

What you(th) can do: be active and speak out

The guide represents a support tool for local authorities, which are, together with national governments, the main actors in the implementation of the recommendation. At the same time, youth organisations, young people and youth work providers also have an important role to play in the implementation of the recommendation. This chapter contains suggestions and ideas for what young people, youth organisations and youth work practitioners can do to take action to improve access to social rights for young people.

— It is important that any actions that you initiate to support young people to access their social rights are undertaken in a way that encourages active participation and begins with young people and decision makers. Encouraging young people to become active and critical citizens, engaged in political processes, and ensuring that decision makers are responsive to the situation of young people, requires learning, debate and dialogue for all those involved. Any way in which you can expose young people and decision makers to realities that they do not encounter on a day-to-day basis and that encourages greater understanding of youth social rights and the realities of youth is a step in the right direction.

— The following ideas can also be of significant relevance to policy makers. Very often, taking action and organising initiatives or projects require support, either institutional, in kind or financial. Supporting projects by civil society and young people for young people has proven to be a successful way to get young people to be active citizens.

UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION

— Understanding the different aspects of an issue is essential in order to plan effective actions. Therefore, before deciding what to do about young people's access to social rights in your neighbourhood, you should first seek to understand the situation of young people and the social, political and economic environment in which they live.

UNDERTAKE RESEARCH

— Knowledge is power and knowledge about the way in which young people are denied access to social rights in your neighbourhood is the starting point for action. You can start by thinking about, reflecting on and identifying the issues that confront young people in your neighbourhood:

- ▶ identify the specific issues that affect the quality of life for young people where you live. From your knowledge of the neighbourhood, you could identify the issues that make life difficult for young people, for example, access to housing, the cost of leisure facilities, access to youth spaces, a lack of sexual health, relationship education and youth-friendly health services, or prejudice towards a particular minority group;
- ▶ speak to young people and identify the things that they are frustrated by and/or are passionate about. Keep in mind that young people will often notice and say things that adult policy makers don't, won't or can't. Identify the issues that matter most to young people in your neighbourhood;
- ▶ involve young people in identifying and understanding the issues that affect them most, or that they are motivated to change. Keep in mind that it can take a long time and a lot of effort to make even small changes to the situation. Similarly, you or the young people you work with may have to learn more about certain issues and explore them from a variety of perspectives before taking action;
- ▶ stay realistic, manage expectations and be clear about what you would consider success to be; you could start by simply trying to raise awareness about the issues facing young people.

TAKE ACTION

— By action, we mean something beyond a “formal” activity and something that probably includes a wider community than the group itself. Taking action is designed to bring about a result that is valuable, not only from an educational point of view, but also beyond. The actions you plan could be designed to support people affected by the situation, increase young people’s knowledge about the situation, or actually change the situation itself.

LINK UP WITH OTHER GROUPS OR MOVEMENTS

— Although it is useful for young people to initiate their own actions, there can also be benefit in taking action as part of a larger movement, or gaining experience by working with other organisations.

— From the stakeholder mapping you undertake, you may identify organisations, both “professional” NGOs and spontaneous grassroots movements, engaged in working for social rights. Some of these may be operating in your local neighbourhood or may run campaigns that you or the young people you work with could become involved in.

— Remember that an organisation may not always refer to its work as “social rights” work. However, an organisation working on homelessness, child poverty, domestic violence, racism and discrimination, or many other issues, is, of course, working on social rights, whether or not it states it explicitly.

SUPPORT PEOPLE IN NEED

— Many young people and youth groups are active in offering direct assistance to people who have been denied access to their social rights. By meeting those who are experiencing difficulties, listening to their issues, or by providing company or conversation, young people can directly affect the lives of people denied access to their social rights. Visiting the vulnerable and noticing failures by the local, regional or national authorities can also put them in a stronger position to lobby those who are responsible, or to bring the failures to public notice by contacting the media. You could:

- ▶ engage young people in volunteering activities. For example, you or the young people you work with could volunteer at a homeless shelter, with a local NGO or charity, or run sports and leisure activities for other young people in the neighbourhood;
- ▶ involve young people in fundraising activities. For example, you or the young people you work with could organise activities to raise money to support local organisations that work to improve the situation of people in your neighbourhood.

TRAINING AND PEER EDUCATION

— Young people can make excellent educators and are often more effective in recruiting others to a cause or changing attitudes, particularly when the audience is their own peer group. Explaining an issue to others will also help young people both to clarify their own positions and gain greater confidence. You could train young people to act as peer educators. For example, you or the young people you work with could be involved in training sessions that raise their awareness about gender inequality or sexual and reproductive health so that they can raise awareness about these issues among other young people in the local community.

LOBBYING AND CAMPAIGNING

— Policy change – whether at international, national or local level – comes about as a result of a number of pressures, often one after another, from various sources. Sometimes the best way to exert pressure on elected representatives is through co-operation and by trying to get these representatives to understand your arguments. Sometimes protest or pressure is more effective. Generally, policies are changed as a result of influences coming from a number of directions, both collaborative and confrontational.

— Supporting young people to communicate their experiences, hold public meetings or organise around a clear campaign can help raise awareness of the issues you want to address. The most successful meetings, campaigns or lobbying activities have a clear, simple, memorable and coherent message. It is essential that your campaign has clear strategic intent, so be clear about what you want to achieve: for example, you could be trying to raise awareness, or to change opinions, attitudes or a specific decision.

— Ensure that key decision makers and stakeholders hear the experiences of young people who are denied access to their social rights, but also stories of success! Storytelling is a powerful tool for getting across the message of youth-centred social rights. Tell the story of your local activities or the experiences of young people who are denied access to their social rights, using social media as well as other forms of communications. These stories should be directed at policy decision makers, fund providers and, most importantly, the local community. For example, you could:

- ▶ work with young people to inform and educate key decision makers about what young people experience in accessing education, employment, housing, health, leisure, or any of the social rights covered in the Enter! recommendation;
- ▶ organise a public meeting where young people are invited to talk about their experiences. These meetings could allow young people to discuss their experiences with elected representatives and public officials;
- ▶ work with young people to produce short videos or photographs to raise awareness about the issues that they are facing and communicate these through social media;
- ▶ organise peaceful public actions, such as street theatre, a protest march, petitions, or sit-ins that aim to raise awareness, attract others to the cause, get media attention and show politicians or those in power that people are watching. If you are thinking of a public action, bear in mind the importance of doing something that will attract attention: make people laugh, or make them stop and stare; you may even want to try to shock them.

You need to get people talking!