

non-formal education

apprentissage interculturel

youth information

youth policy development

## Compendium of Council of Europe approaches to key youth policy and youth work issues

## Compendium des approches du Conseil de l'Europe sur les questions clés de politique et de travail de jeunesse



politique de jeunesse

intercultural learning

human rights education

participation des jeunes



COUNCIL OF EUROPE    CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

The Council of Europe and young people  
Le Conseil de l'Europe et les jeunes



*This compendium celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Council of Europe's first European Youth Centre and the European Youth Foundation – both created in 1972.*

•••❖ **The European Youth Centres** are unique in the world. They are permanent, international training, meeting and educational centres, where most of the Organisation's activities with and for young people take place. The first was set up in 1972 in Strasbourg; the second in Budapest, in 1995. Together the buildings provide residential facilities for over 200 people.

•••❖ **The European Youth Foundation** is a fund established in 1972 by the Council of Europe. Its role is to encourage co-operation among young Europeans, by providing financial support for youth activities which help promote peace, understanding and co-operation, in a spirit of respect for the Organisation's values. It has an annual budget of approximately three million euros.

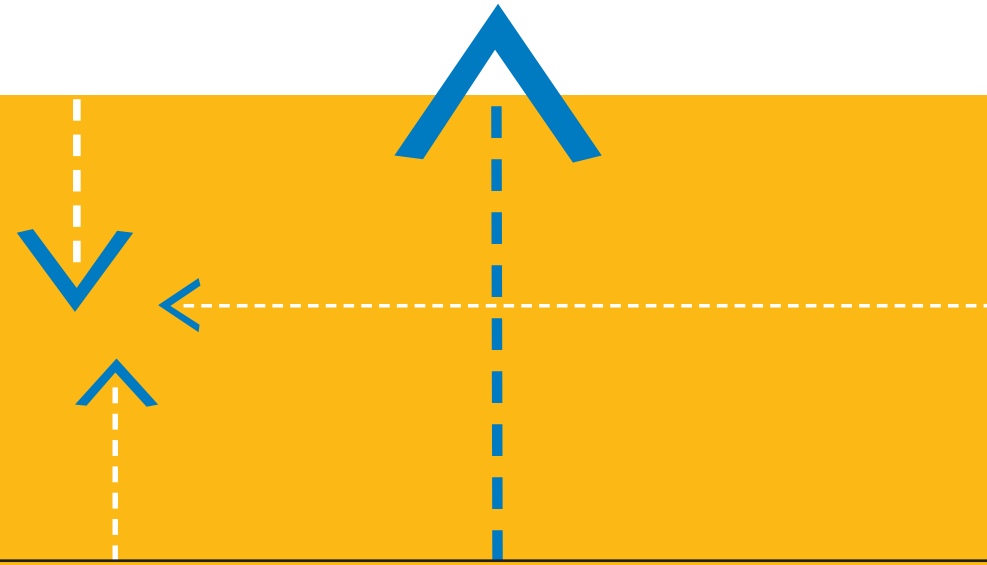
•••❖ **The Council of Europe** has 47 member states with a combined population of over 800 million people. It was set up in 1949 to defend human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

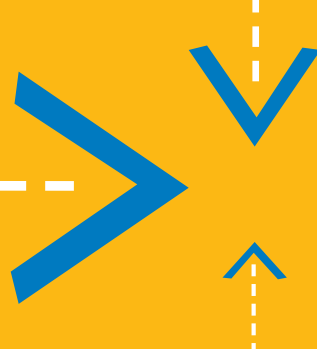
*Ce compendium célèbre le 40<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du premier Centre européen de la jeunesse du Conseil de l'Europe et du Fonds européen pour la jeunesse – tous deux créés en 1972.*

•••❖ **Les Centres européens de la jeunesse** sont uniques au monde. Dans ces centres permanents de rencontres, d'apprentissage et de formation internationale se tiennent la plupart des activités de l'Organisation pour et avec les jeunes. Le premier a été créé en 1972 à Strasbourg, le second à Budapest en 1995. Ces deux centres ont une capacité d'accueil de plus de 200 personnes.

•••❖ **Le Fonds européen pour la jeunesse** est un fonds établi en 1972 par le Conseil de l'Europe. Son rôle est d'encourager la coopération entre jeunes européens, en apportant un soutien financier aux activités de jeunesse qui aident à promouvoir la paix, la compréhension et la coopération, dans un esprit de respect pour les valeurs de l'Organisation. Le Fonds a un budget annuel d'environ trois millions d'euros.

•••❖ **Le Conseil de l'Europe** a 47 Etats membres avec une population de plus de 800 millions de personnes. Il a été créé en 1949 pour défendre les droits de l'homme, la démocratie et l'Etat de droit.





## → The Council of Europe and young people

### Building Europe together for 40 years

For 40 years, the Council of Europe and young people have been working together to build a better, safer and more united world.

We are a pioneer in the field of youth policy; the only organisation in the world which gives both youth organisations and governments an equal say when deciding on youth policies, priorities and programmes.

We have been the driving force behind youth policy and youth work in Europe for over 40 years, breaking new ground with innovative policies, approaches and educational materials.

We have two residential youth centres where around 5 000 young people a year are trained and our European Youth Foundation supports a youth activity for every working day in Europe – 300 grants involving over 15 000 young people a year.

Young people are not passive. They can and do want to be involved in finding solutions to the challenges they face today. They are a huge resource and Europe needs their energy. Young people are tomorrow's citizens; they are also the present. They are making decisions today in the Council of Europe.

## → Le Conseil de l'Europe et les jeunes

### Construire ensemble l'Europe depuis 40 ans

Depuis 40 ans le Conseil de l'Europe et les jeunes travaillent ensemble à la construction d'un monde meilleur, plus uni et plus sûr.

Nous sommes des pionniers dans le domaine de la politique de jeunesse, la seule organisation au monde qui donne aux organisations de jeunesse et aux gouvernements un poids égal dans la prise de décision sur la politique, les priorités et les programmes de jeunesse.

Depuis plus de 40 ans, nous sommes l'élément moteur du travail et de la politique de jeunesse en Europe, et nous ouvrons de nouvelles voies par le biais de politiques, d'approches et de ressources pédagogiques innovantes.

Chaque année, près de 5 000 jeunes résident et se forment dans nos deux Centres de jeunesse, et notre Fonds européen pour la jeunesse soutient un projet de jeunesse par jour ouvrable – 300 financements par an impliquant plus de 15 000 jeunes.

Les jeunes ne sont pas passifs. Ils peuvent et veulent trouver des solutions aux défis qu'ils doivent relever aujourd'hui. Ils constituent une ressource considérable et l'Europe a besoin de leur énergie. Les jeunes sont les citoyens de demain, mais ils représentent aussi le présent, et c'est au présent qu'ils prennent des décisions au sein du Conseil de l'Europe.

[www.coe.int/youth](http://www.coe.int/youth)  
[www.coe.int/jeunesse](http://www.coe.int/jeunesse)



## The Council of Europe and young people Youth Policy

in 1998, at a Council of Europe conference, European ministers agreed on an overarching framework for youth policy for the first time. The aims were to: help young people meet the challenges facing them and achieve their aspirations, encourage their participation in society, provide them with training for democratic citizenship, support the development of youth policy and promote youth mobility in Europe.

The previous year the Council of Europe had started its international reviews of national youth policy. These deal with difficult issues in the country concerned, draw lessons to be shared and identify best practice.

The Council of Europe has been the driving force behind the growing momentum of youth policy in Europe. It has created a framework for the development of youth policies at all levels, underpinned by its commitment to human rights, social inclusion and youth participation. Unlike national youth policy, which often sees young people as a problem, the Council of Europe has focused on opportunity, participation, information, access and inclusion, helping national governments to reconsider their youth policies.





# Youth Policy



## Historical reminder

Just over a decade after the opening of the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, the Council of Europe held a youth research symposium. Although the four themes of the programme were headlined as concerning youth information, youth research, youth participation and intercultural learning, there were glimpses of an early interest in ‘youth policy’. One working group, addressing ‘concepts of youth research’, paid some attention to questions of integrated youth policies and to links between research and policy, practice and provision. Youth research was already identifying concepts of ‘precariousness’, ‘disqualification’, ‘social reproduction’, ‘lifestyles’, ‘transitions’, and ‘social breaking up’ (social breakdown) in the context of debates around ‘cycles of life’, ‘generation’, ‘relations between generations’ and ‘participation’.

It was argued then, in the mid-1980s, that there could and should be a renewal of approaches to understanding and addressing the lives of young people, in which young people, youth workers and youth policy-makers were actively involved, on an equal basis, in a combined research and policy-making process. Even then, there was an undercurrent within the debate about the relationship between youth research and youth policy in a shared endeavour to engage with the changing lives and needs of young people. Another working group, concerned with youth information and advice, mentioned the ‘plurality of concepts of a youth policy’ but, in its recommendations, invited: “each government to urgently draw up a youth policy integrating all the levels and sectors concerned and capable of answering the needs of young people”.

Around the same time, Howard Williamson had written a short piece on the social condition of young people in the UK, maintaining that all countries had a youth policy – by intent, default or neglect. The phrase is still often cited, though it requires some elaboration. Young people grow up as the beneficiaries



or victims of public and private policy, whether or not it is actively focused on their lives or conspicuous by its absence. What public authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and indeed private institutions do, or do not do, for young people needs to be understood, especially at times when both risks and opportunities for young people feature prominently in their transition to adulthood.

It was probably a decade later that such discussions started within the Council of Europe Youth Department. Few had any firm grasp of the rather amorphous concept of ‘youth policy’; indeed, many aligned the idea solely with non-formal education, the bedrock of most of the Youth Department’s activities. It took some time before a wider canvas was considered, let alone recognised and embraced.

### -----> **The concept?**

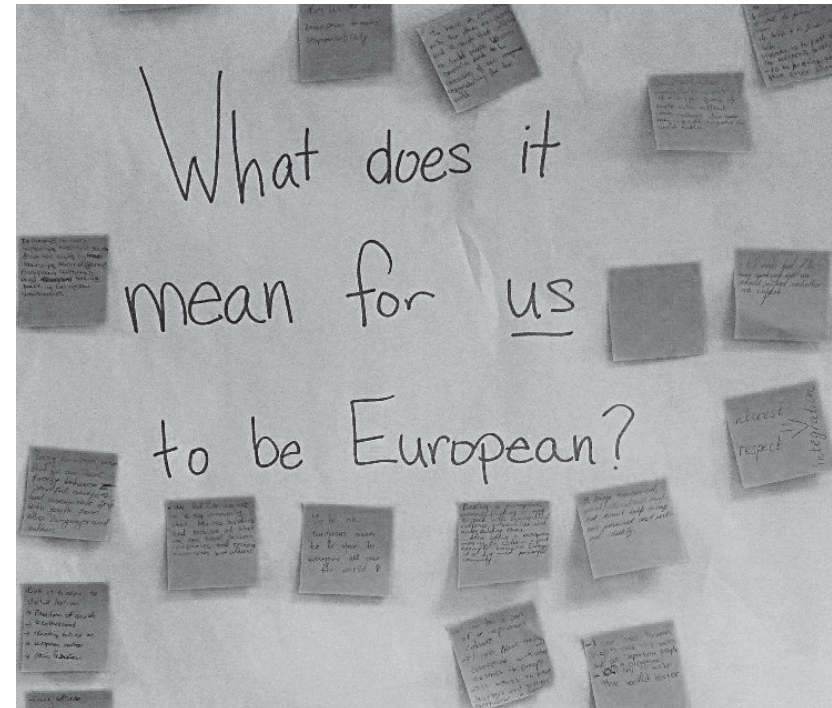
By 1998, however, the meeting of youth ministers of the Council of Europe in Bucharest set out what it considered to be ‘The Youth Policy of the Council of Europe’. This enshrined the following objectives:

- Help young people meet the challenges facing them and achieve their aspirations;
- Strengthen civil society through training for democratic citizenship, in a non-formal educational context;
- Encourage young people’s participation in society;
- Support the development of youth policies;
- Seek ways of promoting youth mobility in Europe.

Youth ministers had met from time to time since their first meeting in Strasbourg in 1985, but this was the first time an overarching framework of ideas concerning youth policy had been discussed and agreed.

### -----> **A specific approach by the Council of Europe**

Arguably, a central catalyst for the emergence of a focus on, and certainly the development of youth policy were the international reviews of national youth policies that commenced in 1997, though it was certainly not clear at first exactly what should be reviewed. Indeed, the idea of ‘youth policy’ at European level was novel, to say the least, notwithstanding the Bucharest ministers’ conference in 1998. This was, indeed, a number of years before the European Commission started to engage in any ‘youth policy’ discussion whatsoever. A great deal of time was expended endeavouring to define the idea. But, like much of the wider work of the Youth Department, the idea of youth policy took shape through experience. Both the process and the framework for the youth policy reviews evolved through



reflecting on previous approaches. Such evolution through reflection produced an ever more comprehensive understanding of what might be the content of youth policy, an extension of the stepping stones on which the review process was conducted and more care and attention to the staging and timing of those steps in the process. By 2012, when the 19th review (of Ukraine) was taking place, the time-frame for a review was around 18 months, very different from some earlier reviews, which had been completed in about a third of that time.

Yet, despite the changes in the pattern and practices of the international reviews, their core aims and objectives have remained the same, since the first review (of Finland) in 1997. These are threefold: to cast a ‘stranger’s eye’ on the country in question in order raise at times difficult questions for internal consideration and response; to draw lessons and understanding from that country to share with the international community; and, to develop a ‘European’ framework, built from a composite knowledge derived from the reviews, that sets out the key elements of ‘youth policy’.

Promoted by the Youth Department’s inter-governmental steering group for youth (the CDEJ), the international review teams typically comprise nominations from both of the statutory bodies of the Youth Department (the CDEJ and the



Advisory Council for Youth, which represents youth organisations), a member of the Secretariat from the Council of Europe, and three independent youth researchers or experts. Though it can never be perfectly achieved, robust efforts are made to reflect geographical, gender, linguistic and other differences. The CDEJ nominee serves as the chair of a review, and one of the researchers is the designated rapporteur. In recent years, the co-ordinator of the review process (a youth researcher himself) has sometimes been one of the three researchers, and occasionally served as the rapporteur, and sometimes been an extra member of the team. In the case of Belgium, reviewed in 2011, and the first federal country to be reviewed, the team was composed of 11, rather than six or seven, individuals (three from the CDEJ, three from the Advisory Council, three researchers, the Secretariat and the co-ordinator). Logistically, in view of the added complexities of a federal state, this was the only way an effective review could be accomplished within the time available.

Once a country has requested a review, the process now starts with a preliminary visit to identify priority issues for the country concerned, on which it would like the international review to focus. The review team also, however, reserves the right to focus on issues that it feels merit particular attention. This approach is a relatively recent innovation: after 14 reviews, the framework that originally guided the areas of inquiry (see below) had become so huge that insufficient depth and penetration was being conveyed in the analysis and commentary on key issues. In anticipation of the first visit by the international team, the host country is expected to prepare a 'national report' delineating its view of its youth policy and providing a descriptive outline of the most central youth policy domains, such as education, vocational training, health, housing or criminal justice. There is no prescription concerning the structure or content of the national report – that is for the host country to determine (and it has been done in many different ways) – but its purpose should be to familiarise the international team with appropriate outline information, offering an anchor on which the team can prepare its lines of inquiry.

The first visit by the international team, over a week involving four working days to gather information and a further day working alone to deliberate on what has been learned, identify gaps in understanding, and make proposals for the programme for the second visit. The programme for the first visit is largely (though rarely exclusively) determined by the host country and concerned with a 'top-down' view of youth policy. It is a series of visits to ministries, national organisations, the national youth council and others who frame youth policy. This is, of course, the official line – focused significantly on decision-making and the development of youth policy: legislation, budgets, structures, visions and proclaimed achievements.

The second visit is very different and concerned primarily (though, again, rarely exclusively) with a 'bottom up' perspective – from regional and local authorities and from young people themselves. It is the experiential line, an effort to

understand more grounded realities in the delivery and implementation of youth policy. It is about exploring the extent to which the rhetoric advanced by the central administration converts into practical measures that actually touch the lives of young people and, if so, which young people, how and with what effect. The final day of the second visit is given over to the international team contributing individual perspectives and interpretations (on both the priorities identified by the host country and on their own key issues) in order to assist the rapporteur in shaping the international report. It has also become an opportunity to provide some preliminary, and provisional, feedback to the relevant public authorities, in order to elicit some immediate response and reaction.

After an exchange of various drafts, and commentary and revision, between members of the international team, a 'final draft' is provided to the host country for correction, comment and criticism. This is usually submitted a short time before an agreed date for a national hearing, an 'open' forum in the capital city to which all respondents to the international review are invited, but to which anyone is welcome to attend and contribute. This is an opportunity for the international team to present its conclusions and recommendations and to debate its key findings. Feedback and issues raised during the national hearing; which can last anything from an hour to a whole day, together with any more formal response from the host government (and indeed other key people involved within a country's youth policy context, such as the national youth council or a significant international NGO), are accommodated within a final international report. This



is then presented to the Joint Council, a joint meeting of the statutory bodies of the Youth Department (the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) and the Advisory Council), sharing knowledge from the country that has been reviewed with all the member countries of the Council of Europe. This international hearing is the point at which the international report becomes a public document.

For some time, the guidelines for the international reviews, a paper produced by the CDEJ in 2002, have mentioned the possibility of a follow-up after around two years. Rarely, however, has this taken place, and certainly not on any formal basis. There are many reasons for this weak link in the review process; suffice it to say here that mechanisms have now been put in place to strengthen the possibility of instituting a follow-up procedure. Belgium has indeed committed itself to engaging in a follow-up review in 2014.

In the early days of the international reviews, there was no preliminary visit, no national hearing and no follow-up. These are steps in the process that have been added in the light of experience. Further refinement and revision of the process is inevitable, though calls to pin it down and, in particular, to specify more precisely the roles and responsibilities of different members of the international team are probably unhelpful. The process has to remain flexible and responsive not only to the particularities, priorities and conditions within the country concerned, but also to the interests, expertise and competencies of review team members, which tend to coalesce in many, but invariably constructive, ways.

Seven reviews took place between 1997 and 2001, at which point the Youth Department felt it was time to take stock, and reflect on what had been learned. What were the implications for the construction of some kind of framework for ‘youth policy’? What were both the shared characteristics and distinctive features of youth policy in countries as diverse as Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Romania, Estonia and Luxembourg? Could any overlaps or points of convergence be detected? A reading of 14 documents – seven national and seven international reports – produced the first provisional framework. It suggested that ‘youth policy’ at a European, inter-governmental level, should be predicated on exploration and discussion of seven areas:

- The conceptualisation of ‘youth’ and of ‘youth policy’;
- Legislation and budgets;
- Structures for delivery (including the constitution and role of a national youth council);
- The range of policy domains, such as education (formal and non-formal), health, housing or vocational training;
- The prominence of different cross-cutting issues, such as equal opportunities, youth information or social inclusion;

- The foundations for youth policy development: youth research, the training of those working with young people, and opportunities for the dissemination of good practice;
- Approaches to review, monitoring and evaluation.

It was this framework that informed the conduct of the international reviews of national youth policies in subsequent reviews. However, after a further seven reviews, that had largely (if not completely) been guided by this framework, it was clear that the model was becoming too cumbersome for individual country reviews. Too many additional themes within many of these areas of interest and inquiry had emerged. These were certainly very useful in their own right: co-management structures in Lithuania, the role and influence of the church in Malta, the place of the military in the transition to adulthood for boys in Cyprus, approaches to national minorities and immigrant groups in Norway and Slovakia and Hungary, confronting discrimination against lesbian and gay young people in Latvia and Malta, developing youth information structures and services in Cyprus and Hungary. However, it was no longer productive or constructive to try to address or tackle every aspect of the framework. Hence the decision to focus on a smaller number of substantive issues and to apply the framework, where appropriate, to those questions. This has been the approach adopted in the most recent international reviews of Armenia, Moldova, Albania, Belgium and Ukraine.

## -----> Perspectives

Three more ‘arms-length’ ideas did, however, emerge from the overarching scrutiny of the evidence accruing from the international reviews.

### Components of youth policy

The first flowed from a desire to distil the youth policy framework into a more memorable list of concepts that both derived from the concrete experience of the reviews and informed wider discussion of youth policy questions. These have come to be known as the five ‘C’s or components of youth policy:

- Coverage
- Capacity
- Competence
- Co-ordination
- Cost

Coverage, a notion linked to service provision and the key challenge of accessibility, is concerned with a number of quite different issues: policy issues, social groups

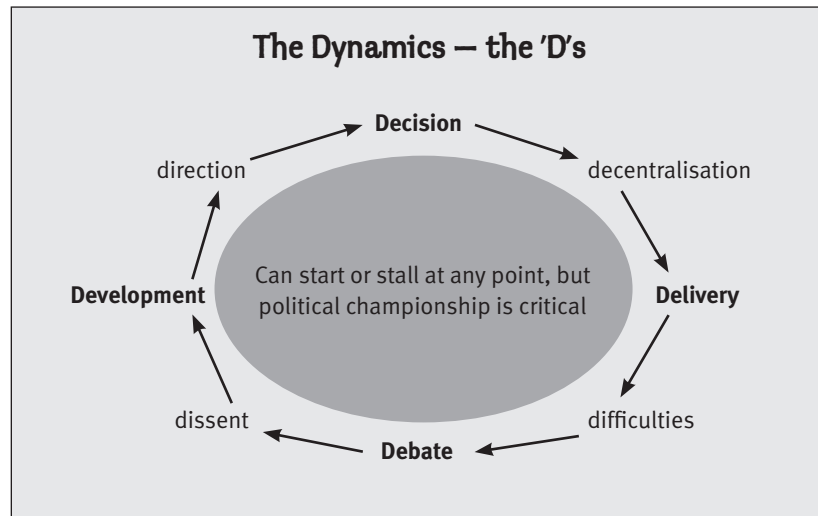




and geographical reach. Capacity is linked to questions concerning political will (and political stability), legislative requirements and effective structures for delivery. Competence addresses the practice of delivery and questions of professionalism and, perhaps, professionalisation. Co-ordination relates to the ways in which, both vertically and horizontally, youth policy activity produces coherence and complementarity. And, self-evidently, the human and financial resources available have a huge impact on the likelihood of policy aspirations being converted into effective practice for the young people towards whom they are directed.

### Dynamics of youth policy

A second lesson to emerge from the policy reviews has been what are now known as the 'D's, or dynamics, of youth policy. In different countries, there is evidence that the youth policy development process can start or stall at many different points. Policy formulation and implementation is not an exact science, nor does evidence have an exclusive influence on its direction. Both political prioritisation and professional lobbying clearly also have their part to play. The cycle below can work in virtuous, positive ways, or less virtuous and potentially negative ways.



The Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policies have provided accounts of interventions (or a lack of them) that have hindered or helped the process at different times. Of paramount importance, however, is the political championship of the youth agenda, which, too often, does not command significant political importance, even when the rhetoric is that young people should be seen as a resource, not a problem and that they represent the future on whom we all depend. The 'youth' portfolio, in many countries, is not exactly a poisoned chalice, but it is

often little more than a stepping stone for those with bigger political aspirations. Where 'youth' is located in national politics and who is championing its cause will always remain a critical feature of youth policy evolution.

### -----> Indicators of youth policy

By 2002, after the completion of the 'synthesis' report on the first seven countries to be reviewed, the Youth Department felt it was in a position to convene a working group on the subject of youth policy indicators. Now an established feature of policy evaluation and development, thinking around indicators was still in a rather crude and embryonic form. Nevertheless, though the indicators were never used within the review process, the report produced by the working group did set out some important markers for youth policy development, not least in relation to the idea of a 'package of entitlement', a commitment to 'opportunity-focused' youth policy, and the need to balance indicators concerning youth 'pathologies' with indicators pointing towards the positive inclusion of young people.

The group's final report in 2003 sought to capture some of the key ingredients of youth policy: learning, inclusion and social cohesion, citizenship and participation, and safety, health and well-being. And, it suggested that youth policy should have the following objectives:

- a. To invest purposefully in young people in a coherent and mutually reinforcing way, wherever possible through an opportunity-focused rather than problem-oriented approach.
- b. To involve young people both in the strategic formulation of youth policies and in eliciting their views about the operational effectiveness of policy implementation.
- c. To create the conditions for learning, opportunity and experience which ensure and enable young people to develop their knowledge, skills and competencies to play a full part in both the labour market and in civil society.
- d. To establish systems for robust data collections both to demonstrate the effectiveness of youth policies and to reveal the extent to which 'policy gaps' exist in relation to effective service delivery to young people from certain social groups, in certain areas or in certain conditions.
- e. To display a commitment to reducing such 'policy gaps' where they demonstrably exist.

Though, in itself, the report on youth policy indicators was a modest document, it did comment extensively on the idea of youth policy, its purposes and its practice. In that respect, it could be seen as representing the moment when youth policy came to be firmly embedded within the deliberations and programme development of the Youth Department. In a little-read annex, the document reiterated the package of rights that it felt should be extended to young people, ranging from



a 'learning offer' of both formal and non-formal education, through information, advice and guidance, and opportunities for mobility and international exchange, to engagement in decision-making. Furthermore, it suggested that the model being proposed was based on the inter-relationship that exists among three basic elements of a youth policy, that is, issues, interpretation and implementation. Youth policy had to be 'tested' against conceptual measures such as participation, equity and inclusion; there wasn't a lot of point extending a youth policy offer to young people who were already able to access most of it through their own initiative, networks and resources, especially if that led to the young people most needing such opportunities and experiences remaining firmly positioned on the margins.

### -----> Forging connections

Within ten years, then, youth policy had moved from the margins to the mainstream of the Council of Europe Youth Department's work. Yet there was some disquiet, even on the part of some members of the CDEJ, that youth policy seemed to be evolving in splendid isolation. Although there had been a strong case for looking primarily at policy and provision for those beyond childhood yet before adulthood (a period always contested and differentially defined), it was clear that 'youth policy' – however broadly or deeply considered – does not stand alone but merges, sometimes seamlessly, sometimes awkwardly, both with adjacent age-related policies and with policy domains that may touch the lives of young people at different points and in different ways. In other words, youth policy could not be brutally divorced from childhood policy, family policy and, indeed, broader social policy for adults that sometimes discriminated against *young* adults.

In order to explore such issues, the Youth Department, with the Ukraine authorities, convened a seminar in Kiev in 2004 on the relationship between child, youth and family policies. In its background paper, it was noted that the Council of Europe: "wants to look into changes and transformations in the life conditions of children and young people within an age range between 12 and 25, to analyse how these transformations affect their transition to adult life, and to examine responses of public policies to the new challenges in this respect".

Of significance here were the distinctions made between policy for children (centrally about protection and development), policy for young people (essentially about promoting participation and keeping them 'in good shape' by avoiding educational drop-out, sexual health risk behaviour, substance misuse and criminality), and policy for young adults (to do with employment, housing and 'life management'). When challenged about the age definition of these three groups, the important conclusion was drawn that the age boundaries could never be hard and fast. Children were somewhere between 0 and 14 (the United Nations definition takes them up to 18), young people somewhere between 11 and 18, and

young adults somewhere between 16 and 25, or more. Youth policy operated at the borders of other policies and there could be as much value in influencing the scope, focus and commitment of those other policies (whether broadly about 'children' or more specifically about housing) to strengthen their recognition of 'youth', as in seeking to harness those issues within a dedicated and discrete youth policy.

### -----> Partnership and policy development at European level

In this first decade of the new millennia, then, youth policy was a pivotal aspect of the agenda of the Council of Europe. It had, of course, also become an item for the European Commission which, in 2001 had launched its own 'impetus for European youth' White Paper around the themes of participation, information, voluntary activities and a greater understanding of youth. From 1999, at first around youth worker training but later around youth research and Euro-Mediterranean co-operation, there had also been protocols and partnerships between the two European institutions, culminating in the formal Partnership between the European Union and the Council of Europe in the youth field. By the end of the decade, both institutions had produced further work on youth policy. The Commission published its new youth strategy in 2009, around the themes of opportunity, access and solidarity. One year earlier, at a Youth Ministers' conference in Kiev, Ukraine, the Council of Europe launched Agenda 2020, also with three overarching themes:

- Human rights, democracy and the rule of law
- Living together in diverse societies
- The social inclusion of young people

Almost simultaneously, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe debated the refreshing of the youth agenda in the Council of Europe on the three themes of mobility, faith and generation.

A significant momentum around youth policy had been established, sometimes looking almost chaotic and disconnected, yet in fact addressing a range of central issues in the changing and challenging lives of young people across Europe. The youth sector of the Council of Europe has been a major driver in that process. Underpinned by its commitment to human rights, to social inclusion and to youth participation, anchored in its principles of co-management and its practice of non-formal education, the Youth Department of the Council of Europe has pioneered a framework within which youth policy can be conceptualised and debated – at local, regional, national and inter-governmental levels.

Unlike youth policy at national level, which, despite vociferous rhetoric to the contrary, is often based on responses to young people as problems or with problems (offending, truancy, drug use, pregnancy, educational underachievement),



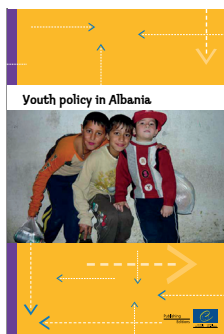
the thinking and direction of the Council of Europe is firmly about opportunity, participation, information, access and inclusion. It has been this thinking, coupled with wider initiatives in youth-worker training, the promotion of the recognition of non-formal learning, campaigns on human rights and democracy, and the combating of racism, discrimination and xenophobia, the participation of young people, and the promotion of youth knowledge through research seminars convened under the banner of the Youth Partnership, that has supported its member states in reflecting on their own approaches to youth policy and in considering, and sometimes implementing, new directions in youth policy.

## -----> Conclusion

Today, amidst a severe economic crisis throughout Europe, record levels of youth unemployment and a wide range of both macro and micro challenges for young people seeking to make successful and effective transitions to adulthood – in civil society, in their personal lives and the labour market – youth policy is firmly on the European map. Forty years ago, the European Youth Centre was, literally, the first concrete response to demands by young people for a place and space to express their voice. Just over 20 years ago, the challenges shifted in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Ten years ago, the events of 9/11 threw other issues into relief, issues that were compounded a year ago by the tragic events in Norway. Human rights education, non-formal education, youth information, intercultural learning and youth participation have been discrete strands within the work of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, but they have also influenced as well as been influenced by an unfolding understanding of youth policy across Europe.

*Contributing author Howard Williamson*

## -----> Publications



International reviews of national youth policies (Series)



Supporting young people in Europe - Volume 2



## The Council of Europe and young people

# Human Rights Education

The promotion and protection of human rights is fundamental to the Council of Europe's mission. The premise is that human rights cannot be protected by legal means alone. Since 1972 the Council of Europe has been working to provide young Europeans with the skills necessary to participate fully in this task. The learning process itself must respect human rights, and it should encourage participants to defend human rights as a result.

The Council of Europe contributes to human rights education through residential and e-learning educational activities, educational materials and youth policy development.

it has issued a Charter, calling for education for democratic citizenship and human rights education to be included in all educational sectors.

One of its most successful publications, *Compass – A manual on Human Rights Education with Young People*, exists in 32 different language versions, in print and on-line. It is used by youth leaders and educators across the globe and has been revised in 2012 to cover the internet and disablism, among other issues. *Compasito*, the children's version of the manual, exists in ten languages.





# Human Rights Education

The commitment of the Council of Europe's youth sector to human rights education is part of the Organisation's commitment to human rights. Human rights education is one of the ways through which the youth sector, with its governmental and non-governmental partners, contributes to the Council of Europe's core mission and values.

It is also the way through which many youth organisations – made up of many volunteer and professional educators – contribute to young people's active citizenship, participation and responsibility within their own societies and within Europe. There is more to human rights education than learning about human rights; it is about life, the present and the future of Europe.



## Human rights education in the youth sector of the Council of Europe – history and main achievements

The promotion and protection of human rights, as defined in the European Convention on Human Rights (the Convention), the European Social Charter and in other international treaties, is a core element of the mission of the Council of Europe. The Convention is a necessary prerequisite to this process, and human rights education (HRE) is an essential instrument for contributing to it. The protection and promotion of human rights in the Council of Europe goes far beyond the Convention and other treaties: it includes important standard-setting mechanisms including non-conventional ones, such as the Commissioner for Human Rights, whose mandate also encompasses human rights education.

The youth sector of the Council of Europe, since its creation in 1972, has been working to make sure young people in European societies have the necessary skills to fully participate in the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy. Human rights cannot be protected by legal means alone.



In 2000, to mark the 50th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Council of Europe launched the Human Rights Education Youth Programme with the aim of “bringing human rights education into the mainstream of youth work and youth policy”. However, it is important to mention that many human rights education activities were organised in the Council of Europe for and with young people before that date. The Human Rights Education Youth Programme is still running (under a different name).

The 7th Conference of European Ministers for Youth, held in Budapest in 2005, underlined the symbiotic relationship between the youth policy and youth programme of the Council of Europe and human rights education, by calling on the Council of Europe to: “make human rights education an essential and permanent component of the programme of the Directorate of Youth and Sport, including the dimension of violence prevention, and to enable it to act as a knowledge and resource centre on human rights education for young people, based on its experience and practice of non-formal education/learning”.

Two activities – the Human Rights Education Forum in 2000 and the Forum on Human Rights Education with Young People in 2009 – are landmarks in the implementation of the programme. The first forum was organised in order to gather potential partners and users of the project, as well as to make an inventory of existing needs, approaches and experiences in the field, while the second was held to review the achievements of the first, to analyse the challenges ahead and look for ways forward.

## -----> **Between 2000 and 2011**

- **101** study sessions organised in co-operation with international youth non-governmental organisations on human rights education, reaching some 3000 young people from all over Europe.
- **17** international training sessions for trainers in human rights education with young people and children reaching approximately 550 youth workers and trainers in Europe and beyond.
- **79** national and regional training courses in almost all Council of Europe member states, reaching some 2000 youth workers, youth leaders and volunteers from local, regional and national youth organisations.
- **297** pilot projects in human rights education were implemented in member states by national and local youth organisations; the projects were supported by the European Youth Foundation.

- **32** different language editions of *Compass* – a Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People – and 10 language versions of *Compasito* – *Manual on Human Rights Education for Children*.

The publication in 2002 of *Compass* became a milestone in the implementation of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme. Not only does this practical and ready-to-use manual provide its users with theoretical knowledge on human rights and human rights education, it also encourages learners to take action for human rights. The activities set out in *Compass* support the development of young people’s skills and attitudes in different cultural and educational settings, for example: in youth clubs, youth exchange projects, school and out-of-school activities. *Compass* is now available in 32 languages with its revised version, including new content, being published in 2012<sup>1</sup>. Without doubt, *Compass* has become a hit; it has resulted in young people being more interested in human rights education and has helped them develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes. Its publication on-line – [www.coe.int/compass](http://www.coe.int/compass) – has made it available across borders.

But *Compass* is not the only achievement of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme. The following are also important :

- The training of trainers in HRE who have, as a consequence, acted as advocates and resource people for human rights education at national and local level;
- The support for key regional and national training activities for teacher and youth worker trainers in the Council of Europe’s member states, organised in co-operation with national organisations and institutions;
- The development of formal and informal networks of organisations and educators for human rights education through non-formal learning approaches at European and national level;
- The development of innovative training and learning approaches and quality standards from human rights education and non-formal learning, such as the introduction of Advanced *Compass* Training in HRE, which made use of blended learning (the mixture of residential seminars and e-learning activities);
- The provision of educational approaches and resources for the *All Different – All Equal* European youth campaign for diversity, human rights and participation that was implemented in 2005;

1. *Compass* and other educational resources are available online at: <http://www.coe.int/compass>



- The dissemination of the Living Library<sup>2</sup> as a methodology for intercultural learning, fighting stereotypes and prejudice;
- The provision of the political and educational framework for intercultural dialogue activities, such as those run in the context of Euro-Mediterranean, Euro-Arab, Asia-Europe youth projects, as well as those run within the Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the youth field;
- The development of policy documents, notably the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (in co-operation with the Steering Committee on Education) and youth policy recommendation on access to social rights for young people (as a result of the long-term *ENTER!* project on access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods).

## -----> **Learning about, for and through human rights – a short introduction to human rights education**

Let's start with human rights. Human rights reflect basic human needs; they establish the basic standards without which people cannot live in dignity. Human rights are about equality, dignity, respect, freedom and justice. Examples of rights include freedom from discrimination, the right to life, freedom of speech, the right to marriage and family and the right to education.

Everyone holds human rights equally and for ever. Human rights are universal, that is, they apply to all human beings. They are inalienable, indivisible and interdependent; that is, they cannot be taken away – ever. All rights are equally important and they are complementary, for instance the right to participate in government and in free elections depends on freedom of speech.

There are many definitions of human rights education (HRE). The youth sector of the Council of Europe developed its own definition of human rights education for the purpose of the Human Rights Education Youth Programme. This defines human rights education as: “educational programmes and activities that focus on promoting equality in human dignity, in conjunction with other programmes such as those promoting intercultural learning, participation and empowerment of minorities”. This definition underlines the fact that human rights education is about promoting basic human rights values, which should motivate people to take

2. More on the Living Library methodology in: *Don't judge a book by its cover! The Living Library Organiser's Guide 2011*, by Nick Little, Gulesin Nemutlu, Jasna Magic, Balint Molnar, 2011, The Council of Europe. The publication is available online at: <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/eycb/Source/EYCB%20Living%20Library.pdf>

action to make sure human rights are protected. Young people have an important role to play in this. It also stresses the fact that HRE does not exist in a vacuum; it is strongly linked to other educational fields, such as intercultural learning, anti-racist education, citizenship education, peace education or environmental education.

The Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education defines HRE as: “education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower learners to contribute to the building and defence of a universal culture of human rights in society, with a view to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

Whatever the definition, there is, nonetheless, an obvious consensus that human rights education has three dimensions:

- Learning about human rights, knowledge about human rights, what they are, and how they are safeguarded or protected;
- Learning through human rights, recognising that the context and the way human rights learning is organised and imparted has to be consistent with the human rights values (e.g. participation, freedom of thought and expression, etc.) and that, in human rights education, the process of learning is both as important as and part of the learning itself;
- Learning for human rights, by developing skills, attitudes and values for the learners to apply human rights values in their lives and to take action, alone or with others, for promoting and defending human rights.

Human rights education is perhaps best described in terms of what it sets out to achieve: the establishment of a culture where human rights are understood, defended and respected, or to paraphrase the participants of the 2009 Forum on Human Rights Education with Young People, “a culture where human rights are learnt, lived and ‘acted’ for”.

A human rights culture is not merely a culture where everyone knows their rights, because knowledge does not necessarily equal respect, and without respect there will always be human rights violations.

So how can we describe a human rights culture and what qualities would its adherents have?

The authors of *Compass* have formulated the following answers to this question. A human rights culture is one where people:

- Have knowledge about and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Have self-respect and respect for others; they value human dignity;



- Demonstrate attitudes and behaviour that show respect for the rights of others;
- Practise genuine gender equality in all spheres;
- Show respect, understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, particularly towards different national, ethnic, religious, linguistic and other minorities and communities;
- Are empowered and active citizens;
- Promote democracy, social justice, communal harmony, solidarity and friendship between people and nations;
- Are active in furthering the activities of international institutions aimed at the creation of a culture of peace, based upon universal values of human rights, international understanding, tolerance and non-violence.

Human rights education is also a human right in itself. All people have the right to human rights education; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has a right to education and that “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (article 26).

HRE is also a legitimate political demand. The message of the Forum *Living, Learning, Acting for Human Rights* recognises that the “values that guide the action of the Council of Europe are universal values for all of us and are centred on the inalienable dignity of every human being”. The message goes further in recalling that human rights are more than just inspiration: they are also moral and political commands that apply to the relations between states and people, as much as within states and among people.

## -----> **Living, learning, acting for human rights – approaches to human rights education in the youth sector**

The youth sector of the Council of Europe has been implementing human rights education programme in three key areas: residential and e-learning educational activities (including pilot projects in human rights education supported by the European Youth Foundation), development of educational materials and youth policy development.

### **Educational activities**

All educational activities organised by the youth sector of the Council of Europe have used non-formal education approaches. Most of them were designed

around methodology developed and promoted in *Compass*. These approaches include the following.

Holistic learning promotes the development of the whole person, their intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potential. Holistic learning also implies that learning takes place in a social context that encompasses all everyday experiences; it is therefore interdisciplinary and cuts across the traditional subjects in school curricula. A holistic approach also means addressing and involving the cognitive, practical and attitudinal dimensions of learning, that is, not only what people learn, but also how to apply their learning in their attitudes or behaviour or how to apply it in action for human rights, alone or with others.

Open-ended learning is structured so that multiple or complex answers to problems are not only possible, but expected. Participants are not steered towards one “right” answer, which makes sense, because life is not black and white and diversity is a fact of the world we live in. Open-ended learning encourages the confidence to express opinions and critical thinking. This is essential in human rights education because human rights issues are bound to result in different opinions and levels of understanding. It is therefore important for the learners to learn together but still be free to disagree or come to opposite conclusions or have different points of view.

Participation means that young people take part in making decisions about what and how they are going to learn about human rights. Through participation young people develop various competences including: decision-making, listening, empathy with and respect for others, and taking responsibility for their own decisions and actions. Therefore, the programme of every educational activity is based on participants’ expectations and it often changes during the activity to respond to participants’ learning needs as they become clear during the activity. Participation also requires a supportive environment which encourages learners to take responsibility for the activities and processes they are involved in. It is important to be transparent and honest with participants about the limits of participation.

Co-operative learning is about learning to respect others and to work together, which is one aim of HRE. In co-operative learning people learn through working together to seek outcomes that are beneficial both to themselves and to all members of the group. Co-operative learning promotes higher achievement and greater productivity, more caring, supportive, and committed relationships and greater social competence and self-esteem. This is in contrast to what happens when learning is structured in a competitive way. Competitive learning often tends to promote self-interest, disrespect for others and arrogance in the winners, while the losers often become demotivated and lose self-respect.

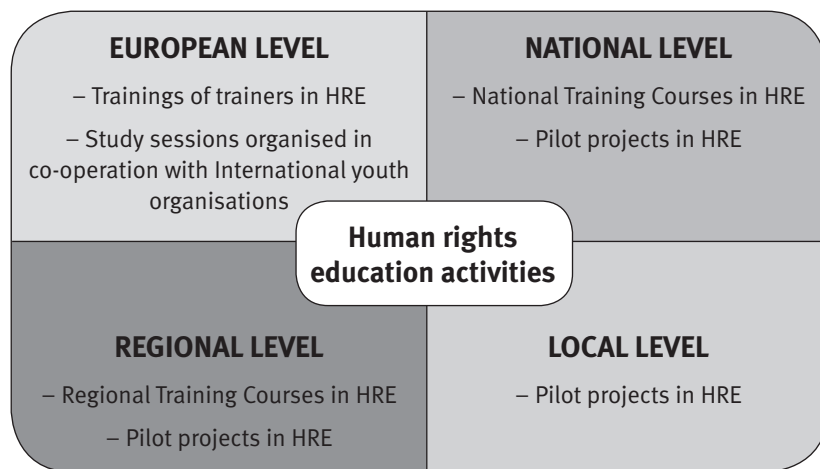




Experiential learning or discovery learning is the cornerstone of HRE because core human rights skills and values such as communication, critical thinking, advocacy, tolerance and respect cannot be taught; they have to be learned through experience and practised. Therefore, the methods used during the training activities include role-play, simulation exercises or case studies.

A learner-centred approach is essential. Human rights education has a very clear purpose: enabling learning about, for and through human rights. Although knowledge about human rights and competences for human rights are fully part of HRE, the learner, or the participant, is at its centre. What really matters is what and how learners/participants want to learn, what they gain from their own learning and how they will put it in practice.

Educational activities have been run on different levels: European, national, regional and local.



All these levels are very closely connected to ensure that the work is disseminated as widely as possible. Trainers trained on European courses organised by the youth sector of the Council of Europe take initiatives after the course and organise national or regional training courses or start pilot projects in human rights education. These contribute to the promotion of human rights education at national and local level.

The approach to training in human rights education at European level includes the use of e-learning, which has been labelled ‘blended learning’, a mixture of residential seminars and online learning activities. The introduction of online

learning platforms<sup>3</sup> allows for better preparation of participants before each course and better support afterwards. It also facilitates a better response to their learning needs as some content can be provided online in the form of e-learning units.

The Advanced Training Course in Human Rights Education was a pioneer long-term training course set up to enhance the quality of human rights education training, which introduced e-learning to the youth programme of the Council of Europe. It has been an inspiration to many organisers and practitioners of human rights education.

In order to support the development and sustainability of human rights education at national level, and in particular the role of youth work and youth organisations, the Youth Department of the Council of Europe supports the organisation of national and regional training courses in human rights education. The courses prepare trainers, facilitators, youth workers and youth leaders, as well as people working in formal education, to develop projects on human rights education at national level and to mainstream human rights education in youth work. The participant-trainers in the course also act as advocates for human rights organisations across institutional and organisational borders.

Pilot projects in Human Rights Education, resulting very often from European, national and regional training courses in HRE, constitute part of the commitment of the Council of Europe’s youth sector to developing awareness, skills and action about, through and for human rights. They are organised mainly by local organisations and reach young people in local communities, having a very clear local impact on human rights situation.

### Publication of educational materials

Human rights education in Europe needs good educational resources, which respond to the situations young people experience in their daily lives and provide opportunities for exploring possible solutions to the human rights challenges they experience. Therefore, the development of educational materials in human rights education has been central to the human rights education programme in the Council of Europe. Starting with *Compass*, the youth sector initiated a series of educational resources for different audiences and on different topics.

*Compass* has been used in almost all educational activities run within the educational programme of the youth sector. It has been revised in 2012, as human rights education, like human rights, is a dynamic concept; it needs to adapt to changing realities and respond to the emerging needs of young people in Europe today.

3. Currently the youth sector uses two e-learning platforms, which are available at: <http://act-hre.coe.int> and <http://e-learning4youth.coe.int>



Soon after *Compass*, a new manual was developed for a different audience. *Compasito – Manual on Human Rights Education for Children* builds on the philosophy and educational approaches of *Compass*. As with *Compass*, it uses a non-formal educational methodology and a structure that provides theoretical and practical support to users of the manual. However, while ‘Compass’ addresses young people themselves, *Compasito* addresses adult educators who work with children. It provides them with theoretical and methodological information and substantial discussion of the book’s human rights themes. *Compasito* also encourages educators to adapt material to reflect their own and their children’s reality.

In addition, the Council of Europe’s *Gender Matters – Manual on Gender-Based Violence Affecting Young People* builds on educational approaches as promoted in *Compass* and provides practitioners in human rights education with specific education tools and insights for a gender-sensitive approach to human rights education.

### Youth policy development

Developing policies to support young people in Europe and the work of youth organisations is the core mission of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe. These policies are based on the real needs expressed by young people, politicians, researchers and youth practitioners who often participate in the activities organised by the youth sector.

The Council of Europe *Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education* is an example. This document was developed in co-operation with the education sector of the Council of Europe and clearly confirms the role of young people, youth organisations and non-formal education in human rights education. It is a result of the direct experience of the youth sector in working with young people throughout Europe. The charter calls on Council of Europe member states to include education for democratic citizenship and human rights education in the curricula for formal education at pre-primary, primary and secondary school level, in general, and for vocational education and training.

“Providing every person within their territory with the opportunity of education for democratic citizenship and human rights education” should be the aim of state policies and legislation dealing with HRE, according to the charter. The charter sets out objectives and principles for human rights education and recommends action in the fields of monitoring, evaluation and research. The charter is accompanied by an explanatory memorandum, which provides details and examples on the content and practical use of the charter.

A youth-friendly version of the charter has also been produced to make it known to young people and, therefore, support its ownership and implementation by the various people concerned with human rights education and youth work/policy.

Between 2009 and 2011, the youth sector ran a long-term project, *Enter!*, on access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The three-year project was designed to develop “youth policy responses to exclusion, discrimination and violence affecting young people in multicultural disadvantaged neighbourhoods”. As a result, a youth policy recommendation on access to social rights for all young people was developed. It recommends that the governments of member states develop and implement sustainable public policies, which take into consideration the specific situation and needs of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

### To sum up...

#### The specific approach to human rights education in the youth sector of the Council of Europe includes:

- A strong multiplying effect; training youth workers, youth leaders and trainers so that they disseminate what they have learnt in the places where they live and share their competences with other people in order to build their capacity to promote and defend human rights – creating close links at European, national, regional and local level – through translations of educational materials, pilot projects and national and regional training courses.
- Provision of educational materials that can be directly used by young people where they live.
- Involving different partners; both in the Council of Europe and beyond, many activities have been organised in close co-operation with and supported by different Council of Europe institutions such as the European Youth Foundation, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. Other partners include the League of Arab States and Asia-Europe Foundation.
- Translating the experience of young people and youth organisations in human rights education into youth policy.
- Linking different initiatives within the youth sector; human rights was one of the most important aspects of the *All Different – All Equal* youth campaign in 2005.

### -----> What next? – perspectives for the development of human rights education with and for young people

The participants of the *Forum on Human Rights Education with Young People* in 2009 stated: “The Council of Europe can, and needs to, do more in order to make the right to human rights education a reality for all children and young people”. These words have been taken very seriously by the youth sector, which took action to develop new approaches and initiatives in order to adapt to the changing realities of young people and to respond to their needs. These initiatives include:



## Revision of Compass

In 2012 *Compass* has been revised and published. It includes new themes and new activities to address human rights issues related to the Internet, disability, terrorism, religion and remembrance.

## Youth Peace Ambassadors Project<sup>4</sup>

This flagship project promotes and supports the role of young people in peace-building activities that contribute to people living together in dignity and dialogue through a network of specifically-trained young people who strengthen the presence and promote the values of the Council of Europe in conflict-affected areas and communities.

### Project: Young people combatting hate speech online

This is another flagship project of the youth sector which aims to combat racism and discrimination in the online expression of hate speech by equipping young people and youth organisations with the skills to recognise and act against human rights violations. It consists of educational activities and a media campaign to reach young people in the Council of Europe's member states and mobilise them to promote and protect human rights in the online environment.

## Advocating human rights education

The youth sector is taking a leading role in the promotion of the Council of Europe *Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education* among young people and youth organisations in Europe. The Youth Sector has contributed to the development of the child-friendly version of the Charter, which includes the publication of a brochure for children and a training manual for youth workers in how to work with the Charter.

Moreover, as a result of the *Forum on Human Rights Education with Young People*, a special Consultative Group on Human Rights Education has been established with the mandate to:

- Propose standards (approaches, core principles, indicators...) for human rights education through non-formal learning and youth work; taking into account existing documents from the United Nations and the upcoming charter of the Council of Europe;
- Liaise with other sectors of the Council of Europe active in human rights education to strengthen co-operation and common approaches and to avoid duplication;

4. You can read more on the Youth Peace Ambassadors Project at: <http://youthpeace.coe.int>

- Provide expert advice on the implementation of specific activities projects and tools;
- Support the process of streamlining human rights education with children and with young people in the work of the Directorate of Youth and Sport;
- Make proposals for gender mainstreaming in all the human rights education activities and for the inclusion of an intercultural learning perspective;
- Support the process of implementation and evaluation of Agenda 2020<sup>5</sup> in relation to human rights education.

Much remains to be done by the youth sector of the Council of Europe in human rights education. What has been done so far has proved to be a success, but it will take considerable effort to fulfill young people's expectations, expressed in their Message to the Council of Europe during the Forum on Human Rights Education. They call on the Organisation to :

- make greater efforts to achieve social inclusion and freedom from discrimination of all young people;
- develop more effective ways to guarantee access to human rights, especially social rights, for all young people;
- continue to promote human rights-based approaches to youth policy and to monitor their observance;
- support the involvement of disadvantaged and vulnerable young people and those with special needs, such as migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, displaced persons, Roma, rural youth, young people with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-gender youth;
- support the participation of young people and children in all matters that concern them; to do nothing about young people without young people;
- further the recognition, development and sustainability of youth work in Europe;
- secure appropriate resources for its youth policy and youth work instruments and foster the engagement of national institutions.

## -----> Recommendations:

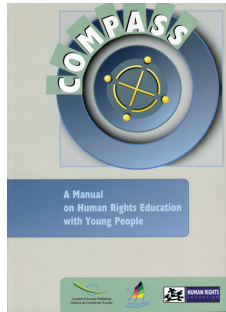
Recommendation R (85) 7 of the Committee of Ministers to the member states on teaching and learning about Human Rights in schools

Recommendation CM/Rec (2010) 7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Council of Europe *Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education*

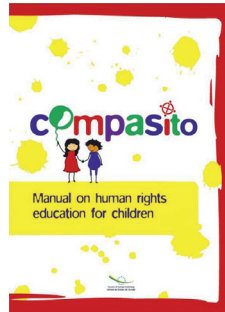
*Contributing authors Darek Grzemny and Rui Gomes*

5. A blueprint on the future of youth policy, adopted by the 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth.

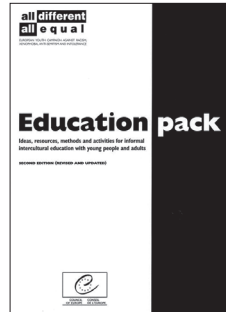
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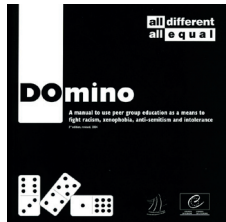
Compass – A Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People



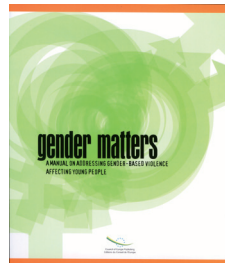
COMPASITO - Manual on human rights education for children



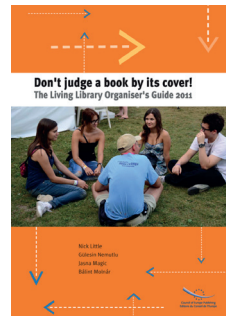
Education pack



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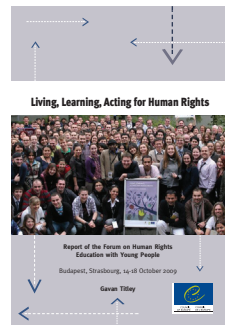
Gender Matters



Living Library



Encompassing Human Rights Education with Young people



Living, Learning, Acting for Human rights



## The Council of Europe and young people intercultural learning

intercultural learning helps counter racism and prejudice. it gives individuals the special skills they need to live in today's multicultural societies. it promotes tolerance, equal opportunities, validation of cultural difference and anti-discrimination. it has a clear political dimension, encouraging people to fight discrimination, social injustice and xenophobia; its aim being to bring about real social change. it is also an evolving concept requiring individuals to remain in a constant state of self-questioning, openness and readiness to learn.

intercultural learning has been accepted as a core part of European youth work for the last 20 years, thanks to a large degree to the work of the Council of Europe in its European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest. The two residential training centres usually work with groups of 25-35 young people from across Europe and beyond, who live and learn together. These are ideal settings for inter-cultural learning to take place.

The Council of Europe's *All Different All Equal* campaigns against racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and intolerance further boosted intercultural learning at community level across the continent. its Euro-Mediterranean training programmes have helped to spread the concept beyond Europe's borders.





# intercultural learning

Intercultural learning has been and remains central to European youth work. The need for it became clear within Europe after the Second World War, when reconciliation and peace-building were at the heart of international youth activities. But early international youth workers certainly understood the values behind it. Since the beginning, intercultural learning has played an essential role in countering stereotypical and prejudicial racist views and in trying to undo the significant damage done by racial ideologies.

It remains fully relevant in today's globalised world, which requires special skills for intercultural learning and dialogue within multicultural communities and societies, from local to global level.

Intercultural learning and intercultural education owe a great deal to the work of the Council of Europe, especially the educational approaches and practices of the European youth centres in Strasbourg and Budapest. However, the understanding of intercultural learning, and the way in which it is practised by youth organisations and youth workers, has strongly changed and developed over time.

In recent years, the status of intercultural learning has grown both politically and in terms of policy. The 8th Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth (in Kiev, 2008) recognised intercultural learning as being “particularly relevant for promoting intercultural dialogue and combating racism and intolerance”.

The *Youth in Action Programme* of the European Union remains one of the main European programmes promoting intercultural learning among young people all over Europe. Most recently, in 2011, the Council of Europe published the report *Living together: Combining Diversity and Freedom in 21st century Europe*. In this report, the importance of education for diversity is highlighted with some concrete examples taken from the programme of activities of the Council of Europe's youth sector.



## -----> What is intercultural learning?

The concept of intercultural learning, like the concepts of culture or intercultural dialogue, can have various definitions. Many researchers and practitioners have struggled to come up with one clear answer to what it is. What they have all agreed is that it would be limiting and fail to reflect the complexity of what intercultural learning means and conveys. The Council of Europe's white paper on intercultural dialogue does not define culture either. However, certain models, theories and explanations have been proposed over the years.

One first important distinction to be made is between multiculturalism and interculturalism. Whereas the first term, most often used in politics, only refers to the variety of cultures existing within the same society, the latter implies actual interaction and "living together" in the society concerned. Multiculturalism by itself can already be conflictual. In multiculturalism, diversity is often perceived as a threat, and "otherness" as a danger. But intercultural learning addresses ways to live together, coexist and contribute to the development of common, diverse societies. An intercultural society is a society in which diversity is seen as a positive asset for social, educational, cultural, political and economic growth. A society with a high degree of interaction, exchange and mutual respect for values, tradition and norms<sup>1</sup>.

According to the Council of Europe's training kit (T-Kit) on intercultural learning<sup>2</sup>: "intercultural learning, on a more literal level, refers to an individual process of acquiring knowledge, attitudes or behaviour that is connected with interaction of different cultures". Intercultural learning, as further described in the T-Kit, helps to explain how people with different backgrounds can live together peacefully. It defines both the competences needed as well as the process to be used to achieve that aim. In that sense, intercultural learning is not just about learning from books. It concerns learning about oneself to start with, about others and their differences, and finally, about what is cultural in each person.

One dilemma faced when trying to define intercultural learning is precisely this: how can we determine what is cultural, and what could be social or economic – or simply personal - in the differences between people?

One of the most famous and widely-used models to explain intercultural learning is the so-called 'iceberg of culture'; the idea that culture can be separated into a visible part (the top of the iceberg), and a hidden, implicit part (under water). Although this model has been and still is broadly used in intercultural education, it has also been strongly criticised for simplifying culture and not taking into account the concept of identity. There is a classic confusion between identity,

1. Lafraya, Susana (2011) Intercultural learning in non-formal education: theoretical frameworks and starting points  
2. [http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/publications/T-kits/4/Tkit\\_4\\_EN](http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/publications/T-kits/4/Tkit_4_EN)

culture, belonging and tradition, in which individual traits are generalised or linked to culture when they are actually much more difficult to define.

Even if it is difficult to agree on one, universally-agreed definition of intercultural learning, there are guidelines for intercultural learning practitioners which ensure that there is a solid understanding of what intercultural learning should involve and achieve. Some of these principles are:

- Openness to others
- Active respect for difference
- Mutual comprehension
- Active tolerance
- Validation of all cultures present
- Equality of opportunity
- Anti-discrimination

Henrik Otten, in his *Ten Thesis* on intercultural learning, emphasizes how important it is for intercultural learning to deal with everyday social and political realities in Europe, so staying close to the daily preoccupations of young people. He further states that intercultural learning should include an obligation to be intolerant towards violations of human rights. In another thesis, he argues that intercultural learning is, naturally and by itself, political.



Peter Lauritzen and Henrik Otten both underline the following three essential principles for intercultural learning.

- Tolerance of ambiguity; the acceptance that different truths exist at the same time, that not everything can be explained through culture and that individual identity plays as important a role as culture.
- Empathy; being ready to put oneself into someone else's shoes is necessary to make intercultural learning possible; it is essential to be interested in who the other is, their reality and emotional background, to be able to listen and be willing to understand the other's point of view.
- Solidarity; the "practical, social and political side of empathy"<sup>3</sup> involves the capacity to work with others, in a group, to contribute to and be interested in everyone's learning process.

### Possible definitions

Peter Lauritzen<sup>4</sup> defines intercultural learning as: "discovery and transgression, change and revision, insecurity and uncertainty, openness and curiosity. It is a programme that opposes any limitation of the mind by national, continental, religious, ideological, ethnic, gender or political dogma".

The Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe, in a course description on intercultural learning in 2008, proposed the following definition: "Intercultural learning (is) the maximum common denominator between human rights education, anti-racist education, international cooperation and a sense of social justice".

Rui Gomes and Teresa Cunha<sup>5</sup> see intercultural learning as the educational approach which is required to ensure intercultural dialogue. They agree with Equipo Claves's definition of intercultural learning: "a process of social education aimed at promoting a positive relationship between people and groups from different cultural backgrounds". They further define the purpose of intercultural learning: "to inflect ethnocentric perspectives, fight prejudices and promote solidarity ... (to) support equality in human dignity and respect for the plurality of cultural identities".

According to Sanchez Miranda (1994), interculturalism is: "a space in which people can be different, marked by a history and a culture, a particular attempt to give meaning to everything. And each unfinished, complementary culture

3. See "Intercultural Learning", Lauritzen Peter

4. See "Intercultural Learning", Lauritzen Peter

5. See "Against the waste of experiences in intercultural learning", Cunha, Teresa and Gomes, Rui

needs to be able to show curiosity about other ways of living in the world, so as to understand others and be able to recognise oneself"<sup>6</sup>.

Intercultural learning is more than a purely educational concept; it has a political and policy dimension. As stated in *Mosaic: The Training Kit on Euro Mediterranean youth work*, intercultural learning includes the ability to interact and the capacity to act. It clearly encourages people to fight discrimination, to react to social injustice, to denounce xenophobia and to go beyond their own stereotypes and prejudices. At various times in the past 30 years, intercultural learning met either with strong support or strong resistance in different countries and from different political leaders. It is also interesting to see how political statements on the "failure of multiculturalism" keep coming up again every 10 years (Der Spiegel, 1997, discourse by Angela Merkel, 2010)<sup>8</sup>. What does this interpretation mean? Does it mean that intercultural learning and intercultural dialogue have not succeeded in achieving their aims or, the opposite, that they remain needed and essential approaches to living together in dignity?

One thing remains sure; culture and intercultural learning and dialogue are not static; they evolve, move and change with time, which also invites us to remain in a process of self-questioning, openness and readiness to learn. This is also true of youth workers' definition of intercultural learning and dialogue and how they put it into practice.

## -----> Intercultural learning through history

### Intercultural learning and young people

The 1970s and 1980s saw the qualitative – and, especially, quantitative – development of international youth activities, thanks to the European Youth Foundation and the activities of international youth organisations at the Strasbourg European Youth Centre and the first youth exchange programmes of the European Communities. These exchanges, which addressed mainly youth workers and youth leaders, focused on a value-based intercultural pedagogy, working with stereotypes and developing competences to ensure the success of intercultural encounters.

6. Sánchez Miranda J: Sánchez Miranda J. y otros (2001): "Mediación Intercultural. Una propuesta para la formación". Sevilla, Andalucía Acoge.

7. [http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/publications/T-kits/11/6577\\_T-Kit\\_11\\_A4\\_assemble.pdf](http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/publications/T-kits/11/6577_T-Kit_11_A4_assemble.pdf)

8. Der Spiegel (1997). The defeat of the multicultural society; Further on, Der Spiegel (2010). Merkel sees multiculturalism as a failure.





They played an important role in raising young people's and youth workers' awareness of cultural differences and the need to go beyond ethnocentrism. Frequently the concept of culture was (and still is) used to refer to national culture.

### Intercultural learning, education and policy

In the early 90's, intercultural learning was given a policy dimension. The 1995 *All Different All Equal* youth campaign<sup>9</sup> against racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and intolerance provided timely impetus to the development of local, regional, community projects dealing with intercultural learning. Cultural diversity was also perceived as existing within countries and between various groups. Many youth organisations used this campaign as a starting point to work with minorities and to better integrate young people from other cultural backgrounds. The education pack *All Different All Equal* defines intercultural learning as: "a mutual recognition of diversities within societies".

Diversity started to be seen as a positive factor to be embraced and encouraged. From a policy perspective, the *All Different All Equal* campaign encouraged young migrants to create consultative councils and to become involved in local policy structures. Overall, intercultural learning became a more concrete, comprehensible concept, including the recognition of others and of individual identity.

Another important development in the field of intercultural learning was the development of links between formal and non-formal education. Traditional intercultural pedagogy in schools, which mainly included information about other cultures and religions, realised the need to go beyond traditional forms of education to reach out to excluded, marginalised young people and minorities.

The inclusion of young people from a Roma background, from migrant communities and from national minorities in the activities of the European youth centres further reinforced and made visible the link between intercultural learning as an educational approach and the fight against discrimination.

### From intercultural learning to intercultural dialogue

The beginning of the 21st century has been marked by terrorist attacks, wars and increasing globalisation. This has only confirmed the need for a greater focus on and political and educational investment in intercultural learning, in the fight against emerging phobias and fears.

9. The *All Different All Equal* campaign was firstly launched in 2005 as a campaign "against Racism, Antisemitism, Xenophobia and intolerance". In 2006, 10 years after and following an evaluation, the second *All Different All Equal* campaign "for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation" was launched in 47 Member States.

Various international organisations started focusing on what had by then become "intercultural dialogue": the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations<sup>10</sup> was created, the European Commission declared 2008 "European year of intercultural dialogue" and the Council of Europe produced its white paper on intercultural dialogue<sup>11</sup> – the first political text submitted to the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers acknowledging the importance of education for intercultural dialogue. Intercultural dialogue had therefore become more of a political project concerning all dimensions of life, implying mutual recognition, respect for the rules of democracy and active participation.

But does intercultural dialogue replace intercultural learning? How can intercultural dialogue be implemented in educational terms? Can dialogue be learnt, and is it enough for peaceful cohabitation?

One possible answer to these questions could be found which was, at the time, a new approach to learning – human rights education.

### Intercultural learning within human rights education

If intercultural learning is perceived as the educational approach which emphasizes the values of solidarity, empathy, equality and dignity; then human rights education is probably the approach best adapted to intercultural learning. It is important to note that, over the last ten years, the Council of Europe's Youth Department has developed its human rights education work through training and education, publications and as an overall priority. The approach is based on the universality of human rights, and thus the equal dignity of human beings, irrespective of their cultural background. Universality of human rights cannot be considered without accepting the concepts of tolerance of ambiguity and empathy: two concepts which are also essential in intercultural learning. As Miles Davis said: "If you understood everything I said, you'd be me...".

Initially, intercultural learning was not credited with an emancipatory or transformative function; it was seen a way of learning about other people and how to communicate with them. It is clear that the concept and experience of intercultural learning have evolved, and that it has become a reference in all work

10. The United Nations Alliance of Civilization (UNAOC) was established in 2005. It aims to improve understanding and cooperation between nations and peoples across cultures and religions. It also helps to counter the forces that fuel polarisation and extremism.

11. The White Paper aims to promote intercultural dialogue, mutual respect and understanding, based on the core values of the Organisation. The Ministers emphasised the importance of ensuring appropriate visibility of the White Paper, and called on the Council of Europe and its member states and everyone involved to follow up on its recommendations.

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper\\_final\\_revised\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper_final_revised_en.pdf)



of the Council of Europe, with young people and beyond. It now has, with the white paper, a political as well as educational dimension.

## -----> Intercultural learning in the Youth Department of the Council of Europe

Intercultural learning has been almost a mantra in international youth work in the past 20 years. The Youth Department of the Council of Europe played an essential role in this development, first through the creation of its two European youth centres in Strasbourg (1972) and Budapest (1995), and through the wide variety of training and education programmes developed.

The European youth centres have been ‘life laboratories’ for intercultural learning. By bringing together 25-35 young people from Europe, and often other continents, for each residential education and training seminar, helping them to learn together, live together, share rooms and meals, they have been ideal and natural settings for intercultural learning to take place outside the classroom.

The long-term training courses on intercultural learning were one of the main tools for achieving intercultural learning, both in terms of content and approach. Even where the topic of a course was not specifically intercultural learning, it became clear that intercultural learning was the essence of and driving force behind any activity run by the Council of Europe’s Youth Department (even when misunderstood and confused with “intercultural evenings”!).

Intercultural learning quickly became a quality criterion for European youth projects and for project funding by the European Youth Foundation (EYF). “The construction of Europe is above all learning to live in a multicultural society. This learning is obtained through exchange or confrontation which form the basis of EYF educational policy”<sup>12</sup>. It was not just a topic to address, but rather an attitude, a global approach for any youth project developed in a European context.

Alongside the educational activities, a range of methods and educational approaches were developed to accompany the courses. Subsequently, the methods used were sometimes highlighted to the detriment of the content and the purpose of intercultural learning. It became necessary to provide training and education to put the methods into context, so that they would be used for their intended purpose – to promote transformative change in societies – rather than just as simple group work methods.

<sup>12</sup> Presentation of the European Youth Foundation, in *The Dublin Report: Training course for youth exchange organisers*, European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, 1989



European campaigns, such as the *All Different All Equal* campaigns in 1995 and 2006, played a crucial role in further mainstreaming intercultural learning in European youth work. The creation of new international youth organisations, working with minorities, opened European youth work to new groups of young people, thus developing intercultural learning to include new topics and dimensions. Since then, regular work with young migrants and refugees, Roma youth and national minorities has become part of daily life in the youth centres.

Beyond training courses and campaigns, the Council of Europe Youth Department also introduced study sessions very early in the 1970s. These are activities organised and ran by international youth organisations with the financial, logistic and educational support of the Youth Department. They take place in one of the youth centres and help non-governmental organisations (NGOs) develop their skills on European youth work topics. In those study sessions, which still take place today, intercultural learning is often an explicit topic, but always an essential part of any session. Some international youth NGOs even have intercultural learning as their main purpose or in their title.

The partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth has also focused on intercultural learning, notably with two research seminars, *Resituating Culture*, in 2003, and *The Politics of Diversity*, in 2006. Moreover, the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in the field of youth has taken the concept beyond European borders, providing new perspectives and questions, such as described in the T-Kit *Mosaic*.



But what makes these training courses and seminars organised by the Council of Europe Youth field so special? What differentiates them from other training courses?

One essential difference lies in the deconstruction of culture. International youth activities: “are influenced by relations of cultural dominance which exist within and among multicultural/ethnic societies. Intercultural learning is the educational approach to lay open these differences and tensions and to work on them towards peaceful solutions”<sup>13</sup>.

When applying, participants are selected as representing a certain Council of Europe member state. But once they are together, they are asked to be themselves, to put aside their categories and act as individuals in a neutral setting. This encourages participants to detach from their cultural associations and to look beyond their mental borders. But it also forces participants to leave their comfort zone and be ready to experience and experiment in a safe environment. The European youth centres are ideal for such experimentation, as they help young people feel they are in a safe space, with professional educational staff accompanying and guiding their learning. Symbolically, it is also noteworthy that the youth centres are on European territory, and so are not literally on the grounds of a member state as such. They can therefore be considered neutral spaces for intercultural encounters. The learning which takes place in the centres is based on non-formal education methodology, starting from participants’ experiences and realities rather than from theories and texts. It assumes that all 30 participants have relevant contributions to make, have real experiences, feelings and thoughts about culture, about identity and about others.

The Council of Europe’s Youth Department and the Organisation as a whole is often perceived as a ‘school for democracy’. It provides a space to reflect, to work on individual attitudes and to bring about social change. Intercultural learning does not happen at the end of one activity or a week’s training. It is a process of change, which carries on once participants have left the centres and go back to their daily lives. There, they continue reflecting on the courses and on their experiences while interacting with others. The youth centres start a process which is then pursued and expanded beyond the initial activity. Many participants stay in touch, develop cross-border youth projects and continue to exchange contact.

Sometimes, in order to make intercultural learning authentic and to take into account specific considerations, such as conflict or social realities, educational activities take place outside the youth centres and in member states. The assistance programme, developed in the 1980s, ran many youth training activities in the Balkans and in the Caucasus, involving young people from conflict zones and using the local context as a tool for intercultural learning, thus bringing young

13. Dublin Report: Training course for youth exchange organisers, European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, 1989

people together who would otherwise avoid each other, fight or continue developing strong prejudices. In that sense, intercultural learning in some cases can also be understood as a tool for conflict management and conflict transformation.

Finally, unlike other fancy topics, which last for a while and then go out of fashion, intercultural learning is recognised as a reference point in all European youth work. The concept and the approach are not even questioned anymore. The only questions relate to *how* to ensure intercultural learning is achieved efficiently.

### Intercultural learning in other parts of the Council of Europe

Of course, intercultural learning and intercultural dialogue are not only priorities within the Youth Department of the Council of Europe. Its Department of Education, focusing on formal education, has been working on intercultural learning in the classroom for many years. Learning and teaching intercultural competences, which include both teacher training and pupil’s training, have been a way of ensuring that intercultural learning also reaches the formal education systems.

Various campaigns such as *Speak out against discrimination*<sup>14</sup> were launched by the Council of Europe, building directly on the youth campaigns and enlarging the scope of the work. One of the Organisation’s departments was even developed to specifically work on intercultural dialogue.

This proves that young people are only a part of European societies, and that the work done by the Organisation’s Youth Department over the past 40 years is a reflection of its priorities and activities.

## -----> Perspectives and achievements

The recent shift of emphasis from intercultural learning to intercultural dialogue has raised the profile of political work on diversity and living together in dignity. It has placed the importance of working on intercultural learning on the agenda of European policy making and mainstreamed it into many sectors of people’s everyday lives.

Nevertheless, intercultural dialogue still presents some dilemmas for the years to come and questions about the direction to take in the future.

- Is there a risk that the new focus on intercultural learning will take attention away from educational work?
- Does the new focus on intercultural dialogue not risk limiting human beings to cultural beings, thus going back somehow to the initial understanding of

14. <http://www.coe.int/t/DG4/ANTI-DISCRIMINATION-CAMPAIGN/>



individuals as representatives of their culture? In his paper, *Plastic, Political and Contingent*, Gavan Titley analyses the work on intercultural learning within the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and raises this concern himself: “the constant emphasis on anything called ‘intercultural learning’ compounds the tendency to centre culture as the key resource and problematic in social life and youth work activities”<sup>15</sup>.

- How frequently is dialogue about cultures? And is intercultural dialogue supposed to facilitate dialogue about cultures or between cultures? Here again, Titley states: “the question is not whether or not culture should be engaged with, but how, in relation to whom, to what extent, in interrelation with what, and with which underlying meanings”.
- Finally, is it necessary to speak about culture to have intercultural dialogue or does it naturally happen when “cultures” get together and exchange?

It is clear that the Council of Europe Youth Department has played a vital and central role in the developments of youth work in the field of intercultural learning, fighting social injustice and combating discrimination. But, in recent years, a new culture of fear has emerged, requiring more action and support to facilitate and ensure a continuation of dialogue and learning beyond political discourse.

A further challenge for European institutions, and especially for the Council of Europe as the home of human rights, is to recognise that intercultural learning goes beyond European borders. The Council of Europe now has 47 member states, which has made intercultural learning much more necessary, but also more ambiguous. With a growing “Fortress Europe”, the risk of excluding other citizens of the world – other young people needing access to inter-cultural dialogue and wanting to take part in intercultural learning – is a real one. These are challenges which the Council of Europe’s Youth Department already recognised some time ago and which led to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and partnerships with international institutions beyond European borders.

Finally, to close with some inspiring words by Peter Lauritzen: “Respect of otherness, individuality, the capacity to live with insecurity and ambiguity within communication and the intention to increase “mixophilia” (Baumann) should be the cornerstones of an educational strategy aiming at a better management of diversity”. What more could we ask the Youth Department to do – with the same success and professionalism it has shown over the last 40 years – in the 40 years to come?

*Contributing author Nadine Lyamouri-Bajja*

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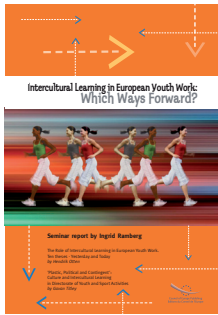
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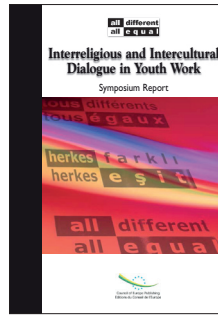
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-----> **Publications**



Intercultural Learning in European Youth Work: Which Ways Forward?



Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue in Youth Work



## The Council of Europe and young people

# Youth information

information is a human right. Without it, young people cannot access their rights or participate actively and responsibly in society and political life.

Young people have a particular need for access to information because they have to make critical decisions concerning their future, without the life experience of adults.

in 1990 the first European reference document on youth information was agreed by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers. Another milestone was the start of the official partnership with the "European Youth information and Counselling Agency" (ERYICA) in 1997. The partnership promotes young people's access to information and counselling. it has contributed to the professionalisation of youth information and supported its development in eastern and central Europe.

Youth information aims to provide young people with accurate information, for example, on access to their rights, education and working life. it also helps them evaluate the available information and reach a decision. Given the deluge of material available on-line, an ability to critically assess information is crucial.





# Youth information



## Historical reminder & main achievements

Democratic societies cannot function without information; it is a prerequisite, in particular, for access to citizens' rights, participation in civil society and freedom of choice.

Young people have a special need for information. Being at a crucial phase in their lives, in transition from childhood to adulthood, they have to take important decisions that will influence their later life significantly. Their choices regarding education, employment, detachment from the parental home and personal lifestyle will define their future. Whereas adults can always rely on their own experience, young people have a wide range of first-time decisions to make and need to be able to rely on complete and comprehensive information as a basis for their autonomous decision-making.

Therefore it was only logical, in post-war Western societies, for a new branch of specialised youth work to emerge, and 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 guide young people when faced with complex situations and questions.

The late 1960s then saw the creation of the first generalist youth information services, starting in Flanders and spreading quickly to Germany, France, the Netherlands and further afield. Those services were no longer focused on the personal situation of each young person, but covered all topics of interest to young people, following a holistic approach based on the needs of the target group. One of the reasons those services were introduced was the demand from young people for access to reliable, neutral and accurate information on all areas concerning them; information that was comprehensive and reflected the reality of their lives.







- 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 8<sup>th</sup> Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth in Kyiv, Ukraine
- 2009** Publication of “Youth Information Starters Kit”  
Seminar – “Youth Policy and Youth Information”
- 2010** Colloquy – “Bridging the Gap” – celebration of 20 years  
Recommendation 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** Foundation of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency ERYICA
- 1990** Recommendation 90 (7) concerning information and counselling for young people in Europe of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers
- 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 2010 (8) on Youth Information of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers

## → 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, 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-trainer” 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 of those countries were invited to specially-organised seminars. A “Starters Kit” for decision-makers and non-governmental organisations 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 which wanted to know more about youth information. Those meetings lead to a wide range of new contacts, the start of youth information provision in some countries and even 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 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. The campaign “Information – right now!” was launched on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2012 and is the next joint activity within the partnership to promote information and counselling for all young people in Europe.

## -----> Concept

### Youth Information in a nutshell

The essential aim of youth information is to help guide young people in all aspects of their lives and in their autonomous decision-making. It builds on the fact 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 those steps are challenging for anybody, but especially for young people, facing them for the first time, who are often still in the process of developing their own personality.

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

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.

Youth information needs to bring together two professions to be able to meet those aims and provide the best possible service for young people – namely youth work and information/knowledge management.

## Information management

Information management comprises:

- Research – sourcing and selecting information,
- Documentation – organising and filing information,
- Design – creating and designing information products.

A speciality of youth information, however, 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 Work: dissemination and forms of intervention:

A well-managed and prepared stock of information is the starting point for several forms of intervention that youth information undertakes with young people:



- *Mix of information channels:* face-to-face, print, online and outreach are all forms of dissemination that are needed to provide a holistic service meeting the different needs of and questions from diverse young people.
- *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 on relevant topics in the area of service, thus being able to signpost or refer young people to the correct institution or person for their demand.
- *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, young people from time to time 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.

Note that 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.

### Information Literacy

A function of youth information, that 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 straight away and of all the possible techniques available to evaluate and identify quality criteria. Youth information strives to integrate these techniques, but not only in its own research, documentation and dissemination of information; more and more it is trying to develop different ways of transmitting the relevant key skills for modern life to young people themselves.

Youth information is a part of youth work and shares its key values, such as: being open to all young people, acting in the interest of young people or defining its options based on the needs of the target groups. It became a specific branch of youth work because of the wide range of skills which were also needed in other areas such as, research, documentation and the creation of information products.

### -----> Specific Council of Europe approach

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 Convention of the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 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 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 for 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 an important factor in ensuring access to their rights and promoting their autonomy.

As mobility increases understanding and peace among all people in Europe, it is another important aim of the Council of Europe 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 as well as in Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)8 on youth information.

All those 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.

## -----> 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 with 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 & 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 involving young people as peers directly in the dissemination of information. Youth information strives to do this while considering the concerned young people's needs as the crucial factor, supporting them in all phases of the experience, from planning to evaluation, to make sure that they are ultimately enriched and not exploited. A tokenistic approach is avoided at all times. Those 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.

*Contributing author Alexandra Cangelosi*

### -----> Related documents

Recommendation 90 (7) concerning information and counselling for young people in Europe adopted by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on 21.2.1990

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

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

“Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life”, of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, 21 May 2003 [http://youth-partnership.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth\\_Policy/docs/Recognition/Recx95x18E\\_12\\_October\\_1995.pdf](http://youth-partnership.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Recognition/Recx95x18E_12_October_1995.pdf)

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 adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 8.7.2009

Recommendation 2010 (8) on youth information adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16.7.2010

“Youth information Starter Kit” (2010)

Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2012 – 2015) adopted on 15 February 2012

### -----> Publication



Youth information starter kit



## The Council of Europe and young people

# Youth Participation

The Council of Europe defends youth participation in its most profound sense; young people having a say in all decisions and activities which affect them and their community. It is about empowering young people, but also strengthening democracy. It covers voting and elections and also on-going decision-making, particularly at local level. National authorities have a responsibility to give young people the means to participate too; it is not enough to award them rights. And, youth participation must be sustained and comprehensive, not just tokenistic.

The Organisation has made youth participation a political and practical priority over the last 40 years:

- Adopting its pioneering co-management structure in 1972, where young people make decisions side by side with government representatives;
- Creating the European Youth Foundation in 1972 to fund youth activities which promote peace, human rights and democracy;
- Establishing its two unique residential European Youth Centres, which train around 5,000 young people a year;
- Adopting in 1988 its "Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life" (revised in 2002), which requires the meaningful participation of young people in decisions and action taken regarding employment, housing, education, transport and culture, including excluded and isolated young people.





# Youth Participation

*Tell me and I will forget  
Show me and I may remember  
Involve me and I will understand*



## Introduction

Youth participation, while broadly supported, means different things to different people. When pressed, those who support and promote youth participation are in fact talking about several different things. There is in fact a spectrum of participation ranging from informing, to consulting, to involving, to collaborating and finally to empowering people<sup>1</sup>. Many people who support the participation of young people in decision-making, including young people themselves, as well as politicians, policy makers and public officials, may all be at different places on that spectrum.

The Council of Europe has, through its words and deeds, stood for an ambitious interpretation of youth participation. Simply put, youth participation is the idea that young people should have a say in decisions and action which affect them and their community. It makes sense on so many levels, leading to better decision-making, the promotion of active citizenship among young people and the deepening of our democracies.

However, while broadly accepted, much more needs to be done to put it into practice across Europe. Too often the apathy or immaturity of young people is cited for lack of action by authorities and institutions, when the real obstacles are often the lack of understanding or capacity within institutions to engage with young people.

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1. International Association for Public Participation. <http://www.iap2.org/>





The Council of Europe – particularly through the work of its Youth Department (and previously the Directorate of Youth and Sport) – has been an institution which has not only articulated the principle of youth participation, but has provided political and practical support to young people, youth organisations, policy makers and institutions to make it a reality. This article charts the important role of the Council of Europe in this area over the last 40 years.

## -----> Defining Youth Participation

There are many different views and perspectives on youth participation, all of which can contribute to our understanding. However this article seeks to focus on the work of the Council of Europe and in that context I will restrict myself to exploring how this institution has defined the issue. The Organisation’s approach is best summed up by this definition in the *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*<sup>2</sup>.

*“The active participation of young people in decisions and actions at local and regional level is essential if we are to build more democratic, inclusive and prosperous societies. Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means,*

2. *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, Council of Europe, May 2003.

*the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engaging in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.”*

This Council of Europe definition recognised that youth participation is not just about empowering young people, but about strengthening our democratic systems and societies. Its approach also goes beyond a narrow focus solely on the number of young people voting, involved in political parties and standing for election. While acknowledging the importance of political participation, it articulates a more holistic vision of youth participation which embraces their right to have an input and influence into decision-making on an ongoing basis. It goes further, by stating that awarding rights alone is not enough and calls on authorities to actively support young people to participate. The Council of Europe has always put a particular emphasis on the local level, on the basis that this is the level at which young people are best able to become involved and where their input can have the most impact. Its definition also recognised that youth participation is not solely about developing active citizens or building democracy for the future, where it can of course play an important role. If youth participation is to retain legitimacy and be meaningful for young people, they must be able to influence and shape decisions and the action taken now and not only at some later stage in life.

## -----> Background

The Council of Europe has a distinguished and long record of supporting European youth organisations and youth work, and has been a key actor in advancing European youth policy since the 1970s. Participation has been at the heart of that work, as Eberhard noted in his 2002 report, ‘The Council of Europe and Youth’<sup>3</sup> in which he stated that: *“Participation as a way of learning democracy is a recurrent theme in the Council of Europe’s youth sector – and could even be seen as its raison d’être”*. This is demonstrated by the establishment of the European Youth Foundation in 1972, an innovative instrument to provide financial support for international activities run by young people in non-governmental organisations. A further innovation was the support for study sessions, which started in 1974, allowing young people active in organisations across Europe to come together to explore a broad range of issues and to develop shared solutions.

## Political Developments

At a political level the Council of Europe recognised as far back as 1983 the importance of involving young people in issues of relevance to them, with a resolution by the

3. The Council of Europe and Youth, Thirty Year of Experience, Eberhard, Council of Europe 2002





Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE)<sup>4</sup>. They invited local and regional authorities to engage with young people in addressing the problems they faced and to ensure the voice of young people was heard.

In 1988 the Committee of Ministers adopted a far-sighted resolution stating: *“Participation is more than involvement in institutions and decision-making. Participation is a pattern of how one lives in a democracy; it is relevant to work, housing, leisure, education and social relations”*<sup>5</sup>.

1988 was significant too, because the Council of Europe strengthened co-management in the youth sector. Co-management was introduced in 1972 and was a particularly innovative step forward in that it allowed young people from non-governmental organisations to formally participate in decision-making, concerning priorities, budgets and programmes for the youth sector, alongside the representatives of the Council of Europe’s member states. It serves as a model which some countries have followed and also demonstrated a willingness by the Organisation to practice what it recommended to others.

The adoption of a charter on the participation of young people in municipal and regional life by the CLRAE in 1992 marked another significant development<sup>6</sup>. The charter called on local and regional authorities to implement a policy on the participation of young people and to engage with them on a range of issues such as education and training, employment, housing, culture and information. It also proposed the development of co-management structures between decision makers and youth representatives at local level.

## Revised Charter

In 2002 the Council of Europe decided to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original charter by drafting a revised version and established a working group comprised of representatives of the CLRAE and youth organisations. In 2003 a revised version was adopted by the CLRAE. The revised text greatly expanded the scope of the original charter, embracing a broad range of policies and issues that concern young people. It called for the meaningful involvement of young people in decisions and action taken in policy areas such as employment, housing, education, transport, culture and sport. It outlined not only the political and administrative measures required to enhance youth participation, but also the social and cultural conditions necessary to facilitate it. In addition, it also

4. Resolution 144 (1983) on young people in towns, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe.

5. Point I. 1 of the final text of the Second World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth of the Council of Europe, MJN2(88)9 – Strasbourg, 1988.

6. *Charter on the participation of young people in municipal and regional life*, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, 1992.

highlighted the important role of youth organisations in providing a unique space for the participation of young people. The revised text also recognised that young people are not a homogenous group and that action must be taken to meet the needs of different young people. In particular the text called for measures to support the participation of the most excluded and isolated young people.

Following the adoption of the revised text, there was a concerted effort by the Council of Europe to make it as accessible as possible and to assist young people, youth organisations and local and regional authorities to engage with it and to implement the recommendations. This involved the translation of the charter into several languages, the development of a plain language version, a manual<sup>7</sup> to advise on implementation, entitled *“Have Your Say!”*, and the organisation of a number of training courses to explore how the charter could be implemented across Europe. In 2003 the Council of Europe held a conference and produced a report examining the participation of young women in political life<sup>8</sup>. In 2004 and 2006 respectively the Committee of Ministers adopted recommendations calling on local and regional authorities to support youth participation and to promote an environment favourable to the active participation of young people and reinforcing the importance of the active citizenship of young people in public life.

## Recent Developments

The participation of young people was also one of the three main themes of the European Youth Campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation, organised by the Council of Europe, in partnership with the European Commission and the European Youth Forum, which ran from 2006-2007.

In 2009 a seminar was held exploring new ways to promote and support youth participation through communication and information technology<sup>9</sup>. The seminar explored the importance of access to information and knowledge and highlighted the fact that, as long as the digital divide exists and as long as equality of access to the Internet is not guaranteed, e-participation cannot support the development of democracy and human rights. It recommended that all strategies and decisions around e-participation be developed and implemented in co-operation with all concerned, in particular young people.

This brief history does not do justice to the full range of political statements, policies, events and activities of the Council of Europe and its contribution to

7. *“Have your Say!” – Manual on the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*, Council of Europe, February 2008.

8. The participation of young women in political life, an overview of key policy texts. Sineau. Council of Europe 2003

9. Seminar on new ways of youth participation based on information and communication technologies. Evrard editor, Council of Europe 2009.





similar structures at local, regional and national level across Europe and indeed globally. It could be argued that the structural dialogue process which emerged from the 2009 European Union Youth Strategy is a child of co-management. The Council of Europe proved that the sky didn't fall in when you involved young people and this encouraged other institutions to become more ambitious in their approach.

### **Comprehensive and sustained**

The Council of Europe has also laid down some key standards for effective youth participation, namely that it must be comprehensive and sustained. Too often public authorities seek to engage on their own narrow terms with young people; it's a case of, yes, you can participate, but only on these topics. In many cases public bodies just want young people's view on a particular development or in one policy area. The revised charter and other Council of Europe texts make it clear that meaningful youth participation must encompass the range of issues affecting the lives of young people. Also, the experience of many young people and youth organisations is that too many public authorities view participation as a one-off activity to be conducted every few years, rather than an ongoing process, as outlined in the revised charter. In the worst cases, events are mere photo opportunities for politicians and officials. Token participation is worse than no participation as it only serves to alienate young people. While structures may need to be revised and reformed they should be permanent if authorities are fully signed up to the concept of youth participation. The revised charter makes the point that participation is not like a light switch that can be turned on and off. It needs to be fostered in all aspects of young people's lives, such as in schools, where young people should not only have the opportunity to hear about participation and active citizenship, but should also have the opportunity to practice it.

### **More than giving the right**

The Council of Europe has persuaded public authorities to do a lot more than recognise the right of young people to have a say in issues and actions that affect them. It has long understood that giving young people the right to participate is only part of the process, which needs to be followed up with meaningful action. If serious about supporting young people to become involved, the Council of Europe recommends that public authorities need to recognise that, in most cases, young people lack the experience, resources and opportunity to contribute. The framework in the revised charter refers not only to providing the right to participate; but also the means (training, learning new skills or improving skills), space (creating conditions conducive to participation), opportunities (participation organised in such a way as to ensure young people's input can be taken on board) and support (financial resources required to engage). This

approach gives public authorities the responsibility to think through how they can make meaningful youth participation a reality.

### **Respect for diversity**

Human rights, equality and respect for diversity have been core areas of work for the Council of Europe since its creation. It has always emphasized, that while young people share many common interests, they are not a homogeneous group and that that must also be recognised in work to promote participation. The revised charter calls on public authorities to ensure that young women are fully represented and that the needs and views of minorities – such as ethnic minorities, disadvantaged young people and young people with disabilities – are fully represented and respected.

### **Participation must work now**

Too often political leaders speaking about youth participation refer to it solely in terms of its importance in supporting young people to be active citizens in the future. Too often official speeches have used the phrase “*young people are our future*”. This may be true, but young people also have needs, concerns and views now. The Council of Europe has always acknowledged youth participation as an important nursery for democracy, but has also emphasized the fact that participation must be meaningful for young people now and not be seen solely as training for the future. Action and measures which focus solely on the future are bound to fail and may instead discourage young people later in life.

### **Role of youth organisations**

The Council of Europe has always recognised the important role of youth organisations as key intermediaries for young people. A vibrant, independent and active non-governmental youth sector plays a key role in the promotion of youth participation, as it provides a space where young people can develop their social and personal skills. The revised charter recognises that youth organisations are unique, in that they are primarily focused on reflecting the views and serving the needs and interests of young people. For the last 40 years, the Council of Europe has supported the development of international youth organisations and youth representatives through the European Youth Foundations and other means. It has also challenged youth organisations in a positive way to be more responsive and open, in particular to the needs of unorganised youth.

### **Positive approach**

The Council of Europe approach, particularly in later years, has been to shift the emphasis, from defining young people as a problem to be solved, towards viewing young people as citizens with rights, who, if supported, can shape their



own destiny and make a valuable contribution to society. Too often young people are treated as either a vulnerable group that need help or as a group that are a threat or just cause problems. The Council of Europe recognises that, while young people need support and guidance, they can also be active players in organisations and community life if given the chance.

### **Support for public officials and institutions**

The Council of Europe's work in the area of youth participation recognises the importance of engaging with public officials and institutions. Engagement with young people and youth organisations is important, but only half the story. More needs to be done to convince public officials and authorities not only that it is important work, but that it makes sense and can be achieved. In some cases the biggest obstacle to youth participation is a lack of understanding or doubts from officials. The revised charter sets out a clear rationale on how the input of young people can improve decision-making and lead to better results for all, not just young people. It provides a policy framework for officials who may in principle be supportive, but are not sure how to proceed.

### **-----> Conclusion**

As an institution, the Council of Europe – and indeed the various political leaders, officials, trainers and youth representatives who have all contributed – can take great pride in the work and achievements of the last 40 years. The ripple effect of those efforts have spread across Europe and have had a positive impact on the lives of young people, giving them a voice and helping to promote greater youth participation. In Ireland alone, a number of initiatives, projects and authorities have been directly or indirectly influenced by the youth participation work of the Council of Europe. Much remains to be done and the challenge for the Council of Europe is to build on its impressive legacy in the next four decades. It is to be hoped that this will be the case, because the active participation of young people will not only benefit them but help to build better societies and stronger democracies across Europe.

*Contributing author James Doorley*

## **-----> Appendix**

### **Key resolutions, texts and reports.**

Resolution 144 (1983) on young people in towns, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe.

Charter on the participation of young people in municipal and regional life, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, 1992.

Recommendation 1997 (3) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on youth participation and the future of civil society, Council of Europe, February 1997.

Resolution 78 (1999) on “Europe 2000-youth participation: the role of young people as citizens”, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, June 1999.

Revised Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, May 2003.

Recommendation (2004) 13 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the participation of young people in local and regional life, Council of Europe, November 2004.

“Revisiting youth political participation”, Challenges for research and democratic practice in Europe, Forbrig, Editor, Council of Europe Publishing, March 2005.

Final Declaration of the Conference on the Implementation of the Revised Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, Komsomolsk, June 2005.

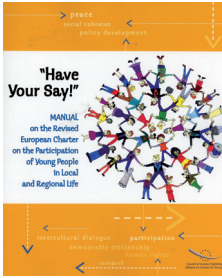
Recommendation (2006)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on citizenship and participation of young people in public life, Council of Europe October 2006.

“Have Your Say” Manual on the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, Council of Europe, February 2008.

Seminar on new ways of youth participation based on information and communication technologies, Evrard editor, Council of Europe 2009.



-----> **Publication**



**“Have your say!”**  
Manual on the Revised  
European Charter on the  
Participation of Young  
People in Local and  
Regional Life



PREMIER 37412

## The Council of Europe and young people Non-Formal Education

The Council of Europe spearheaded the development of non-formal education, even before the term itself was coined in the 1990s. Non-formal learning must be learner-centred, participatory and voluntary; it must focus on promoting democratic values. It provides unique learning opportunities to millions of young Europeans every day in an out-of-school context.

Over the years, the political focus has moved from the definition of non-formal education to the formulation of quality standards and the proper recognition of non-formal education and youth work. The *European Portfolio for Youth Leaders and Youth Workers* was introduced by the Council of Europe to help youth leaders and workers assess and validate their competencies. The Organisation also kick-started the so-called *Strasbourg Process*, a pan-European strategy to promote the recognition of non-formal education and youth work.

Throughout this time the Organisation has itself put these ideas into practice. For 40 years now, the methodology of non-formal education has been applied and developed in the work of the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest.





# Non-Formal Education

Since its establishment in 1972, the youth sector of the Council of Europe<sup>1</sup> has been a pillar of the Organisation, contributing to the spread of democracy across Europe. Through its European youth centres (centres of knowledge and experience about youth and youth affairs in Europe), and the European Youth Foundation (the Council's funding scheme for European youth projects), the youth sector has contributed to the progress of freedom and democracy – from the fall of the Western European dictatorships in Spain and Portugal to the fall of the Berlin Wall – and radical changes in central and eastern Europe. This has been achieved through the strengthening of social movements and political education processes in the fields of: democracy, human rights, citizenship, intercultural learning and evidence-based childhood and youth policies.



## Non-formal education and learning: framework, methodology and philosophy

Non-formal education has a long and lively tradition in Europe, a tradition that is widely acknowledged to have been spearheaded and shaped by the Council of Europe, in particular its youth sector. It has been the core methodology and philosophy of the Council's youth programmes, although the term “non-formal education” as such was only introduced in the 1990s<sup>2</sup>.

Starting with the need for and belief in value-based education after 1945, to the focus on acquiring life skills in support of citizenship and employment in the present millennium, the European youth centres, the European Youth Foundation and the Youth

1. “One of the last remaining socio-topos of co-management in Europe and probably the only example of such within a European or international organisation (Eggs in a pan, p. 162).”
2. As Peter Lauritzen phrased it in a speech on life-long learning, non-formal learning and citizenship in December 2004: “Today, we speak of the same items as three decades back, but we have changed the language.” (Eggs in a pan, p. 64)



Partnership have been instrumental in: developing concepts and methodologies for non-formal education and learning; proving and developing its value; initiating and supporting its recognition; boosting and documenting its quality; and, facilitating and researching its contribution to education and social change.

40 years after the establishment of the first European Youth Centre in Strasbourg in 1972, as an arena to discuss the future of Europe and a laboratory for experimental learning and educational reform, non-formal education has become an extensively-used framework and well-documented concept within and beyond the youth sector. It stands for a range of core learning principles, methodologies and approaches, commonly emphasising the learner's intrinsic motivation, voluntary participation, critical thinking and active role in the democratic process. It is widely acknowledged and recognised as providing unique learning opportunities for millions of young Europeans on a daily basis. It is the educational rationale underpinning the institutional youth sectors of the Council of Europe, the European Union and their Youth Partnership, as well as representing the identifying and binding principle of youth work provision by youth organisations in Europe and beyond.

## -----> **Importance, relevance and political recognition of non-formal education and learning**

Over the past decades, the importance and relevance of non-formal education has been increasingly recognised by civil society, governments and European institutions alike. Non-formal learning and education have been consistently confirmed as key priorities and work areas of education-related organisations and institutions, particularly in the youth sector.

The European Youth Forum – as the pan-European platform of youth organisations, a vital partner of the Council of Europe – has highlighted the role and contribution of non-governmental organisations as providers of non-formal education<sup>3</sup>.

The European institutions have likewise given non-formal education and learning a high status and considerable momentum with high-level policy papers: the Council of Europe, with Recommendation (2003)8 of the Committee of Ministers on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning of young people; and, the European Union, with Resolution 2006 / C168 on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth sector.

Consequently, non-formal learning and education have been indisputably established as key priorities within the European institutions' policies and programmes. For the

3. In resolutions in 2003, 2005 and 2008 and several thematic publications, including the Sunshine Report on Non-formal Education, which presents best practices from its member organisations.

Council of Europe, the Conference of Ministers highlighted in its Agenda 2020 that the recognition of non-formal education and learning makes a strong contribution to young people's access to education, training and working life. Furthermore, the Council of Europe's Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education refers to non-formal education as playing a central role for learning in education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. The European Union has reaffirmed, in similar terms, its own focus on the recognition of non-formal learning in the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth sector (2010-2018): "As a complement to formal education, non-formal learning for young people should be promoted and recognised, and better links between formal education and non-formal learning developed".

Political interest in the variety of learner-centred and practice-based educational processes that are subsumed under non-formal education and learning has shifted over the years – as becomes evident from the most recent policy documents – to focus on quality standards, validation and strategies for recognition. This shift has also been facilitated by frequently bringing together the youth sector's researchers, policymakers and practitioners, who have a common interest in explaining the actual and potential value of non-formal learning, in particular in settings beyond the boundaries of formal education and its characteristic forms of assessment and qualification. The Council of Europe, in particular its youth sector, has played a key role in these developments.

## -----> **Pathways towards the validation and recognition of non-formal education**

Embedded in this policy framework, several instruments were developed to facilitate the validation and recognition of skills and competencies acquired through non-formal learning. Among them is the European Portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers, introduced by the Council of Europe to support youth workers and youth leaders in identifying, describing and assessing their competencies and, in doing so, contributing to the recognition of non-formal education and learning.

This shift towards quality standards, validation and recognition can be seen in the 2004 and 2011 *Pathways* documents<sup>4</sup>. Both are working papers jointly developed by the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and the Youth Unit of the European Union's Commission, within the framework of their Youth Partnership, in co-operation with, among others, the European Youth Forum. The papers provide a comprehensive overview of the political context and relevant

4. Pathways towards validation and recognition of education, training & learning in the youth sector (2004); Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe (2011)





policy frameworks surrounding non-formal education, describe essential features and characteristics of non-formal learning in the youth sector and set out ways to achieve its validation and formal recognition.

The 2011 working paper *Pathways 2.0 towards recognition of non-formal learning/ education and of youth work in Europe* outlines ten steps for a renewed recognition strategy, arguing that it is time to implement concrete steps, including:

- Developing a common understanding and a joint strategy in the youth sector and improving co-operation and communication;
- Making the role of youth organisations visible;
- Assuring quality and training in non-formal education/learning;
- Increasing knowledge about non-formal education/learning in youth work;
- Developing existing tools further and making them accessible and transferable;
- Reinforcing the political process at European level;
- Linking youth to lifelong learning strategies and vice versa;
- Involving those concerned in the employment sector;
- Associating the social sector; and
- Co-operating with other policy fields and interested groups in civil society.

## -----> **Conceptual developments: the first symposium on non-formal education and learning in 2000**

A symposium on non-formal education organised by the Council of Europe's youth sector in 2000 started from the observation that most knowledge and expertise about non-formal education was largely undocumented, illustrated by the 1999 study *Building Bridges for Learning*: "Probably the single most important finding of this study is that we know amazingly little about non-formal education practices in general, and even less about those occurring within youth organisations" (Sahlberg, 1999, p. 20).

## -----> **Common elements of non-formal education approaches**

The 70 youth sector professionals and activists participating in the symposium readily agreed that a universally-valid definition of non-formal education was neither possible nor desirable; nobody wanted to subscribe to a definition that rapidly became out-dated, and everyone wanted to respect diversity of perspective

and practice. But through identifying common elements and essential features across the various forms of creative, experiential and participatory non-formal learning, the first symposium on non-formal education nonetheless made a crucial contribution to documenting and verifying how non-formal education was perceived, understood and practiced in the youth sector.

### **Figure 1: Common elements in existing definitions of non-formal learning**

- purposive learning,
- diverse contexts,
- alternative/complementary teaching and learning styles,
- less developed recognition of outcomes and quality.

Source: Council of Europe Symposium on Non-Formal Education: Report (2001).

The symposium report also challenged the binary opposition between formal and non-formal learning, noting that: "their respective features fade into one another towards the centre of what is ultimately a continuum of learning contexts, contents and methods" (Chisholm, 2001, p. 62).

The first symposium also marked a terminological shift in the youth sector. The title used the word *education*, whereas the report introduced the term *learning* as an alternative, maintaining that that term drew attention to activities rather than systems and, by seeing people as the central concern, was closer to the rationale and value of learner-centredness in non-formal learning contexts.

Following the symposium, the discourse and understanding of non-formal learning gradually shifted. It was defined in 1974 by Coombs and Ahmed as "any organized, systematic educational activity, carried on outside the framework of the formal system". After the symposium, it was defined as, multiple learning situations positioned on a learning continuum and structured across multiple dimensions between formal, non-formal and informal of learning.

## -----> **Essential features and core methods of non-formal learning**

In *Informality and formality in learning*<sup>5</sup>, Helen Colley, Phil Hodgkinson and Janice Malcolm analysed attributes and aspects of formality and informality in learning – process; location and setting; purposes; and content – and came up with a list of 20 criteria, aiming to capture the complex links between informal and formal attributes of learning situations.

5. A report published in 2003 by the Learning and Skills Research Centre



These criteria were used for the external evaluation of the *Advanced Training of Trainers in Europe (ATTE)*, a two-year part-time pilot programme for non-formal educators in the youth sector. The report noted substantial progress since the symposium in 2000: “The educational principles and practices informing the sector’s work are now moving consistently towards the conscious development of greater theoretical and pedagogic coherence for a specific set of purposes, challenges and learners” (Chisholm, 2006, p. 24).

The evaluation report summarised, on the basis of the discussions at the initial symposium, essential features of non-formal learning:

**Figure 2: Essential features of non-formal learning**

- balanced co-existence and interaction between cognitive, affective and practical dimensions of learning
- linking individual and social learning, partnership-oriented solidary and symmetrical teaching/learning relations
- participatory and learner-centred
- holistic and process-oriented
- close to real-life concerns, experiential and oriented to learning by doing, using intercultural exchanges and encounters as learning devices
- voluntary and (ideally) open-access
- aims above all to convey and practice the values and skills of democratic life

*Source: Council of Europe Symposium on Non-Formal Education: Report (2001).*

The features emphasise conditions for learning that might have a variety of purposes and be very different – showing that people working in the youth sector understand non-formal learning as firmly rooted in practice and the relevant context – and which inform the palette of non-formal methods as shown below:

**Figure 3: Non-formal teaching/training and learning methods**

- communication-based methods: interaction, dialogue, mediation
- activity-based methods: experience, practice, experimentation
- socially-focused methods: partnership, teamwork, networking
- self-directed methods: creativity, discovery, responsibility

*Source: Council of Europe Symposium on Non-Formal Education: Report (2001).*

## The learning continuum: formal, non-formal and informal learning

Building on the list of 20 distinguishing criteria, synthesised by Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm, the ATTE evaluation reformulated the criteria to make their meaning simpler, separated some of them into their component parts, and placed each criterion into one of four clusters – process, location and setting, purpose and content – namely the one to which it was arguably most closely related. It then positioned ATTE, as a real example of non-formal learning in the youth sector, on a three-point scale for each criterion.

Formality/ Informality			Criterion cluster
			Process
1	2	3	Is this planned/structured or organic/evolving learning?
1	2	3	Is this explicit or tacit learning?
1	2	3	Is this compartmentalised or integrated/holistic learning?
1	2	3	Is this individual or collective/collaborative learning?
1	2	3	Are learning outcomes measured or not (and possibly non-measurable)?
1	2	3	Is this teacher/trainer-controlled or learner-centred/negotiated learning?

Formality/ Informality			Criterion cluster
			Location and setting
1	2	3	Is this an explicitly-labelled educational activity or not?
1	2	3	Does this take place in an educational setting or in the community?
1	2	3	Is learning the main and explicit purpose for all involved or not?
1	2	3	Is learning part of a recognised course or not?
1	2	3	Is the learning timeframe fixed/limited or open-ended?



Formality/ Informality			Criterion cluster
			Purposes
1	2	3	Is learning explicitly assessed and accredited or not?
1	2	3	Is assessment of learning summative or formative?
1	2	3	Are learning outcomes transferable/generalisable to other contexts?
1	2	3	Are learning objectives and outcomes externally determined or not?
1	2	3	Does the learning serve the needs of dominant or marginalised groups?
1	2	3	Is access based on explicit criteria or not?
1	2	3	Does learning preserve the status quo or foster resistance/empowerment?
1	2	3	Do agents or authority mediate the learning or is this a case of learner democracy?

Formality/ Informality			Criterion cluster
			Content
1	2	3	Is the professional/social status of the knowledge to be learnt high or low?
1	2	3	Is the knowledge to be acquired propositional or practical in nature?
1	2	3	Is the learning seen as purely cognitive or more 'embodied'/multidimensional?

These 22 clustered criteria, reformulated as tangible questions, are the most advanced attempt by the sector to analyse and position an educational activity or programme in terms of whether it is formal, non-formal or informal across the learning continuum. It remains to be seen to what extent it can capture the essence of non-formal education, which Peter Lauritzen once described as follows: “Participation has to be learned, as does democratic culture and the acceptance of minorities. Learning to be, acquiring life skills, developing an individual quality in tune with social qualifications, defending an interest, advocating specific agendas, and forming coalitions and teams – all make up the curriculum of non-formal learning, the educational approach of the associative movement ever since it appeared as a political subject, be it as *education populaire*, *folkeoplysnik*, workers’

education, community work or any other tradition of out-of-school education” (*The Making of the European Citizen*, *Handbook of Applied Developmental Sciences*, Vol. 3, p. 366).

## -----> Non-formal education and learning practice

For the better part of the 40 years since the creation of the European youth centres, the programme of the two educational centres was dominated by study sessions; international training and debate seminars for young people, requested and co-organised by youth associations, which aim to strengthen transnational European youth structures. These activities were based on a non-formal education methodology, although not referred to as such in the beginning.

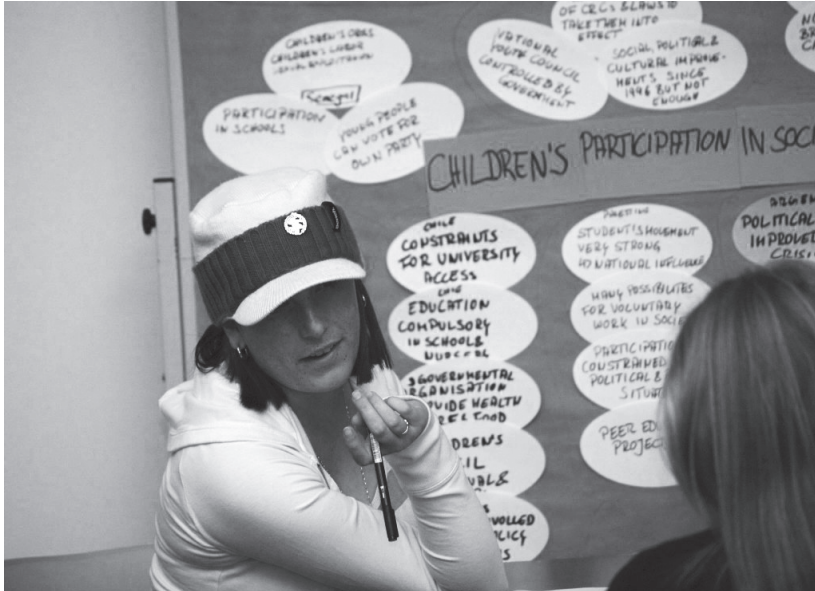
In the 1980s, the first training courses were introduced into the programmes of the Council’s youth sector, clearly declared as educational activities, and with some resistance since they seemed to be in conflict with the political aspirations of youth movements and organisations.

In recent years, most notably through increased cooperation with the European Union, the programme priorities shifted towards an increased number of short and long-term training courses for those working in the youth sector in administrative, policy making, political and pedagogic capacities.

## -----> From disputed experiment to undisputed success: long-term training courses

ATTE was by no means the first long-term training course (LTTC), but rather the fruit of years of experimentation with long-term formats in non-formal education, including long-term training courses on intercultural learning. Discussions on this new format started as early as 1988. Some of the subsequent pioneering work was carried through in co-operation with the European Commission, for example, a long-term training course on social inclusion in the mid-1990s. Other well-established centres, such as the *Interkulturelles Zentrum* in Vienna, also developed long-term educational formats to train the trainers. These initiatives, and others like them, were all precursors of ATTE and the long-term training courses to follow, including ACTHRE (*Advanced Compass Training in Human Rights Education*, 2005-2008), TALE (*Trainers for Active Learning in Europe*, 2008-2010) and ENTER! (LTTC on access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, 2009-2011).





## Documentations, reports, magazines, research seminars and books

The experience gained through the running of the many non-formal education activities is regularly documented and reflected in various publications, including:

- *Forum 21*, the European Journal on Child and Youth Policy and the European Journal on Child and Youth Research, for example with a contribution on the recognition of non-formal learning in the policy journal's 14th edition (2009);
- *Coyote*, the youth sector's magazine, published by the Youth Partnership, with issues 3 (2000) and 11 (2006) focusing specifically on non-formal learning and education;
- Training Kits, published by the Youth Partnership, such as T-Kit N° 4 *Intercultural Learning* and T-Kit N° 6 *Training Essentials*;
- Knowledge Books, most notably the 2005 *Trading up – Potential and performance in non-formal learning* (resulting from the research seminar “The Youth Sector and Non-formal Education/Learning: working to make lifelong learning a reality and contributing to the Third Sector”, 28-30 April 2004, European Youth Centre Strasbourg) and the 2011 *Intercultural learning in non-formal education* book, the latter with a special focus on non-formal education and intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean context.

## Quality standards in non-formal education

Additionally, quality standards in education and training activities of the Council of Europe's Youth Department were extracted from the decades of experience in running non-formal education activities. The standards are documented in a dedicated document, both as a reference for all those involved and concerned by the Council of Europe's education and training activities and as a commitment of the Council of Europe in relation to its education and training activities with young people.

These quality standards are:

1. A relevant needs assessment. Basing activities on clear needs and the expectations of the Council of Europe and its partners and on the political, social, cultural and educational reality they are meant to address is necessary to ensure the activities are relevant, their results sustainable and those involved see their expectations fulfilled.
2. Concrete, achievable and assessable objectives. Each activity, in addition to the overall aims that derive from the needs analysis (including the political and cultural dimension), must always have concrete educational and social objectives that will allow for an adequate programme to be developed, for the identification and recruitment of the best-suited target groups, for an adequate evaluation process and for consistent follow-up.
3. The definition of competences addressed and learning outcomes for the participants. Training activities must have a clear, implicit or explicit, set of competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) to be addressed and developed with and by the participants.
4. Relevance to the Council of Europe programme and priorities. The activities, especially when based on open calls for participation, are a means of making the priorities and programme of activities of the Council of Europe known and accessible to its target groups. They are, obviously, the way through which the Council of Europe pursues its longer-term and annual objectives in the youth sector.
5. An adequate and timely preparation process. A successful activity depends largely on a timely, thorough and complete preparatory process, in which all major aspects of the activity are considered. This is especially true in the case of activities with an intercultural dimension, in which there is a specific need for developing a culture of communication and cooperation.
6. A competent team of trainers. All educational offers should be run by multicultural teams of trainers and facilitators, with complementary roles and competences, recruited through a transparent process and accountable to all concerned.

7. An integrated approach to intercultural learning. Intercultural learning is one of the foundations of the youth sector's educational philosophy and practice. Intercultural learning should be part of the formal education and training programme and inform the methodology used for the activities.
8. Adequate recruitment and selection of participants. The selection and recruitment of participants should be made in a way that ensures transparency, objectivity and equal opportunities for all those applying.
9. Consistent use of non-formal education principles and approaches. All activities respect and develop the commonly-accepted pedagogical principles of non-formal education, notably in being participant-centred, action-oriented and value-based.
10. Adequate, accessible and timely documentation. All activities must be documented, especially with regard to their results and outcomes, to ensure they are followed up by participants and that they can positively influence other activities and organisations.
11. A thorough and open process of evaluation. An adequate evaluation of the activities is crucial to ensure, among other things, stock-taking of the results, the evaluation of the quality of the learning process and the necessary follow-up.
12. Structurally optimal working conditions and environment. The working conditions and environment in which the activities are held play a crucial role in their success. As a general principle, the success of an activity should never be conditioned by the working conditions and facilities.
13. Adequate institutional support. Each activity should have administrative and institutional support and recognition from the organisation.
14. Visibility, innovation and research. Visibility is the recognition of the value of the activities, a condition for their viability and a guarantee of transparency. Innovation and research ensure that quality will develop and respond to the needs of an ever-changing society and youth scene.

## -----> The second symposium on non-formal education and learning in 2011

The 2011 Symposium *Recognition of Youth Work and Non-Formal Learning*, again with the involvement of representatives of the entire youth sector – and building on its predecessor's achievements, the analytical work of developing descriptive criteria as well as the strategies outlined in the *Pathways 2.0* document – tried to establish common ground for a medium and long-term coordinated strategy towards recognition of youth work and non-formal learning in Europe.

The participants produced a declaration to start a common European political process towards the recognition of youth work and non-formal learning, dubbed the *Strasbourg Process*. This began with discussions and reflections on the current situation and challenges relating to the recognition of youth work and non-formal learning, a common understanding of the milestones which led to the symposium, and a shared vision of what had to be achieved in a mid-term and long-term perspective,

Many people taking part felt the process was long overdue, as the *Study on the links between formal and non-formal education* had already observed in 2003: "For the first time in European educational history, non-formal education steps out of the shadow of marginal relevance for the future of the young generation and into the bright light of the centrality of learning as the most important activity of human beings at present. The application of non-formal education to a much broader public than adults alone, who in the past used non-formal education mainly to compensate for missed educational chances, must not be misunderstood as only one of so many well-intentioned measures in the field of youth welfare and youth policy, but must be understood as part of a development which changes the concept of learning as a human activity, and education as the societal organisation of it. These changes are irreversible and must therefore be analysed with scrutiny to prepare a sound educational policy for the future." (*Du Bois-Raymond, 2003, p. 7*)

The symposium's declaration was addressed to: European institutions, ministries responsible for youth and education, structures concerned with young people at national, regional and local level, youth organisations, youth work practitioners, young people, education providers and the research community. It identifies eight challenges, namely:

1. Making the concept of youth work and non-formal learning or education better understood;
2. Keeping a balance between the various levels of recognition;
3. Risking formalisation of non-formal learning/education;
4. Assuring quality in youth work and in non-formal learning/education;
5. Maintaining and cultivating diversity;
6. Building knowledge;
7. Being dependent on other sectors;
8. Creating partnerships.

In response to these challenges, seven recommendations were developed to frame and guide strategies for the recognition and validation of non-formal education in youth work.

1. Initiating a political process for recognition and validation. The political process for better recognition and validation of youth work and non-formal learning/education in the youth sector should be reinforced by a joint strategy called the *Strasbourg Process*.
2. Reaching out at national, regional and local level. To improve the overall opportunities for young people to make the results of their learning in the youth sector visible, the European debate on the further development of the recognition of non-formal learning in the youth sector should be taken up and reflected at national, regional and, particularly, local level.



3. Making non-formal learning visible. Youth organisations and other providers of youth work should make the learning that is taking place in their programmes visible. To increase trust and credibility, the youth sector should highlight the positive outcome and impact of relevant activities.
4. Supporting a holistic approach to education. Non-formal learning/education has to be acknowledged as a process that gives young people a chance to develop competences that complement those acquired through formal education.
5. Building and providing knowledge. The continuing practical and theoretical development of youth work and of non-formal learning/education in the youth sector is essential for strengthening its capacity and recognition.
6. Reinforcing dialogue with other education fields. Youth work has its place within lifelong learning, thus the dialogue with other educational fields has to be reinforced. That partnership needs to take place between providers of education and ensure learning mobility between different sectors.
7. Building alliances beyond education. Strategic partnerships as well as more efficient communication channels must be built to increase the cooperation and coherence between the youth sector and social and other related fields.

An action plan underpins the seven recommendations, detailing that the Strasbourg Process – described as a political process comparable to the Bologna process in Higher Education – should be based on evidence and address the following:

- Making recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education a priority of European cooperation in the youth sector, in both the European Union and the Council of Europe;
- Acknowledging the areas of concern that should become the political core of the process;
- Starting work on a legal text to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, including the *Strasbourg Process* and inviting the member states of the Council of Europe to encourage the adoption of specific measures to enhance recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education in the youth sector at national, regional and local level;
- Actively supporting the initiative of elaborating a legal text by sharing expertise and creating links with other relevant European structures, e.g. the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of Regions;
- Developing a Joint European Framework on recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education in the youth sector;



- Ensuring compatibility of legal structures related to youth work and non-formal learning/education in the youth sector, particularly regarding youth worker qualifications, to increase workers' mobility in the youth sector;
- Supporting development of national and local policies for the recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education;
- Ensuring monitoring of the *Strasbourg Process*.

The Action Plan also calls for joint activities to foster co-operation between, among others, researchers, policy makers, youth workers and social partners within and beyond the youth sector, and for a European promotional campaign including a European Year on Recognition of Non-formal Learning/Education, signalling exciting times ahead for all of us.

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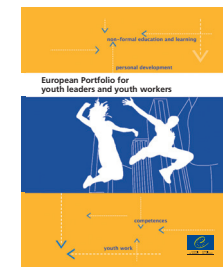
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Manual for facilitators in non-formal education



European Portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers

