

Guidelines for the implementation of the international reviews of national youth policies

Introduction

Youth policy of the Council of Europe

One of the priority objectives of intergovernmental co-operation in the Council of Europe's youth field is to promote and support the development of youth policies¹ in the member States. Different texts have been elaborated by the European Steering Committee for youth (CDEJ), with a view to developing a Council of Europe approach to youth policy, which could be described as follows:

Fundamentally, the approach of the Council of Europe's youth sector to youth policy is one that aims *to support young people's participation as a citizen and their - often complex - transition to autonomy*. An expert report on youth policy indicators² in 2003 defined the governing ideas of youth policy as: (a) (lifelong) learning (b) inclusion/social cohesion (c) citizenship and participation and (d) safety, health and well-being. It continues by contending that these ideas imply that youth policy should approach young people and their issues not as problems to be solved – a so-called 'fire brigade approach' - but holistically across policy domains and through clear objectives that can be assessed. Youth policy-makers can also display a commitment to being 'for, by and with young people' by involving young people in their formulation, and by being made meaningful through evidence-based development, research-based assessment and evaluation.

Youth policy, in the Council of Europe's youth sector's approach, combines a multi-dimensional concern with ensuring young people's well-being, providing them with relevant learning opportunities, increasing the probability of their successful integration into society and transition to autonomy, and enabling them to participate in decision-making and civil society. This multi-faceted focus on different aspects of young peoples' lives is supported by a set of principles on which sound policy-making should be based. As the synthesis report *Supporting Young People in Europe: Principles, Policy, Practice* contends: "Broad conceptions of 'youth policy' ...include not only those policies which are directed specifically towards young people but also those policy initiatives within other policy arenas which affect young people, one way or another" (Williamson 2002: 15). This core insight suggests principles for youth policy formulation:

¹ The Council of Europe youth policy addresses children from the age of 10/12, young people and young adults up to 30.

² DJS/YR/YPI (2003) 1 March 2003

1. Youth policies are *cross-sectoral* and cover domains such as access to education and the labour market, welfare and social and economic rights, culture and cultural production, lifelong learning and non-formal education, housing, citizenship, leisure time, criminal justice, health, sexuality, lifestyle and reproduction, mobility, military service and conscientious objection, and many more;
2. The vertical (age) and horizontal (socio-economic possibility and lifestyle) heterogeneity of young people implies that youth policies should be *evidence-based*. In the youth sector this has been expressed as a ‘magic triangle’ linking the research networks with relevant public authorities and civil society actors representing young people and youth policy users and respondents;
3. Youth policy respects the agency of young people while recognising the specific challenges and obstacles they face in according to their position and possibilities.

International reviews of national youth policies

In 1997, as a means to implement this objective, the CDEJ incorporated the review of national youth policies into its intergovernmental programme. To date, seventeen countries have undergone a review (Finland, The Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Romania, Estonia, Luxemburg, Lithuania, Norway, Malta, Armenia, Slovakia, Cyprus, Hungary, Latvia, Moldova and Albania).

Furthermore, following a request from the Slovenian government to the Directorate of Youth and Sport, a group of experts went to Slovenia in 2002, to provide advice on the preparation of draft legislation on youth policy to be submitted to the Slovenian Parliament, with the intention to reproduce this work format if it proved successful. Other such “Youth policy advisory missions” have been organised (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Romania, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Czech Republic, Ukraine and Moldova). This form of support to youth policy are directed to countries which are not yet prepared to go through the process of an international youth policy review but need advice or assistance in establishing or further developing specific aspects of their youth policy .

Different formats for the international reviews of national youth policies

Since the implementation of the first youth policy review in 1997, regular evaluations of the review process took place, which resulted in a number of improvements. In this regard, the possibility of developing different formats for the reviews have been discussed, with a view to taking into consideration the different member states situations as well as to promote effective youth policies in Europe, one of the main objectives of the Council of Europe in the youth field. Against this background, three types of youth policy reviews are being considered, although only one of them has been experimented so far³:

³ In 2011, an international review of the youth policy of Belgium was implemented (at the level of each of the three Communities but within the overall context of the country)

*a) International reviews of national youth policies **with a particular focus on one specific youth policy issue** (youth participation and citizenship, equal opportunities/gender equality, etc. **or area** (youth work, health, etc.);*

*b) International reviews of **regional youth policies**, particularly relevant to federal states where youth policy is of the competence of regional authorities.*

*c) International reviews carried out at **Sub-regional level** (e.g. the Baltic states, the Caucasus region, the Benelux, the Nordic countries, etc.), providing there is a clear interest for the countries involved to carry out such reviews as well as a relevance for the Council of Europe in its approach to youth policy.*

1. Objectives of the process of international reviews of national youth policy

- a) to advise governments on key national youth policy issues as listed, for example under point 4 below;
- b) to contribute to a learning process about the development and implementation of youth policy in Europe;
- c) to identify components of youth policy which might inform an approach to “youth policy” across Europe.

The international reviews of national youth policies are not aiming at delivering judgements on the youth policy of the countries concerned and introduce changes but at looking into the opportunities provided to young people by public authorities in a constructive and supportive manner.

2. The necessary conditions for the implementation of the process

The basic conditions for the implementation of the international reviews of national youth policies are as follows:

- a) The country volunteering for a review accepts the objectives listed above, complies with the procedure and accepts the independence of the process. It takes the engagement to secure sufficient human and financial resources for fulfilling the different tasks which fall under the responsibility of the country.
- b) The reviews take into consideration the differences regarding the material and human resource based situations of youth research in member countries (reliability of data, inter-ministerial co-operation, training of staff in charge of research, level of development of civil society, etc.);
- c) There is an agreement, with the country volunteering for a review, on the main dimensions to be covered by the national report, notably as a matter of comparability;
- d) A co-operative approach regarding the international review process is established.

3. Implementation of the process

The youth policy review process should be implemented in the following manner:

- a) Presentation of applications roughly one year before starting to work on the national report ⁴;
- b) Inclusion in the intergovernmental programme of activities (CDEJ's decision). Written confirmation by the country volunteering for a review;
- c) Establishment of the international team of experts ⁵;
- d) Discussion between the country concerned and the co-ordinator about the organisation of the review ⁶ and the preparation of the national report. This can be done before or during the preliminary visit to the country;
- e) elaboration of the core national report ⁷;
- f) Preparation of the international review ;
- g) visits of the international team (2 visits per country);
- h) preparation of the international report;
- i) presentation of the international review in the country, with public debate (national Hearing);
- j) presentation of the international review and debate within the Joint Council, with the participation of the authorities of the country concerned (international Hearing); examination of the recommendations from the international team and evaluation of the process; authorisation given by the Joint Council to publish the international report and make it public;
- k) follow up to the international review:
 - preparation, after two years, of a brief report, by the country reviewed, on developments which took place since the review and on the implementation of the recommendations stemming from the international report;
 - if needed, the examination of complementary requests formulated by the country (expert visits, assistance, etc.);
 - elaboration, on a regular basis, of a synthesis report on the overall process (every four years).

⁴ E.g. presentation of the application in July and nomination of the representatives of the CDEJ and Advisory Council in October, prior to the selection of the experts and researchers.

⁵ Seeking notably to ensure as much as possible gender and geographical balance in addition to expertise.

⁶ The government of the country is provided with detailed information/guidelines about the review process and its responsibilities as well as the responsibilities of the Council of Europe and international team.

⁷ The core national report is the report which should be available for the international team at least **6 weeks** before the first visit to the country.

4. Dimensions of youth policy⁸ to be covered by the international reviews

a) youth policy domains

- Education
- Youth work and non formal education
- Training and employment
- Health
- Social protection
- Values and religion
- Leisure and culture
- Military and alternative service
- Family policy and Child welfare
- Housing
- Youth justice

b) Cross-cutting issues

- Youth participation and citizenship
- Social inclusion/social exclusion
- Youth information
- Multiculturalism and minorities
- Mobility and internationalism
- Equal opportunities/gender equality
- Radicalisation and reaction
- Local v. global pressure
- The role of new technologies
- Centre-periphery relationships
- Urban-rural polarisation
- Elites and outsiders
- Environmental issues
- Diasporic influence

5. The different components of the international reviews

The preliminary visit

The preliminary visit is, by definition, a part of the international review process that precedes the composition of the review team. It was established in order to better understand and identify the priority concerns of the country to be reviewed. This would then, to some extent at least, inform the composition of the international team. Team members would simply learn of these priorities once they had become involved. The practice so far has been that the preliminary visit is done by the co-ordinator⁹ of the review and/or a member of the Directorate of Youth and Sport.

⁸ Youth policy in the Council of Europe addresses children and young people from approximately 12 – 29 years old.

⁹ Currently, the task of co-ordinating the organisation of the reviews is given to a consultant, in liaison with the Head of the intergovernmental co-operation and youth policy Division of the Directorate of Youth and Sport. In future, this task could possibly be given back to the Directorate of Youth and Sport

The preliminary visit is also an occasion to check that the Ministry in charge of (children) and youth Affairs has a clear picture of the review process ¹⁰ and knows exactly what its responsibilities are including the responsibility of informing and preparing other Ministries concerned and youth NGOs.

The composition of the international team

The members of the international team are:

- one member of the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ), acting as the Chair of the review (and of the international team),
- one member of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ),
- up to three experts, including at least one youth policy specialist and one youth researcher (one of them should be appointed Rapporteur),
- the co-ordinator (if any) ¹¹
- Council of Europe Secretariat ¹².

There should always been a connection with the previous review – either from the previous team or the ‘hosting’ CDEJ member for the country concerned – *and* a connection with the next planned review: ideally a youth researcher from that country (the nominated youth research correspondent, if there is one) who might then be expected to ‘lead’ on the production of its National Report. Furthermore, in some cases, it might be appropriate that the international team includes one expert who comes from a neighbouring country.

The preparation for the international review

There needs to be a robust approach to preparing the international review team for its task. This can take the form of a preliminary team meeting, after receipt and reading of the National Report and prior to the first visit. Though the programme for the first visit might have been agreed on the occasion of the preliminary visit, this preliminary team meeting would enable members to meet each (not all would already know each other), discuss divisions of labour and agree working methods, and consider prospective agenda items within the meetings scheduled for the first visit.

In addition (or alternatively, if such a preliminary team meeting is not possible), the present guidelines should be made available to all new participants in the review process.

Moreover, beyond the information provided in the National Report, the Youth Directorate should identify its contacts within the host country and notify the international team; this could provide an additional strand to information-gathering.

The team relationships

Participation in the team is, simultaneously, ‘demanding’ and ‘tiring’, and ‘enriching’ and ‘enjoyable’. Some teams spend virtually all their waking hours together, taking every opportunity – beyond the formal programme – to discuss developments in the review as well

¹⁰ An information paper is sent to the authorities of the country summarising the different elements of the review process and underlining who (Council of Europe or country) is responsible for what.

¹¹ At present, the organisation and implementation of the reviews are co-ordinated by an external consultant.

¹² The experts and researchers are selected by the co-ordinator in liaison and with the agreement of the Council of Europe secretariat.

as other issues of common interest. Other teams spend far less time together, with individual members slipping off quite regularly to see personal friends, to attend other commitments, or just to relax alone. There are, of course, no golden rules on these matters but a clearer sense of minimum 'requirements' – perhaps agreed by the whole team during a preliminary meeting – concerning attendance during the formal programme and during more social occasions is most likely to establish greater clarity for team members as to what is expected of them.

During each visit, based on team discussion and agreement, different team members should take the lead role in shaping and guiding the agenda within particular meetings during the formal programme.

At the conclusion of the second visit (or possibly at the very end of the process), the international review team should reflect on, and evaluate how effectively it had worked as a team.

The national report

An international review should not start before the National Report is completed *and* published. This report is the main tool by which the review team can focus on, and start to understand, the host country's situation, perceptions, expectations and needs which, at least for programme and agenda purposes should not be re-written for the duration of the international review process.

The preparation of a national report by the country reviewed may in certain cases represent a very large amount of work, which may require a lot of time and sometimes delay considerably the overall review process. Moreover, for some countries, the requirement of producing a national report (as done in the past) could be a strong motive of hesitation for volunteering for a review. In order to ensure that the preparation of a national report does not constitute an obstacle, much more flexibility has been introduced in this respect, with the possibility for the international teams, either to discuss with the country the scope of the national report and, if needed, to collect by themselves, additional information and data about the country. Needless to add that, if a country has the possibility of producing a comprehensive national report without affecting the timetable of the review, it should be encouraged to do so. In any event, a national report, even concise, is needed for the proper implementation of a review.

The national report should provide minimum information around the following questions:

- How do you define youth policy (concept) ?
- How do you deliver youth policy (delivery mechanisms) ?
- What are the domains of youth policy in your country (youth policy domains and cross-cutting issues) ?
- What are the mechanisms for supporting youth policy (legislation, budgets, research, etc.) ?
- How do you evaluate youth policy (what benchmarks are used) ?
- What are the 3 key priorities of youth policy in the country ?

Furthermore, the national report should also provide some information on youth and society.

Visits to the host country by the international team

There is wholehearted support for the ‘ideal’ framework for the review process – the first visit to the central administration, a period for exchange and consolidation, then a second visit to address emergent themes and more operational issues in the regions.

All reviews should involve at least two visits: even small countries have complex histories and challenging issues with which to grapple.

The shape and balance of the programme needs careful attention and considered negotiation between hosting groups and the international team (or its nominated lead). In particular, space must be set aside, and defended, for the international team to be able to reflect on how its work is progressing and to plan properly for meetings that lie ahead.

There may be different reasons for maintaining contact *between visits*, but there is unlikely to be a good reason for not doing so at all. Simply sharing emergent information on the host country, stumbled upon by one individual or another, would be a ‘bottom line’; a ‘top line’ would be the draft preparation by different team members of elements of the international report. Once more, the key point is that this should not be left to chance or in a vacuum, but purposefully debated.

The production of the international report

The international report aims to give a truthful but limited picture of the youth policy of a country at a given time in history. It cannot cover the entirety of youth policy issues, nor can it go into details. After a presentation of the historical and political background, the report examines some issues (3-4) considered as important by the government as well as some other issues (3-4) identified by the international review team as key issues. The report makes recommendations and suggestions on how to possibly improve areas of weakness and further develop best practice.

The *process* by which the international report is put together is ultimately the responsibility of the Rapporteur, but it is not, or should not be, his/her sole responsibility. Team members have to accept that the compilation of the International Report is a shared and open process, not a closed one¹³. The responsibility of the Rapporteur as *the author* of the international report should nevertheless be clearly reflected in the report.

If team members are to play a part in contributing to, or responding to, drafts of the International Report, then this does need to be formalized in some way – possibly through some system of rewards or sanctions. Too often, material has been promised and never delivered. Too often, feedback has been requested, and never given. This places the Rapporteur in an invidious position, especially where deadlines or hearing are looming.

Minority positions and perspectives within the international team obviously jeopardize the ‘integrity’ of the final International Report, but there is now a model for accommodating them while retaining an overall consensual report.

¹³ After all, the International Report is collectively authored by all members of the international review team

The national and international Hearings

The national Hearing is designed to be an open meeting in the host country's capital in order to present and debate the draft International Report. Points can be clarified and corrections can be made prior to finalising the International Report for the international hearing. One rationale for the national hearing is to permit all actors in the youth policy context have the opportunity to hear a constructive critique of that policy, to consider what kinds of responses might be possible and appropriate, and to hear of any commitments that the government might make. While it would be absurd to think that national administrations would take on board even all those issues raised by the international team considered by the host country to be valid, it is hoped that some key concerns would, over time, be accorded political and professional attention.

The international Hearing allows for discussion before the Joint Council of the finalised international report. It presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the international review team in the presence of the representative of the country under review. The international Hearing is concluded by the decision of the Joint Council to authorise the publication of the report.

Follow up

With regard to the follow up of the reviews, the group proposed the following approach, in which the Secretariat is expected to play an essential role:

- countries volunteering for a review should be aware that the process includes a follow up which aims at both receiving feed back on what countries have done for implementing the recommendations (or some) stemming from the review (included at the end of the international reports), and, if needed/where appropriate, to identify possible support measures;
- In liaison with the co-ordinator of the reviews, the Secretariat should regularly (on an annual basis, for example) identify a limited number of countries which have undergone a review of their youth policy and ask them to send a free report on what they have done in terms of follow up of the review. Such a report should not exceed 10 pages;
- in parallel, the Secretariat, in liaison with the Chairs and Rapporteurs of the selected reviews should identify some relevant recommendations from the respective international reports and agree on what the authorities of the countries should be asked to report in respect of these recommendations;
- in the light of the information provided by the countries regarding the said recommendations, it should be considered whether or not there is a need to arrange a post-review visit to the country. The aims, format and methodology of this visit would need to be established in the light of the result of the countries' reports.
- the results of the follow up process should be presented in a single written report (covering all the countries selected).

Financial matters

The Council of Europe covers all expenses relating to the review with the exception of certain costs occurring during the visits, namely local transportation and interpretation if needed, as well as the production and translation of the national report. The expenses covered by the Council of Europe includes notably the contract fees for the co-ordinator, the fees for the Rapporteur, the travel and subsistence expenses of the members of the international team during their visits and the production of the international report. The Council of Europe's rules concerning experts/consultants' fees are as follows: there exists three categories of contracts:

1. Service contracts (hotels, venues, etc.)
2. Outsourcing contracts
3. Consultant contracts

For all the three above types of contracts, should the amount of fees exceed 5000€ at least three different offers must be provided. Should the amount of fees exceed 50 000€ a tender board must be convened. There is no rule as such concerning the minimum and/or maximum amount of fees for the above categories of contract.

APPENDIX I

Council of Europe approach to youth policy: principles and main objectives

The Final Declaration of the 6th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for youth (Greece, November 2002) stipulated that:

“Youth policies need to be as comprehensive as possible, taking into account the overall needs of young people and recognising their diversity and their many facets and resources. In particular, youth policies should:

- be anchored in universal values of pluralist democracy and human rights and pursue objectives such as justice, respect for identities, access to one’s own culture, equal opportunities, including therein men and women, and social cohesion;
- have a cross-sectoral dimension as well as a local, regional and national dimension;
- integrate the educational dimension in a long term perspective, taking into consideration young people’s aspirations; promote their access to autonomy as well as their sense of responsibility and commitment, through, notably, voluntary youth work;
- facilitate active participation of young people in decisions which concern them, and encourage them to commit themselves in their community life;
- facilitate the access of young people to the labour market, by means of appropriate projects and training schemes which are likely to increase their professional opportunities;
- facilitate the access of young people, notably from disadvantaged groups, to information which concerns them, and in particular, to the new communication technologies;
- promote youth mobility by reducing administrative and financial obstacles and encouraging the development of quality projects;
- promote non-formal education/learning of young people as well as the development of appropriate forms of recognition of experiences and skills acquired notably within the framework of associations and other forms of voluntary involvement, at local, national and European levels;
- promote co-operation between Child, Family and Youth policies.”

APPENDIX II

Council of Europe priorities in the youth field (Agenda 2020)

The 8th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for youth (Kiev, October 2008) Adopted a Declaration “the Council of Europe youth policy: Agenda 2020”, which resulted in the Committee of Ministers Resolution (2008) 23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe, setting out the priorities of the Council of Europe in this domain for the coming years as follows:

a. *Human rights and democracy, with special emphasis on:*

- ensuring young people’s full enjoyment of human rights and human dignity, and encouraging their commitment in this regard;
- promoting young people’s active participation in democratic processes and structures;
- promoting equal opportunities for the participation of all young people in all aspects of their everyday lives;
- effectively implementing gender equality and preventing all forms of gender-based violence;
- promoting awareness education and action among young people on environment and sustainable development;
- facilitating the access of all young people to information and counselling services.

b. *Living together in diverse societies, with special emphasis on:*

- empowering young people to promote, in their daily lives, cultural diversity as well as intercultural dialogue and co-operation;
- preventing and counteracting all forms of racism and discrimination on any ground;
- supporting initiatives of young people and their organisations with regard to conflict prevention and management, as well as post-conflict reconciliation by means of intercultural dialogue, including its religious dimension;
- supporting youth work with young refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons;
- further encouraging the development of sub-regional youth co-operation in Europe and beyond;
- encouraging young people to promote global solidarity and co-operation.

c. *Social inclusion of young people, with special emphasis on:*

- supporting the integration of excluded young people;
- ensuring young people’s access to education, training and working life, particularly through the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning;
- supporting young people’s transition from education to the labour market, for example by strengthening possibilities to reconcile private and working life;
- supporting young people’s autonomy and well-being, as well as their access to decent living conditions;
- ensuring young people’s equal access to cultural, sporting and creative activities;