information centres and workers are already active. There is always room for improving our work, and for better understanding its rationale, reasons and importance, especially in the era of the Internet and mass communication.

Finally, I thank the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and the Bureau Information Jeunesse Bruxelles for their support and contribution, without which the very existence of this publication would not be possible.

Davide Capecchi

Director
ERYICA

Introduction

The European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (hereinafter ERYICA) in co-operation with the Council of Europe has prepared a special publication – the Compendium of national youth information and counselling structures for initiators and policy makers. This compendium aims at being the main systemised source of information for stakeholders in countries where no youth information and counselling (hereinafter YIC) structures have yet been established and in countries where such structures or separate services could be significantly improved. It summarises the material from key publications on the topic of YIC, which have been published by ERYICA and the Council of Europe, describes the tasks and functions of YIC, provides insights into the functioning of YIC structures in different European countries as well as a brief history of the way these services developed and offers a comprehensive guide to establishing YIC services.

Generalist youth information and counselling services have been working since the 1960s in most European countries. Time has shaped these services and they have quickly and painlessly adjusted to the changing reality. The online world has made communication and the search for information smoother but not, however, easier. Years of being asked questions and giving answers in a professional manner shows that young people do need assistance in understanding how society works, and in making informed decisions that will shape their future. Millions of users of YIC services prove that most probably young people in your country would also appreciate having this public service available to them. The European Youth Information and Counselling Agency offers its kind support in this task and presents a toolkit – the Compendium of national youth information and counselling structures. It might give you some first hints and ideas on how to start your journey into the future of happier, more responsible, conscious and informed young people.

Section I

Youth information and counselling: concept and history

The first part of the compendium provides an overview of the history of YIC, beginning with its early stages in different European countries, the way it evolved and responded to the changing needs of young people and new information channels, the unification of different national providers of YIC services under the umbrella of ERYICA, as well as an overview of the key documents and policies adopted by ERYICA, the Council of Europe and the European Union that are extensively used by organisations providing YIC services. This part of the compendium also describes ERYICA, which is a unique international non-governmental organisation (NGO) that unites providers of YIC services in different European countries. Over the years ERYICA has gathered broad and valuable expertise in the field of YIC, which it shares not only with its members, but also external parties interested in setting up YIC structures or helping to improve the quality of services that are already in place. The way ERYICA operates and the training courses, support programmes and other services it provides are described here in detail.

THE DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF YOUTH INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING, ITS FORMS AND FUNCTIONS

Young people who are in transition from childhood to adulthood are at a special and very important point in their lives. They have to make certain decisions that will have a significant impact on their future. The choices they make about their education, career paths and other areas of their personal lifestyle will define their lives. These autonomous first-time decisions need to be based on unbiased, complete and comprehensive information.

Often faced with dilemmas, young people turn to various sources of information, one of these being specialised or generalist youth information and counselling services. The term “youth information and counselling” can encompass a wide range of services that are set in different frameworks and provided by many different organisations.

The essential aim of youth information and counselling is to help guide young people in all aspects of their lives and in their autonomous decision making. It builds on the fact that it is not possible to make a sound decision without knowing one’s options and alternatives. However, it does not stop there: being aware of the different possibilities is only the first step, which has to be followed up by evaluating all the options, putting them into a broader context and, last but not least, relating them to one’s own abilities, skills and wishes. All these steps would be challenging for anybody, but are especially so for young people, who are facing them for the first time and who are often still in the process of developing their own personality.

Youth information aims to:

- ▶ provide reliable, accurate and understandable information;
- ▶ give access to different sources and channels of information;
- ▶ give an overview of the options and possibilities available on all relevant topics;
- ▶ help young people sift through the information overload they face today;
- ▶ ensure that young people are aware of all the rights and services available to them and that they know how to access them;
- ▶ provide support in evaluating the information obtained and in identifying quality information;
- ▶ guide young people in reaching their own decisions and in finding the best options open to them;
- ▶ offer different channels of communication and dialogue in order to directly support young people in their search for information and knowledge;
- ▶ contribute to the information literacy of young people.

A function of youth information, which has become ever more important over the years, is contributing to the information literacy of young people, especially in our digital age. A critical approach to information has become even more important since the Internet allows everybody to publish on any subject. Young people have to be aware of the necessity to challenge the information they find, and of all the possible techniques available to help them evaluate and identify quality criteria. Youth information strives to integrate these techniques, but not only in its own research, documentation and dissemination of information; it is also increasingly trying to develop different ways of transmitting the relevant key skills for modern life to young people themselves.

Moreover, a speciality of youth information is a certain form of translation that has to be provided by youth information workers. There is a lot of knowledge available nowadays, not least through the Internet. Often, and especially when it comes to topics that concern rather formal or legal issues – such as education, family affairs, contracts, rights and duties – the information provided is not easy to access and understand. In those situations, youth information does not create the information itself but acts as an interpreter.

Youth information uses a vast range of techniques – from informing to signposting and referring, to orienting and to counselling – to guide young people through this process and support them in reaching their own decisions. Below is a closer look at these techniques:

Informing: providing reliable, accurate and up-to-date facts on all relevant topics for young people in an understandable and user-friendly way and putting them in a meaningful context.

Networking/referring/signposting: providing not only relevant information, but also knowledge and a network of contacts on relevant topics in the area concerned, thus being able to signpost or refer young people to the appropriate institution or person who can help with their query.

Orientation: putting the information offered in a broader context and offering the young person, through interaction with a youth information worker (whether online or not), the possibility to reflect on different alternatives and the consequences of deciding on each option.

Advising/guiding: in addition to tailor-made information, from time to time young people also need the advice or guidance of a professional. Youth information aims to help them by offering several points of view, while always ensuring that the decision itself is taken by the young person independently.

Counselling: in the youth information context, counselling very often focuses on clarification. In a guided and professional conversation the youth information workers and the young person together first identify the reasons and motives behind a question or a problem put forward by the young person. Then they seek to clarify what the next steps might be.

Not all youth information centres and services offer all these forms of intervention. For example, not everywhere in Europe is counselling seen as an integral part of youth information. What youth information services offer often depends on the provision of other services for young people in the area, as youth information aims to close existing gaps and not to duplicate services.

Youth information is a part of youth work and shares its key values, such as: being open to all young people, acting in the interests of young people or defining options based on the needs of the target groups.

The approach to youth information that is adopted by actors in this field today can be twofold, based on the scope of information services that are provided.

Various organisations at local, national and European level provide specialised information and services. These are specialised local, national and European bodies in different areas which inform young people (and the general public) about their area of competence. Their activity may or may not be targeted exclusively at young people.

The following topics fall under “specialised information services” – it is an indicative list and the types of services available from different providers depend largely on available funding and other resources:

- ▶ careers guidance
- ▶ studies and scholarships
- ▶ jobs and training
- ▶ general health matters
- ▶ relationships and sexuality
- ▶ social security benefits
- ▶ rights of young people
- ▶ consumer rights
- ▶ legal advice
- ▶ European opportunities for young people
- ▶ youth activities and exchanges.

Organisations providing generalist youth information and counselling services

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.

Essentially, generalist youth information is a user-centred approach, that is to say, that the youth information provider adopts as its starting point the questions and needs of the young people who are its users. As these cover a wide range of issues and problems, the centre or service providing youth information and counselling services is organised either to respond directly to a large number of topics (hence the term “generalist”), or to refer the user to an organisation or service which is competent in the desired area.

The centre may provide other services which are complementary to its basic information and counselling role, such as youth discount cards, tickets for concerts and transport services, cheap accommodation, rooms or equipment for youth activities, and help in organising youth projects. It may also make available information and information materials from a wide range of sources (official administrations, associations, commercial services) which promote activities and opportunities aimed at young people. But in its contact with each individual user, the primary concern of the centre (or service) is to respond to the question or need raised by the user, irrespective of any other external interest. It seeks to do this in a way which enables the user to have a maximum of choice, and which respects his or her autonomy and anonymity.

Therefore, “generalist” youth information and counselling centres (and services) have the following characteristics, which are based on the European Youth Information Charter, a national set of standards or a national charter where these exist:

- ▶ they are specifically designed to respond to the needs of young people;
- ▶ they are open to all young people without exception, without an appointment;
- ▶ they provide information on a wide range of subjects, in a variety of forms, prepared both for young people in general and for groups of young people with special needs;
- ▶ the information that they provide is practical, pluralistic, accurate and regularly updated;
- ▶ they operate in a way which personalises the reception of each user, respects confidence and anonymity, provides a maximum of choice and promotes his or her autonomy;
- ▶ when necessary, they refer the user to a specialised service.

This is the approach adopted by the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency’s (ERYICA) partners, one which has been tried and tested since the late 1960s in a number of countries, and which is today used in more than 30 European countries.

However, a very important function of a “generalist” youth information centre (or service) at local level is to develop and maintain good knowledge of the local and national specialised information services, in order to allocate material that may be useful as a resource when dealing with enquiries from young people. Furthermore, the centre (service) continually develops contacts and co-operation with relevant youth-related services in its locality to be able to offer the best possible and most comprehensive service to its users.

Perspectives

Youth information, as for all other forms of youth work, is directly influenced by changes in society, as young people's lives and their needs depend on the demands of modern life. Some current developments give us a new perspective on issues that youth information will have to tackle in the future.

The merging of online and offline lives

Mobile phones, the Internet and the availability of applications for every topic and situation have led to 24/7 access to and use of new technology. Young people tend not to differentiate between what some years ago was still called “real life” and their online activities. Friends, interests, news, hobbies and all other aspects of life are seen as equally close, valid and real, in their online lives as much as offline. The natural consequence of this development is the demand for youth information to respect this reality and offer services tailored to the needs of a generation that believes in sharing through social networks as much as in an online chat. Youth information has made big strides in this direction over the last few years, e.g. using social network sites to interact with young people. But there is still a long way to go and a need to keep constantly up-to-date with recent developments, both technical and sociological. Furthermore, all those new options raise ethical questions and the need for an exchange of experience and debate about adopted professional principles and guidelines.

Oversupply of information and lack of advice

Complexity is a serious issue in the coming of age of young people today. They are faced with an ever-growing range of choices when it comes to education and employment, for example. However, this freedom of choice might become an illusion for those who are not skilled enough to sift through the deluge of information available or do not have access to all sources of information in the first place. In addition, this (for some, theoretical) freedom of choice is combined with an insecure future due to constant changes in the economy, social security and educational systems, and the rather negative image of the future of modern European societies transmitted, for example, by the mass media. Besides, it is not only young people themselves, but also their first point of contact for advice – such as parents, teachers and friends – who are often unable to provide first-hand experience on the issues in question, as this issue of complexity affects them, too. In such situations young people need accurate and reliable information as well as dialogue with and advice from professionals. This is a need that youth information will have to respond to in the future, even though it might go beyond current concepts and the resources available.

Quality and information literacy

The quality of the information provided is an issue that youth information has worked on since the beginning and important steps have been made in the provision of training, exchange of expertise and the creation of quality criteria and standards in many countries. The idea of a common European quality label is proposed at regular intervals whenever youth information workers come together to discuss the development of their work. The experience of the last 50 years is that youth information shares the same values and principles across the continent, but that the situation at national level is very diverse. However, even if a common quality label remains a vision, it is a valid vision that is worth exploring. In addition to high expectations regarding the quality of the information provided by and through youth information centres and services, a new challenge has emerged over the last few years. Today, youth information workers are not only called upon to secure the quality of their own products, but also have to take up and develop their role in supporting young people in becoming information-literate.

Outreach and peer-to-peer

The involvement of young people in all aspects of youth information is one of the underlying principles defined in the Council of Europe's recommendations on youth information and has become more and more important in youth information work all over Europe. Youth information centres have also acknowledged in the past few years that providing easy access to a centre/shop/office is no longer enough to reach all young people and

respond to their needs. Hence, concepts have been developed all over Europe to meet young people where they are, as well as to involve young people as peers directly in the dissemination of information. Youth information strives to do this while considering the young people's needs as the crucial factor, supporting them in all phases of the experience, from planning to evaluation, to making sure that they are ultimately enriched and not exploited. A tokenistic approach is avoided at all times. These activities have become part of the basic options made available by youth information services all over Europe and can be developed further, discussed and evaluated in the coming years.

Networking and advocacy

Networking has always been essential for the provision of youth information as, for many enquiries from young people, experts need to be consulted and young people have a right to be referred to a specialist for their specific question on the basis of the professional knowledge of the youth information worker. Looking at the increasingly complex environment that young people live in and to which youth information needs to respond, it is immediately clear that networking has an even more crucial role to play within the functions of a youth information service. Last but not least, advocacy for the right of young people to have access to all the information and support they need for autonomous decision making is of the utmost importance in today's society. This process must involve continuing to discuss our knowledge-based society as well as lobbying for the provision of information and tailor-made counselling for young people.

THE HISTORY OF YOUTH INFORMATION

Specialised youth information emerged rather quickly, starting in the late 1950s, when information offices for internal migrants opened in Finland to support young people who had moved from the countryside to the big cities. Already then the underlying idea of youth information was to give orientation to young people when they are faced with complex surroundings and questions.

Youth information is a right to information. It is not only giving advice, there is a right to be informed.

Bernard Charbonnel, youth information expert, former president of Eurodesk AISBL

But it was not until 1961 when the need for specific provisions for young people in problem situations inspired the Young People's Consultation Centre in London. It was probably the first "walk-in" centre for young people in Europe, where young people could directly approach a professional with their issues. It was critical not to give adolescents the feeling of being thought of as having a mental illness when seeking help. Hence, the centre was designed in a way that young people would feel as little inhibition as possible to enter and receive immediate attention and help in order to prevent serious social and psychological harm in later stages of their lives.

The dawn of the cultural revolution that particularly addressed youngsters in the western world focused on rejecting a sterile, excessively consuming, overly technological, and alienating social order and would leave young people facing new somatic and psychological problems. Hence, the gap between the two cultures needed to be bridged by the new alternative services in youth information and counselling. During the second half of the 1960s, the open door concept stimulated the founders of the centre for youth information and counselling (Info Jeugd) in Ghent and the advice centre for young people (Jongeren Advies Centrum) in Amsterdam which were inspired by a fundamental criticism against the then established, traditional youth assistance services. Their criticism concerned, among other things, the bureaucratic method (e.g. waiting lists, by appointment only), the official character of the assistance (the counselling process started by asking the person's name, address, age, employment, etc.), and the psychiatric-medical model of assistance services, etc. "Release", a youth information centre in London established in 1967, strived to help young people who had been arrested for alleged drug offences and who were faced with other, new social problems that resulted from the shift in youth culture.

The first generalist youth information and counselling centres in Belgium, England and the Netherlands that opened in the 1960s were the product of private initiatives that were initially or eventually assisted by local authorities. In France, exceptionally, the initiative to establish a generalist youth information service came from the state, which created the Centre d'Information et de Documentation Jeunesse (CIDJ) as a private association in 1969.

At the time of their creation different factors, in varying degrees, contributed to the emergence and development of such structures, but the following are elements that were most commonly present:

- ▶ a recognition that as new opportunities available to young people opened or expanded, specific channels were needed to inform them and assist them in making decisions;
- ▶ a realisation that existing information services were often highly compartmentalised and dispersed and not adequate to deal with the wide range of subjects that were of concern to young people;
- ▶ the fact that many information services at that time, especially those whose public was not exclusively young, were failing to reach young people, particularly those at risk or least unable to confront the increasingly complex choices and procedures that were part of society.

During the 1970s and 1980s youth information spread all over Europe and developed into an integrated part of youth work in many countries. In the mid-1980s, youth information and counselling was an important focus of attention of the First Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth (Strasbourg 1985), which included youth information and counselling among its priorities for future action and co-operation at the European level. As a result of one of the recommendations of this ministerial conference, in 1986 the Council of Europe established the Committee of Experts on Youth Information in Europe. After the first international meetings were held and a dialogue started among professionals in the field, this contributed to the concepts and available services on local and national levels, and also led to the creation of a European Network in 1986: the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency, ERYICA.

In 1990 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe issued a recommendation concerning information and counselling for young people in Europe (Recommendation No. R 90 (7)), which gave the issue of information and counselling for young people a significant new importance and provided a first European document to rely on and refer to, not only for politicians and decision makers, but also for youth information workers at all levels. Ever since then, it has been one of the underlying reference documents when discussing the implementation and development of youth information services in Europe. In 1993 ERYICA adopted the first version of the European Youth Information Charter, which describes the underlying values, principles and working guidelines for the part of youth work that relates to youth information.

As a consequence of the development in the youth information field, in 1997 the Council of Europe decided to strengthen its involvement in and dedication to the issue of information and counselling for young people in Europe. The specific approach of the Council of Europe towards youth information is characterised by the belief in information as a right of all people (as defined in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in general and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in particular), as well as the insight that youth is a special, potentially more vulnerable target group.

Later on, youth information faced a huge change in its needs and forms when the Internet became a source of information for all. The profession had to redefine its tasks and role (ERYICA adopted the revised European Youth Information Charter in 2004) and was further transformed into a service focusing on orientation and guidance. In 2009, ERYICA adopted the Principles for Online Youth Information as well as a Starter Kit for decision makers and NGOs interested in the field, which were published as a first introduction to the subject.

In recent years, youth information centres have acknowledged that providing an easy to access centre/shop/office is no longer enough to reach all young people and respond to their needs. Hence, concepts have been developed all over Europe to meet young people where they are, as well as to involve young people as peers directly in the dissemination of information. Therefore, advocacy for the right of young people to have access to all the information and support they need for autonomous decision making is of utmost importance in today's society, including not only a general debate on today's knowledge society but also ongoing lobbying for the provision of information and counselling that is tailor-made for young people. In this framework, ERYICA and the Council of Europe launched the Information Right Now! campaign in 2012.

Young people have to be aware of the necessity to challenge the information they get and also to be aware of all possible techniques that enable them to evaluate and identify quality criteria. Youth information strives to integrate these techniques not only in its own research, documentation and dissemination of information, but also increasingly develops different ways of actively transmitting the relevant key skills for modern times to young people themselves.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION AND EXPERIENCE EXCHANGE IN THE 1970S AND 1980S

Professor Dr W. Faché

In this chapter we will focus on conferences and co-operation initiatives that took place in the field of youth information between 1972 and 1986, and which are still relevant today or help to understand the current situation.

International conferences

The first European Conference on Youth Information and Counselling Centres in 1972 in Munich

At the initiative of the Jugendinformationszentrum in Munich and in collaboration with the International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany (IJAB), the first European Conference on Youth Information and Counselling Centres took place in Munich in 1972. In the space of one week, the participants visited (by bus) several European cities where innovative forms of youth information and counselling services had been set up: Munich, Erlangen, Essen, Amsterdam, Amersfoort, Utrecht, Ghent and Brussels (Faché, 1973).

The three questions at issue during this first European conference that continued to be discussed during the 1970s and 1980s were:

1. the advantages and disadvantages of a comprehensive youth service and a subject-specialised service;
2. the differences between and strong points of three service concepts: youth information centres (YICs), youth counselling centres (YCCs), and services that integrate youth information and counselling (YICCs);
3. the social action of youth information and counselling services.

The second European Conference on Youth Information and Counselling Centres in 1975 in Tihange (Belgium) and the third European conference in 1977 in Munich

The second conference was organised by the Centre National d'Information des Jeunes (Brussels) and the third conference by the Jugendinformationszentrum in Munich. The focus of these conferences was on exchange of experience.

During the second conference the International Centre for Advancement of Innovative Youth Information and Counselling Services in Ghent was asked to compile a directory of all youth information and counselling services in Europe. With financial support from the Centre National d'Information des Jeunes (Brussels) the directory was published by the centre in Ghent on the occasion of the third European conference (Faché et al, 1977).

WHO working group on youth advisory services in 1977 in London

During this meeting special attention was paid to the changing role and objectives of youth advisory services to determine the extent to which they offered possibilities for primary prevention and early detection of problems in adolescent life.

In light of the debate about the societal causes of personal problems of young people, the working group discussed

the role and function of social care, since it is considered that many problems of youth arise from the fact that social structures and situations show deficiencies and defects. In these cases, helping the individual can only be successful if society-changing actions are considered as well. ... Youth advisory services can help to create change in social policy by identifying issues of concern to young people and by bringing them to the attention of planners and politicians at the national and local levels.

As a consequence, youth advisory services have functions in relation to both the individual and to society.

Youth advisory services have been set up to meet diverse and changing needs and the activities they develop to meet those needs vary widely. Consequently, they have to be flexible and adapt to change (WHO, 1978).

The first European Colloquium of Youth Information Centres in 1985 in Marly-le-Roy

The first UN International Youth Year took place in 1985. In the framework of the International Youth Year the CIDJ in Paris¹ organised the European Colloquium of Youth Information Centres in Marly-le-Roy and published

1. The Centre d'Information et de Documentation Jeunesse in Paris was established in 1969.

the “Directory of Youth Information Centres in Western Europe”. This directory was an updated version of the directory of 1977, but under a changed name.

It is noticeable that in the name of both the directory and the colloquium, only youth information was mentioned rather than youth information and counselling centres, although this had also been the case for earlier conferences. I had the suspicion that the French organisers, under the leadership of the CIDJ in Paris, wanted to use the international colloquium to “export” the French concept of youth information centres and gain international recognition of their logo.

The organisers also supported the development of a European network of youth information centres. During the colloquium an international liaison committee was founded. After much discussion during and after the colloquium about the integration of YCCs into the network, it was decided to go ahead with the proposal to integrate counselling centres into the name of the new body, which resulted in the founding of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) on 17 April 1986 in Madrid.

In addition to the resulting international co-operation, the conference also initiated a working group on new technologies for informing young people.

First Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth in 1985

During the First Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth (Strasbourg 1985), youth information was among its priorities for future action and co-operation at the European level. As a consequence of this meeting the Council of Europe organised a Committee of Experts on Youth Information in Europe.

Council of Europe Committee of Experts on Youth Information in Europe (1986-1988)

The Committee of Experts on Youth Information in Europe was established by the European Committee for Intergovernmental Co-operation in the Youth Field to implement the recommendations of the First Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth. In particular, the committee's tasks were to study in depth the needs in the field of youth information, carry out a feasibility study on a European network of existing youth information centres, and define the scope of intergovernmental activity in the field of youth information. In his function as consultant expert of this committee, Professor Dr W. Faché wrote a report about “The aims, methods and organisation of information and counselling centres in Europe” (Faché, 1987). This report was sent to all centres in Europe, together with a questionnaire. On the basis of the feedback from the centres and discussion in the committee, the report was updated and published by the Council of Europe in 1989.

International experience exchange in the 1970s and 1980s

One of the conclusions of the first European Conference on Youth Information and Counselling Centres in 1972 in Munich was that the documentation on innovative youth information and counselling services – especially the experience and project reports, conference papers, government reports, annual reports, technical reports, etc. – was only available in restricted numbers and not held by the existing documentation centres. This made it difficult to trace such documents. Making this literature accessible to all those concerned with a particular subject (practitioners, researchers and policy makers) was seen to be important and necessary for the development and further improvement of innovative approaches to youth information and counselling.

At the conference it was decided that a single international organisation must collect documentation on youth information and counselling and make it accessible. The centre should try to be as comprehensive as possible in its coverage. Professor Dr Faché, founder of Info Jeugd in Ghent and working at the University of Ghent, had already collected documentation about innovations in youth information and counselling work in Europe, the USA and Canada. The participants at the conference, fully recognised the international documentation collection, and decided to take the Ghent collection as the basis for a European documentation centre for youth information and counselling services and to support this work by regularly sending documentation from their countries to this focal point. They also decided to locate this documentation centre in the International Centre for the Advancement of Innovative Youth Information and Counselling Services hosted by the University of Ghent, Department of Youth Welfare (IJAB, 1972).

The International Centre for Advancement of Innovative Youth Information and Counselling Services in Ghent (1971-1989)

This centre was an international non-governmental non-profit making organisation. The activities of the centre focused in the areas of documentation and research.

Documentation

In 1972, the centre in Ghent possessed over 4 000 documents from and about youth information and counselling services in Europe and North America. In 1974 the centre started the publication of separate bibliographies on youth information and counselling services per country and on specific themes, such as “detached youth work”, “street-corner-worker”, etc.

Even though many people were interested in consulting the documents mentioned in the bibliographies, it was difficult for them to come to Ghent to do so. That is why, in 1981, the centre started publishing national source-books (per country) on youth information and counselling. These source-books contained the most important and original documents published in a country. Texts having informational value were included there and, as a result, these documents became accessible to a wider public. It was no longer necessary to request the centre to provide photocopies of the documents mentioned in the bibliographies. The source-books provided important information for those studying developments in youth information and counselling in a particular country. They were also an instrument to help identify innovative forms of youth information and counselling and thus to introduce innovations in a centre’s own work. They also became an educational instrument for the training of counsellors. From 1981 until 1986 source-books from the following countries were published in photocopied form: Great Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands.

In 1977 a directory of all youth information and counselling services in Europe was published.

The journal *International Exchange*

From 1973 until 1977, the centre published the journal *International Exchange*. This journal informed about the youth information and counselling services in Europe and provided information on documents and books that had been published in this area and about conferences and exchange programmes as well as national youth policies. Owing to a lack of financial means, the publication of this journal ceased in 1977.

Practice-oriented research

In co-operation with the University of Ghent, the centre carried out research on three aspects of youth information between 1981 and 1988, namely:

- ▶ methodology for introducing specific and innovative objectives and methods at youth information and counselling centres;
- ▶ a review of current objectives, methods and organisation of youth information and counselling centres in Europe;
- ▶ the information and counselling needs of young people.

The creation of ERYICA as the result of grants from the French government led the International Centre for Advancement of Innovative Youth Information and Counselling Services in Ghent to end its activities in 1989. The main results of its research were subsequently published in *Innovation in youth information and counselling in Europe* (Faché, 1989).

The European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA)

ERYICA was founded on 17 April 1986 in Madrid and hosted by the CIDJ in Paris.

International comparative research in the field of youth information and counselling services

According to Deichsel (1987) in his PhD thesis, the first international comparative research was published in 1973 by Faché. Deichsel published his thesis about his comparative research on youth information and counselling services in 1987. In 1977 the World Health Organization also published a comparative study based on visits to 11 European countries with the aim of analysing the early development of youth advisory services.

Issues of debate in the 1970s and 1980s

Three questions at issue during the first European Conference on Youth Information and Counselling Centres in 1972, which, according to our research in 1987, continued to be discussed during the 1980s (Faché, 1987) were:

- ▶ the advantages and disadvantages of a comprehensive youth service and a subject- specialised service;

- ▶ the differences between and strong points of three service concepts: youth information centres (YICs), youth counselling centres (YCCs), and services that integrate youth information and counselling (YICCs);
- ▶ the social action of youth information and counselling services and feedback about problems of clients rooted in society.

Below is a brief overview of each of these topical discussions.

A comprehensive youth service or a subject-specialised service

A variety of information and counselling services exist which concentrate on one specific problem or subject area. These services differ from each other quite fundamentally in terms of the subject area of their respective specialisation. An entirely different specialised service that has existed since the 1960s is a one which concentrates on a particular target population – young people. Such population-specific services are comprehensive as far as the subject area is concerned and in this way youth information and counselling centres are comprehensive services for young people. Such services for young people have come into being in the USA, Canada and in all western European countries.

There is a general awareness of the value of comprehensiveness, with the following arguments being put forward. The principle of comprehensive provision means that any young person may walk in with any problem. This important working principle concerns the intake criteria, the result being that a youngster does not need to make a self-diagnosis before calling upon a youth information and counselling service. This is not always the case with subject-specialised services, in which every request for assistance has to be as precise and clear as possible. Current intake criteria of specialised services are “persons having questions or problems in the field of...”, followed by a restrictive list of fields, such as sexuality.

A comprehensive youth information or counselling agency will usually be necessary as a first resort or a last resort, somewhere to go when you do not know where to get information or help, or somewhere to go when other sources fail. The desirability of comprehensive youth information and counselling services has still other arguments in its favour.

While there are many agencies, such as those for career counselling, that together provide a range of services to young people, individually they often only deal with a specific problem or subject area rather than treating the young person as a whole person. Problems are not always so specific that one needs a specialised information and counselling service; they must frequently be seen in their context and in relation to other questions.

Finally, comprehensive centres must accommodate those who do not wish to admit that they have a problem or who may be unable to formulate their distress in terms of a specific problem. In the “Guidelines on how to create a youth information centre” published by the Council of Europe and ERYICA (2002) these centres are called “generalist youth information centres”.

Differentiations made between types of comprehensive youth services

The second question at issue during the first European Conference on Youth Information and Counselling Centres in 1972, which continued to be discussed during the 1970s and 1980s, was the differentiation made between types of comprehensive youth services.

There are, depending on the kind of social support provided– information or counselling – three different types of comprehensive youth services: youth information centres (YICs), youth counselling centres (YCCs) and services that integrate youth information and counselling (YICCs).

Before dealing with the differences between and the arguments in favour of each of these types, it is necessary to make a distinction between informing and counselling.

Counselling means discussing a problem raised by a person seeking assistance in order to increase one’s insight into his or her problem. The counsellor helps his or her client to explore thoughts, feelings and behaviour, and to reach a clearer self-understanding, and then find and use their strengths so that they can cope more effectively with life by making appropriate decisions or by taking relevant action. The focus of the counsellor is on the other person rather than simply on the problem. In this context, counselling does not mean recommending something to someone, dissuading someone from doing something or persuading someone to do something, but is aimed at reinforcing the capacity of the person seeking assistance to take action. The discussion must enable this person to decide for himself/herself in matters that affect him/her and his/her situation (Lawton, 1984).

In this context, informing involves so-called “social information” that young people require in order to be able to act adequately in concrete situations, in other words, to be able to function socially and societally. Young people in particular encounter a lot of problems because they are “new” in our society.

In youth counselling centres, the focus is on counselling as it is described above. In youth information centres, workers give information via the telephone, letters, online or in face-to-face contact. Young people can also consult information stands and databanks on their own. A number of organisations consciously strive to integrate both kinds of support (information and counselling) into one service. For the public, some of the integrated youth information and counselling centres appear to be only information centres; they also call themselves as such because that name implies a lower threshold (i.e. they are less inhibiting) for young people (e.g. Info Jeugd in Ghent, Belgium and CIDJ in Paris).

Centres that were mainly founded during the 1970s in France, Spain, Portugal and Greece were youth information centres. In other European countries, counselling centres for young people or centres that integrate youth information and counselling into one service were found more often. The integrated approach is more and more prevalent nowadays, including in France.

What are the arguments for and against each of the alternatives? In our international survey we found the following arguments (Faché, 1987):

Integrated youth information and counselling centres (YICCs)

The argument in favour of integrating informing and counselling into one service is sustained by referring to the fact that requests for information may sometimes lead to an unforeseen counselling session. This may happen for different reasons. It may be because young people do not easily admit their need for counselling in problematic situations. Often they experience a serious problem as a mere lack of information. It may also be because a young person has not yet realised that there are people who are prepared to discuss his or her problem and its possible solutions and who take him or her seriously. If one has not yet realised that one can be helped through dialogue, one can hardly have any expectations in that regard. Counselling can also develop from an initial informative conversation. It is therefore difficult to distinguish between informing, that is the process of finding relevant information, and counselling, because the two may be interrelated. Young people sometimes use a request for information as a stepping stone towards a request for counselling. The request for information then allows them to see how far the worker can be trusted and how far anonymity is guaranteed. Whoever offers information to young people must therefore take into account that he/she could also be asked to be a counsellor. However, we are not implying that a worker must see a request for counselling behind every request for information.

The integration of informing and counselling into one service has still other arguments in its favour. By integrating the various kinds of assistance into one service, one also limits the number of situations in which young people have to be referred on to another organisation. Referral also holds the risk that clients may give up when they have to tell the whole story again to another organisation. What is more, because of their lack of insight into the complex structure of the service system, young people often do not know where to go with which question. Therefore it is very important for them to be able to turn to one location with all their questions. In a limited number of situations, it also permits the worker to see a problem that the young person is not even aware of behind a more obvious problem, and to point this out to the youngster.

Finally, integrated information and counselling services accommodate those who often do not wish to admit that they have a problem or who may be unable to formulate their distress in terms of a specific problem.

One remarkable finding from our international survey is that workers in youth information centres mention the same advantages of integrated youth information and counselling services as those who work in youth information centres. Yet the workers in the youth information services mention that the YICC concept cannot always be realised, even if one wished it could. The government, which grants subsidies, sometimes obliges an organisation to only give information, for a variety of reasons, one example being that informing is less labour intensive and it can therefore help a larger number of young people using the same number of workers. Indeed the realisation of an integrated youth information and counselling service demands a number of preconditions, the most important of which being the higher number of workers and their range of expertise.

Youth information centres (YICs)

The arguments in favour of a youth information service are limited to the possibility of helping a large amount of young people with a relatively limited staff. This argument is used by workers at youth information centres in large cities who have to deal with thousands requests for information per year. What is more, youth information centres do not require highly qualified personnel such as social workers and psychologists.

The main argument against the youth information concept is that young people who need counselling are left out in the cold or have to be referred to a counselling centre.

Youth counselling centres (YCCs)

The concept of counselling services is defended using the argument that counselling demands more privacy for lengthy and confidential conversations than the provision of information. Counselling is hindered when large numbers of young people with requests for information visit a centre at the same time. As an argument against the YCC, one could mention the danger that it inhibits young people from requesting assistance, because they are afraid of being stigmatised as problem cases when entering a YCC.

Nowadays youth information, advice and counselling services are more differentiated. According to Grove and Rayment (1997) the role of the youth information centre is rarely limited to a strict information function. These authors define the following core services, which differentiate several functions that go beyond that of simply "informing" young people.

Information: Providing relevant information enables young people to make informed choices based on accurate and up-to-date information.... The primary focus for the [youth information centre] will determine the depth and detail of the information provided, which might range from a stand of appropriately selected leaflets and local resources to a sophisticated system to support a well-developed advice service.

Advice and advocacy: While information is a good start to empowering young people, often the issues and options confronting young people are complex. A well-trained advice worker can help in sorting through the appropriate choices. Advice work needs a quiet space to meet, a worker who can establish a relationship with the young person to help them to explore their situation plus the knowledge and skills to offer relevant information and options to support the young person in making and carrying out choices. Some young people may require further help with the advice worker taking on an advocacy role, taking action on their behalf, e.g. telephoning, letter writing or representing them.

Befriending/support work: Young people in distress can benefit from a supportive relationship which enables them to develop realistic coping skills. Befriending has an important place in lessening a young person's sense of social or personal isolation. Each [centre] will need to develop clear boundaries for befriending and other informal support work. This will determine where it takes place (only on the premises or at a young person's home, or other venues?), the frequency and range of contacts (recreational activities, shopping, talking). The absence of formality and the greater degree of freedom which characterises befriending and support work arguably places even greater importance on the need to contract with a young person what is and is not included in the befriending role.

Counselling: Counselling offers the young person the opportunity to explore issues of concern within a well-defined counsellor / client relationship. The boundaries are tightly defined and once established provide the environment for self-exploration and change. In addition to suitably trained and supervised counsellors..., offering counselling requires quiet private rooms and a system of appointments in addition to any drop-in service. Some [YICs] extend their provision by offering counselling in other venues, e.g. schools, colleges, youth clubs. In these situations it is essential to agree a contract with the "host" agency to establish issues such as confidentiality, privacy and safety.

Nowadays, these functions differentiate centres from each other.

Social action and feedback about youth problems rooted in society

Problems sometimes become apparent in the life of an individual, but the causes of these problems are not always in the first place bound to the individual. Problems of clients are frequently rooted in the society in which they live (e.g. shortcomings in working, housing, school and leisure environments) and not in supposed individual inadequacies. In other words, many of the problems that young people may experience are in fact collective as opposed to exclusively individual problems.

Youth information and counselling centres greatly differ in their vision of their role in relation to these societal causes of personal problems. In other words, there are different visions of the social action approach in youth information and counselling services.

Four different approaches can be distinguished in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s.

1. Assistance to young people and social action are integrated

In the first place, the workers should, over and above the provision of information or counselling, make their clients aware of the societal factors of the clients' problem. They should motivate and involve their clients in

social action, through which societal changes may occur. These workers regard their clients far more as people who report societal shortcomings and as potential collaborators in social action. As a result, they are mainly interested in those groups of clients who report on societal problems (Mulder-de Bruin, 1978).

2. Assistance to young people and social action run parallel

To bring about societal changes is a difficult and complex process. From this second point of view, it is not justified to involve clients in such social action because they are already faced with their own personal problems. Indeed, clients who are already wrestling with a personal problem will feel even more powerless if social action fails. But the defenders of this point of view feel that, in the long run, counselling only makes sense for the client and the counsellor if at the same time efforts are made to weaken or eliminate societal shortcomings. If not, it is feared that counselling may operate as an alibi for the continuation of these societal problems.

Contrary to the first viewpoint, social action as a result of a request for information or counselling is regarded as an activity that runs parallel to individual help and is undertaken by the counsellor or colleagues without the clients' involvement (de Turck and Martens, 1978).

Where the clients are made aware of the societal basis of their problems, this is not done in order to motivate them to social action, but in order to help the clients in their process of internalising new rights and opportunities (emancipatory help). Indeed it is known from experience (cf. women's emancipation) that people who have adapted to deprivation or discrimination oppose changes even if they will benefit in the long run.

3. Assistance to young people and drawing attention to societal problems as a parallel task of workers

According to a third point of view, counsellors should in the first place concentrate on helping the client. Yet the counsellor should report back to other appropriate organisations on which effects of their policies and societal structure are impairing the development of young people. This feedback function is seen as an additional function running parallel to the helping process. The defenders of this point of view feel, as do the defenders of the preceding view, that in the long run, counselling only makes sense for the client and the counsellor if at the same time efforts are made to weaken or eliminate societal shortcomings.

4. Only assistance to young people

From a fourth point of view, the only function of youth information and counselling centres is to give assistance to young people. The youth advocacy function, the feedback function, or social action are the functions of other agencies.

All four above-mentioned views are to be found in youth information and counselling centres. However, they do not occur together at one centre. They constitute a basic choice. Most centres in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s expressed their preference for assisting young people and, in parallel to this, "putting pressure" by drawing attention to societal problems (model 3). This is also the view of many centres nowadays.

International overview: who does what and where?

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. The right to obtain, possess and impart information without restrictions is a core human right, as recognised by various international institutions.

United Nations

In its very first session in 1946, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 59 (I), stating, "Freedom of information is a fundamental human right and is the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated". This document, which, the UN General Assembly considered at its first session would later become the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948. Its Article 19 reads:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the UN General Assembly in its resolution 44/25 on 20 November 1989 further builds on the concept of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and additionally outlines the right of a child to receive information in the media of the child's choice, and have access to information from different national and international sources. The states parties commit to encouraging international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of information that is beneficial to the child with regard to linguistic needs. The convention also recognises that an essential part of a child's right to education is educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children.

Council of Europe

The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms that was drafted by the Council of Europe and ratified by its member states draws inspiration from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In its Article 10 on the right to freedom of expression, the Convention uses a wording similar to that provided in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers". Certain restrictions are mentioned, however – the exercise of this freedom must be done in accordance with law and be "necessary in a democratic society".

At policy level, the Council of Europe has supported the ideas and principles of youth information from the very start. The adoption of Recommendation No. R (90) 7 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 1990 was an important step in the recognition of youth information on a European level and has been a core reference document for youth information in Europe ever since. The recommendation called for co-operation between member states and support for youth information and counselling services. It also outlined the principles that these services should follow:

- ▶ the services should be versatile, using varied sources of reliable information that enable them to provide comprehensive replies to enquiries;
- ▶ young people's right to anonymity should be respected;
- ▶ the services should be accessible to all without discrimination, be of a non-commercial character and promote young people's independence.

The Council of Europe has continued to focus on youth information since adopting this recommendation. In 2010 it issued a new recommendation on youth information which takes into account the new information needs of young people – Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)8, that serves as an update of Recommendation No. R 90 (7). It recognises that young people require more guidance than in the past to help them cope with the increasing amount of information and the need to be able to assess it and evaluate its quality. The text recommends:

- ▶ to support and develop youth information and counselling structures as a means for addressing these new needs;
- ▶ to foster the development of those structures in as much as they can address the new information needs of young people;
- ▶ to develop the acquisition of those competencies needed by young people (and further elaborate them);
- ▶ to raise young people's awareness of risks and dangers, along with opportunities, regarding new means of communication;
- ▶ to make online information accessible for young people with fewer opportunities.

The Council of Europe has pioneered European youth policy and was the first institution to adopt a document outlining the importance and principles of youth information and counselling in Europe.

The specific approach of the Council of Europe towards youth information is characterised by the belief that information is a human right (as defined in the European Convention on Human Rights in general and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in particular) and that young people are a special and vulnerable target group. Furthermore, the commitment to the participation of young people in all areas that concern them – as demonstrated, for example, by the Council of Europe's system of co-management through which youth leaders make decisions alongside government representatives – strengthens those underlying values

Apart from the recommendations directly concerned with information and counselling for young people, the role of information in supporting the participation of young people and giving them access to their rights is also expressed in the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and in the recently launched Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2012-2015). The Council of Europe acknowledges that access to full, comprehensible and reliable information is a right of young people that enables them to exercise

complete freedom of choice and that it is a prerequisite for their inclusion and active participation in society as well as for responsible citizenship. It also considers tailor-made information and counselling based on young people's needs to be an important factor in ensuring access to their rights and promoting their autonomy.

As mobility has the effect of increasing peace and understanding among all people in Europe, another important aim of the Council of Europe is to support and foster mobility, particularly among young people. Information and counselling are crucial for the mobility of individuals as well as groups. This is another reason for the Council of Europe to strengthen and support information and counselling, especially for young people in Europe.

Lately the Council of Europe has also responded to the new challenges young people face in today's digital age due to an oversupply of information and the necessity to manage this, as well as the technical aspects of a knowledge-based society. This can be seen, for example, in 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.

All these different elements and approaches add up to a holistic view of the needs of young people in Europe, based on respect for their autonomy, having regard to their rights and bearing in mind society's responsibility to offer all possible means to ensure their inclusion.

Decision-making structures of the Council of Europe, youth sector

Co-management

The Council of Europe's commitment to fostering greater youth participation can be demonstrated through its system of co-management. This involves representatives from youth NGOs sitting down in committees with government officials who together then work out the priorities for the youth sector and make recommendations for future budgets and programmes. These proposals are then adopted by the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe's decision-making body.

The European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ)

The CDEJ brings together representatives of ministries and organisations responsible for youth matters from the 50 States Parties to the European Cultural Convention. It encourages closer co-operation between governments on youth issues and provides a forum for comparing national youth policies, exchanging best practices and drafting standard texts such as Recommendation No. R (97) 3 on youth participation and the future of civil society and the Convention on Transnational Long-term Voluntary Service for Young People. The CDEJ also organises the conferences of European ministers with responsibility for youth matters and drafts youth policy laws and regulations in member states.

The Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ)

The CCJ acts as the non-governmental partner, alongside the CDEJ, in the co-management bodies of the youth sector. The CCJ may:

- ▶ contribute to the mainstreaming of youth policies across the Council of Europe programme of activities by formulating opinions and proposals on general or specific questions concerning youth in the Council of Europe;
- ▶ be invited by the Committee of Ministers to formulate opinions on general or specific questions concerning youth policy;
- ▶ formulate opinions and proposals concerning the priorities, expected results and budget allocations for the youth sector.

The CCJ is composed of 30 members who are designated, under the terms of reference, for a period of two years: 13 representatives of international non-governmental youth organisations (INGYOs) and seven representatives of national youth councils are designated as members by the Committee of Ministers on the proposal of the European Youth Forum; 10 members, representing non-governmental youth organisations or networks, not members of the European Youth Forum, are designated by the Committee of Ministers on the proposal of the Secretary General.

The Joint Council on Youth (CMJ)

The CMJ brings the CDEJ and the CCJ together in a co-decision body, which establishes the youth sector's priorities, objectives and budgets.

The Programming Committee on Youth

This is a subsidiary co-decision body made up of eight members each from the CDEJ and the Advisory Council. It establishes, monitors and evaluates the programmes of the European youth centres and of the European Youth Centres.

Partnership agreement with ERYICA

In 1997, the Council of Europe and the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) signed a partnership agreement in order to develop European co-operation in the field of youth information and counselling.

The aims of the partnership are:

- ▶ to promote youth information and counselling as an important dimension of youth policy;
- ▶ to facilitate and organise training for the persons involved in youth information and counselling, in order to ensure a high standard of service;
- ▶ to meet the demands in this field of all the member states of the Council of Europe and the contracting parties to the European Cultural Convention.
- ▶ In order to achieve these aims, a joint co-ordinating committee was established with the following composition: three representatives of the CDEJ, three representatives of ERYICA and one representative of the Advisory Council on Youth.

The joint co-ordinating committee is responsible for drawing up and supervising the annual programme of the partnership.

The programme of activities of the partnership includes one or two annual meetings of the joint co-ordinating committee, at least one annual activity (colloquy, seminar, training course, etc.) bringing together different actors (practitioners and policy makers) from the youth information domain, and the realisation of studies and publications.

The main achievements of the Council of Europe/ERYICA partnership

Training

In the beginning, the partnership activities focused very much on training, which was a clear need expressed by youth information workers all over Europe. In the first five years of the partnership alone, around 200 practitioners were given the chance to participate in training-related activities. As few European countries provide formal education in the field of youth information, those activities were crucial for the professionalisation of youth information services, especially at local and national level.

The activities also included study sessions that focused on developing training modules and methods for youth information courses and led to the creation of a first training course that later spread across Europe through "train the trainers" courses. The trainers then adapted the knowledge and methods learnt to the country concerned. ERYICA's 2012 training scheme, consisting of different modules, is in many respects still based on this first course developed within the partnership agreement.

Quality

Apart from the training activities that added to the quality of the information and counselling services in all participating countries, the partnership also provided study sessions, surveys and colloquies. Such opportunities for professional exchange of knowledge and experience contributed to an increase in quality and the development of youth information in Europe. It allowed the field to gain inspiration from experts from other European countries and to decide on future strategies and new options and services based on evidence and best practice.

Support for countries that are new to youth information

One of the major aims of the partnership has always been to support states which are members of the Council of Europe or which have ratified the European Cultural Convention, particularly the countries of central and eastern Europe. Therefore study visits, technical assistance missions and publications have been included in the schedule of common activities. During the last five years, the partners decided to focus especially on supporting those countries in Europe where youth information is still in its infancy or just an idea. Participants from those countries were invited to specially organised seminars. A "Starter Kit" for decision makers and NGO interested in the field was published as a first introduction. ERYICA was invited to several Council of Europe

events and was therefore able to engage directly with member states wanting to know more about youth information. Those meetings led to a wide range of new contacts, the start of youth information provision in some countries and even to some new members joining the ERYICA network.

Visibility

Although promotion is not a direct goal of the partnership as such, during the last 15 years the activities of the partnership have contributed greatly to the visibility of youth information, especially on a political level. The two recommendations of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on youth information and counselling have placed youth information firmly on youth policy agendas. The partnership contributed to the development of Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)8 and, especially in recent years, ERYICA has been invited to participate in Council of Europe events such as the summer universities or, on several occasions, as an observer at the Council of Europe's European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) meetings. Last but not least, the partners decided in 2011 to prepare a campaign to tackle the role of youth information in giving young people access to their rights and promote the fact that information is a right in itself.

Past activities

A chronology of the main activities undertaken within the framework of the partnership agreement between the Council of Europe and ERYICA

- 1996 – (Pre-agreement) training course – “Different approaches to youth information in Europe”
 - 1997 – Training course – “Different approaches to youth information in Europe”
 - 1998 – Training course – “Different approaches to youth information in Europe”
 - 1999 – European training course – “Minimum standards, and measures to improve the quality of youth information services”
 - 2000 – European study session for youth information trainers
 - 2001 – Study session on “Different approaches to youth information in Europe”
 - 2002 – Training course for youth information trainers
 - Paper – “Guidelines on how to create a youth information centre”
 - 2003 – Study session – “Practical ways of involving young people in youth information work”
 - 2004 – Working group of trainers: preparation of training modules
 - 2005 – Seminar – Quality Matters in Information for Young People
 - 2006 – Seminar – Participation of Young People in Youth Information Work
 - 2007 – Colloquy – The Future of Youth Information in Europe
 - 2008 – Seminar – Youth Information and Youth Policy: Europe and Montenegro
 - Participation of ERYICA in the 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth, in Kyiv, Ukraine
 - 2009 – Publication of Youth Information Starter Kit
 - Seminar – Youth Policy and Youth Information
 - 2010 – Colloquy – Bridging the Gap – celebrating 20 years of the Recommendation No. R 90 (7)
 - 2011 – Conference on History of Youth Information
 - Preparatory Meeting on Campaign on Rights of Young People to Information
 - 2012 – Campaign – Information Right Now! on the right of young people to youth information.
- Important milestones that were not directly linked to the partnership activities, but had a significant influence on the field of youth information and therefore also on the activities undertaken by the Council of Europe and ERYICA together:
- 1986 – Establishment of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA)
 - 1990 – Recommendation No. R (90) 7 of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers concerning information and counselling for young people in Europe
 - 1993 – ERYICA adopts the European Youth Information Charter
 - 2004 – ERYICA adopts the revised European Youth Information Charter
 - 2009 – ERYICA adopts the Principles for Online Youth Information
 - 2010 – Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)8 on youth information of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers

Starter Kit

Both ERYICA and the Council of Europe are frequently approached by 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 ERYICA and the Council of Europe decided to create a Youth Information Starter Kit. The Starter Kit is intended for organisations, youth workers, policy makers and young people who want to set up a youth information service in countries where no such service exists or where one is just starting up.

The Youth Information Starter Kit gives a first insight into what youth information is, its underlying working principles and missions, how to start creating youth information services and it provides some practical information on what the different European structures have to offer to those who want to step into the world of youth information.

Information Right Now! campaign

The joint co-ordinating committee managing the partnership between the Council of Europe and ERYICA decided to support a campaign on young people's right to information. The campaign entitled Information Right Now! with the slogan "Young people are asking" was implemented in 2012 and was officially launched on Youth Information Day, 17 April. Through this campaign ERYICA and the Council of Europe wished to raise awareness of the special role of youth information with regard to young people's access to rights and – eventually – on the access to information as a right in itself for all young people.

The campaign objectives were:

- ▶ to help young people understand that they have a right to information;
- ▶ to help young people understand that they have a right to information and motivate them to find it in the youth information centres;
- ▶ together with young people, ask decision makers to guarantee their right to information.

On a decentralised level, the campaign consisted of numerous activities of different scope and scale in all Council of Europe member countries, organised by local youth information centres and youth workers, and tailored to the respective target audiences. A Facebook page, photo competition and dedicated website were launched and co-ordinated centrally by ERYICA. "Youth Ambassadors" who were selected during the campaign acted as European-wide spokespersons and were actively involved in the activities of the campaign by advocating for the right to information among youngsters, decision makers and media.

This compendium and the kit on how to better inform young people about their rights were created as an outcome of this campaign. The final reports of the campaign can be downloaded at www.eryica.org and www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth.

European Union

The first EU-level reference document stressing the importance of youth information was the Council Resolution of 31 March 1995 on co-operation in the field of youth information and studies concerning youth (95/C 207/02). In it the Council of the European Union underlined the importance of youth information and information on young people as factors encouraging mobility and European citizenship. It also recognised the common principles of youth information that were defined in Recommendation No. R (90) 7 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

In this resolution the Council agreed to step up co-operation in the field of training of information workers, socio-educational youth workers and educators (professionals and volunteers) working in the youth information sector and provide support to linking youth information structures in the member states.

The next major development concerning youth information was the White Paper on youth. Announced to the European Parliament at the end of 1999 and published by the European Commission in 2001, the White Paper, called "A New Impetus for European Youth", identified youth information as one of four key priorities (along with participation, volunteering and knowing more about young people).

The White Paper identified youth information as being closely linked to participation of young people in society. It set out a framework of co-operation: the open method of co-ordination was adapted to the youth

sector. The White Paper also gave the youth dimension greater priority in other policies and programmes of the European Union.

A direct follow-up to the White Paper on youth was the resolution that the Council of the European Union adopted on 27 June 2002 regarding the framework of European co-operation in the youth field (2002/C 168/02). Here it proposed four priority themes for the framework:

- ▶ encouraging young people's participation in the exercise of active citizenship and civil society;
- ▶ enhancing the information addressed to young people and existing information services for young people;
- ▶ promoting voluntary activities among young people;
- ▶ encouraging greater understanding and knowledge of youth.

This was followed by the Council's Resolution of 25 November 2003 on common objectives for participation by and information for young people (2003/C 295/04). The Council approved the common objectives and proposed to promote access to information for young people in order to increase their participation in public life and help them realise their potential as active, responsible citizens, in particular by:

- ▶ improving access for young people to information services;
- ▶ increasing the provision of quality information;
- ▶ increasing participation by young people in youth information.

The European Youth Portal, arising from a commitment in the White Paper, was launched in 2004. The portal is multilingual, it addresses young people in Europe and provides access to youth-related European and national information.

Lastly, the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018 recognised the importance of youth information and counselling services and specifically listed the development of quality standards on youth participation, information and consultation as a separate field of action aimed at ensuring full participation of youth in society. Following this, the Council of the European Union Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European co-operation in the youth field (2010-2018) (2009/C 311/01) called for "improving access to quality youth information and disseminating information through all possible channels at local, regional, national level, as well as through Europe-wide organisations such as Eurodesk, ERYICA and EYCA and other European networks".

ERYICA and its services

The European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) is an independent European organisation, composed of national youth information co-ordination bodies and networks. It works to intensify European co-operation in the field of youth information work and services. It aims to develop, support and promote quality generalist youth information policy and practice at all levels, in order to meet the information needs of young people in Europe and to apply the principles of the European Youth Information Charter.

ERYICA is an international non-governmental non-profit-making association. The agency has two decision-making organs: a general assembly and a governing board.

As the principal organ of the agency, the ERYICA General Assembly is convened each year and examines a report on the activities of the past year, as well as the financial accounts. It also discusses and adopts the work programme and budget for the next year, takes decisions on major policy issues, and (every three years) elects the governing board.

The ERYICA Governing Board is composed of eight members: a president, two vice-presidents, a treasurer and four members.

ERYICA is registered as an international non-governmental non-profit-making association in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, in accordance with the 1928 Luxembourg law on associations.

History and development

ERYICA was established on 17 April 1986 in Madrid, in accordance with a recommendation adopted by the first European Colloquium of Youth Information Centres organised in April 1985 in Marly-le-Roi (France). This colloquium, which brought together some 200 youth information and counselling professionals from 18 countries, was an initiative of the Paris Youth Information and Documentation Centre (CIDJ), with support from the French Ministry for Youth and Sport and from the Commission of the European Communities.

ERYICA's initial partners constituted 12 organisations in 8 countries and the partnership has developed well beyond this point, proving that there is a great need for co-operation. Today ERYICA consists of 25 members, 7 affiliated and 2 co-operating organisations working in 28 countries.

ERYICA is composed of national bodies (non-governmental or governmental) which seek to guarantee the right of young people to full and reliable information, which helps them make the choices they face in their lives, and which promotes their autonomy and their active participation in a democratic society.

For a detailed chronology of events in the agency's history, see the ERYICA website at <http://eryica.org/page/key-dates>.

The key events are outlined below:

1987 – ERYICA registered as a non-profit association with the Amsterdam Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

1988 – the 1st ERYICA General Assembly, and 1st Meeting of Executive Committee.

1990 – The Council of Europe adopted Recommendation No. R (90) 7 concerning information and counselling for young people in Europe – a document that had great relevance to the work of the agency.

1991 – HAYICO (Hungary) became first member of ERYICA in a country of the former eastern bloc.

1991 – ERYICA published the "Directory of Youth Information Centres in Western Europe": 471 centres in 18 countries are active.

1992 – ERYICA registered as a non-profit association in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

1993 – Secretariat of the agency in Paris registered as a non-profit association under the French law of 1901 governing associations. On 1 August 1993 ERYICA became administratively independent of CIDJ (Paris). ERYICA adopted the Youth Information Charter.

1994 – A co-operation agreement between ERYICA and EYCA (the European Youth Card Association) was signed on 28 May.

1996 – ERYICA organised national campaigns to promote access of young people to youth information and, jointly with the Council of Europe, held the 1st European training course for beginners in the field of youth information.

1997 – 45 organisations in 30 countries constitute the ERYICA partnership. A partnership agreement between ERYICA and Council of Europe was signed. ERYICA surveyed the number of youth information centres and points in Europe: 5 039 "generalist" centres and points in 22 countries were active.

1998 – the first issue of "ERYICA Newsletter" was published and the Internet version of the Infomobil service was launched, containing information on 13 European countries.

1999 – Council of Europe appointed ERYICA to be a member of new Advisory Council on Youth Questions. In July ERYICA published a study on "Generalist youth information in Europe in 1997", covering 17 countries.

2000 – 1st national training seminar (Malta) organised in framework of the partnership agreement with the Council of Europe.

2001 – ERYICA was heavily involved in the preparation of the European Commission's new European Youth Portal. In November, the European Commission published a White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth".

2002 – ERYICA survey showed that in 2002 around 12 500 youth information workers worked in 7 381 generalist centres and points in 25 countries, which had received more than 20 million visits during the year.

2004 – ERYICA, Eurodesk and EYCA invited by European Commission to contribute to the implementation of the "Common objectives for youth participation and information for young people". An updated version of the European Youth Information Charter was adopted by the 15th ERYICA General Assembly, replacing the original 1993 version.

2005 – ERYICA survey showed that in 2005 more than 13 000 youth information workers worked in 8 000 generalist centres and points in 25 countries, which had received around 23 million visits during the year. In 2005 ERYICA also announced that 40 organisations in 29 countries had so far signed the 2004 version of the European Youth Information Charter.

2006 – 46 organisations in 36 countries constituted the ERYICA partnership.

2008 – ERYICA started its first-ever project Meet the Street, which was aimed at increasing young people's contribution to decision making.

2009 – ERYICA prepared and distributed the Youth Information Starter Kit within the framework of the partnership agreement with the Council of Europe. The 20th ERYICA General Assembly adopted the Principals of Online Youth Information and ERYICA launched SHERYICA, the interactive platform for youth information workers.

2011 – ERYICA celebrated its 25th anniversary and launched JIMMY, the Youth Information Mediator, and published the “Guide to safety and quality online”.

2012 – ERYICA launched the Information Right Now! campaign.

2013 – ERYICA began the Youth on the Move – InfoMobility (YoMIM) project, the goal of which is to innovate and enhance youth work.

Services offered

ERYICA performs activities and provides services in a number of areas. Where these coincide with the aims and priorities of the Council of Europe and of the European Union, ERYICA seeks to collaborate with these intergovernmental bodies. Since 1997, the agency has maintained a partnership agreement with the Council of Europe with the aim of developing training activities for youth information workers.

ERYICA publishes a quarterly newsletter in English, as well as reports of its seminars, occasional studies, and an annual report of activities.

Promotion of youth information

Since 1985 there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of youth information by youth policy makers and youth service managers throughout Europe. Youth information is being recognised as a fundamental tool to facilitate responsible decision making by young people and their active citizenship in our society. The growing number of countries establishing national networks of youth information centres and services emphasises this development.

ERYICA is working intensively to reinforce and further promote the recognition of youth information at the European level. Through its national partners, the agency is actively promoting the concept of a national youth information strategy in order to achieve this goal.

Sharing methods and experience

ERYICA largely facilitates knowledge exchange and the sharing of experience among practitioners of youth information and counselling work throughout Europe.

These exchanges take place in the framework of activities organised by the agency, such as seminars, working groups, and general assemblies. The distribution of ERYICA publications and material on youth information practice supports the activities.

Since 2003, ERYICA has considerably developed the range of materials and resources available, based on the experience of its national partners and the methods used by them, which its members can access through the agency's website.

Professional principles, minimum standards and quality measures

In 1993, the ERYICA General Assembly adopted the European Youth Information Charter, which has since become a reference document throughout Europe as a set of professional principles and guidelines for generalist youth information work. The charter was updated in 2004.

The European Youth Information Charter has been recently extended by an additional supporting document, the Principles for Online Youth Information. ERYICA has acknowledged online youth information as an integral part of youth information work and this document aims at establishing quality standards in this field.

ERYICA's partners in a number of countries have developed minimum standards and quality measures for youth information centres and services, with a view to maintaining and improving the quality of the services that they provide to young people. It is expected that ERYICA will pay increasing attention to this area of its work in the coming years.

Training of youth information workers

ERYICA regards the training of the staff who work in youth information centres and services as an essential element in the continual efforts of its national partners to develop and maintain standards in youth information work. In this area, the agency pays particular attention to the needs of countries that are seeking to initiate youth information and counselling centres or services.

Since 1996, a range of different training activities have been conducted in the framework of the partnership agreement between ERYICA and the Council of Europe.

Study visits

Annually, ERYICA organises a number of study visits to monitor existing competences, realities, resources and challenges in youth information around Europe. Study visits are usually attended by several representatives of ERYICA, who share their experience and provide valuable input for youth information and counselling structures by suggesting methodologies, providing examples from their respective countries and sharing good practice that helps organisations hosting the study visit to improve their services.

Training

ERYICA is a leading player in developing, supporting and promoting quality generalist youth information policy and practice at all levels.

As such, it aims:

- ▶ to improve and maintain a high quality of youth information across its network; and
- ▶ to help its members attain and maintain a high level of professionalism.

ERYICA's training system serves both of these aims and it was developed with the needs of this diverse network in mind.

The system is continuously broadening, and existing modules are constantly revised by keeping an eye on new trends in the youth information field and the different situations in member countries.

Design and development

Training courses are designed and revised by ERYICA's Training Task Force (TTF), a gathering some of the most recognised trainers and training experts in Europe in the field of youth information work.

The mandate of the TTF is granted by the general assembly and the team is led by a representative of the governing board. When the TTF has finalised a training course, an international "train the trainers" course is carried out with representatives from a wide range of ERYICA member networks, who multiply this knowledge in their national youth information networks via training courses carried out by themselves.

YIntro

YIntro is the ERYICA training course for beginners in the field of youth information. It covers the basic areas of knowledge and skills needed for youth information work and is meant to be an introduction to the field. It is built on four areas that can be delivered in five full training days or equivalent time sessions.

The course is based on the expertise of ERYICA training experts with national and international training in youth information and the experiences gained over the last eight years with European "train the trainers" courses and national courses on the minimum basic training course (MBTC) module.

A YIntro course can be organised either by ERYICA or on a decentralised level.

Aims of YIntro:

- ▶ to introduce the relevant areas, competences and skills of youth information provision;
- ▶ to offer a basic course to newcomers to the field;
- ▶ to enhance a common quality framework within the ERYICA network;
- ▶ to provide a coherent route to competence as a first step into youth information work, which will be followed by advanced modules covering certain areas of the work in more depth.

There are additional modules to the YIntro course covering specific themes and topics that are of relevance to the youth information field and in cases where a training need is communicated by ERYICA members.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the YIntro course, the participant should demonstrate:

- ▶ an awareness of the basic key principles and background of youth information work;

- ▶ an understanding of the basic methods used to deliver youth information in practice;
- ▶ an awareness of the skills, values, responsibilities and individual role of the youth information worker;
- ▶ a clear action plan for future implementation based on the reflective self-evaluation exercises undertaken.

The YIntro training manual is available in English, Finnish and Spanish.

For more information, see the ERYICA website: <http://eryica.org/page/yintro-%E2%80%93stepping-youth-information>.

Advanced YIntro

Advanced YIntro is the ERYICA training course for experienced youth information workers who aim to further develop their related skills and competences as well as to broaden their expertise.

The course is built around four areas that can be delivered in four full training days or equivalent time sessions, preferably in two modules.

Aims of the Advanced YIntro course:

- ▶ to further develop the professional skills of youth information workers;
- ▶ to introduce diverse and participatory youth information delivery methods;
- ▶ to introduce the managerial aspect and strategic planning behind youth information services;
- ▶ to provide continuous professional development for experienced youth information workers;
- ▶ to enhance a common quality framework within the ERYICA Network.

Content of the course

Area 1: advanced professional skills and knowledge.

Area 2: delivery models.

Area 3: management of youth information development.

Area 4: continuous professional development.

Each area is divided into sessions covering one specific topic. The complete course consists of:

- ▶ a pre-task;
- ▶ an introductory session;
- ▶ 13 sessions;
- ▶ three self-assessments;
- ▶ a mid-term task; and
- ▶ an assessment talk.

The course material includes a reflective workbook for participants that contains certain tasks and reflection sheets, as well as a general description of the course.

Digital YIntro

The training course on “Digital youth information” is an additional module to the ERYICA beginners course YIntro. It is therefore designed for youth information workers who have already successfully completed a YIntro course or have gained experience in basic youth information knowledge through practical work and/or other national training.

The course is built around five areas and can be delivered in 18 working hours or equivalent time sessions.

Aims of the Digital YIntro course

- ▶ to introduce relevant areas, competences and skills within digital youth information;
- ▶ to offer a basic course on specific skills and tasks when working with young people in digital environments;
- ▶ to enhance a common quality framework within the ERYICA network;
- ▶ to promote the ERYICA Webbies Workshop and the “Guide to safety and quality online” and motivate youth information workers to actively use it.

Content of the course

Area 1: key terms for online information literacy.

Area 2: quality issues for online youth information.

Area 3: producing quality online youth information.

Area 4: perception of online risks and opportunities.

Area 5: digital citizenship.

The Digital YIntro training manual is available in English and French.

JIMMY

The JIMMY training course is targeted at youth workers who, within the context of their daily job, are partially but not exclusively providing information to young people.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

- ▶ understand what youth information is;
- ▶ see the importance of youth information for the development and empowerment of young people;
- ▶ understand the link between youth information and youth work;
- ▶ understand how to use practical youth information skills and qualities in their role as a youth worker;
- ▶ be aware of resources and networks that can support their work;
- ▶ establish a partnership with their closest youth information centre, leading to potential links with regional, national and international networks;
- ▶ gain basic knowledge on the key issues and current information needs of young people.

Content of the course

Area 1: what is youth information work?

Area 2: target group.

Area 3: skills.

Area 4: basics of quality information and next steps.

The JIMMY training manual is available in English, French, Italian and Spanish.

Webbie workshop

The purpose of the workshop is to provide an opportunity for young people to learn more on how to safely use the Internet, how to be active producers of content online in times of Web 2.0 and how to increase their awareness of the various levels of quality in the information that exists online.

During the workshop young people, with the guidance of trainers, discuss their online habits, the good and bad experiences they have had with online information, and they also shoot their own movie on “dos and don’ts” in the online world, among many other activities.

Webbie Workshops can be led by any youth information worker and youth worker. A description of the activities can be found in the “Guide to safety and quality online”, available in English, French and Finnish. For more information on Webbie Workshops, see <http://eryica.org/page/webbie-workshop>.

Youth on the Move – InfoMobility (YoMIM)

Youth on the Move – InfoMobility (YoMIM) is one of ERYICA’s new projects. The overarching goal of the project is to innovate and enhance youth work while fostering synergies between the main actors in the field of youth information and counselling, paying special regard to cross-border European mobility.

By especially addressing mobile young people, this project concerns the preparation, provision and evaluation of information on opportunities and practical aspects linked to young people’s stay abroad. Moreover, by pursuing innovation, this project aims at offering new methodological and technological solutions to the actual challenges of youth information and counselling work.

The project is supported by the Youth in Action programme of the European Commission.

SHERYICA

SHERYICA is the online platform for European youth information workers. It aims at enhancing collaboration between youth information professionals from a variety of backgrounds and to facilitate networking in the youth information field on a European scale.

By using SHERYICA, youth information workers exchange ideas on upcoming projects in the youth information field, they share their individual competences, discuss experiences and exchange good practice. On top of that, SHERYICA is a channel for the promotion of international projects making use of this unique European network of youth information professionals.

SHERYICA includes the following sections:

Stories

Keep up with what is going on in youth information around Europe!

In this section youth information workers can post stories resulting from their daily work with young people. It is an excellent space for project promotion, for calls for training or invitations to meetings.

People

Want to know more about other people using SHERYICA?

The profiles of all youth information workers that are already part of the network are collected in this section. At a glance you can view each of the professionals' competences and skills.

Information centres

Need to contact a specific professional?

This section contains contact information for the youth information centres represented in SHERYICA.

SHERYICA was created on an initiative of ERYICA, with the support of Youth Agora, a Brussels-based networking and communications organisation. The platform has been developed within the project A Better Youth Information for New Times with funding from the Youth in Action programme of the European Commission.

For more information on SHERYICA, see www.sheryica.org.

Good practice – biennial publication

“Good practice in youth information” booklets were published in 2010 and 2013.

The 2010 publication was created as part of the project A Better Youth Information for New Times and described good practice in youth information among the ERYICA members and partners in three fields: youth participation, peer-to-peer and reaching out – all concerning the field of youth information. The project descriptions were chosen based on their quality, innovative practices and demonstrable success. They thus represented the actual trends and developments in youth information practice across Europe.

This publication advertised youth information practices that were of a particularly innovative nature and which could serve as an inspiration for possible future projects or collaborations. Through this publication, ERYICA encouraged bilateral contacts for the development of co-operation between European youth information centres.

The 2013 publication was prepared with much the same aims in mind – it showcased recent projects across a variety of European countries. This time, however, the good practices were mostly based on stories that were published on SHERYICA, the online platform for youth information that enables workers at grassroots level to share and be inspired.

European level: other reference documents, actors

European Youth Information Charter

The European Youth Information Charter was adopted by the ERYICA General Assembly in 1993, followed by the adoption of its revised version in 2004 as a reaction to the changing environment of young people. The principles of the charter are aimed at all forms of generalist youth information work and “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.”

Indicators for a national youth information policy

These indicators, adopted by ERYICA as a policy statement in 2005, are part of the agency’s work that aims to assist governments to develop quality youth information services. ERYICA member organisations have formulated 12 indicators for a national youth information policy that 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. They are a tool with which to advance the idea of a national policy on youth information or to further develop the elements of such a policy.

Principles for Online Youth Information

In 2009 ERYICA adopted a set of 16 principles that aim to ensure the quality of online youth information services and guarantee their added value and trustworthiness. By doing so the agency stressed the importance of the Internet as a powerful source of information and communication and recognised online youth information to be an integral part of youth information work. Hence, all the principles formulated in the European Youth Information Charter also apply to online youth information, but the 16 principles outlined in this document provide additional criteria for the development and provision of online youth information.

European youth information networks

ERYICA

The European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) is an international non-profit association. It is an umbrella organisation for generalist youth information and counselling providers. As of February of 2013, the ERYICA network consists of 25 members, 7 affiliated and 2 co-operating organisations working in 28 countries. All of them are bodies (governmental or non-governmental) responsible for generalist youth information services and most of them operate national networks of regional and local centres.

According to the results of a survey conducted in February 2009, ERYICA:

- ▶ offers services in more than 7 500 local and regional youth information centres;
- ▶ where 13 000 workers provide young people with generalist information following the principles of the European Youth Information Charter.

ERYICA works to intensify European co-operation in the field of youth information work and services. It aims to develop, support and promote quality generalist youth information policy and practice at all levels, in order to meet the information needs of young people in Europe and to apply the principles of the European Youth Information Charter.

As stated in the agency’s constitution, ERYICA has three aims:

1. to promote respect for the principles of the European Youth Information Charter, and to work for their implementation;
2. to ensure European co-ordination and representation in the field of youth information and counselling;
3. to promote the establishment of a European arena in this field, especially by developing a European network of youth information and counselling structures.

In order to achieve these aims, the agency seeks, in the field of youth information and counselling:

- ▶ to bring together at the European level co-ordinating bodies in this field;
- ▶ to monitor at the European level the current situation of this sector and its evolution;
- ▶ to facilitate European co-operation among bodies working in this field, especially through professional exchanges;
- ▶ to promote research and innovation in this field and the development of services which meet the needs of young people;
- ▶ to co-operate with European institutions (such as the Council of Europe, the European Union, etc.) in this field;
- ▶ to undertake other initiatives in the sense of the agency’s aims which are deemed useful by its members or its competent organs.

In 2004 ERYICA, Eurodesk and EYCA signed a declaration for co-operation, which was followed by several jointly organised events concerning the development of youth information and counselling and quality initiatives in this field.

Eurodesk

The Eurodesk network provides information on European policies and opportunities for young people. It offers:

- ▶ a free enquiry service and advice on European questions;
- ▶ fast access to European information online by using the Eurodesk database that contains information on different funding programmes and opportunities available in Europe in terms of youth, training and education;
- ▶ training and professional support to information multipliers.

The Eurodesk network unites national co-ordinators and over 900 local and regional partners in more than 30 European countries. Members of the network are located in generalist youth information structures, in national agencies of the EU Youth Programme, or other national NGOs in the youth field.

The network is also responsible for ongoing provision of information and news to the European Youth Portal and answers enquiries from users of the portal.

Its target group is young people and those who work with them. Contact is made by visiting network partners or contacting them by phone, e-mail, online and during events and conferences.

EYCA

The European Youth Card Association (EYCA) is a non-profit organisation that represents 41 youth card organisations in 38 countries, resulting in the issuance of the European Youth Card to more than 5 million young people.

EYCA has one member organisation in every country/territory where it is represented; this member develops the youth card and provides young people with benefits in the fields of culture, mobility, accommodation, services and products. EYCA member organisations are mostly NGOs and private foundations, as well as state and public institutions and private companies.

With its activities and projects, EYCA raises awareness about European issues and active citizenship.

- ▶ EYCA promotes youth mobility by offering young people discounts and benefits on transport, accommodation and other travel services.
- ▶ EYCA provides youth information through the many communication channels available to its member organisations – national and regional websites, print magazines, e-newsletters, discount guides, groups on social networks and others.
- ▶ EYCA encourages youth participation by organising and promoting projects, exchange programmes, campaigns, competitions and other youth-targeted events.

Since 1991, EYCA has implemented the Partial Agreement on Youth Mobility through the Youth Card within the framework of the Council of Europe. Now EYCA co-operates with all member states of the partial agreement, which contribute to a two-yearly programme budget. This programme includes training, exchanges among member organisations, new technology developments and information for cardholders.

Section II

The impact of youth information

Part two of the compendium deals with the impact that an established youth information and counselling structure has on the young people themselves and other parties that are involved in the whole system of youth information and counselling services. Here we also provide a brief overview of the current state of youth information and counselling services in Europe – it is evident that these services are now provided in a majority of European countries, which have made full use of their benefits and continue to support them as a powerful and efficient tool to guide young people.

YOUTH INFORMATION FACTS – PRESENTING THE CURRENT STATE OF YOUTH INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING IN EUROPE

In its essence, youth information and counselling (YIC) is a truly European concept. It originated on the continent and ever since 1961 when the first youth information centre – the Young People's Consultation Centre – was opened in London, YIC has undergone major developments, with each country building its own unique structure of YIC to meet its young citizens' need for information.

YIC activity contributes to the implementation of a country's youth policy. It directly impacts on education, employment, equal opportunity, health and active citizenship as well as providing young people with much needed support in the transition to adult life. So just how extensive are YIC services in Europe nowadays?

According to the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), which is a non-profit association that unites European providers of YIC services, in 2009 YIC services were offered in more than 7 500 local and regional youth information centres where over 13 000 workers provided young people with generalist information. According to data from the year 2005, youth information centres across ERYICA member countries received a total of around 23 million visitors.

The 2012 EU Youth Report states that in January 2011, around 95.2 million people aged between 15 and 29 lived in 27 EU member states. Although we cannot directly compare these figures due to data being collected in different years and the fact that they represents slightly different countries, it is clearly visible that YIC services are used by a large proportion of European youngsters.

Currently ERYICA has members in 28 countries – these are either organisations that provide information to young people, co-ordinate and support the local and regional bodies that inform young people or are involved in youth information work and are taking steps to help YIC evolve in their countries. It is therefore safe to say that YIC services, in one form or another, currently exist in all 28 countries that ERYICA members represent.

With 60 years of history behind them, are YIC services a thing of the past? Not quite, although methods of their delivery are undergoing significant changes. The Council of Europe urges its member governments to develop YIC structures. It stresses that the process of young people's social integration, which YIC services facilitate, is now more important than ever due to the fact that it takes more time and is more complicated.

Even though the number of young people in Europe is decreasing, they are more educated and independent, especially where obtaining information is concerned. This is aided greatly by new technologies – nowadays a well-informed young person has a lot more choices and, as a consequence, a lot more problems. This means that YIC services have not just retained their importance but have also increased their scope and provide information that is not just meant for reactive decisions, but rather helps young people plan their lives proactively.

Youth Information

Impact and Benefits



Provides young people with information covering all their areas of interest and increases opportunities for and access to policy tools.



Good indicator for adjustment of youth policy that is implemented in the country.



YIC helps integrate the socially excluded, including drop-outs and unemployed.



YIC helps those in transition.



YIC complements all other fields of youth policy.



A network facilitated by YIC services ensures optimisation of services and costs and establishes crucial co-operative relationships between similar actors in the field.



YIC is able to attract diverse groups of youngsters and this may therefore actually increase the number of visitors to specialised information providers.



YIC encourages the involvement and co-operation of young people in the provision of information. As a partner, they are flexible and able to react quickly.



Information on digital literacy is uniquely provided by generalist youth information services.



A state might expect young people to be more aware and active – youngsters who assess information critically and take responsibility for their decisions.



High standards of quality, regular training of staff and feedback from users help to ensure quality information.



The necessary tools and methodologies already exist and this saves the government money.



YIC facilitates intergenerational dialogue.



YIC provides information and guidance on employment opportunities and contributes to the implementation of the "Youth Guarantee".



"When I read information in the Internet, it is difficult for me to judge how correct it is"

Prefer getting information face-to-face



of respondents are rather or definitely satisfied with the help they received from the youth information centre.



Surveys show that a stronger impact can be expected from youth information and counselling services in rural areas.

Unemployed are mostly in need of more information about education and training, leisure and free time



YIC - youth information and counselling

Impact of youth information services and benefits for the state

YIC is a two-way channel for reaching out to young people and providing them with information about different opportunities, promoting various means provided by the state or just helping them to orientate and better understand how society functions. This also works in the opposite direction: annually YIC services are reaching

thousands of young people and researching their needs, changing trends and lifestyles as well as emerging problems, which can be a good indicator of the need to adjust the youth policy that is implemented in a country.

YIC services and professional youth information workers use a variety of techniques to reach young people and the fact that services are available to all youngsters helps them to reach young people who are vulnerable, those outside any kind of system, such as education or the labour market, for example. The active approach of professional YIC workers helps dropouts, the unemployed, or those at social risk and in difficult social, financial, legal or health situations to reintegrate into society.

Most young people face major challenges at various times of transition in their lives and in most cases these are the times when young people find themselves in a “grey zone” (neither in school, nor in employment, etc.) and are thus at the highest risk of dropping out from the very societal structures that help the state to organise its citizens. YIC services can serve as a key factor in ensuring that those facing problems in such times of transition receive the help they need.

Youth policy in many European countries works through three main pillars: youth organisations, those working with youth – open youth work, and youth information services. While the first involves the most active young people and the second involves mainly the very vulnerable and socially sensitive, YIC may involve all of them, but focuses on those in the middle group. This group of young people is the largest, however, and in many cases such youngsters are left alone, so they are at risk of dropping out or, of course, becoming youth leaders and members of youth organisations. Thus YIC services complement the field of youth policy.

Young people may find it difficult to understand the actual role played by the wide variety of specialised information services for citizens and public institutions in general. YIC services, in co-operation with different actors and stakeholders working with young people, create a network facilitated by the YIC services. This ensures optimisation of services and costs (i.e. production of information material or organisation of high visibility events, etc.) and establishes crucial co-operation between similar actors in the field.

Whatever types of different information services for young people already exist in a country, generalist youth information and counselling services that use a holistic approach are not an alternative for existing ones, but rather are complementary to them. YIC more easily attracts diverse youngsters because of its “low threshold”, its unbiased and professional approach, and together with a young person it explores his or her actual needs and refers him or her to the right specialised partner organisation should this be necessary. YIC may therefore even increase visitors’ numbers to specialised information providers.

Since generalist YIC covers the main topics that are important for youngsters, it is a very flexible public service which is able to adjust very quickly to the changing needs of young people, society in general and the state. This enables YIC services to find new areas of focus, which are very relevant for most young people, but which are still not covered by any of the specialised information providers. Development of new information services takes place with the close co-operation and involvement of young people themselves through co-design and peer-to-peer networks. Thus it is very important for the state to have a partner who is flexible and able to react quickly, and who can take care of the changing information needs of youngsters from diverse groups.

Information and digital literacy are topics that only generalist YIC services provide. Training young people how to build their capacity for selection, management and usage of relevant and accurate information in this era of information overflow is crucial. While globalisation offers so many opportunities and changing environments, which might be challenging for some, YIC shows, in an unbiased way, different aspects of the possibilities open to young people and encourages them to be active. Moreover, YIC fosters autonomous decision making. A state might therefore expect the result to be young people who are more aware and active, who are able to assess information critically and take responsibility for their decisions.

YIC services may contribute to the implementation of a “youth guarantee”, in which young people are given a good quality, concrete offer of further education or any kind of occupation within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. YIC can thus help solve youth unemployment.

YIC services operate on the basis of the common European Youth Information Charter, which clearly states that information services shall be independent of any commercial, political, religious or any other influence, which would change the content of the information or counselling requested by young people. High quality standards, regular training of staff and feedback from users help to ensure quality information and to monitor the performance of YIC services. International co-operation helps YIC providers to maintain a high quality of services and to share good practice. Moreover, there are international training courses for youth information workers to help them become professional YIC service providers. As the tools and methodologies already exist, governments wishing to establish YIC services or maintain their structure will be spared the expense of investment in this area.

Since the concept of YIC emerged after a period of European social uprising some 60 years ago, it is clear that YIC services are an important player in helping anxious young people communicate with their government and society. The services ensure constructive intergenerational dialogue and first aid for young people facing difficult situations. Preserving this social cohesion is of interest to every country.

Youth information determinants

eryica

The need for specific provisions for youngsters in immediate need of help: a walk-in service where any young person can come in and talk so that the time when intervention may be beneficial is not missed. *Young People's Consultation Centre in London, 1961.*

Information for young people on the move: an integral part of most young people's lives is moving within the country or travel. Youth information and counselling helps them find their way. *Youth Department of the City of Helsinki, 1953; USE-IT in Copenhagen, 1971.*

The need for a comprehensive information service for young people entering a complex society: dealing with immediate problems and an ability to provide young people with information on all possible subjects affecting their lives. *Centre d'Information et de Documentation Jeunesse in Paris, 1969.*

Seeking new approaches to emerging social problems: as lifestyles and social orders change, new problems that need to be addressed appear. *"Release" in London, 1967.*

Supporting young people in coping with information overload: teaching young people how to manage information – from obtaining to evaluating it – and building "information competence".

Criticising existing assistance for youth and seeking an innovative approach: a need for less bureaucracy and services of a less official, more friendly nature. *Info Jeugd in Ghent, 1966 and the Jongerenadviescentrum in Amsterdam, 1969.*

THE RATIONALE FOR YOUTH INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING SERVICES

Professor Dr W. Faché

This chapter focuses on the rationale behind the origin of youth information and counselling services. These innovative services originated roughly from the mid-1960s in the USA, Canada and western Europe. From an analysis of the literature on the inception of these services and the interviews we had with many of the founders, as well as on the basis of our own international research, we can discern the different reasons that played a role in the period of inception of these innovative forms of youth work (Faché, 1987).

We will also analyse the arguments that initiators nowadays put forward to support the creation of a youth information and counselling centre. What is the current rationale behind a proposal for an information and counselling centre?

Not all initiators formulate a clear rationale for their project. Some past services drew their inspiration from existing innovative “models”, when they came into being. (Lacoumes, 1973).

The need for a specific provision for young people in immediate need of help

This was the rationale for the Young People’s Consultation Centre in London in 1961. It was described as probably the first “walk-in” centre for young people in Europe, “that offers [adolescents] the opportunity to talk to a professional person about problems that worry them” (Halpin, 1967).

According to Laufer (1964), the founder of this centre:

We chose a name which would be neutral and all-encompassing, and avoided any words which would give the impression of a clinic, or of illness. In order to assure a service which would be able to deal with those immediate problems for which adolescents sought help, and also be able to detect signs of more serious pathology, the intervening staff of the Centre consists of professional people who have all been trained in psychoanalysis and who have had previous experience in work with adolescents. There is also a psychiatric social worker, a medical adviser, a psychologist, and a legal adviser... The idea of having a “walk-in” service, with professionally qualified staff, was based on the premise that there are many adolescents in the community who are in immediate need of help, but who would not seek help from many of the existing agencies. Adolescents are very frightened by the thought of mental illness, and agencies which are somehow linked to “illness” or “trouble” will not often make contact with those adolescents who may be in serious need of help. Our belief was that if we created the opportunity for adolescents simply to come in and talk with somebody, we would be able to meet many adolescents at a time when intervention of some kind could well prevent serious social or psychological trouble later on in their lives.

The “walk-in” concept or “open door” concept of the Young People’s Consultation Centre in London appeared to offer facilities which met the needs of young people (WHO, 1978).

The open door concept of the Young People’s Consultation Centre in London was the inspiration for Info Jeugd, the youth information and counselling centre in Ghent (Faché, 1966) and the advice centre for young people (Jongeren Advies Centrum) in Amsterdam (Mc Gillavry, 1969).

The need for specific provision for young people in a problem situation is nowadays still the reason on which youth counselling services are based.

Criticising the established assistance for youth and changing the approach to youth information and counselling

The creation of Info Jeugd in Ghent (1966) and the Jongeren Advies Centrum in Amsterdam (1969) was also based on a fundamental criticism of the established youth assistance services. This criticism was formulated in a creative way by developing an alternative. The notion of “alternative” was recalibrated by these social innovations and the noun “alternative” became used as an adjective meaning “based on entirely new principles, aimed at a set of other than the prevailing methods”. The criticism concerned, among other things, the bureaucratic method (waiting lists, by appointment only), the official character (asking the person’s name, address, age, employment, etc.), and the psychiatric-medical model of assistance services. The innovative assistance services developed not as complementary but rather as a competitive or an alternative form of assistance to the existing assistance services available (Faché, 1973, 1990).

Most of the revolutionary innovations from the early years have been incorporated into the established system. As a consequence, the innovative approaches of the 1960’s are no longer alternative services.

New social problems require innovative approaches

New somatic and psychological problems appeared among youngsters in the 1960s in the USA, Canada and western Europe. These problems seemed to be related to the new lifestyle of a considerable proportion of middle-class youth.

These young people saw themselves as participants in a cultural revolution rejecting a sterile, excessively consuming, overly technological and alienating social order (Holleb and Abrams, 1975). "Prominent among the standard-bearers of this revolution were the masses of freaked-out kids who began to invade the cities in the summer of 1967. These 'hippies and freaks' gathered in that summer in Boston and San Francisco like a convention of gypsies to smoke dope, drop acid, make love and listen to music". These young people were, according to a US research report (Glosscote et al., 1975), often unwelcome at traditional assistance facilities, and clearly made to feel so.

As Holleb and Abrams (1975) observed, "The movement for alternatives in mental health and counselling arose as a part of and as a response to this time of changes. The founders of these first alternative services were in a unique position to bridge the gap between the two cultures. They were dropouts who had not completely dropped out".

Thus, alternative services sprang up. The free clinic movement was born in Haight-Ashbury (San Francisco) in 1967. In the same period, walk-in counselling centres, hotlines, runaway houses, etc. were opened (Corner et al., 1972). According to the Interim report of the Canadian Government's commission of inquiry into the non-medical use of drugs (1971), innovative services started in Canada too. These services can be described as:

A human response to the social problems directly associated with the various life styles embraced by large numbers of Canadian youth. Some characteristics of this style are: a desire to travel, a disinterest in material things in and for themselves, less than usual concern with conventional standards of health and sanitation, and sexual and drug experimentation (ibid. p.417).

In the same period, Release was established in London (1967): "Release aimed at helping those young people who had been arrested for alleged drug offences" (Coon and Harris, 1969). This was a time when a number of drugs, especially cannabis, were gaining popularity with a particular segment of young people, thus giving rise to new social problems. Problems which, as far as the police and courts were concerned, were about the question of how to treat this new type of offender, but which, from the offender's point of view, were about securing their legal rights. In a direct response to this situation, Caroline Coon and Rufus Harris founded Release (D'Agapeyeff, 1972). Release grew into a "life-support system" for at least a certain percentage of the typically young clientele coming to it. Linked with this was the persuasion of Glosscote (1975, p.3) "that we would find that getting into trouble with drugs is almost always a symptom of serious other kinds of problems in living – sometimes intolerable environmental circumstances, sometimes because one's 'head is not together', sometimes both."

In all these countries services came into being in an attempt to provide, through innovative means, social, material and psychological assistance for young people with problems, who had not been seen before and/or who had not been dealt with properly by existing services. Part of the rationale to argue for youth information and counselling services nowadays lies more in the prevention of problems, the provision of information related to contraception and the prevention of HIV/AIDS, for example (initiative of Infoyouth: www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/media-development/media-literacy/youth-and-information-technology/, accessed 29 September 2013).

Uncovering the societal causes of youth problems

In 1969, in The Hague, the Sosjale Joenit originated from the so-called "Experimentele Maatschappij", a flower-power youth group with radical-anarchist traits (Mulder-de Bruin, 1978). At about the same time, the Bond voor Vrijheidsrechten in Amsterdam stimulated the establishment of a local Release (1970), more or less after the London model. The Bond was an organisation of academics who were worried about the increasing intolerance of the "Right" (de Kler and van der Zande, 1978).

Both organisations were of the opinion that assistance must first of all lead to an insight into the situations hampering freedom in society which, in turn, must result in action to change the societal structures causing the problems and to prevent the causes of the individual problems (Arendshorst, 1972; Moerkerk, 1973).

Nowadays this reason for starting up an information and counselling service is no longer relevant. Counsellors should in the first place concentrate on helping the client. But workers in YCCs also feel that, in the long run, counselling only makes sense for the client and the counsellor if at the same time efforts are made to weaken or eliminate societal shortcomings, which are impairing the development of young people. If not, it is feared that counselling may operate as an alibi for the continuation of these societal problems. Contrary to the viewpoint that the above-mentioned organisations draw attention to societal problems as a result of a request for help, counselling is regarded as an activity that runs parallel to individual assistance and is undertaken by the counsellor or colleagues without the clients' involvement. This feedback function is seen as an additional function running parallel to the assistance process.

Where the clients are made aware of the societal basis of their problems, this is not done in order to motivate them to social action, but in order to help the clients in their process of internalising new rights and opportunities (emancipatory help). Indeed it is known from experience (cf. women's emancipation) that people who have adapted to deprivation or discrimination oppose changes even if they will benefit in the long run.

Need for a comprehensive information service for young people entering a complex society

In the late 1960s in several countries youth professionals argued in favour of comprehensive youth information centres in order to meet the need for information of the young newcomers in a complex society.

The rationale behind the foundation of Info Jeugd in Ghent (Belgium) in 1966 was the need for a service that would be able to deal with those immediate problems for which adolescents sought help, and also be able to help young people in need of information on all possible subjects affecting their lives.

Faché states:

We live in a complex society, that offers so many possibilities and choices. In this society young people need information and assistance to understand what is available and how they can use the services which exist. Without such assistance, many will not have the opportunity to live effective lives and contribute to their community. In order to try out new roles and experiences, young people have a tendency to distance themselves from adults, like their parents. While this distancing is important to the exercise and acceptance of independence, it often removes young people from advice and support which would assist them at this important stage of their development to independency. This beginning autonomy must be supported by offering information and counselling in a setting which young people accept or in a language and format which take into account the problems of transition to adult life. We live in an information era. While a lot of information is available, it is usually written or presented in a way in which it is difficult to understand, and is not always relevant to the new members, the newcomers of the society. Moreover, the available information is very fragmented among numerous organisations and services. As a result of this void, there was a demand for "comprehensive" information centres for young people (1965).

Another organisation from the initial period of youth information centres was Télé-Jeunes, that came into existence in Brussels. It started in 1965 by giving information on leisure and education by telephone to young people in particular (for two hours on Saturdays) and in 1966 broadened its activity by giving young people comprehensive information and advice on all possible areas affecting their lives. In 1966 the centre changed its name to Infor Jeunes.

In Munich (Germany) the city youth service established in 1967 a similar comprehensive information centre for young people (Jugendinformationszentrum (JIZ); Baumann, 1988).

In Paris (France) the CIDJ was established in 1969 with the aim of giving comprehensive youth information and advice. It became the first of a large network of centres throughout France. Nowadays this network is one of the largest in Europe: 255 information centres and 1 248 information points.² This initiative of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 1969 followed the results of a national survey about young people in 1967 that found

2. "Tout jeune peut accéder librement à une structure Information Jeunesse quelle que soit sa situation. Il pourra s'y informer, obtenir des conseils pratiques et ceci sur tous les sujets qui constituent sa préoccupation du moment. A sa demande, il bénéficiera d'un accompagnement personnalisé conduit par des professionnels sur des thèmes qu'il souhaite approfondir (départ à l'étranger, Service Civique, montage de projets ...). Le champ des informations traitées par les structures d'accueil, en constante évolution, s'adapte à la demande des jeunes : filières professionnelles, filières de formation, logement, santé, jobs d'été ... " Le service information jeunesse. Un service de proximité pour les jeunes. UNIJ (www.cidj.com, accessed on 29 September 2013).

that there was a need for a comprehensive information centre where young people could find information on all possible subjects affecting their lives.

The “Guidelines on how to create a youth information centre” of the Council of Europe and ERYICA (2002) also refer to the need for a comprehensive information service for young people entering a complex society. According to these guidelines:

a young person is faced with many new situations and decisions, which may be linked to school life, courses and study options, family and other relationships, leisure activities or the discovery of new environments and cultures. Above all, during this period, young people are trying to find their own way in life, to establish their own identities, to stand on their own feet, and to construct a new way of relating to their parents and the world of adults. Many young people come through this period without major difficulty, with the help of their family and friends, and with minimum usage of official/non-official networks of information and assistance. Many others, in the context of rapidly changing social legislation, are confronted with choices that are outside the experience of their immediate circles, and/or feel the need to turn to a service that offers a wider range of choices than might otherwise be available, with an approach that allows the young person to make her/his own decisions and to exercise a growing autonomy. The earliest examples of the “generalist” youth information centre (YIC) were created in the late 1960s to meet the needs of this public, as a single service where many questions could be answered in order to avoid, as had often happened, that a young person was passed from one service to another without finding what s/he wanted. When a “generalist” centre or service is not able to answer the enquiry adequately itself, it can use its network of contacts to refer the user to someone specific in a relevant service. “Generalist” youth information centres are a specific form of intervention that, in accordance with a number of professional principles, considers informing young people as a means to an end, putting the emphasis on increasing their options, their participation, their responsibility and their autonomy.

Information is a precondition for participation, stated the above-mentioned “Guidelines on how to create a youth information centre”:

In recent years, in seeking to develop coherent and comprehensive youth policies, many European countries have attached much importance to increasing the involvement of young people and their organisations in the formulation of youth policy and in the organisation and management of programmes and services aimed at young people.

In this area also, it is widely acknowledged that there can be no effective participation without young people being informed about the opportunities that are available to them, at the local, regional, national, European and world level. As a young person, one cannot use a service or participate in an activity, if one does not know that it exists. In short, a young person cannot exercise her / his rights and responsibilities as a citizen or consumer, as a parent or driver, as a worker or unemployed person, if s/he is not adequately informed.

The above-mentioned rationale for comprehensiveness of information centres related to the complexity of society is at the present time still an important rationale for youth information and counselling services. Added to this complexity aspect of society there is nowadays another aspect of importance: the information overload.

Supporting young people in coping with information overload

Today’s young generation lives in a world of information overload. In such a world, it has become crucial to teach young people how to manage information: how to find the relevant information and how to assess or evaluate information. According to the umbrella organisation of youth information centres in Austria, Österreichischen Jugendinfos, the critical and reflective use of information requires different skills and is more important than ever. Youth information services must help young people to develop this “information competence”.³

3. “Zu den Zielen der Jugendinformation zählen:

Orientierung – in einer Zeit des Informationsüberflusses ist Unterstützung bei der Auswahl der auf die jeweilige Lebenssituation passenden Angebote und Alternativen zu einer zentralen Aufgabe der Jugendinformation geworden.

Autonomie – durch relevante Information werden Jugendliche befähigt, ihre eigenen Entscheidungen auf Basis von Wissen um ihre Möglichkeiten zu treffen.

Teilhabe – das Wissen um die eigenen Rechte und Pflichten ist eine der Grundvoraussetzungen für aktive Teilhabe an der Gesellschaft.

Informationskompetenz – der kritische und reflektierte Umgang mit Information erfordert unterschiedlichste Fähigkeiten und ist heutzutage wichtiger denn je. Jugendinformation hilft Jugendlichen, ihre Informationskompetenz weiterzuentwickeln.“ (www.jugendinfo.at/home/jugendinformation, accessed on 10 July 2013).

The same vision and rationale is formulated by recently founded youth information centres. For example a centre in Kildare, a small town in Ireland:

Our vision:

Young people will have the ability, skill and confidence to use and apply information to become active citizens and to fully participate in society. This process will empower young people to challenge inequality, to advocate for change and build a more democratic, inclusive and prosperous society.

Rationale:

In this age of "information saturation" young people are constantly bombarded with information, they need more than ever to be supported to navigate their way. In an ever-changing society youth information helps young people to identify and develop their own resources, skills and strategies enabling them to take their own actions and make their own informed decisions. (www.kys.ie/projects/youth-information-centre accessed 29 September 2013).

The Council of Europe's argument in favour of youth information services is also related to the information overload. The Council of Europe recommends that the governments of the member states:

g. 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, Council of Europe, 16 June 2010).

Information needs of young people who have moved from the country to the city

Youth information and counselling took its first steps in Finland in the 1950s. In 1953 the Youth Department of the City of Helsinki started to provide information and counselling to young people who had recently moved from the country to Helsinki, in order to help them find their way around in an urban environment. Themes covered included leisure activities, study options and the various NGOs that operated in the capital (www.koordinaatti.fi/en/83/history.html). In 1955 a counselling centre was also opened at Turku railway station to assist young people who were arriving into a much more complex environment than the one they came from.

In developing countries in particular, where there are large groups of young people on the move, this rationale for the foundation of youth information and counselling centres has also become crucial.

Information needs of young tourists

The first USE-IT was founded in 1971 in Copenhagen. That year, the Danish capital was swarming with hippie travellers (drifters) from all over the world, who slept wherever they found a place: in parks or on benches. Mayor Andersen decided that something should be done about it and started a service providing no-nonsense tourist information for young people. USE-IT publishes maps and guides and creates websites that will guide young people through a city in a no-nonsense way. USE-ITs in some countries also have a visitors' desk, mostly run by volunteers (www.use-it.travel/home, accessed 20 September 2013).

Mutual influences

The history of innovative approaches to youth information and counselling services is a chronicle of change and exchange. The initial visions of the founders have been revised and revised again. One important factor that has caused this change is the contact with other innovative organisations. For example, the initial argument in favour of the Info Jeugd in Ghent was criticism of the established, traditional assistance given to youth and the individual casework model. Due to the confrontation with the causes of clients' problems and thanks to the contacts with Release in London and Amsterdam and JAC Amsterdam, there was growing attention given to the societal causes of young people's problems and to social action. This aspect became part of the rationale (Faché, 2012).

Conclusion

Depending on the specific set of reasons that plays a decisive role in the foundation of a youth information and counselling centre, a service fulfils a supplementary role with respect to existing assistance services (e.g. a service is created because of the need of a specific provision for young people) or it is a competing or alternative form of assistance (a distinct approach created because of criticism of the existing forms of assistance). During the initial period, youth information and counselling centres approached young people in a completely different way: they were mostly alternative services. Nowadays youth information and counselling centres are supplementary services.

The role a new youth information and counselling centre could play depends on the local situation. Before creating a youth information centre, the “Guidelines on how to create a youth information centre” of the Council of Europe and ERYICA (2002) recommend making enquiries about what youth services and information services are already available locally and conducting a survey identifying the informational needs of local young people.

SURVEY ON THE IMPACT OF YOUTH INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING

Ewa Krzaklewska and Dunja Potočnik

Introduction

Young people in most contemporary societies face challenges in a different way than previous generations, due to the abundance of ever-changing and often contradictory information in a particular context. In this constellation of new services and infrastructures young people have to be enabled to access relevant information and to be able to assess its relevance and reliability in order to use it in an enriching and productive way and as a prerequisite for their active participation in society. Following the recognition of youth information and counselling services as a tool that supports young people to improve their social status on the basis of their needs and aspirations, we can say that access to quality information is a prerequisite for enabling young people to become self-fulfilled, happy and productive members of their societies.

As already presented in the previous chapters of this compendium, there is a wealth of youth policies in area of youth information services and a very well-established network of youth information and counselling services, centred around ERYICA and similar associations. Nevertheless, in order to ensure that specific measures in this field are tailored to appeal to young people we have to examine their experiences with youth information and counselling services and submit their objections and proposals to the stakeholders in youth information and counselling. In the background paper for the Youth on the Move Event⁴ seven important issues in the area of youth information and counselling were recognised:

- ▶ limited outreach – limited awareness of young people of the existence of youth information centres and/or their services;
- ▶ lack of interest shown by young people to approach youth information services in a case of need;
- ▶ personal traits or position of individuals that make them vulnerable or ashamed of their situation and therefore hesitant to ask for help;
- ▶ lack of funding that could provide long-term sustainability;
- ▶ lack of support from local, regional or national government;
- ▶ lack of expertise among workers at the youth information centres;
- ▶ lack of insight into the youth standpoint and their aspirations and needs.

These challenges cannot be resolved only by the actions of youth information and counselling services themselves; youth experiences and attitudes also have to be taken into account as elements that will help to deal with the above-mentioned challenges.

Methodology and sample

ERYICA conducted a survey on youth information needs by organising focus groups throughout its European network of youth information centres (YICs) in 2010 and 2011, and presenting the results in the Annual

4. <http://eryica.org/sites/default/files/Background%20Paper%20YoMIM.pdf>.

Report 2011.⁵ This survey showed that the priority information needs of young people are supported by what is actually on offer at YICs: education and training, youth mobility, housing and health. These areas were the starting point in designing a new study that would, in a quantitative way, try to gather insights into the complex matter of the impact of youth information and counselling on young people's lives. In the next step the survey team identified ten areas as being crucial for young people to achieve a high quality of life and to enable each young individual to fully use all their potential and to contribute to their life and wider society:

- ▶ education and training
- ▶ employment, internships, apprenticeship
- ▶ health and well-being
- ▶ housing
- ▶ leisure time/free time
- ▶ international mobility
- ▶ volunteering
- ▶ sexuality and intimate relationships
- ▶ relationships in the family and with friends
- ▶ violence.

These areas were examined regarding the youth perception of accessibility, the help received from the youth information and counselling services in a respective area, and the usefulness and reliability of information received. Consequently, the survey team together with ERYICA identified five hypotheses to be tested – basic statements that could help in testing the impact of the youth information and counselling services on the lives of young people:

- ▶ using youth information centres (YICs) helps young people to solve their problems in different areas of their life;
- ▶ information provided through YICs is considered to be reliable more often than the information from other sources;
- ▶ those who use YICs more often think that access to information is easy;
- ▶ the face-to-face approach is the preferred method in youth information and counselling services;
- ▶ youth information supports the unemployed and NEET youth (those not in education, employment or training).

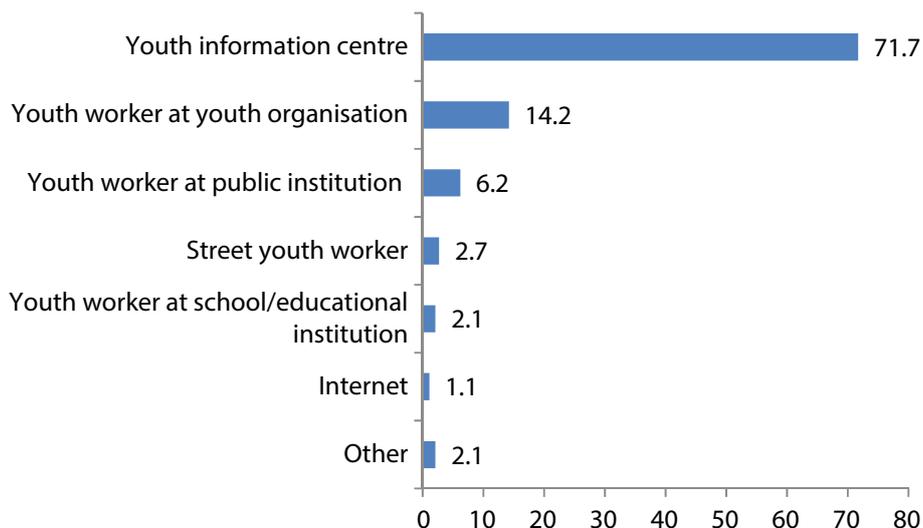
In our survey, the above-mentioned areas of youth information and counselling were tested in relation to the following characteristics of our sample group and the differences compared:

- ▶ the type of facility that administered the questionnaire;
- ▶ the number of years of usage of information and counselling services;
- ▶ the total number of contacts with the youth information and counselling services;
 - the gender of the respondents;
 - the age of the respondents;
 - the place of residence of the respondents;
 - the educational level of the respondents;
 - the socio-professional status (life situation) of the respondents.

ERYICA's members and partners played a crucial role in designing this survey as they helped in administering the questionnaires and translating them into national languages. The survey was administered with help from youth information and counselling services from 14 European countries. This resulted (Figure 1) in the fact that the majority of young respondents (almost three fourths) filled in our questionnaire after they had been approached by YICs, while those who participated as a result of other forms of contact included in the project varied from one seventh in the case where a youth worker at youth organisation had made the approach, to only 1% of respondents who were informed about the survey via the Internet. That such a small percentage of respondents filled in the questionnaire via the Internet is not surprising as YICs targeted only their users with known e-mail addresses.

5. http://eryica.org/sites/default/files/Annual%20Report%202011_1.pdf.

Figure 1: Type of youth information facility that provided the questionnaire (%)



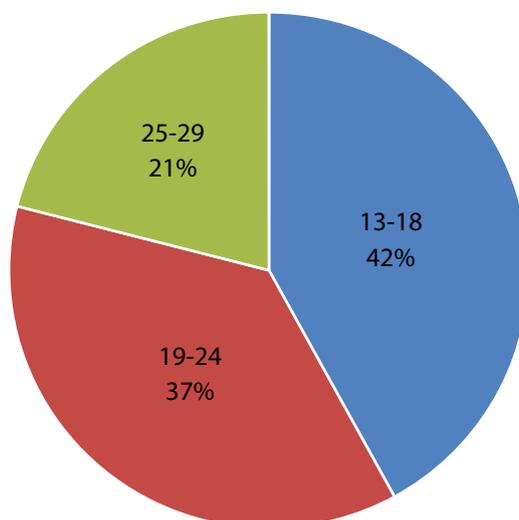
Results presented in Figure 1 above imply that the direct approach, channelled through youth centres, still presents the best way to get results in the field of youth information and counselling and co-operation with young people. This thesis will be repeatedly confirmed throughout this chapter.

WOMEN UNDER 25, STILL IN EDUCATION AND RESIDING IN URBAN AREAS

In this section we will describe the population we surveyed, both regarding the respondents socio-demographic characteristics and some attributes of their experiences with the youth information and counselling services. The survey comprised 438 respondents from 14 European countries, whose names, in accordance with the partnership agreement, will not be revealed in this study. One of the prerequisites for acquiring reliable data is achieving trust both from institutional and individual partners, and we accomplished it by guaranteeing anonymity – both on the individual (respondent) and institutional (country) level. It has to be stressed that we did not aim to target a representative sample of youth, but a purposive sample of young people who were using youth information and counselling services and were willing to take part in the survey. The nature of such a sample is primarily reflected in the gender ratio, which was biased towards female respondents and consisted of exactly 60% female and 40% male respondents.

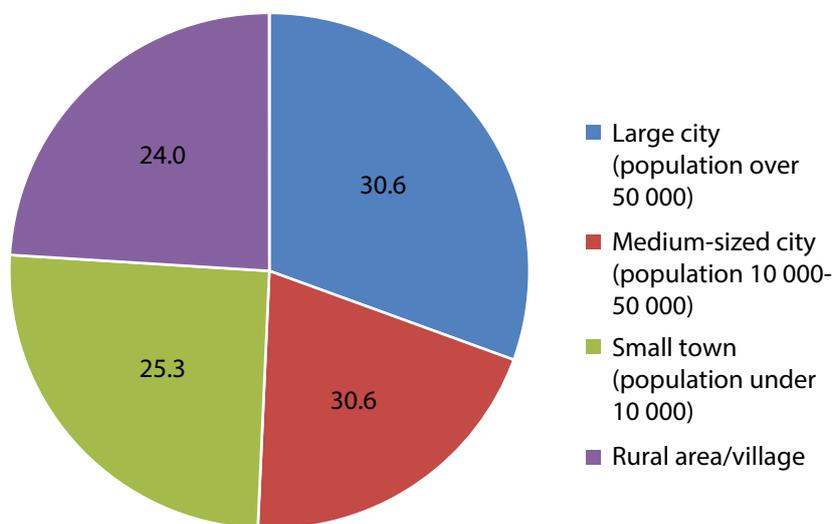
The following socio-demographic variable – age (Figure 2) – gave us a picture that was sharply inclined to the younger users of the information and counselling facilities, as more than 40% of them belonged to the age category 13-18, while respondents older than 25 constituted only one fifth of our sample. This is easily understandable as people in the youngest age group are just beginning to find their way in different areas of life and seek help from different services more often than the older group (aged 25-29).

Figure 2: Age of respondents (%)



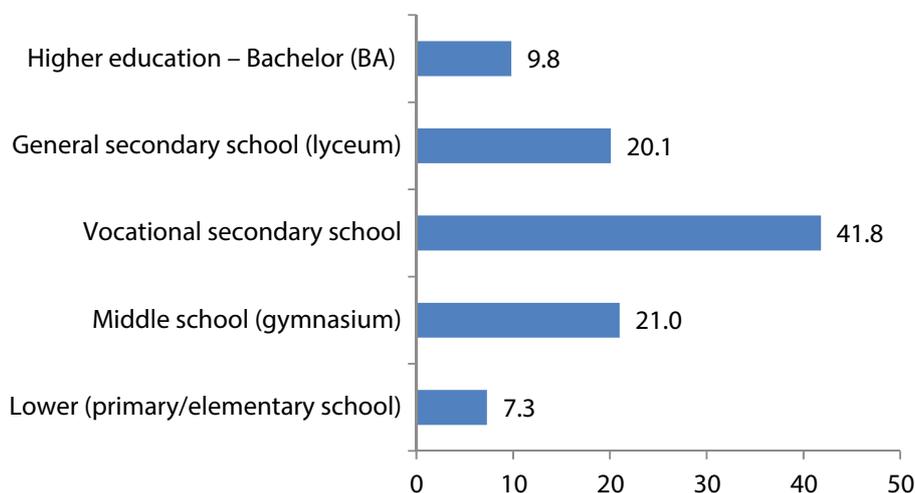
We received information from young people living both in urban and rural areas, but as young people from urban areas tend to have more contact with youth facilities, there was a higher probability they would fill in the questionnaire (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Place of residence (%)



As far as educational achievement (Figure 4) was concerned, young people who had completed vocational education constituted the biggest group in the sample (42%). The two least frequently represented subgroups of young people were those with primary education and those with higher (BA) education. This can be explained based on existing knowledge of which groups make most use of youth services. The youngest group (and thus, in general, the least educated young people) are generally not prone (or confident enough) to approach youth information services, while the oldest group do not perceive themselves as “young” any more, or do not need such services to a large extent (because they might have a better situation in life).

Figure 4: Educational achievement (%)



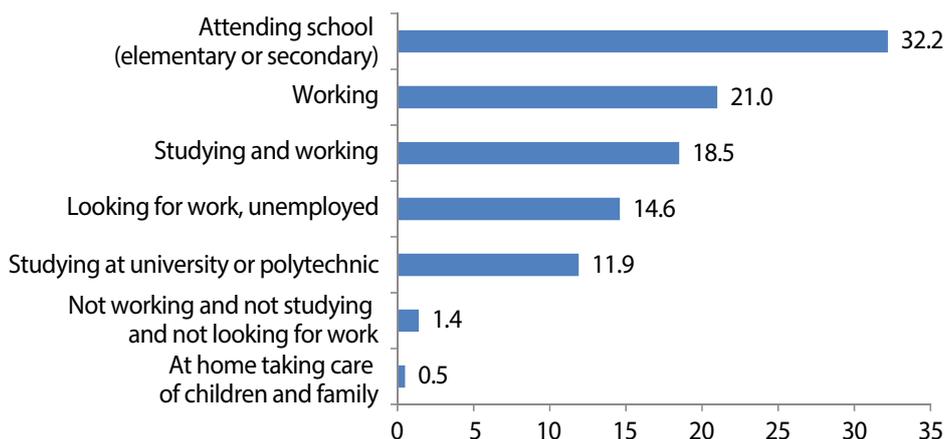
When summarising the educational characteristics of our sample it is useful to compare it with Eurostat data on the youth population (young people with a given educational attainment level by sex and age dataset “yth_demo_040”).⁶ Eurostat data for youth aged 15-29 in the EU-28 (in 2012) show there were 34.5% of “pre-primary, primary and lower secondary” educated youth, 47.0% with “upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education” and 18.5% with “the first and second stage of tertiary education”. This implies that ERYICA’s sample consisted of youth who were slightly better educated as regards the lower percentages of young people with a lower level of education, but also that there were fewer highly educated

6. http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database.

youth in ERYICA's sample. We also have to note that there was not a single respondent with a Master's or doctoral degree in the ERYICA's survey.

Socio-professional status, or the life situation of young people (Figure 5), is the last characteristic that is related to an individual level in the survey. Data presented in Figure 5 correspond to the previously presented data, as most of our respondents (45%) still attended an educational institution – elementary or secondary school or a higher educational institution. One fifth of youth were active in the labour market and a somewhat lower percentage both studied and worked. Almost 15% of young users of youth information and counselling services who filled in our questionnaire were unemployed and there were 2% of ERYICA's respondents who either did not work/study/look for work or took care of their children and families at home.

Figure 5: Life situation (socio-professional status) (%)



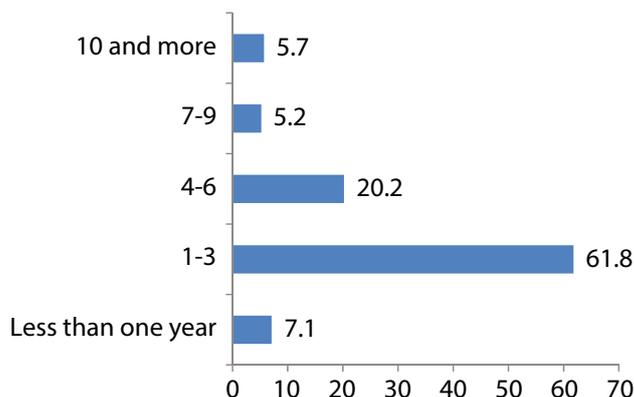
The above presented data show our sample as very young, predominantly consisting of girls or young women, with an average level of education, residing mostly in urban areas, and still attending school or university. These results could help in structuring future programmes and projects for current young users and attracting new young people to the information and counselling services (user-targeted activities).

Length and frequency of usage of youth information and counselling services

MOST USERS OF YOUTH INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING SERVICES ARE NEW TO THE "SYSTEM"

When it came to the question of how long young people had been using information and counselling services (Figure 6), almost two thirds of respondents could trace their experience with these services back for only three years or less; this was followed by those (one fifth) who had a longer experience of using such resources (4-6 years). At the end of the scale were young people who had been in contact with youth information and counselling services for more than seven years. It was also interesting to note that only 7% had used services for less than a year – YIC services therefore appear to be "durational".

Figure 6: Years of usage of the information and counselling services (%)

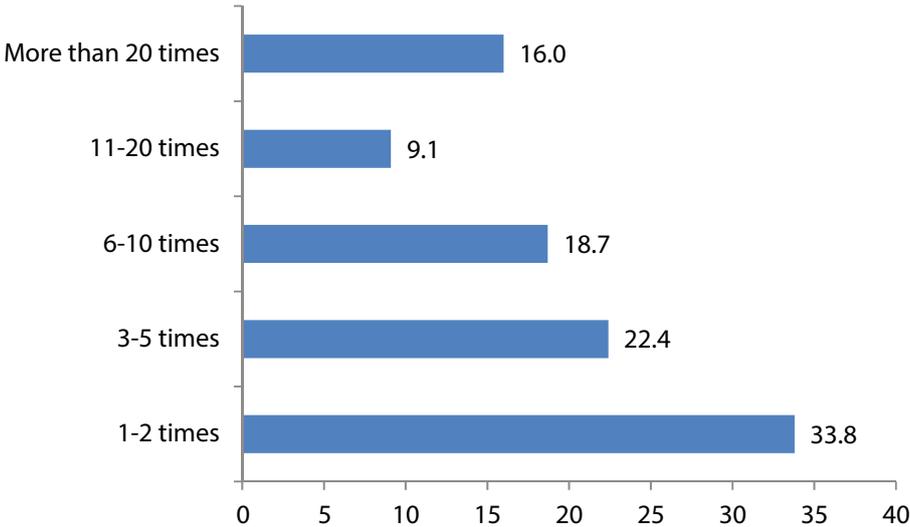


It was interesting to see whether certain subgroups of young people differed in the number of years they had been in contact with the youth information and counselling services in respect of their characteristics and the type of facility that had administered their questionnaire. A test of association showed that young people differed in this question with respect to age, degree of education and socio-professional status, while type of facility, gender and residence made no difference. More concretely, the younger the user the shorter was the period of usage of these services, with the youngest age group (13-18) predominantly in the 1-3 years of usage group. The middle age group (19-24) were very present in the group registering 4-6 years of contact, and the oldest group mainly consisted of those who had been using youth services for more than seven years. The highly educated group were among the most experienced users as they very often used YICs for more than ten years. As far as the life situation was concerned, respondents who still attended school were more likely to use information and counselling services for 1-3 years, while those who were studying and working were more likely to use the services for 4-6 years. Working youth dominated in groups of users with seven and more years of experience, which was understandable as they were older.

AGE IS PROPORTIONAL TO THE NUMBER OF CONTACTS WITH THE YOUTH INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING SERVICES

The following crucial component in understanding the experiences of young people with the youth information and counselling services relates to the number of times they made contact over the years (Figure 7). These data clearly showed that the majority of respondents had made contact fewer times, while those who had been in contact 11 or more times formed one quarter of respondents.

Figure 7: Total number of contacts made with youth information and counselling services (%)



Unlike trends in the previous section, with respect to their individual characteristics the respondents were very homogenous in their frequency of contact with youth information and counselling services. Only age and the number of years that young people had been using these services influenced the number of contacts made. In this respect, expectations that age and the number of years of usage would be proportional to the number of contacts made were confirmed to a great extent. The youngest age group dominated among users with 1-2, 3-5 or 6-10 contacts made, while the 19-24 age group predominated in groups of users who had established contact 11-20 or more than 20 times. A similar trend was observed in the relationship between years of usage and number of contacts – it changed proportionally. This means that a longer duration of usage of YIC services resulted in a larger number of total contacts being made.

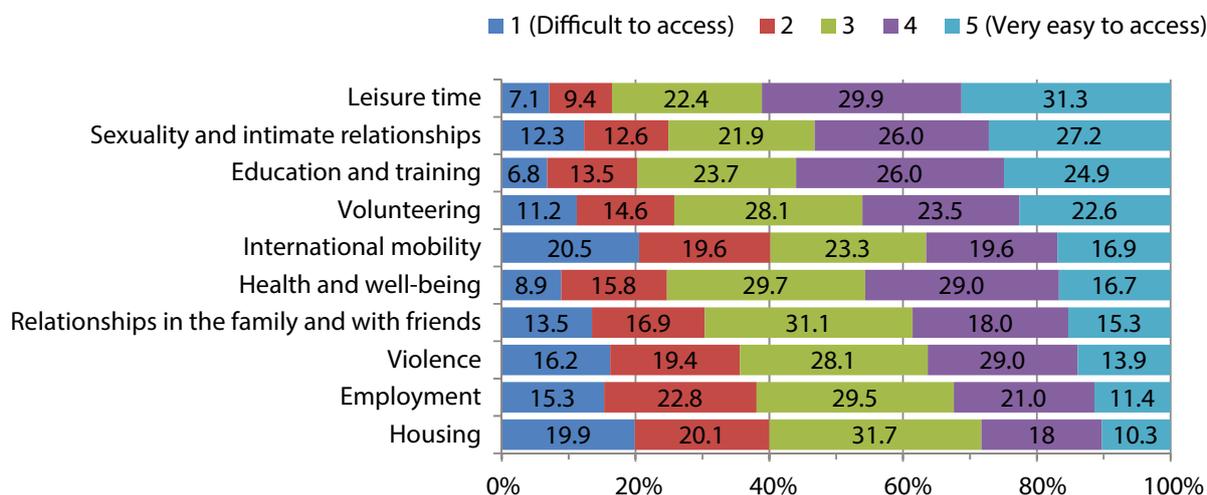
Accessibility of the youth information and counselling services and perceived helpfulness of services

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING IS DIFFICULT

The experiences young people have had with information and counselling services can be analysed on several levels and ease of access to different fields of information relating to everyday life was the first level we analysed. As presented in Figure 8, information about leisure time was most often rated as being very easily

accessible, followed by that on sexuality and intimate relationships, education and training, and volunteering. Not surprisingly, employment and housing were areas where young people did not rate access to information as being easy, and these areas were, especially over the last five years with the escalation of the European financial crisis, the most burdening to young people. Still, we have to note that these two categories (together with health and well-being, violence, and relationships with family and friends) also belong to those in which the highest numbers of young people were undecided because they found it difficult to judge whether the information was easily accessible or not.

Figure 8: Rating of ease of access to information relating to everyday life (%)



Further analysis focused on examining interconnections between the perception of ease of access to information and the individual characteristics of the respondents. Since a five-grade scale gave us somewhat blurred results we merged the two far left and two far right categories, which resulted in a three-grade scale (easy; neither easy nor difficult; difficult).

A comparison of the new scale with characteristics of the young people in the sample indicated that those who were in contact with the YIC services more than three times considered access to information on education easy.

Access to information on employment and housing was easiest for young people who had made contact with YIC services either 1-2 times or more than 20 times.

With respect to access to information on mobility, youth differed according to the frequency of contact with YIC services, which meant that the higher the number of contacts made the higher the perception of ease of access to information. Access to information on international mobility was perceived positively by the 19-24 age group, which is understandable as this age group corresponds to students and young graduates who try to actively enjoy international mobility.

The perception of access to information on volunteering was also influenced by age, with the middle age group slightly above the youngest one, while the oldest group perceived access to information on volunteering as being twice as difficult as other age groups. We can relate such distribution to both the fact that youth volunteering programmes often encompass youth up to age of 25 and to the fact that those older than 25 often have different priorities in life than the younger age groups.

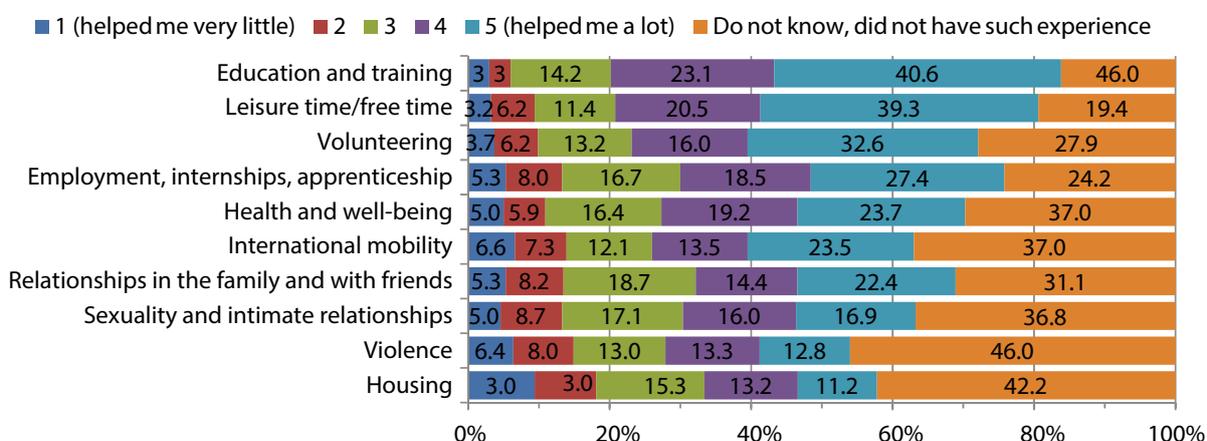
The perception of access to information on relations with family and friends revealed that young people from bigger cities found it more difficult to access such information, while young people from rural areas and small towns had the opposite experience in this respect. Moreover, ease of access to information on relationships with family and friends was, quite surprisingly, positively influenced by the smaller number of contacts made, although there is no explanation for this.

Finally, we should point out that the respondents were quite homogenous in their perception of access to information on health, sexuality and violence, as they did not differ according to any of the characteristics we observed. It should also be stressed that gender, residence, type of facility and years of usage of youth information services produced no differences in respect of the perception of access to information on different fields of everyday life.

THE YOUNGEST AGE GROUP RECEIVED MOST HELP FROM YOUTH INFORMATION FACILITIES

After examination of the results concerning perceived ease of access to information we analysed in what areas young respondents felt they had received help from the youth information and counselling services (Figure 9). Interpretation of these data was divided into two sections, the first referring to the areas in which young people were undecided or did not have experience in seeking help, and the second to areas where most help was received. Violence and housing, with two fifths of young people, closely followed by sexuality and intimate relationships, were the areas where young people probably felt hesitant to ask for help or demonstrated less interest (as with international mobility). On the other hand, results showed areas in which youth information and counselling facilities seemed to be most successful, such as education and training and leisure, where around 40% of respondents expressed the highest degree of satisfaction with the help they had received. Those who were undecided were quite equally distributed over various areas, while housing clearly stood out as an area where young people were least satisfied. This identified housing as an issue that requires novel approaches, which cannot be easily achieved without structural reforms and strong financial investment in incentives for youth housing.

Figure 9: Perceived degree of help offered by the youth information and counselling services (%)



Taking the results on the accessibility of certain areas of youth interest together with the perception of help received in the respective areas, we easily came to the conclusion that young people were most satisfied with the help they received in areas marked as easily accessible – leisure and education. On the contrary, information on violence and housing, marked as being hardly accessible were related to a lower perceived degree of help received.

Similarly to the question on ease of access to youth facilities, the five-grade scale in this question did not give us a clear picture when we linked the respondents' answers to certain characteristics. We therefore merged the two far left and two far right categories, resulting in a three-grade scale (to a great extent; to a medium extent; very little). We also excluded from further analysis those young people with no experience in seeking help from the services. A comparison of the links between variables demonstrated that gender, the level of education and years of usage of youth information services did not influence the perceived degree of help received in various areas. Also, employment, housing, sexuality and violence proved to be areas where young people did not differ with respect to the degree of help they perceived as having received from the youth services.

The younger age group had a positive attitude towards the help they received in the field of education, with respondents in the youngest age group being two and half times more satisfied than in the oldest one.

The perceived degree of help received in the area of health and well-being seemed to be influenced by the highest number of characteristics, the first of these being age, where we could see that the younger the respondent, the higher the perceived degree of help received (three and half times more than the oldest group). The perceived degree of help in health and well-being was also positively related to residence in small towns, followed by residence in large cities, while residence in medium-sized towns and villages shared the same position. Socio-professional status was the last characteristic positively linked to a high degree of perceived help provided in the area of health and well-being, and showed youth still in education to be the most satisfied.

It was interesting that young people who contacted youth information services 1-6 times or more than 20 times demonstrated the highest level of satisfaction with help in organising leisure time.

Mobility also proved to be an interesting area since results showed that young people who had received the questionnaire from youth information and counselling services expressed the highest degree of satisfaction with help they received in the area of international mobility, followed by those who had contacted youth facilities either 3-5 or more than 20 times.

The link between satisfaction with the information received on volunteering and the frequency of contact showed that youth who had contacted youth services 1-5 or more than 20 times were those most satisfied with the help received in the area of volunteering.

The last link observed revealed that the youngest age group (13-18) who were still in education demonstrated the highest degree of satisfaction with the help received in the area of relations with family and friends.

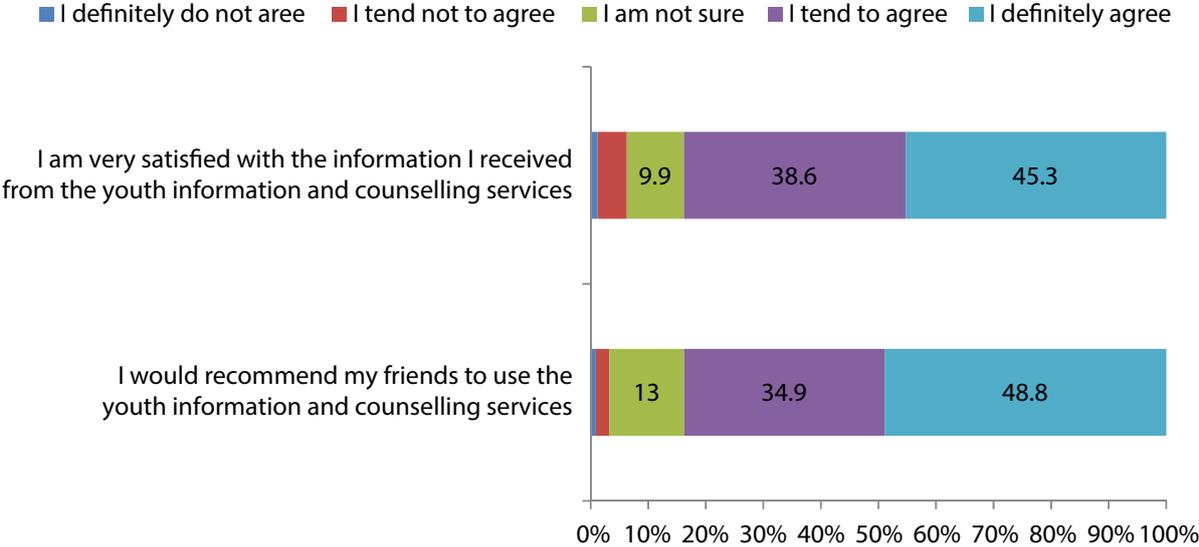
Satisfaction with youth information and counselling services

USERS ARE VERY SATISFIED WITH YOUTH INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING SERVICES

To measure the satisfaction with the work of youth information and counselling services we asked to what extent a person was satisfied with the information received from such services and if a person would recommend his or her friends to use these services (Figure 10). In general, respondents appeared satisfied with youth information and counselling services. Almost half of the respondents definitely agreed that they were very satisfied with the information received, and almost 40% tended to agree that they were satisfied. Only 10% of respondents were not sure about their evaluation and about 6% did not agree with the statement that they were satisfied.

Almost half of respondents (48.8%) would recommend their friends to use the youth information and counselling services and almost 35% of them would tend to agree with the statement that they would recommend it. The numbers of those young people who were undecided or dissatisfied were low.

Figure 10: Satisfaction with the work of youth information and counselling services (%)



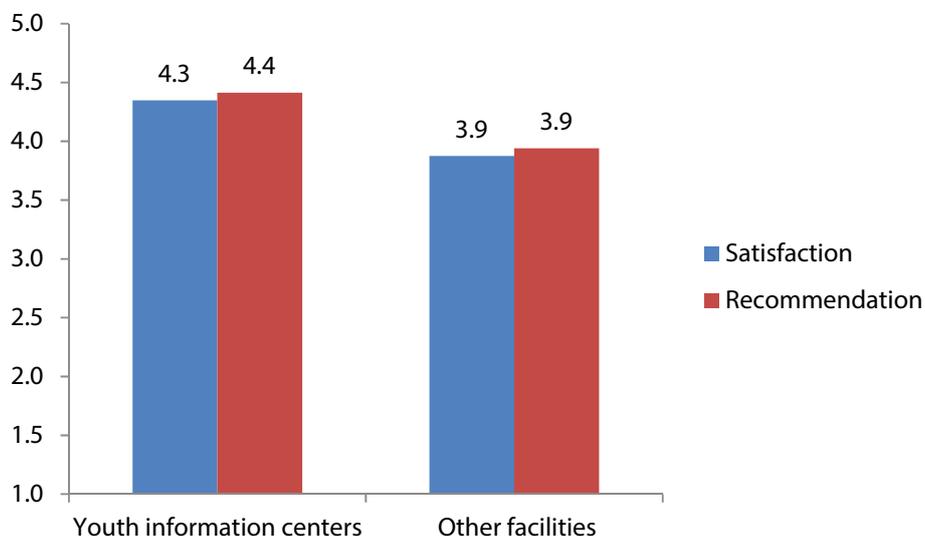
YOUTH INFORMATION CENTRES ARE THE BEST EVALUATED FACILITIES

A very important factor is the type of facility a young person uses. In our survey, young people who used youth information centres and youth organisations were more satisfied with the information provided (Figure 11) than those who used other facilities (treated as a group). They would also more willingly recommend the usage of such a facility to a friend.

The survey results showed that the more frequent the contact with youth information and counselling services, the higher the satisfaction with information received from them, and the more likely it was that a person would want to recommend services to a friend. Age was a further factor differentiating the evaluation of information

received from youth information services – the group aged 25-29 demonstrated a lower level of satisfaction (3.9) in comparison to the two other age groups (average grade about 4.3). Moreover, young people with a higher education degree gave a lower evaluation to information services compared to other groups.

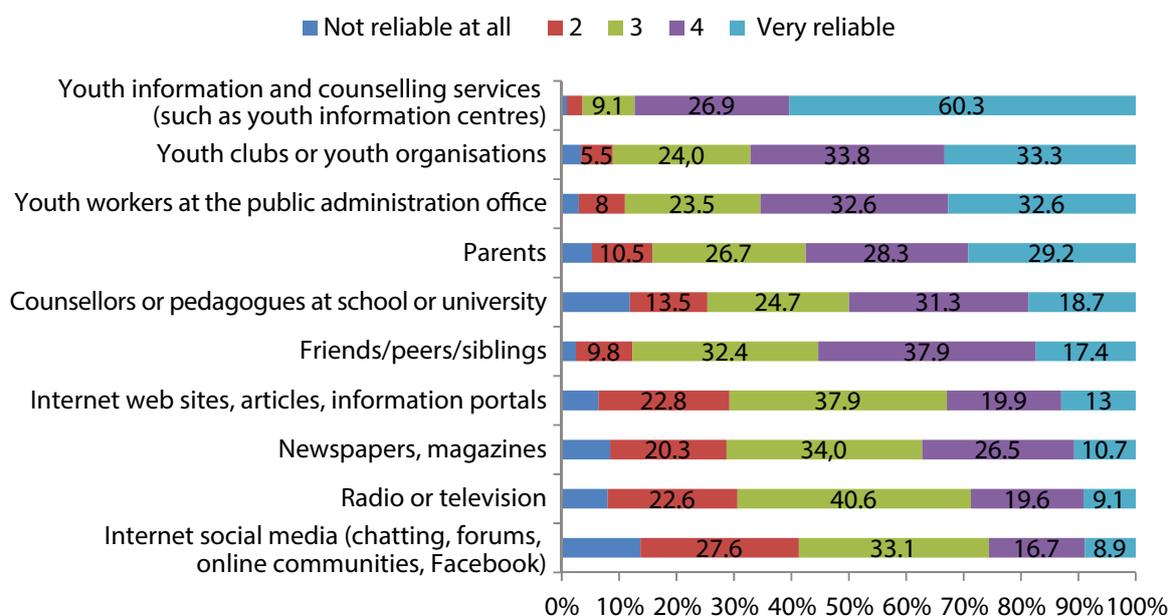
Figure 11: Average satisfaction with information depending on the youth information facility used by a young person



INFORMATION FROM YOUTH INFORMATION CENTRES IS CONSIDERED TO BE THE MOST RELIABLE SOURCE

When compared to other sources of information, the information provided by the youth information and counselling services, that is, mostly by the youth information centres, was most often judged by young people as being reliable (Figure 12); 60.3% of respondents graded it as very reliable and 26.9% as rather reliable.

Figure 12: Reliability of information from diverse sources, evaluated on a scale from 1 (not reliable at all) to 5 (very reliable) (%)



Youth workers from organisations, schools or public institutions were considered to be a relatively good source of reliable information. About 50-60% of young people considered youth clubs or youth organisations, as well as youth workers at the public administration office and counsellors or pedagogues at school or university to be a source of rather reliable and very reliable information. Parents too, as well as friends,

peers and siblings, were considered by more than half of the respondents to be rather and very reliable as sources of information.

Media of diverse types were least often considered by young people to be a source of reliable information. The information from Internet websites, articles and information portals, newspapers and magazines, radio or television or Internet social media was judged as reliable only by about 25-30% of respondents. The information from social media such as chatting, forums, online communities or Facebook, was considered as the least reliable, while the more traditional media such as newspapers were considered to be a bit more reliable.

Summarising, we were able to differentiate three groups of information providers (Table 3). The first group consisted of youth information centres and was considered to be the most reliable source of information. The second group consisted of youth workers as well as parents and other young people such as friends, peers or siblings. The third group, media, both traditional and non-traditional, was considered to be the least reliable source of information.

Table 1: Reliability of diverse sources of information

HIGH RELIABILITY	Youth information and counselling services (such as youth information centres)
RATHER HIGH RELIABILITY	Youth clubs or youth organisations Youth workers at the public administration office Parents Counsellors or pedagogues at school or university Friends/peers/siblings
LOW RELIABILITY	Internet websites, articles, information portals Newspapers, magazines Radio or television Internet social media (chatting, forums, online communities, Facebook)

The opinions about reliability of the information received from diverse sources were rather homogeneous in the group of young people in the survey, but some differences were observed.

While the reliability of the information from the youth information centres was evaluated very positively in the entire sample, the trust towards this source of information was lower in the oldest group of respondents (25-29). They evaluated the reliability of youth information centres a bit lower compared to other age groups.

Those who used YIC services 6-10 times evaluated the reliability of information from YIC sources more highly than those who used them less often, even if those who used the services more than 11 times did not give such a satisfactory evaluation. Those respondents who were contacted by a YIC source to participate in the study also evaluated YIC sources more highly than other respondents, who possibly did not know about YIC work. This showed that knowing about the work of YIC centres might lead to a higher level of trust in their services.

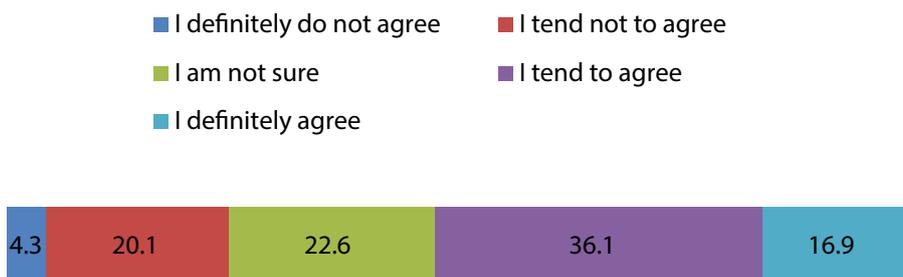
Concerning other sources of information, information from a counsellor or pedagogue at school or university was more often considered to be reliable by women compared to men. Female respondents also trusted more often in the reliability of information provided by youth workers at public administration offices. Workers at public administration offices were more often considered as a reliable source of information by young people from rural areas compared to those from large towns – this might result from the fact that they probably knew the workers personally due to the small size of the localities.

Reliability of the information received from the traditional media was evaluated as being rather low. Still, female respondents trusted media such as radio and TV and magazines/newspapers more than male respondents. Interestingly, the more times the respondents contacted YIC sources, the less they trusted in information found in the Internet and social media (the difference was statistically significant between those who used YIC services 1-2 times compared to those who used them 11-20 times in the case of the Internet and more than 20 times in the case of social media).

IT IS DIFFICULT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO JUDGE THE CORRECTNESS OF INFORMATION FROM THE INTERNET

The difficulty of judging the reliability of information from the Internet is indicated through further analysis (Figure 13); 36.1% respondents tended to agree and 16.9% definitely agreed with the following statement “When I read information in the Internet, it is difficult for me to judge how correct it is”. Only 4% definitely did not agree and 20.1% tended not to agree with the statement.

Figure 13: Agreement with the following statement “When I read information in the Internet, it is difficult for me to judge how correct it is” (%)



Young people who had completed vocational education seemed more likely to agree with the fact that it is difficult to judge the reliability of the information on the Internet. Young people from rural areas and small town agreed with the statement more often than those from large cities.

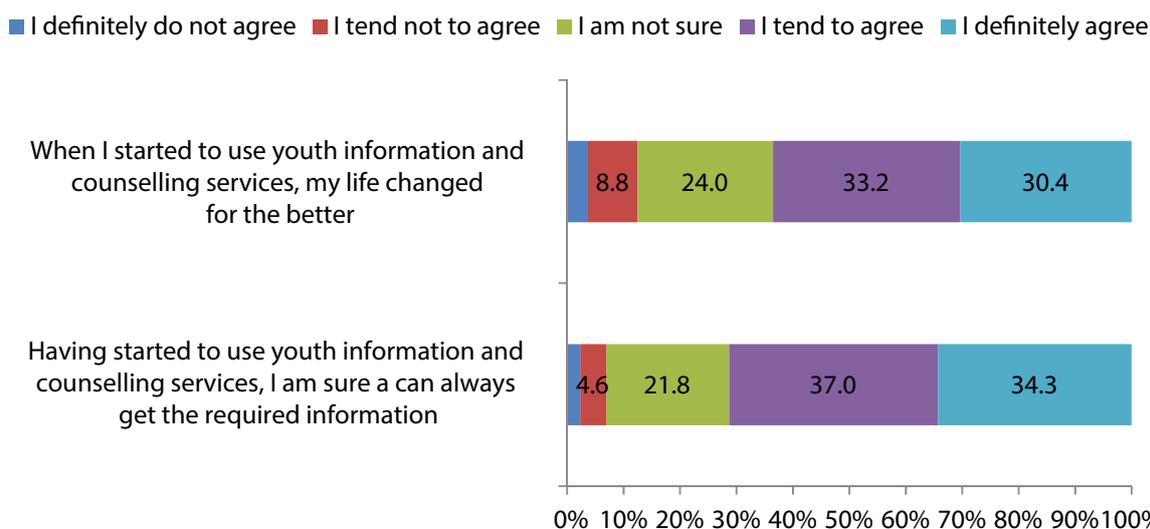
The impact of youth information and counselling services on young people’s lives

INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING SERVICES IMPACT POSITIVELY ON YOUNG PEOPLE’S LIVES

Most of the respondents believed that the youth information and counselling services had a positive impact of on their lives (Figure 14). About 63% of young people who replied to the survey definitely agreed or tended to agree that using such services had changed their life for the better; 24% of young people were not sure about the impact of youth services on their lives and about 12% did not agree with this statement.

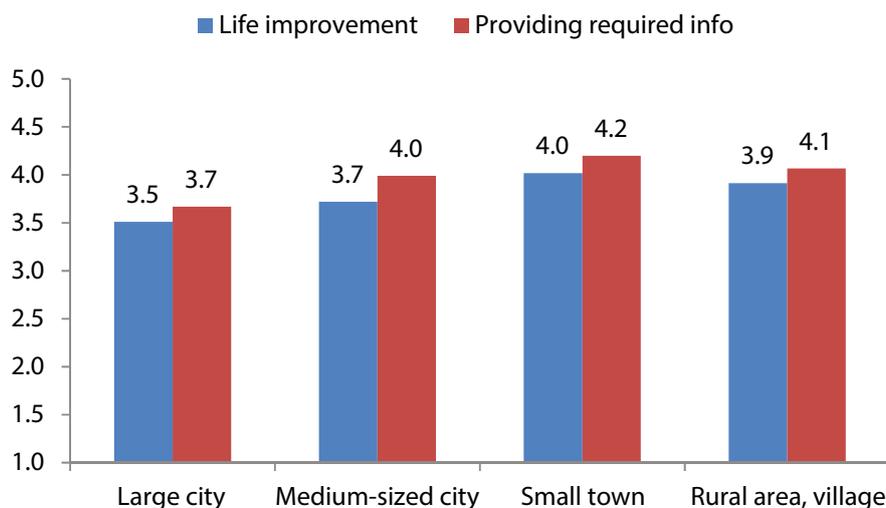
Youth information and counselling services also seemed to create a sense of assurance that when in need one would be able to find the required information. Slightly more than 70% of young people definitely agreed or tended to agree that after having started using YIC services, they were sure that they could always get the required information; 22% of young people were not sure about the statement and about 7% definitely did not agree with it or tended not to.

Figure 14: Opinions about the impact of information and the possible support in the future (%)



Young people from small towns and rural areas more often believed that using youth information services had changed their lives for the better and were also sure that, after having started using youth information and counselling services, they would be able to find the required information there if needed (Figure 15). The differences between rural areas and small towns compared to large cities were statistically significant.

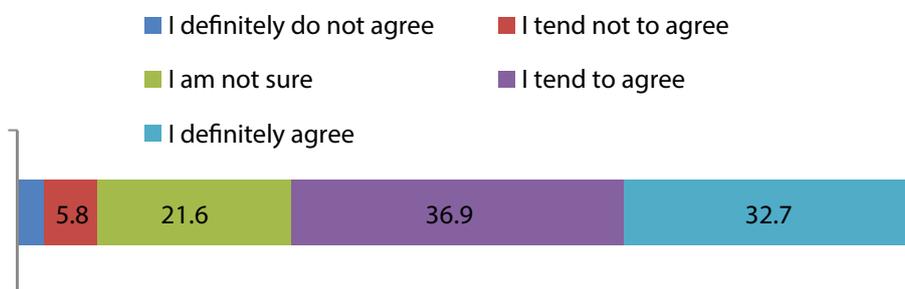
Figure 15: Impact of youth information and counselling services depending on place of residence (average agreement with the statements) (%)



YOUTH INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING SERVICES ARE CONSIDERED TO BE A RELIABLE SUPPORT IN THE SEARCH FOR A JOB

Youth information and counselling services were also seen to be a possible source of support in the search for a job. More than two thirds of respondents believed that if they were looking for work, they would receive such support; 22% of respondents were not sure and about 9% did not agree with this statement (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Agreement with the following statement “If I ever need to look for work, I am sure I can receive support from the youth information and counselling services” (%)



Younger age groups of respondents were more positive that they would receive support if they ever needed to look for work. This optimism may have to do with the fact that they had not yet faced the realities of the labour market.

Among the educational groups, young people with higher education were less likely to agree with the statement that they would receive support if they ever needed to search for a job, while those with middle school, vocational education and secondary level education were more likely to agree with it.

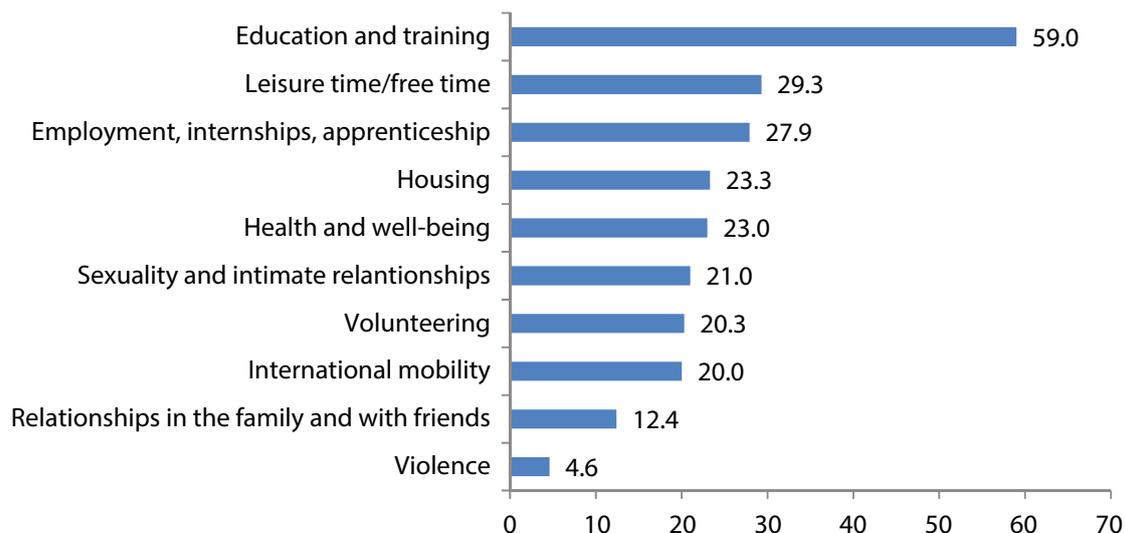
Young people from small towns believed that they would receive help if looking for work more often than young people from large towns.

Areas in which youth information and counselling services should contribute more

YOUNG PEOPLE NEED MORE INFORMATION ABOUT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The main area of interest in which young people would like to receive more information and advice from the youth information facilities was education and training, since almost 60% of the respondents indicated this area (Figure 17). Almost one third of young people said that they would like to receive more information concerning leisure time and free time, as well as on employment, internships and apprenticeship.

Figure 17: The areas in which young people would like to receive more information (%)



Some groups of young people desired information on specific topics more than others. Women more often wished for more information on health and well-being and leisure, while young males were more interested in information on housing and sexuality.

AGE DIFFERENTIATES THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The survey showed that young people want different types of information depending on their age (Table 2). While the type of information most desired was that on education and training irrespective of age, the youngest group of respondents aged 13-18 also mentioned information on leisure and volunteering as areas they were interested in. The group aged 19-25 wanted information on education and training, health and well-being and housing. The oldest group wanted, besides the common priority of education and training, more information on housing, employment and leisure.

Table 2: Three most important information needs of the age groups

Age category	Desired information
13-18	Education and training Leisure time/free time Volunteering
19-24	Education and training Health and well-being Housing
25-29	Education and training Housing Employment, internships, apprenticeship Leisure time/ free time

Other interesting findings concerning the information needs of different age groups included (Figure 18):

- ▶ the younger age group showed more interest in international mobility, but less interest in employment information;
- ▶ information on health and well-being was needed more often by older groups;
- ▶ information concerning relationships with family and friends was needed by the oldest group;
- ▶ information on sexuality and intimate relations was needed most often by the youngest and oldest age groups;
- ▶ the oldest group was least often in need of information on housing.

Their place of residence also influenced the informational needs of young people (Figure 19). While information on education and training remained the biggest informational need of young people, in small towns and rural areas, information about leisure time was also very important. In middle-sized towns the second highest information need was housing, while in the large city it was health and well-being. The smaller the town of residence, the more likely it was that young people would demand information on international mobility, as well as on relationships in the family and with friends.

Figure 18: The informational needs of different age groups (%)

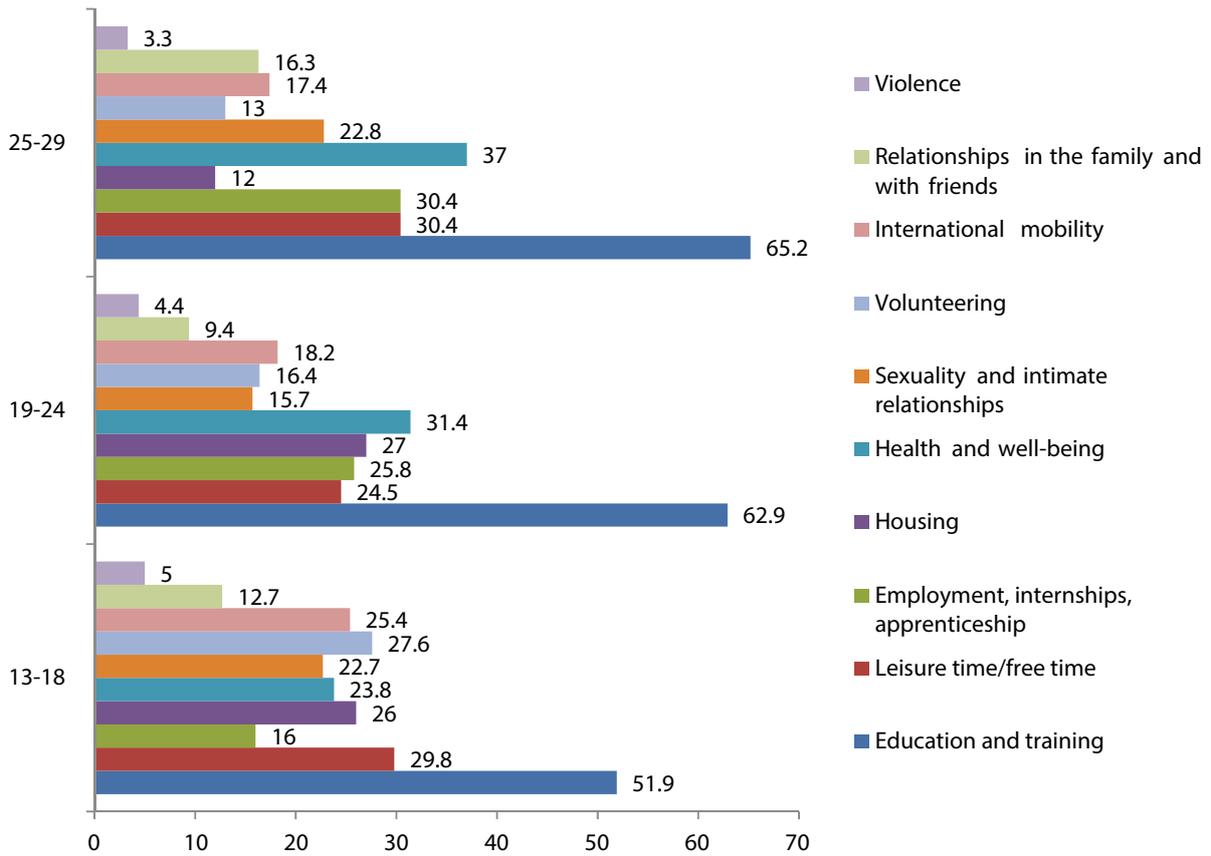
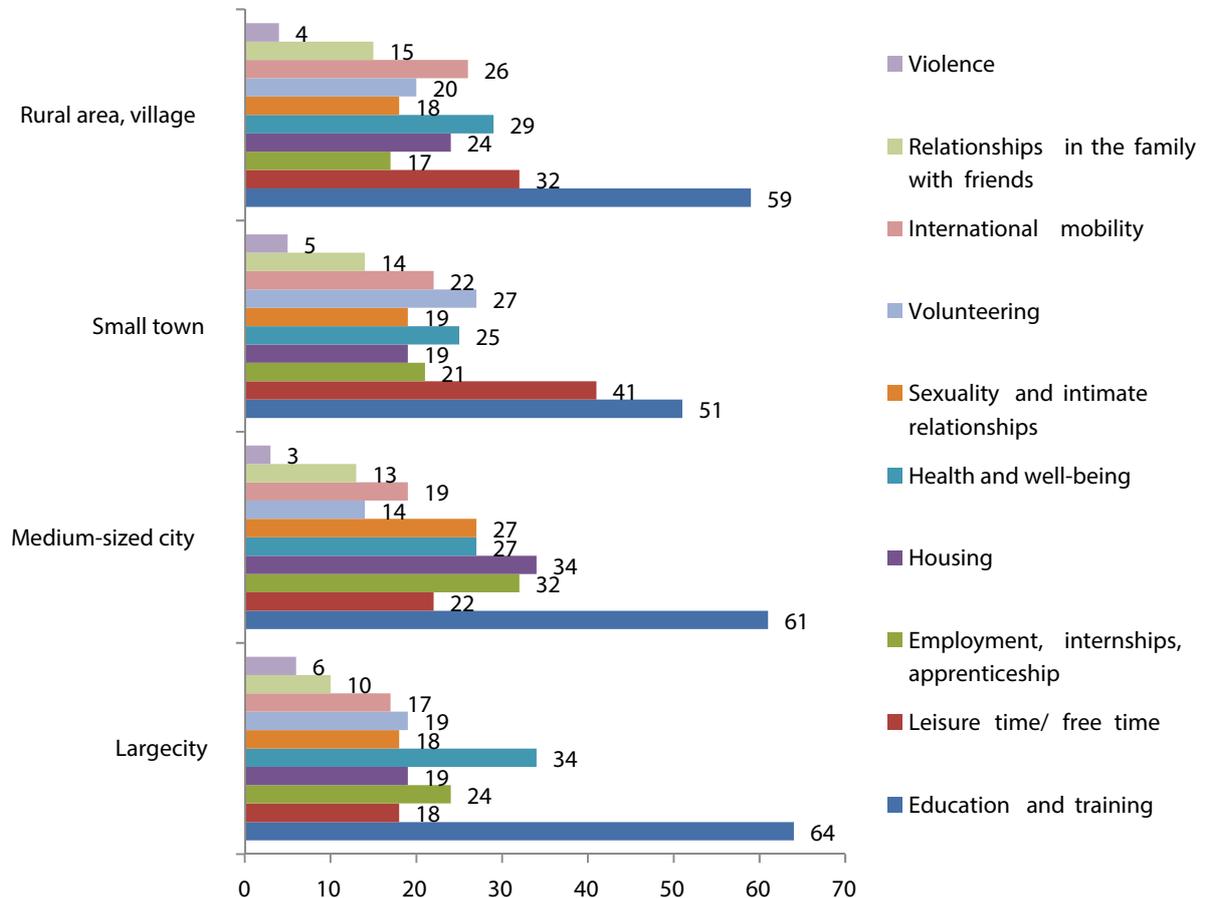


Figure 19: The informational needs of young people depending on their place of residence (%)



Young people have different informational needs depending on their situation in life (socio-professional status). Besides the priority given to education and training, young people in schools stressed the need for information on volunteering, housing and leisure time, while those studying and both studying and working mentioned health and well-being, leisure time and housing. Besides education, working youth mentioned information on health and well-being, employment and leisure time as their main priorities, while unemployed young people focused on leisure time, employment, health and well-being.

Preferred options for receiving information or advice

THE FACE-TO-FACE APPROACH IS HIGHLY VALUED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

“Youth-friendly services” and “user-targeted services” are concepts that are being used more and more in both scientific and expert policy analysis and recommendations. Still, it is not easy to reach such establishments and it requires the direct involvement of users in the process. Data presented in Figure 20 could help in reaching a consensus about the best media for communicating messages to youth. As we can see (Figure 20), more than 70% of young respondents preferred receiving information via face-to-face communication, followed by somewhat less than 40% who preferred private research on the Internet. One fourth of young people in our sample preferred face-to-face interaction through group work, and one fifth preferred social network sites for communication. “Traditional” media (radio, TV or newspapers) seem to be negligible as sources of information among youth, as less than 10% of youth preferred them.

Figure 20: Preferred options for receiving advice or information (*maximum of two preferred options*) (%)



The importance of transferring information to youth via face-to-face interaction was additionally emphasised by the fact that young people, regardless of their individual characteristics or their experiences with youth information and counselling services, preferred this method of communication. Similarly, young people were homogenous when it came to the degree of preference for social network sites, printed materials and traditional media. Examining interconnections between preferred media for communicating information targeted at youth firstly led us to the conclusion that gender, socio-professional status and years of experience with youth services did not significantly diversify youth. On the contrary, face-to-face interaction was preferred by those youngsters who were approached by the YIC services when filling in the questionnaire, while interaction via phone was preferred by youth residing in small towns. Private research on the Internet was predominantly preferred by youth in the youngest age group and by vocationally educated youth, while e-mail was preferred by the middle age group (19-24).

Conclusions

The results of the survey are very positive about the strength of the impact of youth information and counselling services on the lives of young people, but also provide a strong background for further improvement of the way these services function. The users of the youth information and counselling services frequently believed that the work of the services had positively impacted their lives. They were very often satisfied with the information received from the youth information and counselling services and would recommend their friends to use them. Although young respondents indicated diverse areas where they received help from the

youth information and counselling services, there were still areas in which respondents did not receive much help. This raises the question of whether this is because they did not search for help about the specific topic or rather that they did not think they could receive help about some areas of interest to them.

The results of the survey indicate that youth information and counselling services are more effectively reaching the youngest age groups of young people. They seem to have been the most frequent users of the services, they more often perceived information to be reliable, and they claimed to have received the most help from the services, even if they had not been using the services for very long and had not made contact with the services as often as the older age groups. The offer of youth information and counselling services appeared to be less attractive to those in the older age group, or those with a higher level of education, and they were also less trusting of prospective support, e.g. in the case of looking for work, and they perceived the information provided to be less reliable. Youth information services need to reconsider how to reach the oldest group of young people and to what extent this is an important target group for their work. Further insights will be needed, as the results show that age was the characteristic that most often differentiated the opinions in the survey on information accessibility or on information preference, among other things. It would be interesting to examine the research about young people aged 25-29 who were not using youth information and counselling services to see what support and what information they might expect from these facilities, if any.

Youth information centres appear to be the most successful form of information provision according to the study. In many aspects of the study, the users of youth information centres appeared to be very satisfied – not only with the information received from such facilities but they were also most often sure that these centres could support them in case of need, such as when looking for work. Furthermore, information provided through YIC services was considered to be reliable more frequently than information from other sources. One reason why the YIC services are successful might be the very high importance given to face-to-face contact by youth information users, which is in fact realised through such services.

The face-to-face approach was the preferred method for receiving advice or information according to the respondents of the survey. Even if the Internet is becoming the most frequently used source of information for young people, young persons in our study preferred the personal, face-to-face method of contact for obtaining information. Internet research was the second preferred option. The study revealed that person-to-person contact was also a guarantee of reliability – young people judged information from centres and youth workers, or even from parents and other young people, as more reliable than information received from diverse media (including the Internet). Interestingly enough, even if the Internet was not perceived as a reliable source of information – and half of respondents believed that it is difficult to judge the reliability of information available on the Internet – it was nevertheless the second preferred option for obtaining information. This indicates how important it is to improve young people's skills in judging the correctness, reliability and accuracy of information obtained online. The knowledge that this information might not be reliable is already a positive step in learning how to use Internet sources efficiently, but youth information and counselling services should provide more opportunities for young people to learn about the usage of online information.

A positive outcome from the research showed that young people usually used services for an extended amount of time. This would indicate that the services were important and useful at different points in their lives. What has to be assured in the future is the constant inflow of new clients into the youth information system, as it seems that once young people begin to use the services, they then continue to use them. Moreover, persons who use services for longer are also more satisfied with them. This finding can be interpreted in two ways: only those who are satisfied stay longer in the system (dissatisfied persons might have dropped out from the system beforehand and this is why the study does not reveal their opinions), or, on the other hand, that youth information and counselling services take time to be appreciated by young people (for example, it might take time for workers to recognise what the real needs of a young person are). In the light of such results, youth information services need to make sure that the users' needs will be taken care of during their initial contact with the services, so they do not "drop out" and stop using them.

Rural areas appear to be an important area where a stronger impact can be expected from the youth information and counselling services. Young people from these areas noted more often that these services improved their lives and that they created a sense of assurance that youngsters would be able to find the necessary information if need be. On the other hand we noticed that fewer young people from smaller towns and rural areas replied to the survey, which could imply that they are using youth information and counselling services less often – this is why it is critical that more efforts are put into the creation and promotion of such services outside of big cities. Furthermore, the personal contact with professional youth information workers can be provided to young people from rural areas using diverse communication tools. This is why phone contact was indicated as being important more frequently than other methods by the group of young people from small

towns. Other innovative solutions, such as private chat rooms with youth workers, could also possibly be a way to reach young people in the localities where there are no functioning youth centres. It would provide them with the opportunity of having personal, individualised contact with a youth information professional no matter what their location.

Young people received help on diverse topics from youth information sources. Employment and housing, international mobility, violence and relationships in the family and with friends were the areas where the information was evaluated as being least easily accessible for young people. Still, even if information on education and training was perceived as being rather easily accessible, young people in all age groups and from all socio-professional areas stressed the need for more information on education and training. Moreover, the group of unemployed youth chose it as a priority area (before employment).

Widening the outreach is also important from the point of view of further development in this youth policy area. Even if the youth information and counselling services seem to reach mostly young people in education or in employment, as well as connecting both activities, it also appears to be successful in reaching young people who are looking for work. It can be foreseen that this group might be very important in the future work of youth information facilities, as youth unemployment appears to be a very burning issue in many European countries. Youth information and counselling services might become a system for supporting those young people who cannot find work, in addition to the official employment services. What is interesting is that respondents who were unemployed were mostly in need of more information about education and training, leisure and free time, while employment appeared only in third place. That shows that youth information and counselling services can feed the diverse needs of the group of youngsters looking for work, as it does provide support, not only concerning employment, but also other areas of a young person's life. The group of young people who are not working, studying, or looking for work also appears as a group which needs more attention from youth information and counselling services – they need to be attracted to the services offered by these centres. The holistic individualised approach by youth information centres might be a good way of engaging these young people in active participation in society.

In conclusion, the research has confirmed the important role of youth information and counselling services in the provision of reliable and multi-thematic information tailored to the needs of each individual, but also their role in providing young people with more skills with which to evaluate the information they have obtained. Besides their daily role in information provision, youth information centres also constitute an important point of reference for young people, giving them a sense of "information safety" – after having experience of youth information and counselling services young people become more confident that they will be able to find the necessary information there if need be. This is an important area for young people who make decisions in today's world, where the vast amount of information available more often hinders than facilitates access to it.

Section III

Establishing youth information and counselling structures at national level

Part three of this compendium contains information on setting up YIC services and networks. By examining the services that are already offered by different national providers and the organisational structures which these providers chose to adopt for their organisations the compendium provides information concerning the structure, governance, funding, staffing, quality measurement and methods of services of YIC structures. Descriptions of different national YIC structures in four different European countries are also provided for comparison and a theoretical model of how a youth information and counselling network can be set up, along with a proposed budget for such a network, is provided.

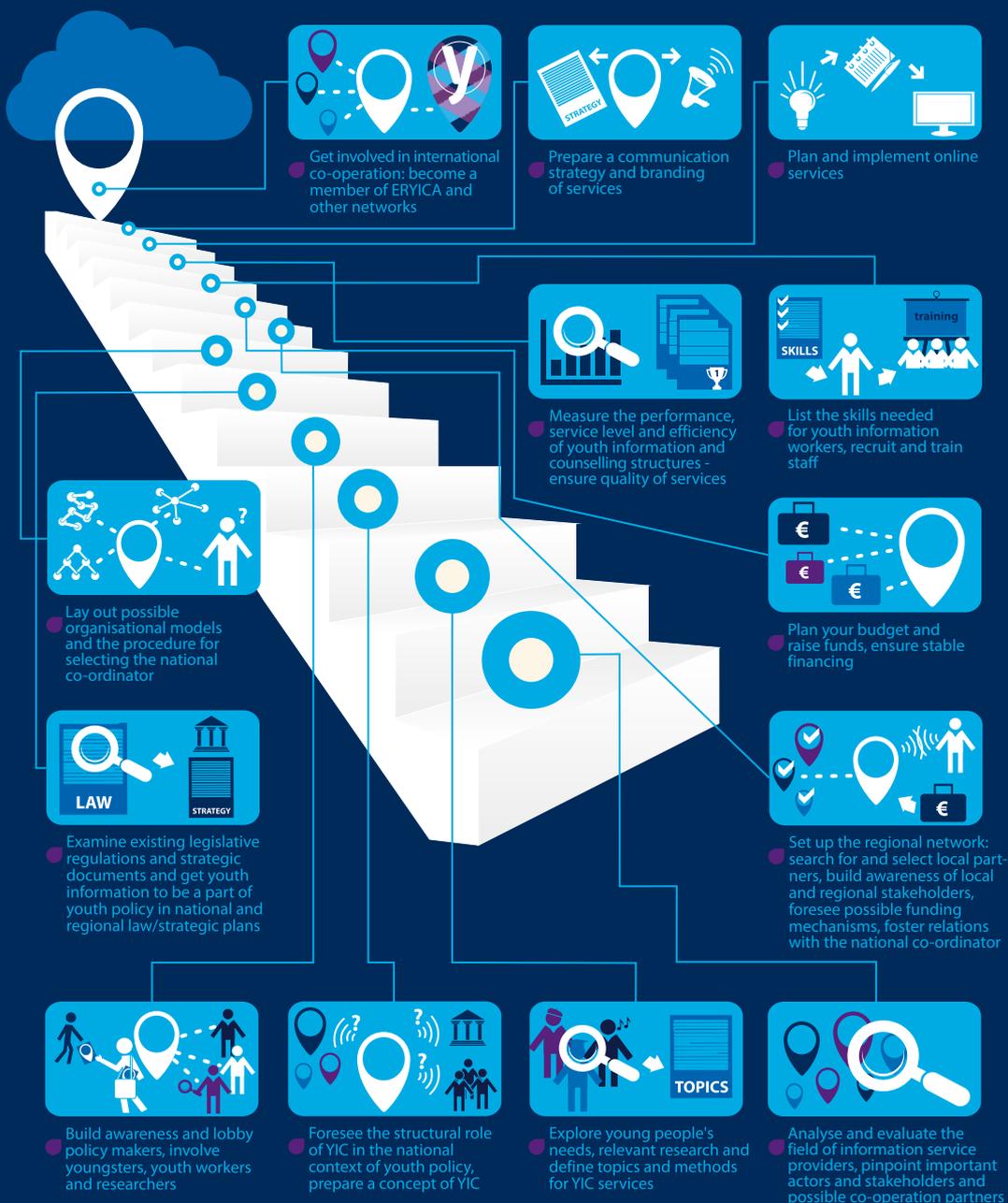
ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF IMPORTANT ACTORS AND STAKEHOLDERS, CO-OPERATION WITH PARTNERS

Before starting the process of establishing a generalist youth information and counselling structure in your country, make sure that there is no such system already in existence. These systems may be called by different names, even though the main idea may be similar. Of course if you have got the idea of establishing a system in the first place, it might be that even the existing structure is not functioning well, so it is worth having a closer look at its work and proposing some improvements. If you are sure that there is no national structure for youth information and counselling services, although there might be some local/regional youth information centres, it is very important to make an inventory of the information and youth services in your country on both national and regional levels.

Preparing a list of each operational information service, for both public information (i.e. employment, tourism, health, business, etc.) and youth (i.e. youth councils, centres, etc.), including short descriptions of the functions and target groups, as well as thematic service areas for each, will help you to identify which target groups (particularly focusing on young people – different age groups and subcultures) and thematic service areas are covered well and which are still so-called “white spots”. This helps to identify thematic areas on which a generalist YIC system and YIC centres could put more emphasis and provide information services that are needed. It is observed that although generalist YIC centres take a holistic approach to all of the relevant topics, it may strengthen the system and help in the lobbying process if there are a couple of topics upon which YIC services put more emphasis, because they are still not covered by specialised information services. In most cases this is information and media literacy and mobility (living, working, studying abroad, etc.).

Since a generalist YIC service is complementary to specialised services, it is of the utmost importance to start creating links with such services from the very beginning. Therefore it is even recommended to invite representatives of existing specialised information services to participate in the process of creating a YIC system. Their experience might be very helpful and this will also ensure prevention of possible overlaps. Partnerships between generalist YIC services and specialised services at national level will ensure easier contacts with regional and local services later on.

How to establish a youth information and counselling structure at the national level?



Organising focus group meetings and inviting different actors in the field of information provision for young people at regional level, especially in cities, may reveal new arguments for a systematic approach to YIC services. Most of the time these organisations do not know each other and this might give a new impetus and a task for a generalist YIC centre to establish a regional and national network of players in the field of YIC. Networking

may optimise functions and costs of different service providers; however, while aiming for that there are a couple of aspects to bear in mind. Firstly, while establishing the network it is very important to react to the needs of each of the future partners and to do it sensitively, making it clear that generalist YIC services are not competitors, but may help by being a complementary partner. Secondly, it is worth envisaging the use of a body (such as a committee, working group, network meeting, etc.), which will ensure regular communication between all partners and institutionalise your relations.

Analysing the situation of stakeholders is important in the process of establishment and it is one of the first steps you should take. There might even be a couple of different ministries interested in the idea of creating a generalist YIC system. Taking international stakeholders into account might be helpful too, because if some problems emerge at national level, supranational partners can back you up in the lobbying process or even help you financially in your start-up phase. Ensuring stable financing from different sources can be the result of successful co-operation with different stakeholders: why not establish a partnership with the central bank for financial literacy resources in your services, or with social and health ministries for information on public welfare? While analysing, have a closer look at the existing programmes and strategic documents of government institutions, since information for citizens is an integral part of any kind of policy, you can find your first supporting channels or at least an excuse to present the concept of YIC to the ministry. However, make sure to involve other partners in the field of youth policy – the national youth council or any kind of youth umbrella organisation or body uniting youth workers or youth centres. They already have the necessary first point of contact with the government, which may open a lot of doors for you.

To sum up, analysing the field of stakeholders will help you to identify decision makers and a review of existing strategic documents will give you guidelines for a successful lobbying strategy. International players are important too, because they can support you in the lobbying process and can even help in finding finance to start up the project. The process of establishment should include close co-operation with and involvement of existing information services providers. If possible, creating an institutionalised framework for your regular meetings and exchange of plans and practices may be very helpful while maintaining the work of the YIC.

IDENTIFYING THE NEED FOR YOUTH INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING SERVICES

Professor Dr W. Faché

Whoever comes into contact with young people experiences their need for social support. By social support we mean those aspects of a social relationship which help someone to cope with a difficult situation with the least possible negative consequences.

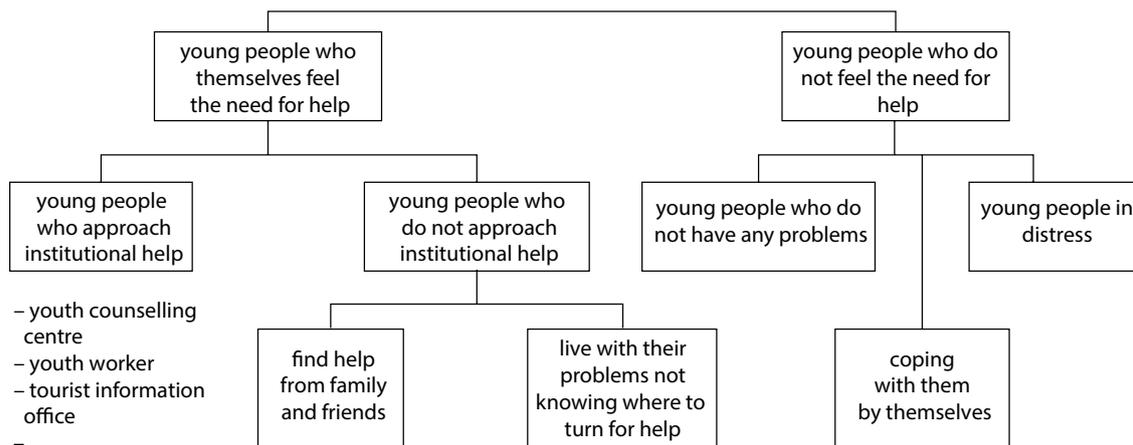
In general, two main aspects can be distinguished in social support. In the first place there is the social-emotional aspect, which deals with understanding, acceptance, respect and security. In the second place there is the instrumental aspect, in which information, advice, counselling, financial and material help are stressed.

According to research (Bondi et al, 2006) most young people identify family and friends as the most appropriate source of the kind of help they need, the so-called “natural” social environment of a young person. Next to the “caring” environment of an individual, social support also has to come from professionals, such as a doctor, social worker or teacher. One form of professional social support is youth information and counselling services.

In this chapter we will answer the questions as to how we can identify the need for a local information and counselling centre and the position of a youth information centre in the local network of different services. Finally we will discuss to what extent “do-it-yourself material” is an adequate form of information for young people. Before we can discuss these issues, we must reproduce in a theoretical scheme the different sources of social support available for young people.⁷

7. In 1972, the Fins Dahlin, L. and Svanström, L. published a theoretical scheme and method to analyse the need for health centres. This document was translated into Dutch and partly published in the information bulletin *De eerstelijns*, (1973 No. 2). This article was the source of inspiration for our scheme and our method for analysing the needs of young people for information and counselling.

Figure 1: Categories of young people with regard to the need for help



Information and counselling needs of young people

It will be clear from the scheme above that identifying the informational needs of young people based only on an analysis of the number and type of enquiries recorded by a youth information and counselling centre will fail to identify the actual need for information. Young people may, for instance, be stuck with their problems because they do not want to ask for professional assistance. In the same way, a survey that tries to obtain data on the need for help felt by young people themselves, does not succeed in providing a comprehensive picture of the actual needs. There are, for example, young people in distress who themselves do not feel the need for help, as was experienced by, for instance, street corner workers. Where and how can we identify the actual need for professional help and thus create a picture that is as complete as possible?

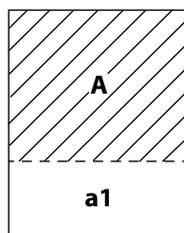
By means of the preceding scheme we can indicate where and how we can identify the needs (Faché, 1989).

(A) A first source of data is the records of young people's enquiries in youth information and counselling centres (YICCs). The precondition is that the record keeping is undertaken systematically. The ideal situation would be one where all enquiries directed to a centre in one year could be analysed. When the workers themselves have to record the enquiries and when the number of questions is very large, one should not record them for one full year, but rather spread the record keeping over certain intervals in the course of a year (as we did in a research project at AMOK in Antwerp).

By means of these record data, we will obtain an actual picture of the volume and type of enquiries at a youth information and counselling centre (Figure 2, part A).

However, as our research shows, a number of young people consult a YICC with questions they could have solved themselves (for instance by using the Internet), or with questions that could have been answered by another, better placed service (for instance the employment service) (scheme 2, part 1).

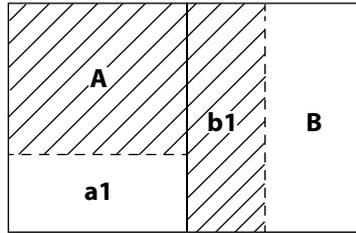
Figure 2



$A + a1$ represent the volume of enquiries that was recorded by a youth information and counselling centre. The part $a1$ represents the questions which the young person could have solved him/herself or for which more appropriate assistance could have been obtained elsewhere.

(B) As we have indicated in scheme 1, young people also turn to other institutions with their problems, such as career advice centres and youth workers, for example. If one analyses the enquiries recorded by these agencies and workers (B in Figure 3), one can ascertain that a limited number of young people might have found more adequate assistance in a YICC (= $b1$ in Figure 3). This becomes especially clear from referrals cases. Hence Figure 2 can be updated in the following way:

Figure 3

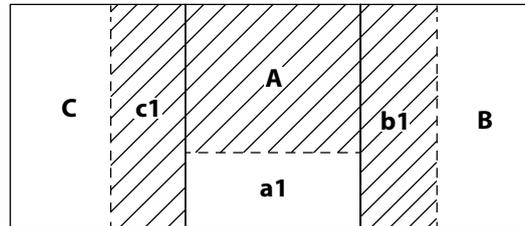


Section b 1 represents enquires made to other agencies which might have been better solved by a YICC. By means of the two preceding research methods and sources of data, we can identify those questions and problems for which young people have actually turned to professional help. However, young people may also come to face problems for which they feel they need help without actually making an appeal for professional help.

- (C) As our representative research project for young people aged 14 to 22 living in cities of over 50 000 inhabitants in Flanders (Belgium) taught us, only a limited number of young people would turn to a YICC with any kind of question. A larger group of young people would only go there with certain questions, in particular those that are not of a very personal and confidential nature. Finally, there is a limited group that would not turn to a YICC for any kind of question. A number of these young people would go to other agencies, but the majority of them look for and obtain help from friends or from members of their families (= C in Figure 4). Such family or friendship “networks” prove to be very important to young people in distress or having social questions, particularly since such networks are often closer at hand when young people need help. But on the other hand, these informal networks do not always possess the adequate resources to help, and then the young people in question could be helped more efficiently by a YICC or by another agency (= c 1 in Figure 4).

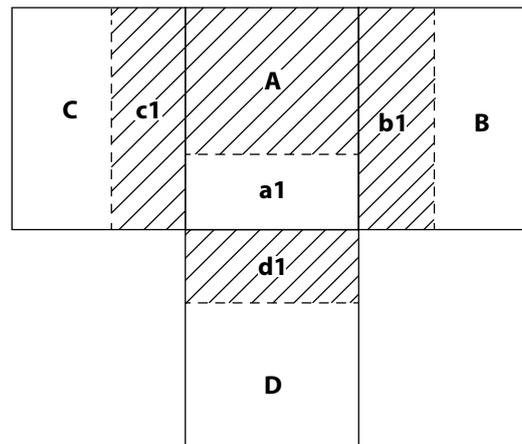
Closer investigation of the networks to which young people belong and these informal sources of help can provide a clearer insight into this form of help.

Figure 4



- (D) There are also young people who feel the need for help, but who do not succeed in finding a form of assistance in their environment that meets with their expectations (D in Figure 5). In reports from detached youth workers one can find testimonies on this category of youth. They appear to be able to identify their need for help. A limited number of these needs may also be fulfilled by consultation of a YICC, as the experience of the Soho detached youth work project in London indicates. These latter cases are mentioned in Figure 5 under d 1.

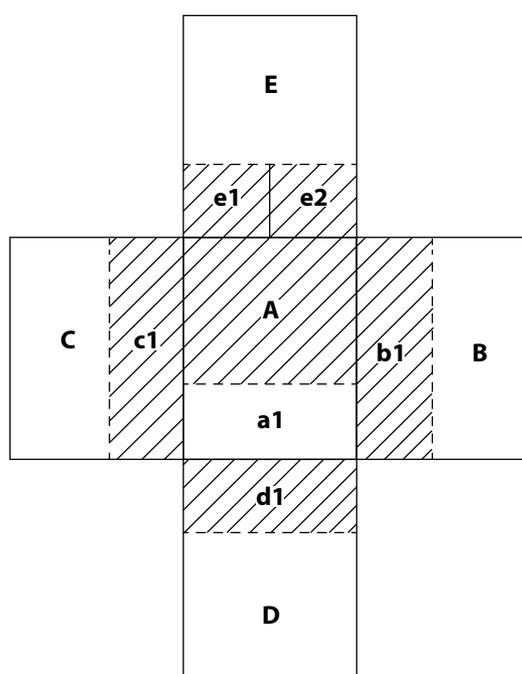
Figure 5



(E) So far we have only dealt with young people who feel a need for help. But there are also those who do not feel the need for help, because they are not conscious of the problematic aspects of their situation (e 1). Their friends are sometimes well aware that they may have worries with which they need help. Other young people are confronted in the context of a complex society with a wide range of choices but do not experience problems at the present moment. Many of these young people come through this period without major difficulty, with the help of their family and friends. Nevertheless, some young people can also come to face problem situations in the future, but have not been given adequate and timely information about issues that matter in their lives, such as contraception, health risks, etc. (= e 2). In Figure 6 we have reproduced these latent needs for help by means of the parts e 1 and e 2.

One cannot learn anything about all these unconscious needs for information and help directly from the young people themselves. People who frequently come into contact with youth, such as youth leaders in youth organisations and clubs, teachers, street corner workers and doctors, often notice these needs and can report them.

Figure 6



In this analysis, we find that the actual information and counselling needs that YICC can meet consist of:

- ▶ A-a1 the enquiries which young people already address to youth information and counselling centres, minus those questions which they could have solved themselves, or for which a better solution might have been obtained elsewhere.
- ▶ b1 the questions which young people address to other services, but which may be solved more effectively by a YICC.
- ▶ c1 the problems for which young people make an appeal to family and friends, but which may be better solved by a YICC.
- ▶ d1 problems that young people come to face but for which they cannot find appropriate help.
- ▶ e1 the young people in a problematical situation, but who are not conscious of it, and who need help.
- ▶ e2 the young people who will perhaps be confronted with a problematical situation in the future, due to a lack of adequate and timely information (preventive information and instruction).

Above we have indicated briefly for each category of needs, which sources and research methods should be considered. From this it will be obvious that in identifying the actual need for youth information and counselling centres, a comprehensive approach that integrates several methods and sources, is necessary.

How can we identify the information and counselling needs of local young people?

Reports from comprehensive research about the information and counselling needs of young people are of great value for initiators of a local YICC. But young people in a locality can have other specific

information needs. The “Guidelines on how to create a youth information centre” (Council of Europe and ERYICA, 2002) recommend conducting the following local survey in order to identify the information needs of local young people.

This is a key step in the creation of a YICC. The first group to ask is the young people themselves. This can and should be done in different ways: a questionnaire in schools, youth clubs and other places frequented by young people ... meetings with youth groups and organisations. Recognise the fact that if the only questions about the needs are coming from adults, the responses and the level of interest and participation on the part of young people are not necessarily going to be the same as when it is other young people asking the questions. It is also important to consult as wide a range as possible of other youth-related services in the area on the question of the local information needs of young people. This will enable you to obtain a more precise idea of what already exists and functions adequately, thus avoiding wasteful duplication. It is possible that the conclusions at the end of the survey will not be so different from the initial ideas of the planning group, but undertaking a serious study of the question of needs offers four important benefits: a) if young people in the locality have other specific information needs, you are likely to hear about them b) asking young people about their needs is a way of involving them, and informing them about the project, which can lead to their active participation in the operating of the YICC c) the conclusions of a survey involving (say) several hundred (or thousand) completed questionnaires, plus meetings with a series of youth groups, are much more convincing as evidence of need than the individual opinions of the persons in the planning group d) the other existing youth-related services are informed about the proposed centre, which will need to collaborate closely with them in the future.

Do-it-yourself information and information through the mediation of persons

In spite of the fact that we live in an information era and a lot of information is available, it is often written or presented in a way that is difficult to understand for the new members, the newcomers to society. Specialised information and counselling for young people are increasingly necessary in a complex and dynamic society that offers so many possibilities and choices.

On the other hand, we can observe that in order to try out new roles and experiences, young people have a tendency to distance themselves from adults like their parents. While distancing is important for the exercise of independence, it often removes young people from supporting entities that could assist them at this important stage in their development toward independence. We must support this early attempt at autonomy by offering information and counselling in a setting that young people accept and in a language and format that take into account their search for independence (Faché, 2012).

From this standpoint, it is useful to make a distinction between do-it-yourself information and person-mediated information. Do-it-yourself information is available in a form that enables those who are interested to solve problems on their own. In this category we can find information booklets, leaflets and information on the Internet. Good examples of comprehensive information material with which young people are able to solve concrete problems of life are the youth information booklets: “16 or so... and everything you need to know” (The Netherlands and Flanders), “Young Scot” (Edinburgh), “Survival Kit” (Newcastle) as well as youth information websites.

Next to these comprehensive youth information booklets and websites, some youth information and counselling centres have developed and disseminated “do-it-yourself information” in the form of leaflets or websites on contraceptives, unemployment benefits, rental acts, drugs, and so forth. Other centres (for instance Info Jeugd in Ghent) have combined information in leaflet form with radio broadcasts on the same subjects. After broadcasting a brief description of the content of the leaflet, listeners can obtain additional personal information by phoning or sending an e-mail to the youth information and counselling centre. Again, other centres combine dissemination of leaflets and class instruction in schools on subjects such as contraceptives, drugs, and so forth.

The implicit assumption of preventive intervention (see above Figure 6, part e 2) in the form of do-it-yourself information is that individuals get into trouble because they have not received timely and accurate information about certain subjects that affect their individual lives. If young people are properly informed about these subjects, they will act properly. Approaches that rely primarily on the provision of factual information are necessary and effective with regard to problems caused only by a lack of appropriate information. The causes of tobacco, alcohol, and drug abuse, for example, appear to be more complex and require more sophisticated preventive interventions.

Although do-it-yourself information material best matches young people’s need for independence, this is not always the most adequate form of information. Information through personal contact via the telephone, the Internet, social media or in a face-to-face conversation may be more effective.

Role of YIC in the national context of youth policy and legal regulations

There are three main different levels of integration of YIC into the national youth policy. There are still some countries where YIC services are not officially recognised in terms of being defined in the national law on youth policy. Instead, references might be found in strategic documents such as a concept of youth policy or similar. However, for a sustainable structure of YIC work it is recommended to have YIC services included in the legal framework of a particular country – the level of integrity depends on the traditions of youth policy and on political willingness, as well as on one's vision of youth information and counselling.

The first level is having YIC as a tool for youth policy, more in terms of an information and policy reform dissemination channel, reaching out to young people and encouraging their participation in civic life. In such cases youth information workers are not normally viewed as experts when shaping youth policy, and there are no permanent participation possibilities for them in working groups, etc. In these cases YIC is present only in governmental programmes for youth, but not in strategic documents or more especially as part of the legal regulation.

At the second level, as in most European countries, YIC is part of youth work. In most cases this is laid down in the strategy for youth policy or even provided for by legal regulation. As YIC is one area of youth work this brings more opportunities to have a say in the policy-shaping process, however it is still hierarchically under the umbrella of youth work.

The third and the highest level would be having YIC as a third pillar of youth policy alongside youth organisations and youth work. However this does not imply the necessity of having this situation legally regulated – it is sufficient that practice shows that national co-ordination of YIC has been involved in the formation and implementation of youth policy in the country. In general, the model of legal regulation also depends very much on the constitution of a state – a federal state would leave defining YIC to regional governments, while a unitary state and a high level of centralisation might be an obstacle to placing YIC into a legal framework. In all cases where it is attempted to define YIC in the legislation and strategic documents of a government this ensures more stability and sustainability in the future work.

What kind of problems can be solved by means of youth information?

You cannot prove this with statistics. It is about supporting individuals in dealing with their life and the challenges they face. That might be experimenting with drugs. Is information solving drug addiction? I don't think so, but it works in a preventive way. You can turn this question around and ask: how many drug addicts would we have if there hadn't been youth information? The same is for teenage pregnancies, family conflicts, self-harm, bullying, suicide, depression, crime in general and so on. All the problems that we are trying to solve can be dealt with by youth information through prevention or early intervention – before the problem occurs. And in not too "heavy" a way – not sending someone, for example, directly to a psychiatric hospital, which costs society a lot more.

Johan Bertels, youth information worker, expert

Awareness building and lobbying of policy makers

Lobbying and regular direct contact with stakeholders and policy makers are critical components of achieving a desired policy change. Lobbying refers to asking an elected official or key decision maker to vote a certain way or take specific actions concerning legislation, rules, issues or policies.

One of the most persuasive forms of lobbying is face-to-face meetings when you explain the issue at stake and the position or actions you would like the person you are meeting to take.

It is important to start talking about the importance of youth information and counselling with people in decision-making positions so as to make them aware of such services and the benefits they bring. Ultimately, the target of a group of youth information and counselling services supporters is to have the government of their country recognise the importance of these services in legislation.

At the very beginning, it is crucial to identify the following:

- ▶ which public body is responsible for the field of youth in your country? (e.g. the ministry of social affairs);
- ▶ who are the key decision makers? (e.g. committee chairs and/or members);

- ▶ who can you reach out to for additional support or help with the initial stage of the process? (e.g. the national youth council of your country, which is likely to already have all the key information as well as knowing possible supporters of your cause).

Next, take steps to make sure your efforts are effective.

1. Research the issue and lawmaker

Make sure you gather information about the state of youth information in your country: what has already been done by other parties and official institutions, what is the current state of the matter and what is your desired result. Make sure you collect some relevant data which can help persuade stakeholders – this is when contacting ERYICA may prove beneficial, as the organisation could provide you with data from other countries for comparison purposes and other useful information.

How can we show policy makers that we need YIC services?

Tip for lobbying: taking young people with you

It is not always possible to have statistics. So we use active youth participation – we brought peers and volunteers into closer contact with politicians. Some time ago there was initiative in the parliament for new regulation on drugs. It was very ambitious, but there wasn't any contact with young people during the preparation of the legislation. So we wrote a letter and were invited to the meeting of the commission. I went there with three youngsters; we had half an hour foreseen on the agenda. However, it turned out to take two hours, and parliamentarians were very impressed with all the information they received while questioning our peers and volunteers. I also try to do this on a local level. When we have negotiations with the ministry, we always take young people with us. You need to make statistics live, so this face-to-face [contact] with politicians helps.

Johan Bertels, youth information worker, expert

2. Schedule a meeting or agree on a way to get your point across

Most lawmakers are eager to meet with their constituents, because they see your opinions as valuable. Keep in mind that you do not need to be an expert to get your point across. Provide brief background information about the issue and clearly define what action you want the person you are meeting to take. There is also power in numbers – setting up a meeting along with 3-4 like-minded individuals can help show even stronger support for your issue. In cases where a face-to-face meeting is not possible, try to find another way of making sure your voice is heard, e.g. write a position paper.

3. Ensure follow-up

Make sure you leave some information material for the person you have met or include it along with other documents you are submitting to an institution. Allow a reasonable amount of time for the person or institution you have contacted to study the material and once that time has passed, contact them again requesting their opinion. Ideally, you would want to establish regular contact with the person you have met or make sure the institution you have reached out to takes the necessary actions and informs you about them.

Since politics is a very dynamic process and policy makers happen to change once in a while, be prepared to do this all over again, because a new government may be willing to cut expenses and it is the easiest for them to do so in policy areas they do not fully understand. So lobbying and taking care of established contacts should become part of your monthly agenda.

Structure and governance – laying out the possible formal organisational models, selection of national co-ordinator

Like the legal regulation of YIC, the governing model of the YIC structure depends very much on the national environment and structure of a state. We can distinguish five different models that exist in Europe. Note that this concerns only national systems of YIC services and new ways of structuring a YIC system might also be created based on your own environment.

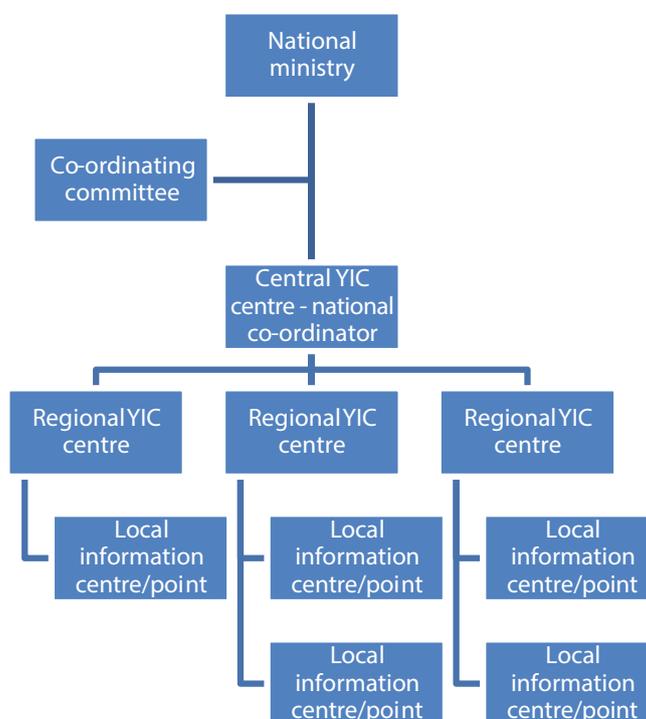
In general, there are five different models of national co-ordination of the youth information and counselling structure:

- ▶ central YIC centre;
- ▶ association of YIC centres with a co-ordinating body;
- ▶ technical co-ordinator/supporter;
- ▶ national agency;
- ▶ no co-ordination.

The aim is the same, but you have to adapt to the historical and cultural environment of one country. What is working in one country may be impossible in another.

Bernard Charbonnel, youth information expert, former president of Eurodesk AISBL

Central YIC centre as a national co-ordinating body

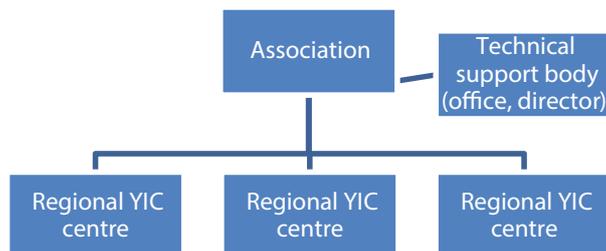


This model includes cases where the national government initiates or supports the creation of a separate agency, which is still partially a governmental body, a so-called centralised YIC centre. This centre is often one of the biggest youth information centres in the country, is established in the capital city and also acts as a national co-ordinating body for the network of regional and/or local YIC services/centres/points. The national co-ordinator takes care of quality assurance, training in the whole system, standardisation of services and communication (i.e. branding and tools used by the network), representation at the national level and international co-operation. Hierarchically this national co-ordinating body also initiates the creation of regional youth information centres but it may also only give the nationally recognised label of YIC to regional organisations, thus creating some obligations for them.

In this case the national co-ordinator is bound very tightly with the national ministry, which is responsible for the regular financial support for the centralised structure. It is therefore dependent on political will and the changing political situation, as well as on financial circumstances. Moreover, to maintain the continuous monitoring of performance of the whole system, the ministry may establish a special co-ordinating committee composed of representatives of the ministry and the national co-ordinator and other actors in the youth field. On every level – regional and local – governments or municipalities contribute financially to the regional/local YIC centres, separately from the national resources.

This model can be observed in France and the Czech Republic.

Association of YIC centres with a co-ordinating body



In countries where regional/local youth information centres were established before a national co-ordination body was set up, an association is a more common form of national co-operation and co-ordination. Normally, YIC centres decide to formalise their informal co-operation network and to create an association – a non-governmental body – which has a technical support structure in itself. The director of this association performs an executive function, taking care of the implementation of the decisions made by the association. The director is appointed by the association or through its governing body (e.g. board), to which he therefore reports.

The national association represents its members – regional YIC centres at national and international levels – unites them for common activities and projects at national level, monitors their performance, provides quality tools (e.g. providing labels for services), methodological support (e.g. a common database of enquiries), training of staff, publications and national information portals and lobbying. Usually the national co-ordinating body – an association – is financed by the national ministry responsible for youth affairs and through European funds for individual activities. Regional YIC centres are sometimes partially financed by the national/federal state, while regional government bears the main costs of maintaining regional YIC centres. Regional centres may be both – public or non-governmental bodies.

This model empowers regional YIC centres to be actively involved in forming the national youth information policy at national level and allows them to have their say on national issues. Since regions may vary from each other, it also preserves regional diversity, which is reflected in the subsequent YIC work. Through being close to young people and having local knowledge, this model helps to stay in touch with young people, and such an organically developed network may better represent young people from all over the country. However, since regions are very autonomous, there might be difficulties in standardising services, quality procedures and especially the visual identity (branding) and communication, which may be problematic for those youngsters who move across the country and cannot identify the same structure in different regions because of different communication strategies.

Associations of national co-ordinating bodies for YIC services operate in Austria and Croatia.

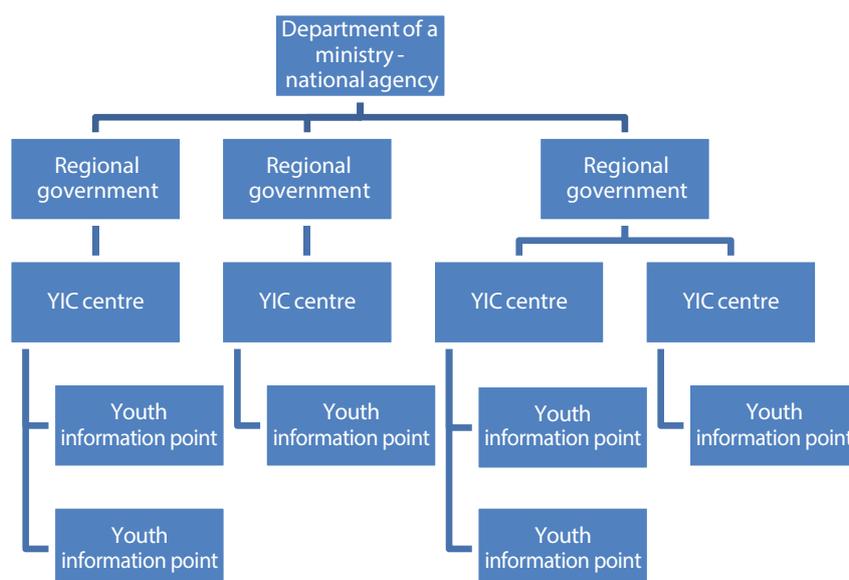
Technical co-ordinator/supporter

It is possible to have a structure of YIC services at national level without any binding official ties or hierarchy. Local YIC centres that are created and financed by the local government (municipality) might receive the same support from the organisation responsible for development of YIC services at national level without establishing an official association or a centralised approach. In this case there is no hierarchy or binding relations between local and national bodies, membership of the network of YIC centres is voluntary, and the national co-ordinating body will provide its services to all YIC centres operating in the country regardless of their membership status.

It is possible to have a structure like this if local YICs are working independently and receiving their main financial support from the local government, while the national co-ordinating body receives support from national ministry funds. The tasks of a co-ordinating body are mainly the same as in an association; however, since the national co-ordinator in this case is an independent body and it is not accountable to the local YIC centres, it is able to act more freely.

Such a structure can be found in Finland.

National agency



A public body, a department of a ministry responsible for youth, or similar, may also act as a national co-ordinating structure for YIC services in a country. This kind of national agency can provide local YIC centres with funds, directly or through regional governments, and have an impact on them through these means. However, national co-ordination should still take care of the quality process and standardisation of services, training of staff, methodological support and international co-operation.

Cultural and religious minorities are not only to be taken into account while establishing the YIC system, but can be also an answer as a policy tool for their better integration.

Bernard Charbonnel

In the case of Estonia, where this model has been in place since 1999, funds are transferred from the Estonian Youth Work Centre to the regional governments – counties – which then decide which organisations – YIC centres – will be supported. Normally, these are the same YIC centres that continuously work in the field of youth information and counselling. However, it has been observed that it might be more efficient to do the selection of organisations through a centralised open call procedure. The so-called youth information points have become a new and important part of the YIC structure in Estonia. Different organisations which work directly with young people have the opportunity to integrate youth information work into their work so as to ensure a wider outreach to youngsters in the country. However, youth info points only receive training and information material for dissemination, but not funds for salaries or similar as the 20 YIC centres do.

No co-ordination

Although the human mind is used to having structures, as they make things easier to understand, it is possible to have successful youth information work without having a national structure. However, this does not mean not having YIC services – on the contrary, some countries are reaching out and informing young people without having a strict system of YIC services. For example, in Scotland YIC services have been provided for three decades by a non-governmental organisation (Young Scot), which receives support from the national government, local authorities and does project work with other entities.

Choosing the national co-ordinator

The national co-ordinating body can be chosen in different ways, if it is not created at the very beginning, as happened in Austria or Finland. The national government can choose one through an open call procedure and provide clear criteria with which this organisation must comply. If there is an organisation that is capable of fully and successfully implementing the tasks foreseen for such a structure and already has the necessary experience in the field, the national authority may also just directly appoint such an organisation. It is, however,

important to take into account that the national co-ordinating body should not be changed frequently (only if it does not comply with the criteria previously foreseen and agreed). Due to the specific features of youth information work there are not so many experienced organisations to fit this specific role and therefore experience and sustainability should be preferred when looking for a national co-ordinating body.

What would you tell the initiators of new YIC structures?

I would say: ask young people – before you start. I would say that YIC services should not be tied to one place. Youth clubs in rural areas may be the only place to meet for leisure, so why not have a YI presence there too? There have been specialised information services in Scotland for years, but young people tended not to use them. Involving young people in the design of new services makes it easier to show policy makers that it comes from young people themselves.

The Scottish government now works to a strategy for the well-being of young people and youth information is one of the services helping it reach its objectives.

Governments of some European countries are conservative and still a bit suspicious about youth rights and young people being active citizens – that's why some still do not have this structure of YIC. It is a cultural aspect which needs to be taken into consideration. Even YI services need to take into account not only different needs of different age groups of different young people, but also the cultural environment in which they will operate.

Fiona McIntyre, freelance journalist, one of the pioneers of generalist YIC services

Ensuring stable financing

Securing a stable financing mechanism for established youth information and counselling structures is vital to their existence. In order for the structure to provide uninterrupted services and not lose expert staff, accumulated experience and customers, and in order to maintain the quality of services, funds must be allocated for its continuous support.

Generally, youth information and counselling networks depend largely on two types of funding:

- ▶ **local or regional government grants:** Funding is allocated within the local or regional government and the provider of the youth information and counselling services works to meet the objectives of local or regional policies;
- ▶ **national government grants:** Financial resources are made available from the national budget, oftentimes serving to finance the youth information and counselling structure nationwide. The funds may go towards the needs of a national co-ordinating body for the youth information and counselling network, if sufficient funding is ensured for regional representatives by means of local or regional funding, or the whole national network encompassing both the national co-ordinator and organisations active on regional and local levels.

Funding from European institutions, which can be divided into two main types:

- ▶ **action grants**, which fund specific projects in a concrete area of activity and are usually insufficient to fund the entire operations of the youth information and counselling services provider. These grants generally last for 1-3 years and are difficult to extend, which leads to loss of project continuity;
- ▶ **operating grants**, which allow European institutions to directly subsidise an organisation. In this case, the grant is based on an analysis of the dimension of an organisation's activities, their scope, an annual work plan, its compatibility with the policy priorities, etc. rather than on individual projects. Alternatively, these grants may also be provided as a result of a strong working relationship between the institution providing the funding and the donor organisation.

Self-generated income is also a way for a provider of youth information and counselling services to gain funds. Although the information and counselling services themselves must remain free of charge to all young people, as this is a core principle of youth information and counselling work, an organisation might choose to generate income using its:

- ▶ **hard assets** (e.g. equipment, office space, conference room rental);
- ▶ **soft assets** (e.g. selling the right to use its material to business entities, media).

Analysis of a financial model for a national youth information and counselling network

In order to provide a purely theoretical example of what a national youth information and counselling network might look like and what annual financial resources are needed to maintain its services, we have described a basic network and created a budget for it.

The following example describes a network comprised of a national co-ordination body and five regional organisations providing youth information and counselling services at regional level, all of which are part of a single national youth information and counselling network. The network is set up in a mid-sized central European country where the euro is the national currency.

Structure

National level

A state institution, together with a partner from the NGO sector, creates a new organisation that will manage the national youth information and counselling network. This organisation – the national co-ordinator – employs a staff of two people. The office of the national co-ordinator does not provide information and counselling services – it acts as a co-ordinating organisation for the regional offices and:

- ▶ it is a centre for the development of youth information and counselling services in the country, is responsible for the expansion of the network and provides support to youth information workers who are employed regionally;
- ▶ it provides training to employees of regional youth information and counselling centres;
- ▶ it prepares publications that are relevant nationwide and distributes them to regional centres;
- ▶ it is a member of an international youth information and counselling network (e.g. ERYICA);
- ▶ it implements the oversight of the whole system and collects statistical data;
- ▶ it maintains a national youth information portal;
- ▶ it creates a visual identity for the whole network and manages its promotion;
- ▶ it is a representative of the national youth information and counselling system, recognised by the government;
- ▶ it evaluates the quality of services provided at regional level.

Regional level

The national co-ordinator establishes new youth information and counselling centres in five regions:

- ▶ each centre employs a staff of two people who work in shifts;
- ▶ the centres are easily identified and accessed by young people due to their central location in their respective cities;
- ▶ the main form of service provision is walk-in, when young people talk to youth information workers in person;
- ▶ each centre also answers e-mail and phone enquiries;
- ▶ at least one public use computer and a selection of free information material is present in all five centres;
- ▶ the centres active at regional level also maintain close co-operation with other information service providers in their area to make sure young people are efficiently referred to other services if such a need arises.

Budget

An estimated budget for this network would be as follows:

Reference period: one calendar year. All figures in euros.

	National co-ordinator	Regional office	Sub-total
STAFF			
Staff salaries	2 x 15 500	2 x 5 x 15 500	186 000
Staff training (including travel costs)	7 500	5 x 2 000	17 500
OPERATING COSTS			
Rental of office space	25 000	5 x 18 000	115 000
Producing and disseminating publications	15 000	5 x 7 500	52 500
Overheads	3 500	5 x 1 500	11 000
Total EUR:			382 000

Skills of a youth information worker



Communication in the mother tongue



Communication in foreign languages



Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology



Digital competence



Learning to learn



Co-operating and networking with other youth services



Social and civic competences



Helping young people to access information and develop their skill in using new technologies



Analysing, planning, implementing and evaluating youth information work



Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship



Guaranteeing access to all young people



Attractive provision of services



Identifying information needs of young people



Cultural awareness and expression



Personalised approach



Respecting privacy and anonymity



Offering information in a complete, up to date, practical and user friendly way



Ensuring objectivity of information



Using innovative methods, tools and strategies in providing youth information



Promotion and marketing of the services in order to reach as many young people as possible



Reaching different groups of young people with different needs



Involving young people in different stages of youth information work

SKILLS OF A YOUTH INFORMATION WORKER

Hannes Sildnik

A youth information worker will often find him or herself multitasking. Daily communication with young people in answering enquiries, updating and organising information, planning further activities and information events, collaborating with colleagues and networking partners – these are just a few of the most obvious tasks. Or rather, a description of the tip of the iceberg of everything that needs to be done. Depending on individual settings, youth information can be provided in a separate entity – a youth information centre – or integrated into a wider array of youth-related services. One way or another, youth information work is not a stand-alone isolated unit, but an intrinsic part of youth work. Therefore, the skills of a youth information worker should also be viewed and understood in a wider context of youth work.

First, let's start from skills specific to youth information work. The easiest way to do that is to look into existing background documents and try to imagine what kind of skills lay beneath the principal tasks. In youth information and counselling work the two most practical background documents are ERYICA's European Youth Information Charter⁸ and Principles for Online Youth Information.⁹ Both of them contain a number of keywords that describe skills needed in youth information work:

- ▶ analysing, planning, implementing and evaluating youth information work;
- ▶ guaranteeing access to all young people;
- ▶ attractive provision of services;
- ▶ identifying information needs of young people;
- ▶ personalised approach;
- ▶ respecting privacy and anonymity;
- ▶ offering information in a complete, up-to-date, practical and user-friendly way;
- ▶ ensuring objectivity of information;
- ▶ use of innovative methods, tools and strategies in providing youth information;
- ▶ promotion and marketing of the services in order to reach as many young people as possible;
- ▶ reaching different groups of young people with different needs;
- ▶ involving young people in different stages of youth information work (identifying information needs, the preparation and delivery of information, managing and evaluating information services);
- ▶ co-operation and networking with other youth services;
- ▶ helping young people to access information and develop their skill in using new technologies.

In youth information work the keywords above can be categorised into client-oriented skills (personalised approach, respect for anonymity, use of appropriate methods and techniques in working with young people, etc.), technical skills (use of information and communication technology (ICT), attractive provision of information, promotion and marketing, etc.) and process-related skills (networking, involvement of young people, identifying information needs, etc.).

Another set of skills of youth information workers have to do with the role of youth information work in the context of youth work. These can be viewed as generic competences also relating to the process, but from the angle of understanding the role and importance of youth information work in achieving the aims of youth policy. The 28 member states of the European Union have agreed¹⁰ that by 2018 the national youth policies will be developed in eight common key areas (Table 1) in order to enhance the employability of young people, fight against poverty, combat early school leaving, foster social inclusion, solidarity, skills development among young people, etc.

Skills development is also a crucial element for youth (information) workers. The European framework for key competences¹¹ provides a platform for continuous self-development throughout life. Key competences for lifelong learning are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. They are particularly necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion, active citizenship and employment.

8. <http://eryica.org/page/european-youth-information-charter-0>.

9. <http://eryica.org/page/principles-online-youth-information>.

10. http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth_strategy/index_en.htm.

11. http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11090_en.htm.

Table 1



In youth (information) work skills development can therefore be seen as a concrete tool for meeting the needs of the ever-changing world of young people, but also for supporting the development of these competences in youth.

The eight key competences for achieving employment and personal fulfilment are:

- ▶ **communication in the mother tongue**, which is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts;
- ▶ **communication in foreign languages**, which involves, in addition to the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue, mediation and intercultural understanding; the level of proficiency depends on several factors and the capacity for listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- ▶ **mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology**, which is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations, with the emphasis being placed on process, activity and knowledge; basic competences in science and technology refer to the mastery, use and application of knowledge and methodologies that explain the natural world and these involve an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and the responsibility of each individual as a citizen;
- ▶ **digital competence** involves the confident and critical use of information society technology (IST) and thus basic skills in ICT;
- ▶ **learning to learn** is related to the ability to pursue and organise one's own learning, either individually or in groups, in accordance with one's own needs, and awareness of methods and opportunities;
- ▶ **social and civic competences** refers to personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life; it is linked to personal and social well-being; an understanding of codes of conduct and customs in the different environments in which individuals operate is essential; civic competence, and particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights), equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation;
- ▶ **sense of initiative and entrepreneurship** is the ability to turn ideas into action; it involves creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives; the individual is aware of the context of his/her work and is able to seize opportunities that arise; it is the foundation for acquiring more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity it should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance;
- ▶ **cultural awareness and expression**, which involves appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media (music, performing arts, literature and the visual arts).

Working skills, however, can also be seen as a facade, a suit that we wear in our professional lives. When a young person enters a youth information centre we welcome him or her by smiling. A smile is natural to some, but a difficult skill in a situation when the youth information worker is tired, overloaded with work or has a headache. In those situations, we know professionally that "being welcoming" is a working method to support

youngsters in their quest for quality information. And that working method involves establishing contact by smiling and being friendly.

What is often more important is what hides behind the facade – our values and attitudes. We all have personal beliefs that influence our behaviour. In youth information work the clients are mostly younger, less experienced, fragile and finding their individual path to adulthood. Therefore the most essential skills of a youth information worker are awareness of one's influence, objectivity and respect for autonomy of the client and constant development of oneself.

Planning and implementing online services

It is clear that young people are heavy Internet users and therefore a modern youth information and counselling network cannot ignore the Internet as a medium for providing its services.

According to the 2012 EU Youth Report, around 80% of young people who are aged between 16 and 24 use computers and the Internet daily and between 2006 and 2011, the proportion of young people using the Internet daily increased in most EU countries much more than the share of new computer users. During this five year period twice as many young people started to use the Internet daily when compared to those who began using computers. And with smartphones making Internet access even easier and the fact that they are used by an increasingly large proportion of Europe's young population, the Internet will only gain significance as a source of information.

It must be stressed, however, that the provision of youth information and counselling services must never turn to solely online-based services, as this would go against one of the main principles of youth information and counselling, which is to make services available to all young people, with no exceptions. Obstacles must not be created for those who are not frequent Internet users or simply prefer other means of service.

However, providing YIC services online is a financially feasible and efficient way of getting information to young people and collecting their feedback.

In 2009, to give guidance to providers of youth information and counselling services, ERYICA adopted the Principles for Online Youth Information. The principles outline the key elements of creating and providing online services and are also available on the ERYICA website in a number of European languages: <http://eryica.org/page/principles-online-youth-information>.

The core elements of an online presence for a provider of youth information and counselling services are as follows:

Website

Depending on the structure of the youth information and counselling services in the country, websites can be created either on a regional or national level. And while both types of websites that complement each other may be present in a country, generally a national youth information portal is preferable where the network of organisations that provide youth information and counselling services is well structured and these organisations are uniform. Where regional differences exist it may make more sense for each region to develop its own website. The type of approach must be decided upon after careful analysis.

Online publications

Online publications can serve to complement printed materials, when, alongside a hard copy, an online version is made available for download. After downloading it can either be stored on users' devices or printed by the users themselves. This saves costs for service providers, which would otherwise go towards producing more copies of the publication.

A publication can also be made available online only, with no print version. In case visitors to youth information and counselling points ask for copies, these can be printed ad hoc for handing out as required.

Newsletters

Newsletters are distributed by e-mail and serve as a way for a service provider to keep in touch with customers on a regular basis. They are an efficient way of:

- ▶ distributing informative content;
- ▶ providing a summary of articles recently published on the website;
- ▶ promoting upcoming opportunities.

Most often users can sign up for a newsletter or opt out of receiving it whenever they wish, either by e-mail or through a website. Newsletters can also be easily shared by e-mail, when the subscribers choose to forward them to other individuals or organisations who might find the information relevant.

Enquiry answering services

Depending on how these services function, they can be real-time or non-real-time.

Non-real-time services are services where a customer submits an enquiry and receives an answer within a set time period, e.g. three working days. Depending on the way in which the provider of youth information and counselling services chooses to deal with them, answers to enquiries can be provided:

- ▶ personally, via e-mail: the enquiry is answered and, unless the customer has follow-up questions, no further action is taken;
- ▶ online, where the questions and answers to them are made available publically on a website, unless the young person who sent in the question has specifically requested not to do so; providing answers to questions online can help make sure that future customers with enquiries covering the same topic will be able to find the required information without having to contact representatives of the organisation that provides information services; furthermore, if a possibility to comment on the answers exists other users may also contribute by sharing their experiences or information;
- ▶ alternatively, the YIC services provider can choose a mix of these two approaches; usually this is done by answering all enquiries personally, but keeping track of the most popular topics that are of interest to young people and publishing a frequently asked questions list on the website to provide quick answers to commonly submitted questions.

Real-time support concerns services where a young person can get in touch with a professional from an organisation providing youth information and counselling services using an online chat service. On the one hand, this provides the youth information worker with more opportunities to obtain more details about the enquirer or other information that may be of relevance and clear up any misunderstandings. However, this also requires the youth information worker to have full understanding of the subject, as he/she will be expected to provide an answer in real time with very little time to research the subject.

Social network presence

Creating profiles or pages on social networks is a good way of reaching out to young people and communicating with them using platforms that are already available, e.g. Facebook, Twitter and others. Social networks can serve as a means of directing customers to content that is already published elsewhere or engaging in a discussion, answering questions and interacting with the target group in other ways.

Communication and branding of services

Visibility and visual identity for a new system of YIC services in one country can be a crucial step forwards or backwards – depending on the effectiveness of the communication work done. You not only need to reach out to youngsters with your online services and offline activities where young people are, but also to create a recognisable visual identity using different tools: branding, corporate design, common and attractive visuals. Based on that you will create your image, which can help you to attract more young people make use of your services, thus being “trendy”. Usage of your visual identity should be all-encompassing in every roll-up, publication, poster, leaflet, website, document and even e-mail.

If you already have different visual identities of YIC services in different regions, consider possibilities to synchronise these, because it is important that young people can easily identify you when they are migrating from one region to another. It is recommended to create an attractive brand (not only logo, but also the audiovisual context in which it is being used). Experience shows that the most effective branding is local one – using local symbols, native language and just being “youthful” – not too sterile – and welcoming to all kinds of young people who use your services. A brand is in itself a strong statement about you and your work, so take good care of it. Do not forget that re-branding is also possible at any time; however it is quite demanding and should be well planned and evaluated in advance. You should consult not only designers and public relations specialists, but also ask young people and see their reactions or even involve them in creation process with a help of professional.

A communications strategy, which describes the main messages, goals and your means of communication for a longer period is a first step you need to take when thinking about successful communication outcomes. Strategy rather describes the content of your communication work and goals and the expected results, while

an annual or biennial communication plan shows very concrete methods and actions for your goals to be reached. You need to demonstrate a presence in media in order to stay visible, not only for young people, but also for their parents and educators to understand what you are doing. This also helps to create new partnerships with other information providers and networks, moreover it is a channel through which to show yourself to the policy makers, and demonstrate that you are actively working, because it would be a pity if all the hard, if sometimes monotonous, daily youth information work you are doing remains unappreciated.

Your presence in news portals, newspapers, TV and radio should be well planned – think of different excuses to be there: you want to share your insights about the problems youngsters are facing, present new information tools or special information campaigns. You even can initiate a special TV reality show on different stories you have experienced while working with youngsters or just answer non-sensitive enquiries of young readers in a dedicated column of a newspaper every week. In any case you should have a person responsible for communication who could answer questions from journalists at any time or take care of the implementation of your plan. Evaluating and adjusting your actions is an important part of success; if some of your channels are not so effective – analyse and change them – everything is in your hands!

International co-operation

Once a national youth information and counselling structure has been established it is important to look into the possibilities for bilateral, regional and international co-operation. Oftentimes, especially if other countries that may be involved in co-operation have a long history of youth information and counselling services, it is possible to benefit from the experience and expertise they already possess. Things like a common language or a single region might also influence co-operation and create conditions for fruitful co-operation. Co-operation with other actors in the field of youth information enables one to:

- ▶ benefit from similar national circumstances and similar information needs of young people and join forces to work together and improve information and counselling services;
- ▶ exchange knowledge and experience as well as compare different national structures and approaches;
- ▶ develop synergies and use them to run joint projects or undertake cost-saving actions (e.g. produce information material centrally).

Bilateral co-operation exists, for example, between the Estonian and Finnish national youth information networks and mainly concerns the exchange of expertise and knowledge in the field of youth information. The co-operation between Czech Republic and France has allowed the Czechs to benefit from the vast experience of the French information system, which in turn even resulted in the fact that the Czech model is based on the French youth information and counselling network.

International organisations, such as ERYICA, allow providers of youth information and counselling services to benefit from co-operation on an even wider level and work on issues that are common for national organisations across all European countries: quality, principles of providing online youth information, and others.

ORGANISATION OF INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING ACTIVITIES IN YOUTH INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING CENTRES

Professor Dr W. Faché

In the 1960s youth information and counselling centres came into being in the USA, Canada and western European countries. They differ fundamentally from the established specialised services, not only in their working principles (the “walk-in” concept, youth-friendly opening hours, immediate help, no fees, anonymity, confidentiality, a client-centred approach and the informal attitude of the workers), but also in the comprehensibility of their service. They are comprehensive in respect of the target population – young people. As was already mentioned earlier such population-specific services are comprehensive as far as subject areas are concerned: any young person may walk in with any problem. This important feature concerns the intake criteria and this means that youth information and counselling services offer help to anyone, over the whole range of psychosocial and practical questions and problems of life, the result being that the client does not need to make a self-diagnosis before calling upon a youth information and counselling service. This is not always the case with subject-specialised services, in which every request for assistance has to be as precise and clear as possible. Current intake criteria of specialised services are “persons having questions or problems in the field of...” followed by a restrictive list of fields, such as study or sexuality.

YIC centres are neutral places where young people meet qualified information workers as well as peers – those who have already experience and want to share it. They are places where young people may also meet employers. A YIC centre is a crossroads for young people, schools, employers and professional information networks. We are the place where people meet.

Claire Conlon, youth information professional, international officer of CIDJ

In the opinion of experienced workers, a precise definition of intake criteria has the following negative effects on the client: clients are sometimes forced to call upon yet another service for every aspect of the same problem. Problems are not always so specific that one needs a specialised information and counselling service. Problems must frequently be seen in their context and in relation to other questions.

Moreover, information services focusing on specific problems often label their clients. This labelling obstructs a holistic approach to the person and consequently the recognition of other personal qualities. The dispersion of services over a variety of specialised service providers further hampers the accessibility to help. “Where to go with which problem?” constitutes a problem in itself. One may even wonder if the various established services, with their autonomous policy of selective intake criteria, do not in fact exclude from help the most vulnerable social groups (e.g. young persons who have run away from home).

Youth information and counselling services have, moreover, experienced that clients do not raise confidential problems during the first contact(s). As an introduction to these problems, a client will ask more objective and practical questions. By offering this opportunity, the service becomes more accessible. The practice of youth information and counselling services further shows that the absence of precisely defined intake criteria leads to the discovery of many problems that were ignored by the network of specialised information services, such as the problems of young runaways and unwanted pregnancies in the 1960s.

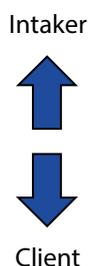
The low threshold to youth information and counselling services, however, raises problems for the information services themselves. By stating that anyone with any problem should be welcome, the centres attract clients who often cannot find help at any specialised service.

Some youth information and counselling centres are more restrictive when defining their intake criteria, accepting, for example, only young people who are purely making enquiries. As most youth information and counselling services have very broad intake criteria, they are faced with a wide variety of persons and problems. This immediately raises the question of how their counsellors are able to handle them.

Three organisational models

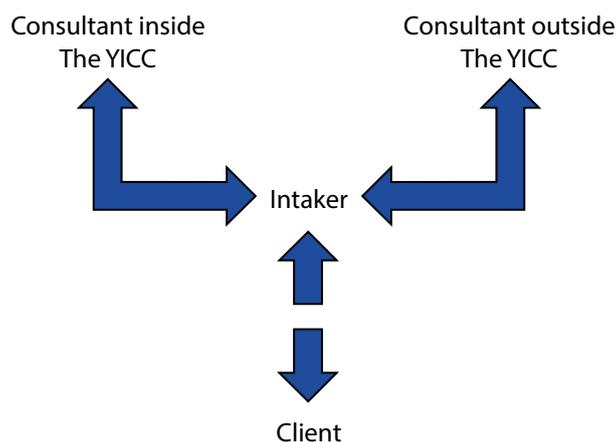
The following three models serve as a basis for the organisation of information and counselling activities.

1. A team of front-line workers operates on a rotational basis when clients arrive with any problem that they might have. The counsellor must work together with the client to achieve effective help. Due to continuous training and constantly updated documentation and knowledge, these workers often succeed in helping their clients in an effective way.

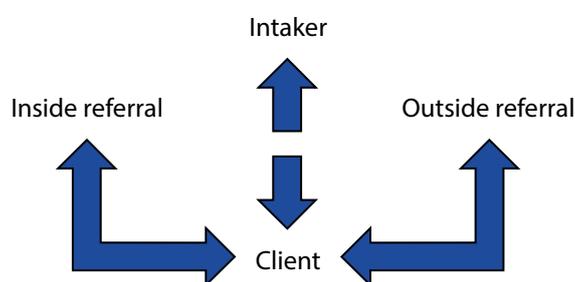


But the diversity of problems facing workers at a youth information and counselling centre sometimes leads to the situation that their knowledge or skills are insufficient to offer effective help. Problems regarding social law, for instance, mostly require an up-to-date knowledge of legislation. Medical, psychiatric or legal problems mostly require professional expertise.

2. In a second organisational model, a consultant is used by the front-line worker (the intaker) in order to help him with some aspects of a problem. The front-line workers make a request to the consultant when they become aware of the fact that they lack the expertise to offer effective assistance. The consultant can be a colleague with specific expertise (for example, a lawyer or a psychologist) who works in the same agency or a consultant from another information agency.



- When the front-line worker (the intaker) feels unable to provide appropriate assistance, then he can refer the client to a more experienced colleague inside or outside the agency. This is mostly the case for medical, legal, psychiatric, drug and employment problems.



In the youth information and counselling centres, referral shows some specific characteristics. Firstly, youth information and counselling centres never refer a client to an agency but always to a particular person. Secondly, the initial contact person (the intaker) remains responsible for the client when referring them to a specialist. The decision to refer the client is a joint one. If this referral does not yield the anticipated result, the intaker must be “on hand” to receive the client again and to go through things a second time in order to find an alternative solution. In this way, it is possible to avoid the client getting lost. Therefore, the youth information and counselling centres make an agreement with outside information agencies that the client may be referred back to the worker if the agency is not able to offer effective help to the client. In this respect, youth information and counselling services differ from established services that constantly refer clients to another service without referring them back to the original service. Moreover, the intaker in a youth information and counselling centre tries to sustain an open relationship with the client he or she refers to a specialist, by telling the client that he or she can always return “if it does not work out”.

The above-mentioned organisational models do not play the same role in the assistance strategy of each youth information and counselling centre. The degree to which one of the models is dominant strongly depends on the expertise of the team of intakers, the scope of the intake criteria, and the policy of the agency. In certain centres, referral of clients occurs so frequently that they operate rather like a switchboard in the network of information services. In order to limit referral as much as possible, other services invite specialised professionals (such as lawyers, physicians, career counsellors) to come once a week, on a fixed day and time, and help young people with specific problems. In the leaflet distributed by the centre, the days and times on which this specialised assistance is directly available in the agency are mentioned.

These organisational models imply that a youth information and counselling centre must develop and maintain an important network of contacts with other assistance bodies and organisations, in order to fulfil its mission.

Youth participation (peer-to-peer)

Involving young people in youth information and counselling work can bring multiple benefits, as who better than youngsters themselves know what questions pop up in their minds and need attention or what topics are of most interest to young people. Generally, it would be preferable to involve young people from the very start when establishing a national youth information and counselling structure. This will enable the creators of this structure to consult young people on topics like service delivery, preferred methods of services, among others.

Why do we need peer-to-peer?

First we need to look back to the history of YIC. In the beginning YI work was part of youth work, but because of professionalisation – training and having professional staff working in the field – we were not so connected to young people. At the beginning we wanted to involve young volunteers as ambassadors to promote the YIC centre. But then we saw that they were already informing their peers on different issues, so we decided to support what they were already doing. The idea is not to make counsellors of them – they are just youngsters who know a little bit more, they can better identify what is happening in their environment and they can think what actions they could take. Since they are in close connection with the local YIC centre and workers there, young people can immediately call them for help. These young people can help YIC services by giving their feedback on services and better understanding the very quickly changing realities of youth.

How to organise a peer-to-peer network?

First you need to think about what you want to achieve. If you think that only creating a training course for young peers on different YIC topics will be enough, you are wrong. You need to think about how to stay in contact, support them and be accessible to them, even when they call you at night. If you are more of a bureaucratic and organised professional, it is very hard to deal with a peers' network – you need to think about different ways of organising it.

Johan Bertels, youth information worker, expert

However, an existing youth information and counselling structure may also benefit from the input provided by young people. For a start, as they are the “customers” to whom youth information and counselling services are provided, you may wish to ask their opinion about the services they receive. This can be done by asking young people to submit evaluations of the services which have been provided to them by using printed or online forms or other means of undertaking a survey.

However, you may also choose to involve young people in your work directly and give them a chance to contribute to the work done in a youth information and counselling centre or network by submitting their input. The following case describes an approach of Eurodesk Lithuania.

Lithuania

In 2011, Eurodesk Lithuania launched the young reporters' network, which contributes to the information content on the national Eurodesk website. Participation is voluntary and open to any person aged 14-29 who is interested in producing written, photographic or video content.

Co-design – what is the model for doing this?

In Scotland there are a variety of ways of involving young people in the design of policy and services. There have been national youth commissions – one involving young people in the development of policy on alcohol and another on smoking. Any young person can volunteer to get involved; they get training and they do the work with support of adults. The co-design model is an extension of that, using creative and innovative tools: indeed co-design is taught in universities now as a part of social development.

Neither of these is about being a national youth forum, it is much broader: the key is providing support and training for young people to be able to fulfill their potential in this role. Young Scot now employs a co-design manager to do just that. People have to be fully involved from the very start.

How do we combine the co-design model with the national YIC structure?

This is easier to do at national level, where there are a lot of local services for young people, some of them more dynamic than others. Scotland is a very small country, so it is possible to do this in a municipality or a region. That works because each of the local youth information services can be quite different in responding to the different needs of young people of that area – if it's a rural area, for example. It's why it's important to work together as a network. It has been working because of local responsiveness and national network support. To do this you need to bring national services to the local level.

Fiona McIntyre, freelance journalist, one of the pioneers of generalist YIC services

Once a young person applies he is included in a system where his every contribution is assigned a number of points. Each month the points are added up and a ranking of young journalists is produced: top performers are awarded prizes and the person with most points is awarded the title of “Editor of the month”. This provides an incentive for young people who are involved to perform at their best, as not only is their work published on the national Eurodesk portal – they are also recognised for their efforts. Other events take place, such as training courses, a summer camp and initiatives aimed at increasing the quality of work of the young people who are involved.

The initiative is carried out in co-operation with the national agency of the EU Youth in Action programme and the national organisation promoting the European Youth Card – every participant is given a Youthpass and a free European Youth Card. In November 2013 the young reporters’ network had 113 active participants.

National level overview – examples of good practice from different national youth information and counselling networks

Austria

The very first youth information centre – Jugendinformationszentrum – was established in 1973 in Vienna, but closed again soon after. In 1985 a mobile youth information service was established in Vienna by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Youth and Family Affairs. In the following years, regional youth information centres were opened in each federal state, appointed by the respective regional government. In 1993, some of these centres started a working group for co-operation in youth information, which in 2004 developed into the now existing Bundesnetzwerk Österreichische Jugendinfos (National Network of Austrian Youth Information Centres). All regional youth information centres are united under this umbrella network, one of them having the status of a guest member.

The national network is the co-ordination body for all national and international issues regarding youth information. The association is financed by the federal ministry and, as a national Eurodesk structure, partly by the European Commission. Regional centres get funding for their activities mostly from regional governments.

The association represents Austrian youth information in the ERYICA and Eurodesk networks at European level. As a national co-ordinator of Eurodesk, Bundesnetzwerk Österreichische Jugendinfos provides regional centres with information and publications on mobility and European funding opportunities. The regional centres are Eurodesk relays and inform about EU programmes, especially Youth in Action. The association also takes care of the European and Austrian youth portals (www.oesterreichisches-jugendportal.at). The national network holds the licence for the European Youth Card in Austria, through the network-owned company Jugendkarte GmbH, and cards are actively disseminated through regional youth card offices.

As a national structure it works in close co-operation with the ministry responsible for youth, and is member of several national working groups on youth policy, invited by the ministry, as one of the three important stakeholders in the youth sector, together with the National Youth Council and the National Network of Open Youth Work.

Contributing to coherence through networking and co-ordination of national projects on youth information, it is also responsible for ongoing quality management: it offers training for the youth information workers from regional centres, organises regular meetings, training courses and experience exchanges, co-ordinates the publication of the network’s brochures, e.g. on mobility, job opportunities, information literacy, and also develops, monitors and updates the quality catalogue, which is compiled by regional points every year. The national co-ordinator monitors and analyses statistics of enquiries through the common statistics tool. In 2012 around 150 000 enquiries were answered by all regional Jugendinfos. More information may be found at: www.jugendinfo.at.

Finland

Youth information and counselling work in Finland is co-ordinated nationally by Koordinaatti – the Development Centre of Youth Information and Counselling Work. Its aim is to ensure that all young people living in Finland have access to quality youth information and counselling services. Through its activities, Koordinaatti encourages the active development of the national youth information and counselling service network. Koordinaatti is a member of ERYICA and co-operates with the Finnish Youth Co-operation – Allianssi – which is an affiliated member of ERYICA.

The first youth information and counselling points opened in Helsinki in 1952 and Turku in 1954 and provided information about work and housing for young people who were moving into the cities from the countryside. Youth information and counselling services have been generally recognised as an integral part of youth work since the 1980’s in Finland. In the 1980’s Allianssi co-ordinated youth information work in Finland. The co-ordination in the 1990’s, until Koordinaatti was established, was taken care of by a voluntary based network of youth information and counselling services.

As services expanded, a network of youth information workers and youth workers lobbied for youth information and the need for a national structure for more than 10 years. The first strategy document on youth information development and the need for a national co-ordination body in Finland was handed over to the Finnish Minister for Cultural Affairs in 2003. Goal-oriented and long lasting lobbying work was successful. In 2006 youth information was included as a part of youth work's basic services in the updated Youth Act in Finland. The Youth Act is the foundation of all youth work and services, including youth information and counselling work. At the same time the ministry for education appointed the Department of Youth Affairs in the City of Oulu as the national co-ordination unit.

Koordinaatti receives an annual operating grant from the ministry and currently employs a staff of four people. The operating grant is based on an annual working plan and evaluation discussions with the ministry. In 2010, the Finnish Ministry for Education and Culture appointed Koordinaatti to the task of planning and establishing a network for regional youth information and counselling co-ordinators as part of a permanent youth work service structure.

In 2006, there were fewer than 30 bodies providing youth information and counselling services. Six years later, the service network covers almost 70% of municipalities in mainland Finland. Almost 90% of young people aged 13-24 have the possibility to use youth information and counselling services in their own municipality and about 340 youth workers are active in youth information work. Services are provided either face-to-face in different operating environments, by peer-to-peer activities or as web-based online services.

The youth information and counselling services themselves are generally provided and funded by the municipalities. A fraction of the services are also provided by NGOs. The Finnish Youth Act encourages municipalities to offer and develop these services. Local and regional youth information services in Finland also have the possibility to apply for project grants for development projects from the Finnish Ministry for Education and Culture and state province offices. Youth information and counselling services in Finland have a key role in achieving the goals of the Youth Guarantee scheme, through information, guidance and counselling.

Koordinaatti keeps in contact with all youth information and counselling services providers on a regular basis and informs them about relevant issues, training courses, seminars and other topics they may find relevant.

On a central level, Koordinaatti also maintains a national youth portal (www.nuortenelemä.fi) in Finnish and Swedish and an online platform for youth information workers, youth workers, teachers, lecturers and students to find information on youth information (www.koordinaatti.fi, available in Finnish and partly in Swedish and English).

The role of young people in youth information services is crucial. It is one of the basic elements in youth work in general. And while youth information and counselling services providers in Finland use the European Youth Information Charter to ensure the quality of their work, the role young people have in the project is often included as a quality criterion when new projects are funded.

France

Youth information services in France began when the French government, by means of a nationwide survey, identified that young people clearly wanted the government to create places where they would be able to find information on all areas that impacted their lives. As a result, the Centre d'Information et de Documentation Jeunesse (CIDJ) was established in Paris in 1969.

Today the French youth information and counselling network is one of the largest in Europe. It is comprised of over 1 500 centres, including information offices and youth information points, with around 5 000 employees. All of them share the same logo and use common information tools.

The central office in Paris employs around 80 people, while on average 12 people work in regional youth information centres and every local information point has 1-2 employees. The whole network receives around 5 million visitors per year. On the regional level the capitals of French provinces have 28 active centres and only these centres, together with CIDJ, which is the national co-ordination body, receive financial support – around 50 per cent – from the French state. Other sources of funding are grants from regional and local authorities and self-generated income. The information and counselling points that are active at local level are supported entirely by municipal authorities or other associations. Overall, the state budget allocates around 8 million euros for co-funding to the French network. Financial support is granted by the French Ministry for Sports, Youth, Non-formal Education and Community Life.

All organisations active within the national network must adhere to the French Youth Information Charter and to the rules of youth information that are described in the "Handbook of good practices", which was adopted in 2007 by the French national organisation for standardisation (AFNOR). In return they are granted a special mark of quality.

Youth information workers in France are highly skilled: they must have at least a Master's degree in education science, law, information and communication, or psychology if they work in a regional youth information centre. In local centres, most youth information workers are youth workers who benefit from specialised youth information training sessions offered by regional youth information centres. However, the French network also hosts young volunteers who provide a valuable contribution to the whole system. The French youth information centres have their own staff training structure to ensure that quality standards are met and national quality standards supplement the European Youth Information Charter.

The portal www.jcomjeune.com is part of the national youth information and counselling system. It is visited by around 8 million users per year.

The French system is an example of the willingness of the state and regional authorities to offer unbiased information services to young people on all topics which are relevant to them, not only in Paris and regional capital cities, but also nationwide, in smaller towns and rural areas.

Croatia

Until 2006, only a small number of associations, focused on themes relevant for youth, carried out youth information activities. Organised youth information work started to develop thanks to the initiative of civil society organisations, while the key step in the development of this area was undertaken with the support of what was then called the Ministry of Family Affairs, War Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity of Croatia, which recognised the necessity for and the importance of youth information centres and gathered several NGO associations to work together on the creation of a youth information system.

A year later four regional youth information centres were formed in Zagreb, Osijek, Rijeka and Split, and several local youth information centres followed. In 2008 regional youth information centres formed an Association of Youth Information Centres in Croatia (AYICC) with the goal of developing a youth information and counselling system on a national level. As a national organisation which unites youth information centres, the association is a member of ERYICA. Today, after five years of active work, there are four regional youth information centres in Croatia, two local info centres and 14 info points. Regional youth information centres are located in four major Croatian cities and regional capitals; the work of each of them covers several counties.

The main role of regional information centres is to provide support for youth organisations which are working on youth information in their local environments, as well as to provide youth in major cities with information and counselling. Local youth information centres focus on smaller, local areas and their work is connected to regional information centres, which give them support in their everyday work and guidelines for future development and expansion. Info points function inside youth associations whose primary activity is not information provision, although this is included in their work through different activities.

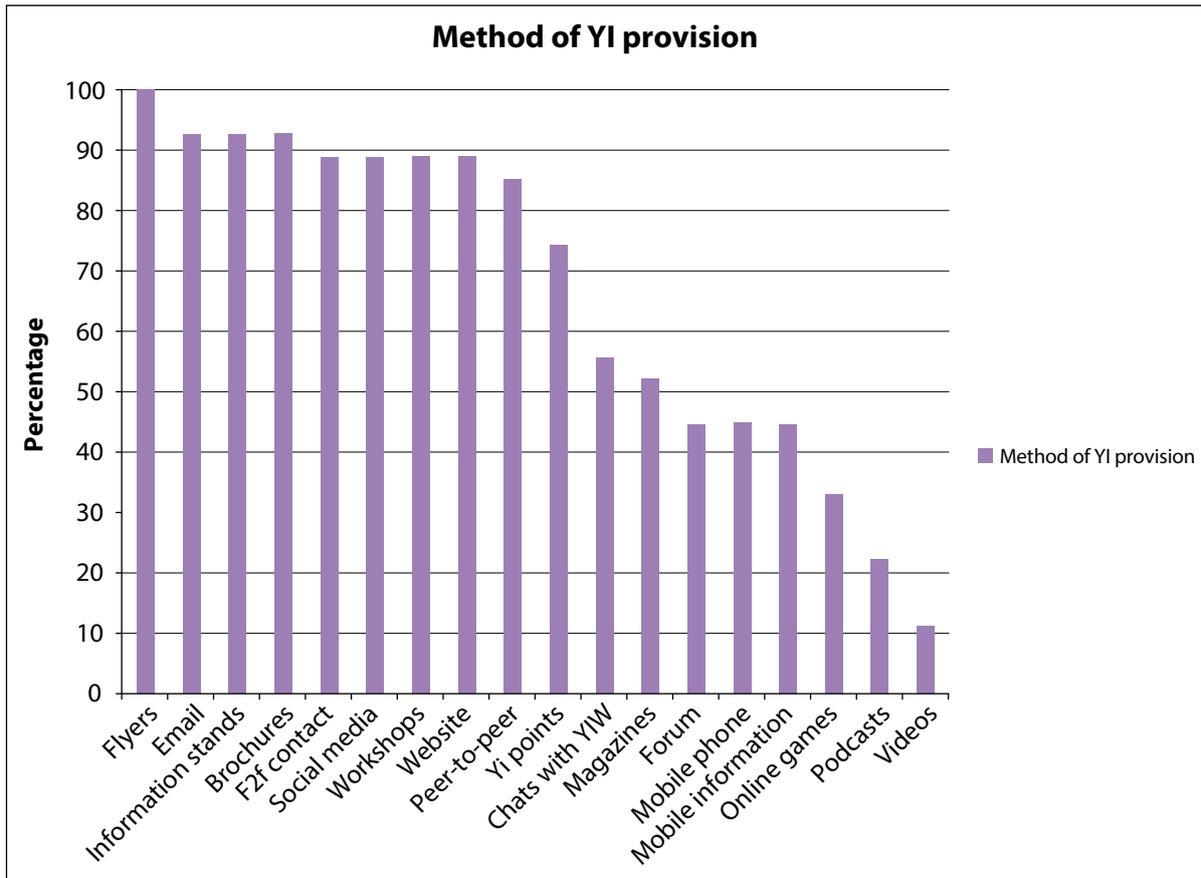
The AYICC in collaboration with ERYICA organises national and international training courses on a regular basis in order to educate young people in the field of youth information and youth work in general. In every Croatian information centre there are educated employees with ERYICA certificates, and youth information provision is conducted according to the principles of the European Youth Information Charter. Thanks to the work and the commitment of the AYICC, Croatia signed the charter in 2012, which was certainly a confirmation of the fact that the relevant ministry for social policy and youth recognises and supports the importance of organised youth information.

Until now, organised youth information and counselling has been defined by the national youth programme for 2009-13, a legally binding strategic document on a national level. A new national programme is currently being created and the AYICC is actively participating in the process. Other than participating in the preparation of the national youth programme, the AYICC also participates in every youth policy creation process in Croatia – all with the goal to include and to emphasise the importance of organised youth information and counselling at all levels, to strengthen the capacities of organisations working on youth information, to increase the quality of the work and expand the network of youth information centres in Croatia.

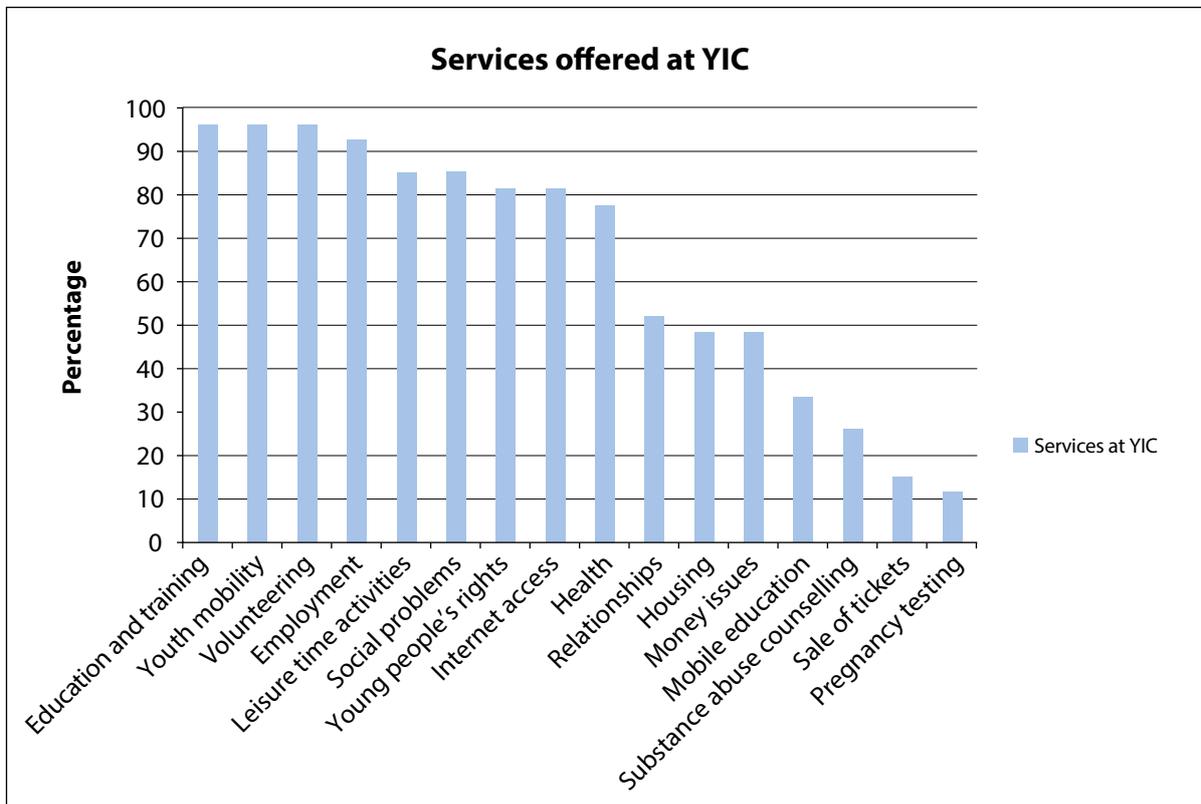
How does youth information work?

Below is a summary of the methods and services offered in most of the European youth information and counselling centres. This survey has been conducted in 25 ERYICA member countries, so it gives an overview of which topics are asked about most often in different European countries and through which means YIC centres are providing youngsters with information. However, not reflected here are the specific needs of every country and region, which should be taken into consideration. Reference should be made back to the articles on how to identify needs of young people, on which YIC services in each country and region should be based.

Methods of youth information provision¹²



Topics



12. Data from the study "State of Youth Information in Europe", 25 member countries, ERYICA, 2011.

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