

# KEY ISSUES IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUTH POLICY STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS



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# **KEY ISSUES IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUTH POLICY STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS**



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# IMPRESSUM

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

This review is part of "Better Strategies for Youth, Youth for Better Strategies" project. The review maps key issues in developing and implementing youth policy strategic documents. It draws upon **interviews** with 17 National Youth Councils (NYCs), a **survey** of 22 NYCs and a **desk-based review** of the youth policy of ten European countries.

## Youth policies in Europe

There is some degree of consensus that young people in Europe face common challenges (as well as opportunities) in areas such as education, employment and social inclusion.<sup>1</sup> However, there is less consensus about how best to meet these challenges through appropriate strategies for youth, usually enshrined in the concept of 'youth policy'. The resources available to countries, as well as their political will to meet those challenges also differ markedly. This contributes to the differences in national youth policies across Europe and poses questions, dilemmas and tensions in relation to the creation of European quality standards for youth policies.

## National Youth Councils' involvement in and influence over youth policy

The involvement of National Youth Councils' (NYCs) in policy making ranges from **formal collaborative** models (the most common) to **confrontational** models (the least common).

The distinction between **access** to policy making processes and **influence** over processes is important and means that formal collaborative models, which provide access, do not necessarily mean NYCs have influence over policy making.

The influence of NYCs over policy is shaped by a number of factors, including:

- NYCs 'offer', their human, financial, social and reputational capital (e.g. their credibility, expertise and legitimacy);

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<sup>1</sup> The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) report, Social inclusion of young people (available online at [http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef1543en.pdf](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1543en.pdf)), assesses the social inclusion of young people in Europe and the efficacy of key EU policies such as the Youth Guarantee, in supporting this.

- the ‘demand’ for or ‘receptiveness’ of policy makers to NYCs contribution (e.g. whether there is an openness to new ideas and/or a political expectation, or legal requirement, that NYCs should or will be consulted); and
- the context, including factors such as political change and competition from other stakeholders seeking to influence policy.

The **positioning of NYC** is also important. The review highlights the ‘shifting sands’ most NYCs operate on, and the ways in which their influence can ebb and flow, even when their ‘offer’ does not change. To continue the metaphor, a strong ‘tide’ (such as political change) can easily wash away a ‘castle’ (NYC’s influence) built on sand. As a consequence, NYCs need to be ‘agile’ and responsive. They need to position (and reposition) and develop new relationships with key stakeholders, depending on their ‘reading’ of the changing policy (and political) ‘landscape’. This is particularly important where their foundations are weak (or built on ‘sand’) because, for example, the culture and tradition of involving NYCs in policy making is relatively new and fragile.

The review also concludes that NYCs have no right to influence; influence has to be earned and it demands perseverance, patience<sup>2</sup>, pragmatism, professionalism and political ‘nous’ (understanding, intelligence) on the part of NYCs.

Influence is not easily won. Policy making is a complicated process and there is no ‘magic wand’ that ensures NYCs have influence: what works in one context may not work in another. Moreover, policy influence depends upon a range of factors over which NYCs have varying degrees of control.

More positively, there are many examples where NYCs are confident that they have exerted influence over policy (although the lack of hard evidence makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions) and there is potential for NYCs to reflect upon their own practice and to learn from other NYCs experiences (which this project, is enabling).

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. it take time to build relationships, policy ideas may be taken up quickly, or may take years to germinate, contexts change, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## National Youth Councils

A National Youth Council (NYC) is “an umbrella organization for youth NGOs and sometimes also other actors in youth work. A NYC functions primarily as a service organization to its members, but is also a lobby and advocacy body.” (European Youth Forum, 2014, p.50)<sup>3</sup>.

NYCs express “the consolidated voice of young people through youth organisations” (ibid, p.18). They advocate on behalf of young people and support their members (e.g. through information and capacity building). Influencing policies that affect young people is seen as one their “most important” roles, and ideally they are seen as “equal partners for the government in decision-making” (ibid, p.19-20).

NYCs typically comprise a Board (or executive body) which provides strategic direction and oversees the work of the NYC; a staff (including volunteers) who manage the day to day operation of the NYC; and member organisations (members) (ibid).

## “Better Strategies for Youth, Youth for Better Strategies” Project

“Better Strategies for Youth, Youth for Better Strategies” project is an Erasmus+ funded project that aims to contribute to more comprehensive, coherent and effective youth policies at the European and national level. The project is a response to the perceived “lack of conceptual standards on how to develop strategic and programme documents”, given the “diverse capacities of individual NYCs to initiate and carry advocacy effort, and different stages of development of youth sectors in different European countries.”<sup>4</sup>

The project aims to develop an “advocacy agenda on the necessity of developing quality assurance standards for national strategic and programme documents in the field of youth”. This is expected to include “conceptual standards which can be applicable in different countries, regardless of its specific context and developmental phase.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> European Youth Forum (2014). Everything You Always Wanted To Know About National Youth Councils, But Were Too Afraid To Ask, available online at <http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2014/11/YFJ-NationalYouthCouncils-WEB-2P.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Emphasis omitted, taken from the MMH webpage (including information about Erasmus+ “Better Strategies For Youth, Youth For Better Strategies” project): <http://www.mmh.hr/en/our-work/erasmus-better-strategies-for-youth-youth-for-better-strategies>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



## Research to map key issues in developing and implementing youth policy strategic documents

As part of the project, the research team, led by the People and Work Unit, working with Professor Howard Williamson, is mapping key issues in developing and implementing youth policy strategic documents, from the perspective of National Youth Councils (NYCs). By outlining key challenges to both youth programmes in the EU and NYCs, it highlights potential priorities for curricula and advocacy tool development.



# 2. SOURCES AND METHODS

## INTRODUCTION

The report draw upon three key sources:

- A desk-based review of youth policy in 10 European countries;
- A survey of a sample of National Youth Councils across Europe; and
- Interviews with representatives of National Youth Councils across Europe.

### Desk-based review of youth policy

The desk-based review of youth policy focused upon **ten countries**: Albania, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia and the United Kingdom. The countries were chosen to ensure the sample included a good mix of “social welfare regimes”<sup>6</sup>, youth policies and institutional histories.<sup>7</sup> Further details are included in Appendix 1. The review drew upon Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy; the European Knowledge Centre for Youth Policy (EKCYC) and Country fact sheets.

The review focused upon the **evolution** and **development** of **national youth policies, including**:

- The guiding frames for youth policy (e.g. the purpose / aims of policy<sup>8</sup>);
- The stakeholders/actors (e.g. key governmental and non-governmental institutions) involved in youth policy making;

The breadth and depth of youth policy, including coverage (e.g. which domains<sup>9</sup> are within or outside of youth policy), connections, such as links to other policy areas (e.g. housing, health etc) and coordination of policy.

The review also covered the **implementation** and **impact of national youth poli-**

6 This draws upon Esping-Andersen's conception of three welfare types: “Liberal”; “Corporatist-Statist” and “Social Democratic” (Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (1990). The three worlds of welfare capitalism. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press); a typology developed further by others, such as Andreas Walther.

7 For example, Norway, an EEA, but not an EU member, represented a Nordic welfare regime, with a well established generous and positive youth policy; whilst Slovakia, an EU member for 10 years, represented a post-socialist regime, with an embryonic youth policy.

8 E.g. participation and citizenship; access to information/informed choices; multiculturalism, minorities, religion; mobility; scent and protection; equal opportunities; the environment.

9 E.g. education and lifelong learning; employment; health; housing; social protection; family policy and child welfare; leisure and culture; youth justice.

**cies**, including the influence of youth policies upon decisions about funding for youth policies.

## Survey of National Youth Councils

The survey of NYCs used an online self completion questionnaire, sent out in August 2015 to all European NYCs (n=39) and focused upon:

- The structure of national youth policies;
- The breadth of national youth policies;
- The impact of national youth policies upon young people; and
- NYCs involvement in national youth policy making and ways in which it could be strengthened.

There were **23 responses** covering **19 countries**: Austria (OJV<sup>10</sup>), Azerbaijan (NAY-ORA<sup>11</sup>), Belarus (RADA<sup>12</sup>), Belgium – Flanders (VJR<sup>13</sup>), Bulgaria (NMF<sup>14</sup>), Cyprus (CYC<sup>15</sup>), Denmark (DUF<sup>16</sup>), Estonia (ENL<sup>17</sup>), Finland (Alliansi), Iceland (LÆF<sup>18</sup>), Ireland (NYCI<sup>19</sup>), Lithuania (LIJOT<sup>20</sup>), The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (HMCM/NMS<sup>21</sup>), Norway (LNU<sup>22</sup>), the Russian Federation (NYCR<sup>23</sup>), Serbia (KOMS<sup>24</sup>), Slovakia (RMS<sup>25</sup>), Spain (CJE<sup>26</sup>), and Sweden (LSU<sup>27</sup>). Roughly two thirds of respondents represented EU countries.

## Interviews with National Youth Councils

Representatives of each of the project's partners – Österreichische Kinder und Jugendvertretung Verein [The Austrian NYC], the National Youth Forum Bulgaria; Mreža mladih Hrvatske [The Croatian Youth Network]; the Cyprus Youth Council; the Federatia Consiliul Tineretului din Romania; Mladinski Svet Slovenije [The

10 Österreichische Kinder und Jugendvertretung

11 National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

12 The Belarusian Union of Youth and Children's Public Associations

13 Vlaamse Jeugdraad

14 Naciolen Mlazedki Forum

15 Cyprus Youth Council

16 Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd

17 The Estonian National Youth Council

18 Landsamband æskulýðsfélaga,

19 The National Youth Council of Ireland

20 Lietuvos jaunimo organizacijų taryba (Lithuania)

21 Националниот младински совет е на Македонија / The National Youth Council of Macedonia

22 Landsrådet for Norske barne- og ungdomsorganisasjoner

23 The National Youth Council of Russia

24 Krovna Organizacija Mladih Srbije

25 The Youth Council of Slovakia.

26 Consejo de la Juventud de España

27 Landsrådet för Sveriges ungdomsorganisationer

Slovenian NYC], Forum Nazionale Dei Giovani Associazione [The Italian NYC] – were interviewed in May 2015.

In September to November 2015, follow-up interviews with 10 other NYCs were undertaken: The Belarusian Union of Youth and Children’s Public Associations (RADA); The British Youth Council (BYC); The Estonian National Youth Council (ENL); Suomen Nuorisoyheteistyö Allianssi ry (Allianssi) [The NYC of Finland]; Nemzeti Ifjúsági Tanács (NIT) [The NYC of Hungary]; Conférence Générale de la Jeunesse Luxembourgoise (CGJL) [The NYC of Luxembourg]; Националниот младински совет е на Македонија (НМСМ) [The NYC of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia]; The National Youth Council of Russia (NYCR); Krovna Organizacija Mladih Srbije (KOMs) [The National Youth Council of Serbia]; and The National Youth Council of Switzerland (SNYC).

In November 2015, the findings were discussed with project partners at the project’s capacity building training.



# 3. NYCs INVOLVEMENT IN NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY MAKING (access to policy making processes)

All but two of the NYCs surveyed and interviewed reported involvement in developing youth policy.<sup>28</sup> Of those who were involved, most expressed satisfaction with their level of involvement and small numbers expressed frustration. Nevertheless, as we outline in this section, the ways in which NYCs are involved, and their levels of access, varies considerably both across countries and across time.

## Models of involvement

Interviews with NYCs identified four broad models of involvement in national<sup>29</sup> youth policy making:

- **Formal collaborative models**, in which, for example, NYCs were invited to contribute to policy making processes through regular meetings (whose frequency range from monthly to annual meetings) with civil servants and/or politicians<sup>30</sup>;
- **More informal or ad hoc collaborative models**, in which, for example, NYCs were invited to contribute to policy making on a particular issue, through participation in a working group, or an invitation to comment on a document, focused on a particular issue, policy or programme<sup>31</sup>;
- **Facilitative or “enabling” models**, in which NYCs helped bring other stakeholders, most notably their members<sup>32</sup>, but also for example, young people

28 The exceptions to this were one NYC which was formally excluded from youth policy making, as it is not recognised as the official NYC by the government and another NYC which described itself as an “INGO”.

29 In almost cases, NYCs primary focus was upon national policy making, although NYCs members were often seen as responsible for engaging with regional, community or local government. For example as one NYC put it: “Our members work with the municipalities”. Exceptions to this would include for example, the Flemish National Youth Council (VJR), (CRIJ - Comité pour les Relations Internationales de Jeunesse) and RDJ (Rat der Deutschsprachigen Jugend) representing the Flemish and German speaking communities in Belgium.

30 For example, one NYC acts as an advisor on policymaking and is a permanent member of the National Education Council.

31 A variation on this, would be the way, for example one NYC has sought to work with Parliamentary Select Committees to scrutinise government policies and programmes.

32 In interviews NYCs described for example, how they would use members’ expertise and, for example, involve trade unions in discussions around youth employment. The desk-based country reviews also, for example, identified that in

themselves<sup>33</sup>, into the policy making process (rather than the NYC itself seeking to directly influence policy); and

- **Confrontational** models, in which NYCs were actively excluded from formal policy making processes, and were instead focused upon advocating for change from the 'outside'.<sup>34</sup>

Formal collaborative models were the most common model and confrontational models the least common.

Most NYCs (in the study) adopted a mix of different (the models are not mutually exclusive), and NYCs could for example, be involved in a formal collaborative process in relation to some issues, whilst adopting a more confrontational stance on other issues. Nevertheless, it was observed, that for some NYCs, confrontational models were “unthinkable” given the political culture they worked in and for others, exclusion from the policy making process, forced them into confrontational models.

Collaborative models enabled NYCs to build relationships with key policy makers. These were often with key civil servants within the Ministry or Department of Youth (or its equivalent). In some cases, relationships were described as long-standing and very friendly, with openness on both ideas to new ideas. These approached the ideal of an equal partnership between government and NYCs (cf. EYF, 2014)<sup>35</sup> and for example, as one NYC, put it, they were now seen as “strategic partners” who were valued and “needed” by the Ministry of Education and Research (which has responsibility for youth policy).

In contrast, in a small number of cases, NYCs were not formally recognised by government and excluded from formal collaborative models. For example, as one NYC put it “we don’t have a relationship...we are on opposite sides to the National Agency on Youth and Sport”. Nevertheless, this did not mean they were completely excluded. They reported that they were still involved in more ad hoc models of collaboration (such as participation in working groups) and they also identified much warmer relations with other parts of government such as the Secretariat for European Affairs.

There are few absolutes and NYCs could be placed somewhere on a continuum,

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Albania the role of the Youth Council (AYC) is described as focused upon strengthening the capacity of youth organisations and supporting their further development through training.

33 For example, one NYC described their role as “facilitating young people; we’re an enabling platform”. They likened their role to that of “a production company. We build the platform, we get the minister in the front row [the audience] ...we get the lights and stage...we teach the young people how to, play the instruments, but it’s their song”. Similarly another NYC highlighted its role in enabling young people’s participation. The desk-based review identified that in Estonia the NYC, ENL, is seen as facilitating greater engagement of young people as service users (a facilitative model) rather than advocating for policy change itself.

34 In a small number of cases, legislation on for example the size and composition of ‘recognised’ youth NGOs was seen as actively limiting NYCs access to policy making process.

35 European Youth Forum (2014). Everything You Always Wanted To Know About National Youth Councils, But Were Too Afraid To Ask, available online at <http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2014/11/YFJ-NationalYouthCouncils-WEB-2P.pdf>

from involvement as de facto equal partners to complete exclusion.

NYCs degree of involvement (or participation) was rarely fixed and even those who considered themselves equal partners might still find themselves occasionally excluded. This reflects the dependence of NYC upon governmental 'grace' (or good will), which can be withdrawn when it suits governments. NYCs also reported that the degree of involvement (or access) could differ from issue to issue. The degree of involvement also tended to differ depending upon the ministry or policy area. So for example NYCs links with the Ministry of Youth (or its equivalent) tended to be stronger than links with the Ministry of Labour (or its equivalent).<sup>36</sup>

Interviews with NYCs also indicated a broad divide between countries with a long and well established consultative culture, such as Finland and Luxembourg, and those where the role of NYCs in national policy making was still evolving, such as The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Belarus. In the former, NYCs access to policy makers was formalised and well established (and therefore relatively stable). There was also a feeling that the political culture was open and sufficiently 'mature' to tolerate criticism from civil society organisations, like NYCs, funded by the state.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, in the latter, access and influence was seen as much more fluid, with levels of each ebbing and flowing over the last 10-15 years.<sup>38</sup> For example, one NYC contrasted its initially strong relationship with government in the last 1990, with its loss of official recognition as the country's NYC in 2006, and its consequent exclusion from policy making processes. This fluidity meant that some NYCs, were advocating for a more formal institutionalised process of collaboration, because as one put it, in terms of their access to policy making process, "nothing is certain".

## **NYCs contribution to policy making**

Different types of contributions to policy making were identified. These included:

- Articulating the 'voice' of young people (representing or advocating on behalf of young people and its members);
- Offering expert advice on youth policies;
- Facilitating consultative and/or policy making processes<sup>39</sup>; and

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36 Nevertheless, this could change, and new initiatives, most notably the Youth Guarantee, were identified as opening up new opportunities for engagement in some (but not all) countries.

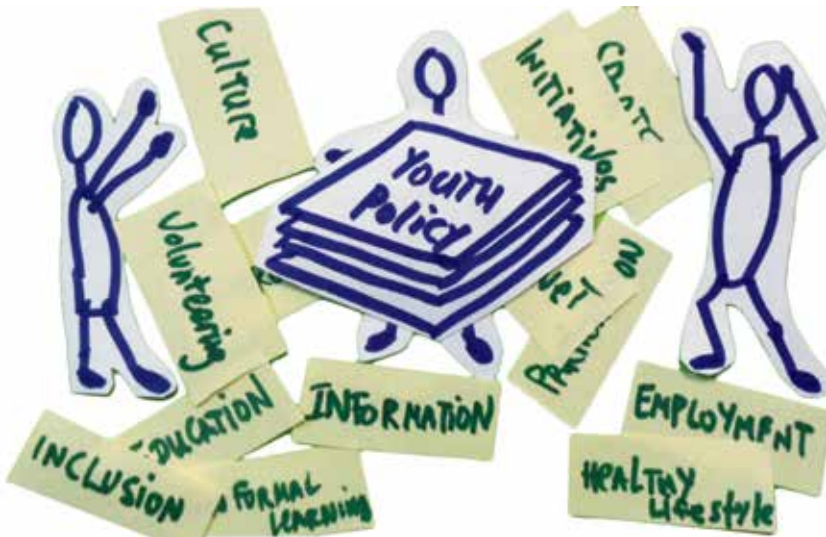
37 For example as one NYC put it: "As an NGO we're free to do what we want – [name of country omitted] has a good tradition of civil society not being afraid of government and government not stopping the subsidies [to NGOs], despite being criticised [by them]."

38 For example as one NYC, explained, in the past "we had had lots of influence...close-cooperation [with government] ...we were listened to by the government". However, around 2000 this all changed, as, civil society began to feel pressure from the government, the political situation changed, and they were frozen out of the process.

39 For example, one NYC identified youth participation as key area of expertise, and described how they had, for example, facilitated the participation of 200 young people in the Federal Government's "youth sessions". Similarly, another NYC focuses upon enabling young people's participation, rather than advocating on their behalf.

- Undertaking research (including monitoring implementation and impact).<sup>40</sup>

Articulating the ‘voice’ of young people was the most common contribution, and undertaking research, was the least common contribution. Some roles were seen as mutually supportive and for example, it was observed that an NYC might need to be seen as having expertise, in order to be able to credibly articulate the voice of young people.



<sup>40</sup> For example, one NYC described how they tried to collect information about the state of young people in the country by talking to other youth NGOs and trying to get information from the government, although they stressed they were “not research organisation”. Another described working with their country’s Youth Research Network, who they knew well and who they commissioned studies from, from time to time.



# 4. NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCILS' INFLUENCE OVER NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

## Introduction

As we outline in this section, interviews with NYCs indicated some frustration, that whilst they might be formally involved in the policy making process (i.e. have access), their influence over policy making was often limited.<sup>41</sup> As one put it, they might be “listened to”, but “ignored” or not taken seriously. Moreover, there were concerns that even if they influenced policy on paper, policy in practice differed (e.g. due to weak implementation or due to the weak linkage between youth policy and budgetary allocations).

## Levels of participation

*Hart's ladder of participation<sup>42</sup> (see figure 1) is a useful way of mapping NYCs level of participation in youth policy making. Only the top five levels (or 'rungs') of the ladder are considered models of participation, with level eight considered the highest level of participation. The model helps emphasise that there are differing degrees of participation and that NYCs involvement in policy making processes does not necessarily mean that NYCs can participate in policy making. For example, their involvement may be “decorative”, and as outlined in the previous section, some NYCs complained that they were involved, but not listened to.*

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41 The desk-based country reviews provided less evidence on the role and influence of NYCs in policy making. While NYCs were visible in all country reviews (with the exception of a two year period after 2008 in Albania), and many received the active support of the state, examples of their influence were limited. This may be a consequence of the sources reviewed.

42 Hart's ladder of participation (Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship, Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre) draws upon the earlier work of Arnstein (Arnstein, 1969, S.R. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," JAIP, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224).

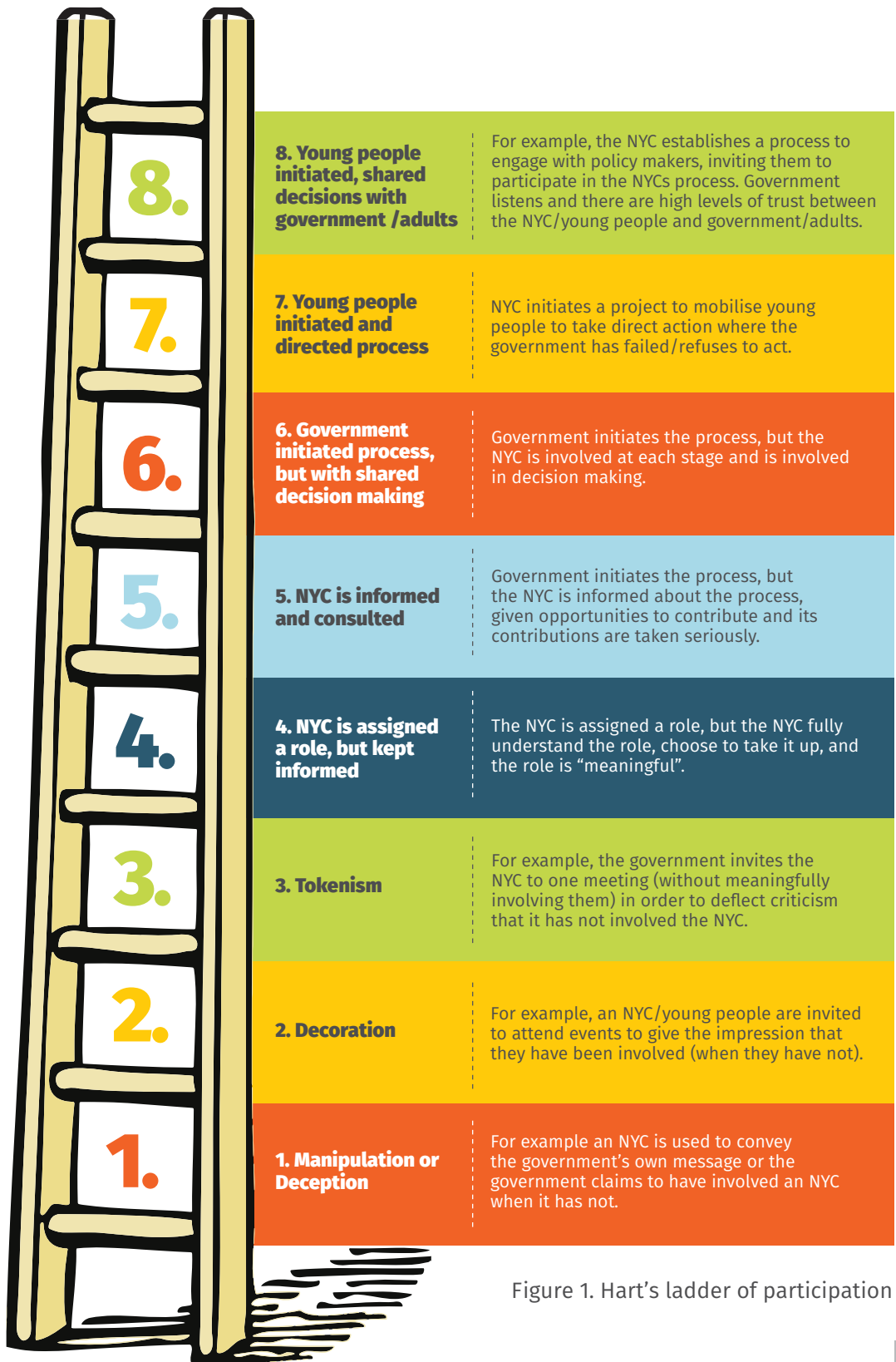


Figure 1. Hart’s ladder of participation

*Hart's (1992) ladder of participation was discussed by NYCs at the Capacity Building Workshop. Most NYCs positioned them somewhere around level (or 'rung') 5 of Hart's model (i.e. they were involved in a process the government initiated, but they understood the process and felt that their contribution was taken seriously).<sup>43</sup>In discussions, a number of NYCs reflected that this level of involvement might be desirable - as if they moved up a 'level', and there was genuine shared decision making with government over youth policy, their NYC might lose their independence from government. Nevertheless, there were also positive examples where NYCs had initiated processes themselves, although the degree to which government had engaged with these processes, differed.*

## **The extent of NYCs influence**

Interviews with NYCs indicated that their influence was often quite narrowly focused, or 'channelled', so as outlined in section three, whilst they might have strong links with the Ministry of Youth (or similar), they often had weaker links with other government ministries or departments. Moreover, even where NYCs felt they had access to and influence with civil servants in the Ministry of youth (or similar), some expressed concerns that the Ministry itself was a relatively small or a somewhat marginal player, with limited influence over other ministries with responsibilities for youth policies in areas such as education and employment.<sup>44</sup> Cuts in budgets, in response to austerity, could also constrain the Ministry of Youth's (or similar) 'room for manoeuvre'.

Relationships with key stakeholders in the public sphere (levels of governance and beyond) and also, for example, in the research community, were an important part of NYCs influence. The relatively small size of some countries, such as Luxembourg and Estonia was seen as an advantage here. For example as one NYC put it, it's "easy to make the links if you want to". Conversely, devolved or federal policy making structures (as in Switzerland), and in extreme cases like Cyprus, partition, made it harder to build relationships and tended to limit NYCs influence (which as outlined in section three, typically have a primarily national and

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<sup>43</sup> Participants were invited to position themselves on a line, ranging from manipulation to shared decision making. However, their levels of participation were not systematically mapped against Hart's eight categories and for example, concerns about the opaque nature of some policy making processes, complicated categorisation.

<sup>44</sup> Similarly, as the Council of Europe Compendium of Youth Policy identifies: "Of paramount importance, ... 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.... Where 'youth' is located in national politics and who is championing its cause will always remain a critical feature of youth policy evolution." (Williamson, H. in Council of Europe, 2012, Compendium of Council of Europe approaches to key youth policy and youth work issues, available online at [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/PR\\_material/2012\\_Compendium\\_all\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/PR_material/2012_Compendium_all_en.pdf), p.8).

European, rather than regional or local focus). This could mean, for example, that a ‘good’ national policy was poorly implemented by local government.

## The ‘demand’ for and ‘supply’ of policy influence

NYCs influence depends upon both what NYCs offer (supply) and what policy makers want (demand). The two factors are linked (supply can influence demand – and vice versa). Nevertheless, it generally easier for NYCs to change the supply side of the equation (i.e. what they offer to policy makers and policy shapers) and NYCs often highlighted how they had to fight for influence. For example as one, NYC explained, “We’ve had to earn it...they’ll [the government] not read the charter of the UN [on participation] and give us a voice – we’ve got to fight [for it].”

On the ‘supply’ side, interviews with, and the survey of, NYCs, indicated that the key factors were **NYCs resources** (including their expertise, size and contacts), which could be thought of in terms of their financial, human and social capital. These were embodied in NYCs staff, members<sup>45</sup> and boards, and the strength of these assets influenced, for example:

- NYCs sustainability and dependence upon government funding;
- NYCs coherence and effectiveness, and for example, their capacity to manage internal tensions and reach shared positions on policy;
- The quality (and value) of their policy ‘inputs’ (such as policy papers and contributions to working groups)<sup>46</sup>;
- The presentation and ‘framing’ of policy ideas to fit with prevailing policy discourses; and
- The quality and breadth of their social networks (and therefore, for example, who they could access and potentially influence, and also who they could go to for expert advice and support).

The willingness of NYCs to engage constructively also emerged as a key theme, which we discuss further below.

On the ‘demand’ side, Interviews with, and the survey of, NYCs, indicated that the key factors were:

- policy makers’ perceptions of NYCs, including the ‘credibility’ and/or legitimacy of NYC (e.g. whether they were seen as having expertise and/or were

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45 The relative weakness of some members, who were for example, seen as lacking an interest and or capacity to engage in policy advocacy, was therefore seen as a constraint on NYCs influence, although it could give NYCs staff and boards greater autonomy in setting an agenda for policy influence.

46 Quality was seen as making a difference. For example as one NYC put it: “Quality work makes a difference: government was impressed”.

seen as ‘really’ representing the ‘voice’ of young people<sup>47</sup>), which could be conceptualised in terms of reputational capital<sup>48</sup>;

- policy makers’ need to engage NYCs, due for, example to the limits of policy makers’ own expertise or capacity, political expectations that NYCs would be consulted, or legal requirements to consult NYCs, and/or a reliance upon the non-governmental youth sector to deliver policy<sup>49</sup>;
- competition from others seeking to influence policy, such as the youth wing of political parties, student bodies and ‘rival’ youth councils<sup>50</sup>;
- policy makers’ receptiveness to new ideas (which might, for example, be greater where youth policies were less well established)<sup>51</sup>; and
- opportunities for engagement, which was seen as shaped by factors like:
  1. the centralisation or fragmentation of youth policy making<sup>52</sup>;
  2. the timing of policy making cycles (with, for example, greater opportunities when a new policy was being developed and conversely fewer opportunities when for example policy making cycle were truncated<sup>53</sup>);
  3. political ideologies and political change (such as changes in government); and
  4. national or European policies/programmes such as the Structured Dialogue with young people and the Youth Guarantee (which could create new opportunities and structures for engagement).

The factors may be linked. For example, capacity may influence openness and vice versa. There may also be tensions between the factors. For example, the strength of a NYC might mean it was considered a potential ‘threat’ by policy makers keen to protect their autonomy over policy making.

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47 The difficulties speaking with one voice, when for example, NYC’s members and/or young people had differing views on a particular subject were noted.

48 For example as one NYC put it: “For many years we have been the ‘keepers’ of youth policy”.

49 “The government knows lots of things will not happen without the youth sector, without civil society... reminds them that they need to involve us” .

50 These ranged from government-sponsored bodies such as The Belarusian Committee of Youth Organizations (in Belarus), to non-governmental bodies such as Romanian Youth Forum in Romania, which is larger than the NYC (CTR) recognised by the European Youth Forum since the summer of 2014. The picture is complicated though, as Inside Romania, both the Youth Council and the Youth Forum are ‘recognised’ by the government; the Romanian Youth Forum has also secured funding from the EU through Erasmus+, which could be considered a form of recognition.

51 Examples were given for example of what were termed “cut and paste” policies, in which policy was ‘borrowed’ and consequently, there was little discussion of policy alternatives.

52 Examples were given of how policy making might be driven by a small team within a single department or spread across multiple ministries and departments.

53 External pressure can also curtail it (e.g. pressure to complete a strategy fast).

## Constructive criticism, compromises and opposition

Interviews with NYCs suggested the importance of pragmatism, of the necessity of making compromises, in order to get things done. For example as one NYC, put it:

***In the past [we were] less constructive, more aggressive...we took a strategic choice to play the game of collaboration. Sometimes we don't agree. We say it first behind the scenes, before going public.***

As the interviewee explained, about 15 years ago:

***My generation...said we can continue to do meetings without an output, or we can try to collaborate. We changed and it worked.***

They went onto explain that they:

***Try to be neutral, like Amnesty...to be fair in the political game, to respect the other side, to behave in a constructive way.***

Similarly, another NYC explained before they had completed the process of registration:

***As [we were] not a legal organisation, felt we cannot fully oppose, unless something [was] very bad... [it was] really important at the beginning to be taken into account... [we] had to be really careful what fights we took ... [therefore our role was more about supporting]... and pointing out the flaws rather than [outright] opposing... [we] try to really point out in a friendly manner what is not working.***

Another NYC explained the sometimes difficult choices faced by NYCs. For example, after the government delayed an evaluation of the national youth strategy, which was intended to inform the development of the next one<sup>54</sup>, as they explained, in response:

***..some [NGOs] ignored the process, didn't want take to part as sign of protest... [at the evaluation report not being made available] we chose to participate, wanted to contribute to the process. We decided it was better to contribute than stand aside.***

<sup>54</sup> The evaluation was delayed until December 2014 and the development for the new strategy was accelerated, so the two processes got completely out of sync.

NYCs were keen to stress that collaboration did not equate to uncritical acceptance of government policy, and the emphasis was very much upon constructive criticism, and at times, outright opposition.<sup>55</sup> The desk-based country reviews identified an interesting variation of this: the way in which the Conseil de la Jeunesse (The Youth Council of the French-Speaking Community in Belgium), described itself as acting as an “itching powder” for politicians<sup>56</sup>. One of the NYC interviewed, also explained that young people had more ‘licence’ to be openly critical. This meant that by enabling young people’s to speak directly to politicians and policy makers, rather than advocating on young people’s behalf, allowed more critical views to be expressed.

One NYC, also expressed their frustration that they – and crucially the young people who had advocated for a change – were not always given credit for their ideas, when taken up by government. They recognised the need to be generous and to let others take their ideas (and crucially improve policies for young people). Nevertheless, they also observed that it might mean that their contribution to policy making might not be recognised, which could both discourage young people from continuing to lobby for change and impact upon their funding in the future.

## **State funding: a double-edged sword**

Interviews with NYCs frequently highlighted a tension between funding by government and their independence. As one put it, “you don’t bite the hand that feeds you”. Government funding might therefore sustain NYCs, and could also ensure access to policy makers, as a ‘recognised’ or ‘official’ social partner. However, it could also constrain the ability of NYCs to influence policy in particular directions.<sup>57</sup> As outlined in section three, this was seen as less of a concern in more open and ‘mature’ political systems, like Finland and Luxembourg.

## **The ebb and flow of National Youth Councils’ influence**

Influence, like access (discussed in section 3) could rise or fall. Interviews indicated that the key factors that affected this were:

- political change and cycles (including changes in the ruling party, in the political discourse around youth policy, and in openness to civil society);
- Policy cycles (for example NYCs influence could rise when policy was formulated and decline while policy was implemented);

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<sup>55</sup> It was observed though that criticism was risky for both the NYC and members of its board, who might for example want to mute the NYCs criticism, if they had political aspirations of their own.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.conseildelajeunesse.be/qui-sommes-nous/youth-council/>

<sup>57</sup> One NYC also highlighted how the impact of cuts in funding had muted much of the criticism from the youth sector (which could be dependent upon increasingly scarce government funding).

- changes in key stakeholders, such as changes in NYCs board or staff and changes in the minister or civil servants; and
- external events, such as economic or political crises, which can force changes in youth policy (which is often seen as less of a priority than other areas of public policy and expenditure).

The factors were often linked, so that political change led to changes in key stakeholders in the state and could mean changes in policy, reversing policy reforms that NYCs had previously pushed for. For example, as one NYC explained:

***Luckily people in the ministry [civil servants] were there from the beginning... [so we] don't have to keep explaining... but ministers change, we have to explain and advocate for something to remain, not to lose the things we've achieved. But it's not easy, the youth sector has not been resistant to political change, especially at a local level.***

Equally external events, changes in key stakeholders and political change and political processes could create new opportunities. For example, Serbia had to renew its commitment to young people after the young led the way in dealing with last year's floods and ambitious politicians and policy makers can raise the profile of youth. Timing therefore matters. For example, as one NYC explained, when they "registered in 2012, [it was] close to elections... [therefore] popular to support us, work with us...[and to support them]." As they put it, it was "a good time" to register.

Although NYCs need to form relationships with policy makers and politicians (in order to exert influence), there are dangers for NYCs. These include politicisation or being perceived as too close to one party, which can be positive when the political 'wind' is fair, but which can rebound badly when the 'wind' changes.

## **NYCs members**

The membership of NYCs was seen as a factor that could ensure access to policy makers, as a representative of its members, and which gave NYCs legitimacy. In some cases, on some issues, policy advocacy was led by members (rather than the NYC). However, their memberships were also seen as a factor that constrained NYCs ability to influence policy in particular directions (because policy positions needed to be supported by their members, and members could often disagree<sup>58</sup>). For example as one put it:

<sup>58</sup> For example as one NYC explained, There are examples where: our "members don't like our position. Like for instance the [name omitted] position on the alcohol law.... we have to agree that sometimes views can be different. [Name omitted] does have a progressive opinion; others are more conservative. In this case we pay attention on how we communicate. It is the same for young people: not all young people share the same views [i.e. not all young people hold 'progressive' views]."



***One of the biggest challenges is the variety of youth organisations as members, [they] have different backgrounds and... to formulate an opinion...it's very difficult, members [are] not on the same page...many times, [this is the] reason [we're] not opposing anyone, as [the] hard part [is getting]...our membership to agree...it's difficult to agree.***

The engagement and interest of NYCs members in policy influence, and therefore the autonomy of a NYCs staff and executive boards in setting their policy agenda<sup>59</sup>, appeared to vary considerably. Where NYCs members could not agree a common position, rather than advocating on behalf of all members, the NYC would often facilitate key members' direct engagement with government. In addition, on some key issues, NYCs would seek to directly involve members with interest/expertise (for example involving trade unions on discussions around employment).

## **Working transversally**

The breadth of youth policy created both challenges and opportunities for NYCs. Interviews with NYCs indicated that the areas of policy that NYCs sought to influence varied, albeit around a small number of themes, most notably: youth participation, education (particularly non-formal education) and youth employment. This reflected a number of factors, including NYCs and their members' interests and priorities; NYCs areas of expertise; their capacity (e.g. the extent to which they could 'shadow' different departments/ministries); the opportunities to influence policy that presented themselves; and the challenges facing young people (and therefore their members' priorities) in different countries.

## **The European dimension**

Some NYCs saw their knowledge of and engagement with European youth policy as a way to influence national youth policy. This was most common in Eastern European countries, where the influence of European youth policy over national youth policies, was seen as stronger. Membership of the YFJ (the European Youth Forum) was seen as adding weight and influence. The influence of the Council of Europe over national youth policy was seen as limited by NYCs.<sup>60</sup>

The desk-based review of policies and interviews with NYCs suggest that Europe-

<sup>59</sup> NYCs could be seen as leading or following their members, when defining a policy advocacy agenda.

<sup>60</sup> This is an interesting finding because it is the Council of Europe's 'soft' influences that can pave the way for the EU's 'harder' influence, especially on candidate countries (because candidate countries want to be seen as complying with the *acquis communautaire* and related EU 'standards'. Moreover, the Council of Europe, through its governmental steering group on youth (the CDEJ) and its youth representative Advisory Council on Youth (the AC), and the two together (the Joint Council on Youth), ensure that 48 countries are in the picture of all pan-European youth policy development, through reporting on national, European and global initiatives and achievements, as well as instituting specific youth policy itself (such as the All Different All Equal campaign, or the current No Hate Speech campaign).

an youth frameworks have influenced national youth policies. The influence has been particularly strong in countries that have developed youth policies ‘from scratch’, often as part of a process of social and political transformation (such as Estonia, Albania, Serbia), and these countries have utilised these frameworks to ‘harmonise’ their own conception of youth and youth policy with that of the wider international community.<sup>61</sup> In contrast, there is much less evidence that European youth strategies have influenced national policies in countries with pre-existing youth strategies (such as Portugal) or whose infrastructure and recognition of youth has been longer established (such as the UK, Belgium, Denmark).

Interviews with NYCs also highlighted concerns that external policy ‘pressures’, such as a push to harmonise national and European policies could be both positive and negative. It could help put ideas and concepts (like structured dialogue as an approach) on the policy agenda. However, it could also risk undermining ownership of national policy, particularly when the focus was upon formal compliance. This could mean that attention focused upon developing a policy and that ensuring effective implementation of the policy was neglected.

## **Strengthening NYCs involvement in youth policy making**

NYCs identified different ways in which their involvement in youth policy making could be improved. These include strengthening their voice and formalising their role in the policy making processes. For example amongst those surveyed:

- Three NYCs wanted to be listened more and/or secure a more structured role in policy making;
- Two NYCs wanted involvement in a wider range of government Departments;
- Two NYCs want involvement in implementation and evaluation; and
- One NYC wanted changes in the law with regard to criminal liability for acting on behalf of unregistered organisations and barriers to obtaining registration for NGOs.

There was also a desire to enhance the capacity of NYCs to articulate young people’s voice in the policy making process. For example:

- three NYCs wanted capacity building (e.g. increased funding); and
- two NYCs would value sharing best practice.

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<sup>61</sup> This was particularly pronounced prior to rounds of EU accession: candidate countries endeavour to reflect EU aspirations and regulations (and, on many fronts, are required to do so). Similarly, some countries, such as Ukraine, although some way from accession often try to emulate principles taken from the Council of Europe. The influence and attractiveness of the EU may have been undermined by the experience of Greece and by a more assertive Russian influence.



# 5. NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES

## Introduction

Youth policy is an ‘elastic’ and contested term that has evolved from a narrow focus upon youth work and non formal education to a broader understanding of the range of policies which affect youth policies. This broader conception means all countries have “a youth policy – by intent, default or neglect”.<sup>62</sup> What public authorities do not do for young people, across a spectrum of issues relevant to their lives, is as much part of youth policy (and is critical in an understanding of youth policy), as what public authorities actively and purposefully do for young people.

## Coverage, structure and coordination

There are two broad types of (intentional) youth policy:

- An overarching national youth policy or framework (the approach in countries such as Austria, Azerbaijan and Sweden); and
- sectoral policies, into which youth policy is “‘mainstreamed’ (the approach in countries such as Norway and Denmark).<sup>63</sup>

Although most European countries have some form of dedicated national youth policy, interviews, responses to the survey and the desk-based review all indicate that:

- policies vary considerably in terms of their definition of “youth”<sup>64</sup>, their content and coverage (e.g. their breadth and focus upon different groups of young people<sup>65</sup>), and their aims and approaches in each policy domain.

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62 Attributed to Howard Williamson, cited in Council of Europe (2012). Compendium of Council of Europe approaches to key youth policy and youth work issues, available online at [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/PR\\_material/2012\\_Compendium\\_Youth\\_Policy\\_text\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/PR_material/2012_Compendium_Youth_Policy_text_en.pdf)

63 For example, in their response, one NYC reported “We don’t have a dedicated youth policy as such. Nor do we want one. In stead [sic], you can find a youth dimension to many other policies, laws etc”.

64 I.e. the age range covered by the policy.

65 For example the extent to which they focus upon three ‘categories’ of young people: ‘Value[d]’ young people who are a resource, whose contribution to society (e.g. through their participation and active citizenship is to be promoted; ‘Villains’: young people seen as a ‘problem’ or challenge, such those involved in offending or anti-social behaviour or those who misuse drugs and/or alcohol, for whom ideas about regulation and control, as well as support and development, inform policy directed towards them; and the ‘Vulnerable’: those in need of care and support, such as young people with learning or physical disabilities and young people looked after by the state.

For example, some such as Serbia's are focused upon facilitating individual young people's agency whilst others, such as Finland's, are more focused upon improving young people's conditions;

- even dedicated national youth policies are not always comprehensive, in that 'youth policy' in areas such as youth justice and housing may not feature at all; and
- there are concerns about the quality of some country's policies and of the value of having a policy on paper that may not be implemented.

Moreover, a dedicated youth policy does not, in and of itself, solve (or resolve) the challenge of coordination: how different strands of youth policy are integrated or 'joined up' to ensure coherence.

## Convergence and divergence in youth policies

Although there were marked differences in the content and coverage of youth policies at a European level, there was more evidence of convergence at a regional level. Interviews with NYCs indicated they often felt their country's youth policy was similar to others in neighbouring countries (with examples given, for example, of "Nordic" or "Baltic" youth policies), but it was also noted that there can be important differences from policies in other regions of Europe (such as Southern Europe). Youth policies have also, for example, been classified by reference to "welfare regime", rather than geography.<sup>66</sup>

### Components of youth policy

In order to identify and explore youth policy frameworks, the Council of Europe reviews outlined the "five 'C's or components of youth policy":

*"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 ... linked to questions concerning political will (and political stability), legislative requirements and effective structures for delivery."*

*"Competence [which] addresses the practice of delivery and questions of professionalism and, perhaps, professionalisation."*

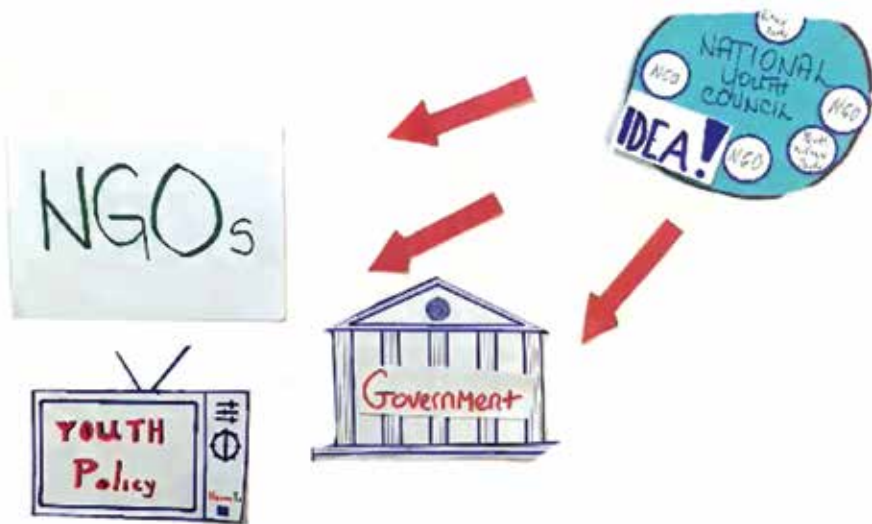
<sup>66</sup> Gösta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990).

**“Coordination** [which] 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”; and

**“Cost”**, as “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”.

(Williamson, 2012, pp.7-8, emphasis added)<sup>67</sup>

The degree of similarity or difference between individual countries’ youth policies can differ depending upon which aspect of youth policy is considered. For example two countries’ youth policy can have similar “coverage”, but differ markedly in terms of capacity, competence, coordination and cost.



67 Williamson, H. in Council of Europe (2008). Compendium of Council of Europe approaches to key youth policy and youth work issues, available online at [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/PR\\_material/2012\\_Compendium\\_Youth\\_Policy\\_text\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/PR_material/2012_Compendium_Youth_Policy_text_en.pdf)

## Impact of national youth policies

Two types of impact were considered:

1. the impact of dedicated national youth policy on sectoral policies (or in crude terms, did practice change as a result of the policy?). For example, did the national youth policy lead to changes in policy and practice in domains such as education or employment?; and
2. the impact of policy changes upon young people (which included both the extent to which policies achieved their stated aims, and the wider, potentially unintentional effects of youth policies, upon, for example, young people's independence and well-being which could be positive, neutral or negative).

In relation to the influence of policy upon sectoral policy and practice, respondents to the survey of NYCs identified that practice in the following domains was most likely to have reported to have changed as a result of having a dedicated national youth policy:

- Lifelong learning and non- formal education;
- Employment and training;
- Leisure and culture;
- Participation and citizenship;
- Youth information;
- Mobility within and between countries

The impacts on young people of changes to policy in these areas were generally reported to be either very or quite positive. Examples of positive impact included:

1. Establishing an infrastructure that enables policy to be developed and implemented: "...financial and administrative support for youth initiatives and youth organizations, establishment of youth centres in regions...";
2. Tackling youth unemployment: "The strategic goals to keep Austria among the EU top-3 countries regarding youth employment rates as well as having the lowest NEET rate in the EU in 2020 have definitely inspired policy reform in the field of youth employment.."; and
3. Promoting young people's participation: " In the case of youth participation we can say that [name omitted] has had a positive impact as it has fostered youth involvement in decision-making processes and supported the development of certain mechanisms for youth participation (youth committees, Governmental Advisory Committee/Council on Youth<sup>[68]</sup>...)..."

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68 This is the body described as the 'National Youth Council' by the Government of Belarus.

A small number of examples (between one to four responses) of negative impact were also reported. Examples included:

1. The impact of policies on mobility: “[county’s name omitted] young people are one of the most ‘mobile’ of all EU but ... many of them are establishing themselves in other EU countries as they have no job opportunities in the country. So a positive policy [sic] (mobility) has quite negative impact in our society.” and
2. “Formal Education: the involvement of Third Sector, but especially young people has extremely [sic] decreased in the past few years, and some “horrible laws” have been passed in the last few years. This shows also the low impact of Youth Policies in “bigger politics”.

Practice in the following domains was least likely to be reported to have changed as a result of having a dedicated national youth policy:

**Formal Education (school, further and higher education); Child welfare; Environmental responsibility; Housing; Family policy; Juvenile justice; and Religion.**

In part this is likely to be because these domains are not part of dedicated national youth policies.

The interviews with, and survey of, NYCs, indicated that although the impact of national youth policies was generally positive, it was difficult to rigorously assess, due for example to:

- inconsistencies in implementation<sup>69</sup>;
- the time needed for policy to have an impact (meaning it was too early to evaluate impact): and
- a lack of data.

The difficulty of assessing youth policies was reinforced through the desk-based review, which also highlighted the difficulties of assessing impacts given the breadth of youth policy.

## **Strengthening national youth policies**

A range of **improvements** in policy were identified by NYCs. They included changes to **policy making processes**, such as:

- Enhancing youth participation: Involve young people in youth policy making/governance (including increasing the role of NYCs/independent youth NGOs;

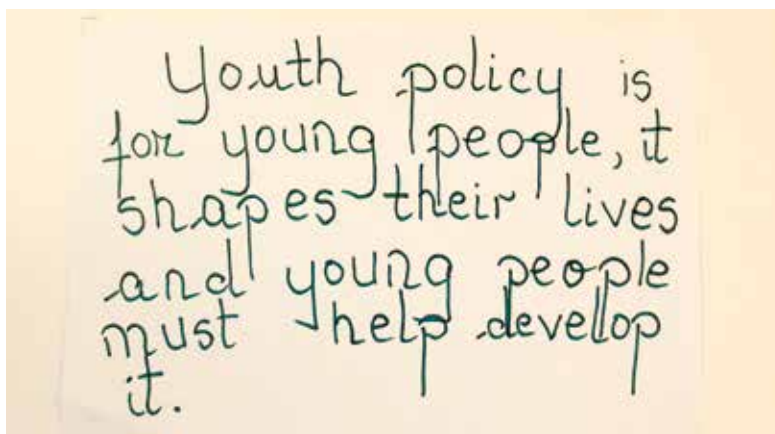
<sup>69</sup> Concerns about implementation were often raised during interviews with NYCs, with concerns about “paper policies”, “policies for show”, that had little impact on practice on the ground,



- Changes to governance: Creating a ministry of youth, increasing the power of Youth and Sports Departments in regions or mainstreaming youth policy;
- Improving implementation of policy/strategy or increasing funding of the strategy;
- Improving indicators and monitoring and evaluation;
- Focusing upon young people's needs: improve strategies (e.g. more evidence/need based), focus upon needs of individuals; more emphasis on the inclusion of marginalized groups such as disabled persons, Roma minority and immigrants; and
- Cooperation: expanding cooperation / increasing dialogue between governmental, non-governmental and private sectors.

And changes in the **focus/content** of youth policy including:

- Investing in, supporting youth organisations;
- Reforming education including: strengthening civic education in Schools and Formal Education Centres; reform formal education (e.g. change the early segregation logic of the school system); or integrate non-formal education;
- Reducing youth unemployment (e.g. through youth entrepreneurship and non formal education);
- Viewing young people as an asset not a problem;
- Empowering young people;
- Developing the youth dimension of foreign policy; and
- Improving young people's mental health.



# 6. DEVELOPING EUROPEAN STANDARDS FOR YOUTH POLICY FORMULATION, DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

As outlined in section four, there are important similarities and also significant differences in national youth policies. This creates challenges and opportunities for the “Better Strategies for Youth, Youth for Better Strategies” project’s aspiration to draft European standards for youth policy formulation, development and implementation.

## What should the standards cover?

As the “components of youth policy” outlined in section five indicate, a ‘quality’ youth strategy could be defined by factors such as its:

- **aims:** the vision and ‘mission’ of policy, and means or approaches to realising the vision, in relation to each domain;
- **“coverage”** and range: which domains and issues are included / excluded; and
- approach to the **coordination** of youth policies (e.g. should there should be dedicated youth policy or not, or more effective measures to ensure consistency and complementarity across disparate policies relevant to young people?).

As outlined in section four, effective development and implementation of a youth policy / policies also requires: **“capacity”**, **“competence”** and adequate resourcing (commensurate to **“cost”**).

Europe has offered a number of *frameworks* for youth policy but has avoided producing a blueprint or prescription. For example, the current European Union Youth Strategy, *Investing and Empowering*<sup>70</sup>, seeks to define the coverage and

<sup>70</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009DC0200&from=EN>

broad aims of youth policy, but leaves Member States to define the approaches, structure and features of national youth policy. It offers one template of what a 'quality' youth strategy would look like. Similarly, the Council of Europe has proposed a core thematic element that it is felt should be represented within youth policy: that youth should be regarded as a "resource, not a problem" and that policy should therefore be "opportunity-focused, not problem-oriented"<sup>71</sup>. This reflects both politics (a blueprint would be inconsistent with EU principles of Subsidiarity) and the difficulties of achieving consensus on issues such as gender equality and sexual orientation, particularly across the 47 member states of the Council of Europe.

## Coverage

As outlined above, there is a common core of domains that most youth policies focus upon (e.g. employment and training, leisure and culture and youth information). This could provide a basis for defining the content of a 'quality' youth strategy / policy and reflects an argument advanced by the 2001 EU white paper, a "new impetus for European youth".<sup>72</sup>

There are also domains that rarely feature in dedicated youth policy, such as juvenile justice and religion. It is not clear (from the data) if this is a weakness (i.e. they ought to be included) or indicative of a view that these domains are of less importance.

The weighting to be attached to different domains is unclear (e.g. are some more important than others and therefore ought to be priorities in youth policies/strategies?)

## Policy aim and approaches

A youth policy needs to strike a balance between a number of key objectives, which cut across each domain. They include:

- enabling young people to exercise informed choices and ensuring procedures and practices that produce those choices;
- (similarly) facilitating young people's agency while strengthening supportive conditions;
- addressing immediate concerns while also tackling future needs; and

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71 [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/CoE\\_indicators.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/CoE_indicators.pdf)

72 As the White Paper identifies: "The results of the wide-ranging consultation exercise which preceded this White Paper are clear: despite highly divergent situations, young people largely share the same values and the same ambitions, but also the same difficulties." (p.4, European Commission White Paper on Youth, 2001)

- adhering where possible to opportunity-focused measures rather than those that are problem-oriented.

Within each domain, there will be choices about how best to achieve these cross-cutting objectives, and also choices about to achieve the specific objectives of the domain (such as reducing youth unemployment, improving young people's mental and physical health and increasing their participation in decisions that affect them). Cross-sectoral coherence is also important to ensure that the policy aim and approach in one domain, does not conflict with, or undermine the policy aim and approach in another domain.

The scoping review and also some of the interviews, indicate some similarities in policy aims and approaches in some domains, particularly where there is an EU policy (e.g. around the Youth Guarantee). However, in relation to other domains, approaches towards, for example, education (cf. schooling and its curriculum), can differ markedly from country to country.

Differences in policy approach and aims are likely to reflect differences in context, such as differences in political, economic and social histories.<sup>73</sup> This means that while there are common challenges, such as youth unemployment, the scale and nature (or cause) of the challenge; the resources available to meet the challenge; and the policy discourse around solutions, all differ (cf. Austria and Greece). Countries may also face 'uncommon' challenges (e.g. the challenge facing Greece following the economic crisis), which demand specific policy responses. The differences make it difficult to define the policy approaches that ought to feature in a 'good' youth policy. It also raises questions about whether a 'good' youth policy in one context could be successfully transferred or transplanted to another context.

Ideas of convergence might suggest that youth policy is evolutionary, with policy changing as the country moved up to the next 'stage of development'. If so a 'good' policy might differ depending on a country's stage of development.

Finally, while it may not be possible to define what a 'quality' national youth policy should look like, it may be possible to define features of a 'bad' policy, such as one with a focus and emphasis on youth as a "problem" rather than "resource"; a tendency towards the regulation rather than participation of young people; and one that risks too much penetration of negative interventions into young people's lives, with insufficient reach of positive opportunities into the lives of young people who are most at risk and marginalised.

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<sup>73</sup> The data from the review does not address this question.

## Developing constructive, coherent and coordinated youth policies

Evidence of the importance of having a dedicated national youth policy is mixed. For example, it may provide coherence<sup>74</sup>; it can mean that areas of youth policy like youth information or participation and citizenship are covered by policy (as these are often not a feature of other social policies); and it can provide focus for a NYC's policy engagement. Equally, implementation of policies is often considered weak; a dedicated policy may create myopia on the part of NYCs, who focus upon the youth policy, rather than sectoral policies<sup>75</sup>; and some NYCs, report that the structure and strength of social policies in general mean a dedicated youth policy is not needed.

The evidence therefore suggests that structure (and choice to have a dedicated youth policy or coordinated sectoral youth policies) is therefore less important than its implementation, and the ways by which coherence across different domains / sectors is ensured.



<sup>74</sup> There are for example risk of fragmentation, where there is no overarching policy (cf. Greece)

<sup>75</sup> E.g. Dedicated national policies provide a focus for engagement, but may sideline attention to / engagement with other areas of youth policy.

# 7. CONCLUSIONS

## European youth policies

There are **key similarities in national youth policies** that may provide a basis for developing European wide standards. For example, most European countries have some form of **dedicated national youth policy**. This typically includes domains such as employment and training, leisure and culture and youth information, but typically does not cover domains such as family policy, juvenile justice or religion.

However, there are also important differences between national youth policies and the evidence indicates that a **dedicated youth policy is not required to ensure coherence across youth policies**. Differences in policy approach and aims are likely to reflect differences in context, such as differences in political, economic and social histories. These differences mean that the scope to successfully ‘transplant’ an effective youth policy from one country (e.g. Norway) to another (e.g. Greece) is likely to fail. Nevertheless, at a regional level, there may be more scope for policy ‘borrowing’ (given the greater similarities in context).

## The impact of youth policies

The impact of youth policies is perceived to be generally (but not uniformly) positive. Nevertheless, almost all NYCs identify ways in which youth policy making processes and to a lesser degree, the content of youth policies, could be improved. Improving young people’s participation (including the role of NYCs) was the most frequently identified example of this.

## National Youth Councils’ influence over youth policies

Most NYCs identified ways in which their **involvement in youth policy making could be strengthened**. This included formalising their role in the policy making processes and strengthening their capacity to articulate young people’s voice in the policy making process (e.g. through carefully focused capacity building).

This review makes it clear that policy making is a **complicated process** and there is no ‘magic wand’ that ensures NYCs have influence. The models and approaches NYC adopt differ and their influence over policy depends upon a range of factors (discussed below), which NYCs have varying degrees of control over. Influence

demands perseverance, patience<sup>76</sup>, pragmatism, professionalism and political 'nous' (understanding, intelligence) on the part of NYCs.

**Context** matters (and **changes**<sup>77</sup>): NYCs need to position (and reposition) themselves depending on their 'reading' of the policy (and political) 'landscape' (they need to be 'agile' and responsive); 'what works' in influencing policy is invariably contingent on context and NYCs need to be prepared to change position and approach. **Timing** also matters: "windows of opportunity" open (and close) in the policy making cycle. NYCs can find themselves at the 'right place at the right time', through luck and/or judgment/positioning, and need to seize the moment.

The range of factors that determine influence, and changes in the context, means NYCs **influence often ebbs and flows**. Access to policy making process is important, but depends upon the 'grace' (or good will) of policy makers and this can be easily withdrawn – or granted when it suits policy makers and shapers political purposes. Although there are examples (such as Finland and Luxembourg) where NYCs have been able to sustain their influence over 10-15 years, this reflects, to a large degree, the stability of the political situation and a broad-based and shared commitment to the youth agenda (rather than just the efforts of the NYCs).

**Access** is important (getting a 'seat at the table') – but does not guarantee **influence** (or that NYCs 'participation' will be meaningful) and there are dangers of getting 'too close' to policy makers (e.g. civil servants) and policy 'shapers' (e.g. politicians and the civil servants accountable to them).

**Relationships** matter (and NYCs need to cultivate relationships with people they may dislike/disagree with) but, the policy makers and shapers NYCs have relationships with can change– and key people in NYCs, who have the relationships with policy makers/shapers, also move on (so NYCs have to start building relationships all over again). NYCs also need to be **generous**, to let others take up and use their ideas, without claiming the credit. The purpose is to influence policy – not to increase the NYCs status.

The influence/power of **intermediaries** (the person/people NYCs have access to) matters (e.g. do the intermediaries NYC work with have influence/'clout' over youth policy?)<sup>78</sup>. Youth policy is often marginalised or forced to adapt against the will of those in the youth field by 'bigger' political and policy imperatives, pressures and concerns – from international events and shifts in governmental priorities or capability, to party political decisions and career moves by individuals with political clout. Equally, in some cases, these changes can help push youth policy and NYCs to the centre.

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76 E.g. it take time to build relationships, policy ideas may be taken up quickly, or may take years to germinate, contexts change, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse.

77 Change is likely and can make influence easier or harder (cf. 'shifting (policy) sands')

78 For example: a Ministry of youth may have little influence over other government ministries which shape policies for young people. The national/regional/local structure of policy making (and implementation) may also be important here.

The **quality** of policy ideas matters: ‘good’ policy ideas (e.g. ideas that are useful, timely, accessible, politically feasible), which are effectively presented<sup>79</sup>, are more likely to be taken up, but quality is no guarantee that they will be taken up. For example, policy ideas have to fit – or to be seen to fit<sup>80</sup> - within prevailing policy and political discourses and the ‘framing’ of ideas is therefore important.

NYCs **credibility** also matters (e.g. is the NYC seen as having expertise? Is it seen as representative?) and is likely to influence access and the ‘reception’ policy ideas get.

**Mutuality** matters: policy makers should get something out of NYCs engagement/ policy ideas. Policy makers’ openness to policy ideas depends upon a range of issues (e.g. timing in the policy cycle, political pressures, their own capacity to generate policy, prevailing political/policy discourses).

**Politics** matter. Political alignment (e.g. with the ruling party) can increase access but risks exposing NYCs if the political wind changes (and e.g. the ruling party loses). NYCs independence from government (and therefore their autonomy) also differs.

The review concludes that NYCs have **no right to influence**<sup>81</sup>, it has to be earned (which includes NYCs willingness to engage): NYCs need to ‘keep their powder dry’, choose their moments to be critical, strike the right balance between being positive or constructive and critical. The balance between being constructive and critical is likely to depend upon context<sup>82</sup> and access. Where for example an NYC has no access, it may be forced to be critical, although that risks entrenching isolation/exclusion from the process.

Moreover, in assessing influence, it is important to remember that NYCs have **no monopoly on the truth**: democratic debate involves competing ideas, and young people themselves often have differing and competing views (making it difficult to represent the views of all young people). NYCs may therefore seek to be more equal partners (e.g. reaching levels 5 or 6 of Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation), but should not seek control of the policy making process.

Equally (and more positively) there are many examples where NYCs are confident that they have exerted influence over policy (although the lack of hard evidence makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions). There is therefore **great potential for NYCs to reflect upon their own practice and to learn from other NYCs experiences**, in order to enhance their access to, and influence over, policy making processes.

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79 Charisma can be important in both building relationships and presenting ideas.

80 Presentation of ideas can be crucial here in determining how policy ideas are received.

81 NYCs may have a formal right to be consulted - but access is not synonymous with influence.

82 Potential to map against welfare or political regime type. E.g. where a more consensual policy making process (e.g. Scandinavia), NYCs may choose to be consensual.



Appendix 1. Profile of countries included in the desk-based scoping review

Country	Welfare type	Youth policy	EU status (all Council of Europe)
<b>Norway</b>	Nordic welfare regime; Oil rich	generous positive youth policy	Non-member but EEA
<b>UK</b>	laissez-faire welfare regime	mixed and often negative youth policy	Member 40 Years
<b>Belgium</b>	complicated, corporatist & separatist regime(s)	different youth policies in different Communities	original member (60 years)
<b>Estonia</b>	post- socialist	positive youth policy	Member 10 years
<b>Slovakia</b>	post-socialist	embryonic EU-modelled youth policy	Member 10 years
<b>Serbia</b>	post-Communist	strong policy, but moderately weak implementation / practice	Candidate (2012)
<b>Greece</b>	Austerity	out migrating youth, stagnating youth policy, complete lack of vision	Member 35 years
<b>Albania</b>	Post communist	Significant economic challenges; dynamic youth policy aspirations	Candidate (2014)
<b>Portugal</b>	Austerity	out migrating youth, imaginative youth policy commitment	Member 30 years
<b>Denmark</b>	buoyant economy	Lack of distinctive 'youth policy' but positive policy environment for young people	Member 40 years

# 8. RECOMMENDATIONS: A WAY FORWARD TOWARDS BETTER YOUTH STRATEGIES

## Introduction

The Erasmus+ **“Better Strategies For Youth, Youth For Better Strategies”** project involves a partnership between eight organisations<sup>83</sup>. It focuses upon three key areas:

- the content of national youth policies;
- national youth policy making processes; and
- the role/contribution of national youth councils (NYCs) to national youth policies and opportunities to strengthen their role.

The project was also informed by the work of the Expert Group on Youth Policy of the European Youth Forum, and reference is made in this paper to its eight quality standards for youth policy (presented in italics).

## National youth policies

Youth policies should enable and empower young people to participate in all areas of life (including the political, economic, social, recreational and cultural). This is a key part of the *Rights based approach to youth policy* standard. Young people will often benefit from support to enable them to participate. This can include for example, providing places and associational spaces for young people to meet and to enhance their skills and knowledge through evidence-based practices.

To help empower young people, youth policies need to be opportunity-focused rather than problem-oriented, thereby promoting ‘positive rights’ and emphasising young people’s agency and their role in co-production/co-management. This can help young people themselves overcome barriers and tackle challenges and strengthen their resilience (their ability to cope with adversity).

Youth policies should be inclusive. They need to reach out and engage and support all young people (including groups that are marginalised or discriminated

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<sup>83</sup> Mreža mladih Hrvatske, Österreichische Kinder und Jugendvertretung Verein, National Youth Forum Bulgaria, Cyprus Youth Council, People and Work Unit, Federatia Consiliul Tineretului din Romania, Mladinski Svet Slovenije, Forum Nazionale Dei Giovani Associazione

against) and ensure (as far as possible) that they ‘do no harm’, and do not, for example, further disadvantage certain groups. This is a key part of the *Rights based approach to youth policy* standard.

There is no ‘one size fits all’ youth policy. Young people across Europe may face many shared challenges and have many shared interests, but for example, the resources they can draw upon, such as their human and social capital, and their aspirations differ. Similarly, while there are commonalities in the policy making context, particularly at regional level, there are also differences across Europe. Therefore, youth policies inevitably and rightly differ. However, not all youth policies are equal. The quality of youth policy making processes varies, in part due to differences in context (such as differences in resources and political commitment). As a consequence, some countries have favourable contexts for young people, but poor youth policies, whilst young people in other countries face challenging contexts, but benefit from effective policies.

Although national strategic and programme documents in the youth field differ, there is much scope for countries to reflect upon other countries’ approaches and how they might be adapted to different political, social and cultural contexts.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that policies for young people are expressed in both ‘youth’ and ‘sectoral’ policies and strategies, in areas such as education, training, employment, health, housing and justice. Some countries place more focus upon overarching youth policies than others. The research for this project concludes that the presentation of youth policies (in an overarching strategy and/or across sectoral policies) is less important than the quality of the policy making processes (which is discussed below) and highlights the need for both youth policies and NYCs to work cross-sectorally.

## **National youth policy making processes**

A good process is likely to improve policy, but in some cases government and NYCs have focused too much upon the output (e.g. the content of national strategic and programme documents) and too little upon getting the policy process right.

The classic policy making cycle with its four key stages (agenda and objective setting; exploration and policy formulation; implementation; and feedback) is well established in research<sup>84</sup>. This is a key part of a *Strategic youth policy* standard, and although policy processes often fall short of this in practice, the cycle provides a valuable benchmark.

The ‘characteristics’ of a good policy making process are also well established<sup>85</sup>

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84 Turner, M & Hulme, D. (1997) *Governance, administration and development: making the state work*, London: Macmillan

85 The “characteristics” are adapted from Rabey, T. 2015, *Connection, Coherence and Capacity: Policy Making in Smaller*

and are reflected in the *Strategic youth policy* standard. They include, for example:

- **a focus on outcomes or objectives and an inter-governmental approach**, to encompass both the different domains that make up youth policy and also to ensure coherence across them (an integral part of the *Cross-sectoral co-ordination* standard);
- **openness, transparency, collaboration and inclusivity** (including for example, young people and their representative bodies such as NYCs, and public, private and third sectors), which is an integral part of the *Participatory youth policy* standard);
- **effective management of the process**, including clarity about roles, responsibilities and accountability (an integral part of the *Political commitment and accountability in youth policy* standard);
- **simplicity (or economy) of design** (doing no more than is required, to minimise the resources required and administrative or regulatory burdens imposed upon others by a policy);
- **an evidence based approach to decision making** (in line with *Evidence-based youth policy* standard), that seeks to be fair and objective, but that is also imaginative, responsive, reflexive (e.g. informed by past experience) and ultimately deliverable (e.g. practical) – a key part of the *Availability of resources for youth policy* standard; and
- **political and professional competence**, drive and commitment to the process (including implementation), which is an integral part of the *Political commitment and accountability in youth policy* standard.

There is nothing fundamentally different about youth policy processes, compared to processes for other policy areas/sectors, and a good process should follow this model and characteristics. There may however, be greater challenges with, for example, ensuring that youth policy is ‘cross-sectoral’, given the potential breadth and depth of the landscape of youth policy (Williamson 2002; 2008<sup>86</sup>) and inclusive (ensuring full stakeholder participation, including that of young people).

Although the model and characteristics of a good policy process are well understood, they can be difficult to implement in practice (and practice is often more complex than the model suggests). For example:

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Countries <http://ppi.w.org.uk/william-plowden-fellowship-report-publication-connection-coherence-and-capacity-policy-making-in-smaller-countries-2/> and Williamson, H. (2002), Supporting young people in Europe: principles policy and practice [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/IG\\_Coop/YP\\_Supporting\\_young\\_people\\_Vol\\_I\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/IG_Coop/YP_Supporting_young_people_Vol_I_en.pdf)  
86 Ibid; Williamson, H. (2008), Supporting young people in Europe (vol. 2), [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/IG\\_Coop/YP\\_Supporting\\_young\\_people\\_Vol\\_II\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/IG_Coop/YP_Supporting_young_people_Vol_II_en.pdf)

- change, pressure and uncertainty in the political, administrative and economic (budgetary) climate of most countries can complicate and upset the process; and
- decisions about priorities and the allocation of scarce resources are vital, but are often not easily resolved, even when the policy process is well designed and implemented.

Increases in opportunities, risks and the pace of change (as classically depicted by Ulrich Beck in his seminal text *Risk Society*<sup>87</sup>) mean that youth policies need to be responsive, but also measured (to avoid rushed, ill thought through reactions). Some changes, risks and opportunities will be very localised, others will be international. This emphasises the need for subsidiarity (making policy at the most appropriate level), an integral part of the *Multi-level youth policy* standard, and can create new responsibilities for development and implementation.

Change reinforces the need for youth policies to be dynamic, to keep up with, and to try to forecast, and get ahead of, changes in young people's lives, through youth participation, youth research and evaluation/review of policies, including the development and use of indicators of impact (integral parts of the *Evidence-based youth policy* standard). However, it also poses challenges to the traditional policy making cycles (which can be slow and bureaucratic); evidence can challenge prevailing politics and existing policy priorities; and weighing the relative merits of different, sometimes competing, forms of 'evidence' is, itself, often a difficult and lengthy process.

## **The role/contribution of NYCs and opportunities to strengthen their role**

Young people's participation in policy making at all levels (local to national) and each stage of the cycle is important as both a means to improve policy and a goal (or end in itself) and is an integral part of the *Participatory youth policy* standard. This can include both physical ('face to face') and 'virtual' participation (e.g. through online technology) and established mechanisms such as 'structured dialogue' and 'youth check', alongside more innovative approaches, are likely to be important here. There is also a need to involve more young people who are not part of existing structures. This could include supporting the development of forums and networks to enable them to discuss and share their experiences at a local level, promoting 'bottom-up' approaches to supporting young people's participation.

NYCs have a key role to play in representing the voice of organised youth in each stage of the policy making cycle, but their role varies from country to country. This reflects a range of factors including:

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<sup>87</sup> Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society, Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage Publications.

- The strategies and choices NYCs make about, for example, the balance between collaboration and criticism/conflict (or opposition) with policy makers and acting as advocate for young people and/or an expert about young people;
- ‘Demand’ from policy makers for NYCs’ contribution (e.g. do they value or need NYCs contribution?) and NYCs’ capacity or ‘offer’ to policy makers (given e.g. their human, social and reputational capital);
- The partnerships NYCs forge with other stakeholders, such as the media, which can provide complementary channels of influence; and
- The different models of access and involvement available to NYCs, reflecting factors like the openness of political cultures and NYCs’ legal status in different countries.

As these factors change over time (e.g. as government changes, ‘demand’ for NYC’s contribution may change), NYCs influence also tends to change (or ‘ebb and flow’<sup>88</sup>). These factors are discussed in more detail in the research paper, *Key issues in developing and implementing youth policy strategic documents*.

Given differences in context and resources, just as there is no single youth policy model, there is no single model for NYCs – and no simple way of ensuring that NYCs have a place in policy making pathways or influence within them. Like youth policies, NYCs need to be flexible and responsive and NYCs will often have to ‘fight’ to have their role recognised and valued. They will often need to use multiple models of engagement, working cross-sectorally and at different levels and they may need to build their capacities in policy areas, such as in employment and economic issues, where they have not traditionally engaged in.

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88 Or rise and fall, like the tide.

## Recommendations

There needs to be as much attention focused upon developing youth policy making processes (including implementation) as there is upon shaping the content of youth policies. This applies to both NYCs and government. This should include for example:

***Enhancing young people's participation through existing structures (like NYCs) and processes (like structured dialogue) and new, more innovative approaches (including the use of digital technology);***

***Prioritisation, in terms of both focus and resources (to ensure policy is both effectively targeted and is deliverable). For example, it may be better to focus upon achieving a few important objectives in a given implementation period, rather than developing an overly-ambitious overarching and "neat" strategy that goes far beyond the capacity of implementing bodies. Naturally, defining these strategic objectives should include broad youth participation that should ideally extend to phases of monitoring and evaluation.***

***Enhancing accountability and evaluation, through a greater focus upon evaluating the impact of youth policies. This may include a greater focus upon measureable outcomes, but care is needed, as for example, the focus may shift to what is easily measureable, rather than what is important to and for young people; and***

***Strengthening cross-sectoral coordination and coherence (given the breadth of youth policies).***



# RESOLUTION ON QUALITY STANDARDS ON YOUTH POLICY

COUNCIL OF MEMBERS  
/ EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, 15-16 APRIL 2016

The European Youth Forum understands youth policy as the set of policy measures aimed at supporting the development of young people in achieving their full potential. It covers different policy areas and involves a wide array of stakeholders, both institutional and non-institutional. The European Youth Forum believes in positive youth policy, which is based on the premise that every young person has its own competences and talents. Furthermore, the European Youth Forum values a positive approach to youth policy that approaches young people not as a problem group, but as rights-holders.

The European Youth Forum proposes a set of quality standards for youth policy. The aim is to reach a common understanding within the member organisations of how quality youth policy should look. These standards offer a quality framework to measure the development of policies to support young people. The standards should be a guide to assess and monitor the state of youth policy, while adapting to different contexts (local, national, European) and be used by different organisations. Moreover, it will serve as a reference to base future advocacy work of youth organisations on youth policy, both at national and at European level.

The quality standards focus on the process of youth policy development (creation, implementation and evaluation). They do not aim to set standards for specific policy areas, but should be applicable at all cases of youth policy development as principles without which policies should not be developed or put in place. Therefore, setting process-oriented standards is a first important step to take.



The importance of defining the quality standards of youth policy was articulated through the 2015 - 2016 Work Plan of the Youth Forum. Based on the knowledge of the Youth

Policy expert group, and additional input from the member organisations, the Youth Forum proposes a set of eight quality standards, as outlined in this resolution.

## **Eight quality standards for youth policy**

Youth Policy should be based on the following eight quality standards:

- **Rights-based approach to youth policy**

Youth policy should be based on the standards set out by the international human rights framework and follow the principles of equality and non-discrimination. A rights-based approach<sup>89</sup> to youth policy urges policymakers to work towards the long-term fulfillment of youth rights, including the right to participate in defining those rights, and empowers young people by defining them as rights-holders.

- **Evidence-based youth policy**

An evidence-based youth policy means that all stages of youth policy development use and are based on reliable, relevant, independent and up to date data and research, in order for youth policy to reflect the needs and realities of young people.

- **Participatory youth policy**

Participatory youth policy involves all stakeholders, at all stages of the policy cycle, from creation and implementation to evaluation. Stakeholders are youth organisations, young people, and all other organisations as well as individuals who are influencing and/or are being influenced by the policy. Particular attention is paid to participation of vulnerable and marginalised groups among all stakeholders. Mechanisms to ensure that the policy development, implementation and evaluation are participative must be ensured and made transparent.

- **Multi-level youth policy**

Multi-level youth policy means that it is developed, implemented, and evaluated in a coordinated manner between all relevant public authorities from local, regional, national and European levels. The principle of subsidiarity is respected – policies is put in place at the level most effective and closest to people.

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<sup>89</sup> European Youth Forum, 2014. A European Youth Forum definition of rights-based approach.

- **Strategic youth policy**

Strategic youth policy is based on an overarching strategy or a legal framework built around a long-term vision and consisting of a set of measurable, resourced and timed objectives, identified target groups and a clear division of responsibilities amongst the different public authorities for its implementation and evaluation.

- **Availability of resources for youth policy**

Sufficient resources, both in terms of funding and human resources are available for youth organisations, youth work providers as well as public authorities to develop, implement and evaluate quality youth policy. Supportive measures, from training schemes to funding programmes, are made available to ensure the capacity building of the actors and structures of youth policy on all levels.

- **Political commitment and accountability in youth policy**

Political commitment and accountability means that decision makers are taking the appropriate measures to implement youth policy in a transparent way and ensure reporting on their actions in an objective way. Youth organisations and young people are active part of the policy cycle and decision makers are held accountable for their actions.

- **Cross-sectoral coordination**

Cross-sectoral youth policy implies there is coordination among different ministries, departments and public bodies responsible for and working on issues affecting young people, jointly working on the creation, implementation and evaluation of youth policy.

## Conclusion

The Council of Members delegates the Youth Forum Board, based on a proposal by the Expert Group, to develop and approve measurable and comparable indicators for each of the standards, complementing and completing the framework and allowing for a thorough assessment of youth policies.









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