



ERYICA SUBMISSION

TO EUROPEAN COMMISSION CONSULTATION

WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

IN PREPARATION OF

WHITE PAPER ON

YOUTH POLICY IN EUROPE

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1. Introduction

The European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), representing its national partners and co-operating organisations in 35 European countries (including all the Member States of the European Union), welcomes this opportunity to contribute, in its field of competence, to the consultation on youth policy issues which will result in the White Paper on Youth Policy in Europe to be published by the European Commission in the second half of 2001. ERYICA strongly supports the demand, often formulated during the national White Paper consultations, that this process of consultation on youth policy issues, with the participation of young people, youth organisations and youth-serving structures, be repeated and developed in a structured and representative fashion, at national and European levels.

ERYICA, of course, recognises that a youth policy in Europe, developed within the European Union framework, formally can only apply to the Member States of the Union. At the same time, the same issues of youth policy concern the young people and governments of countries which are candidates to become members of the Union. ERYICA considers therefore that, in the field of youth policy, the European Commission should find ways of associating these countries in the debates and activities which will follow the publication of the White Paper, possibly through a close collaboration with the Council of Europe. If it is not already the case, ERYICA hopes that the Council of Europe itself, with its long experience of European youth work, with its on-going project which reviews and evaluates national youth policies, and with the unique co-management system of its Youth Sector, will be invited to contribute to the elaboration of the White Paper.

The fact that a White Paper on Youth Policy in Europe is being prepared is in itself a recognition that the European Union at present does not have a comprehensive and coherent youth policy, even if in various sectors (notably Education and Training) substantial policies and programmes aimed at young people have been developed in recent years. Likewise, it can be said that, although there has been progress in some Member States of the Union, the majority do not have a national youth policy which “*is by definition a horizontal policy where coherent and co-ordinated efforts across different policy and administrative sectors are ensured through integrated actions*” (CES 1418/2000, para.2.4), and where monitoring bodies regularly review the impact of measures taken against the objectives previously set. ERYICA considers that one of the highest priorities of an eventual youth policy in Europe must be to assist Member States (and candidate countries) in the elaboration of national youth policies in the sense mentioned above. In other terms, it makes little sense to elaborate a European youth policy, which is not a complementary expression of existing substantive national youth policies. ERYICA therefore fully supports the “General Recommendations” contained in the own-initiative Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the White Paper (CES 1418/2000, page 15), and in particular:

- a) the need for two distinct agendas “*for the Education and Youth Affairs Council, one for the Education Ministers and one for the Youth Ministers*” (ibid.; para. 7.1.2)
- b) the need for “*Youth Ministers (to) undertake a regular review of the progress made in youth policy*” in the framework of the Education and Youth Affairs Council (idem.)
- c) the proposal that the “*European Commission (should) submit an annual report on the progress in youth policy to the Spring European Council*” (ibid.; para. 7.1.3).

1. Introduction (continued)

Informing young people in response to the questions and needs which they themselves express is the *raison d'être* of the more than 7,000 youth information and counselling structures which make up the 30 national networks which co-operate in the ERYICA partnership. This submission will therefore focus on needs and measures in the field of youth information and counselling; examples of good practice from different countries will be communicated to the European Commission in annexes to the present submission.

2. Participation of Young People in Society

2.1 Policy Statement / Definition of Needs

As stated in the report of the national White Paper consultation in Germany, "*information is the precondition of participation*" (Summary Report of National Youth Consultations, second version; page 46). If one does not know about possibilities, services, opportunities aimed at young people (at whatever level: local, regional, national, European, global), one cannot use them. If one does not know one's rights and responsibilities as a citizen, student, consumer, driver, employee or unemployed person, one cannot exercise them. In the school, in the work-place, in the family, or whenever an issue relating to one's health and sexuality, diet, choice of career, social benefits or leisure activities, the better informed you and your friends are, the better your chances are of realising your aspirations and of making informed choices. The "*demand for more and better information*" was summarised in the same Summary Report in the following terms:

"A prominent transversal topic that appeared in all meetings and in most workshops was the need for information. Many young people feel that they are lacking the information which they vitally need for their well-being; for being able to make the decisions that society obliges them to make; for active participation; or for moving around Europe." (ibid. page 32)

All this may seem self-evident but the repeated calls for more and better information on all topics which came from the national consultations indicate that there is a need that is not being adequately met at present. And one may well ask if enough is being done, at all levels in our increasingly complex societies, to ensure that young people, and especially those who are at risk or face specific difficulties, have access to professional information services which operate in a way that maximises the options of young people, and lets them make their own choices and exercise a growing autonomy in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, from educational establishments to the work-place. Young people with a good set of educational qualifications will always find the information they need, but is enough being done to guarantee the right of equal access to information for young people coming from ethnic or cultural minorities, for marginal and underprivileged young people?

The fact that the number of "generalist" youth information services (those dealing in a single service with all the issues and questions that young people raise) throughout Europe has grown over the last 15 years from less than 500 to more than 7,000, with a focus on bringing the information closer to where the young people are, is an indication both of the need for this sector of youth work, and of the recognition of its importance, by the public authorities who finance it.

2. Participation of Young People in Society (continued)

2.1 Policy Statement / Definition of Needs (continued)

If the need for information exists at the local and national level, where in most European countries a range of youth-related services (official and non-official) have been in place already for many years, it exists even more clearly at the European level, where there are only the beginnings of trans-national information services and where the multiplicity of languages constitutes a major obstacle.

This need for information at the European level has been stated very clearly in the national White Paper consultations. With important variations between countries, the European Union has very real difficulties to deliver to the young people who might be interested to participate in its youth programmes the information that they need in order to do so. More importantly, because it concerns a far larger number of young people than the those who participate in European Union youth programmes (which often are group activities, rather than opportunities for the individual), it is far from easy for a young person to access the precise information about possibilities in other countries, about their administrative systems for residence, social security, studying or employment, which s/he needs to make Europe a part of her/his daily life.

The European Union, therefore, should give priority to developing adequate responses to the recognised need for more and better information, in order to reach a much wider public of young people and persons working with and for young people.

2.2 Measures to be Taken

2.2.1 > evaluate what exists at the European level

An important starting-point in deciding what measures should be taken to improve the content and accessibility of information at the European level would seem to be an evaluation of the capacity of the existing public information networks established by the European Union to deliver relevant information to identified target-groups in the youth sector. ERYICA understands that the Directorate-General for Education and Culture is currently evaluating the public information networks which are under its responsibility, and hopes that the activities of these networks aimed at young people and their organisations will be reviewed in depth, with a view to developing a clear information strategy aimed at young people.

2.2.2 > review the information activities of the National Agencies

Given that a key area of information at the European level is the possibilities offered to young people by the youth programmes of the European Union, and that the National Agencies for the Youth Programme have a primary responsibility for promoting these programmes, it would appear important to evaluate the effectiveness of their information activities in recent years. Particular attention should be paid to the channels which they use to reach different target-groups in the youth sector (young people directly, youth organisations, and persons working with/for young people). Examples of good practice and effective methods should be circulated on a regular basis.

2. Participation of Young People in Society (continued)

2.2 Measures to be Taken (continued)

2.2.3 > information must be relevant and understandable

Much more information must be available about opportunities for youth participation in all fields, and about ways of obtaining support for projects (often small and practical) created by young people themselves. It should include examples of good and innovative practice, and of real experiences related by young people. To be effective, where possible, the information should be delivered by structures which are close to young people, and by young people themselves (peer information in schools, for example). It is also essential that information be presented in different and attractive forms, in a language style understandable by young people (including in different languages in places where there are immigrant or ethnic minorities). Many young people are not at ease with written documentation, so it is important also to have audio-visual materials, and to organise occasions when young people can tell other young people about projects in which they have been involved.

2.2.4 > procedures for participation must be simple and flexible

Among the most frequent criticisms of youth programmes at the European level, especially the European Union programmes, are the complexity, slowness and opaqueness of the procedures both for participating and especially for obtaining financial support. The complexity of the application forms and report forms can be accepted in the case of large projects, demanding a high level of resources. But if the European Union wants to encourage and assist small projects at the local level in a way which is not only accessible to the initiated few, it must introduce simple and flexible procedures, and delegate management functions to competent local bodies which are not remote from the young people or youth groups involved in the projects.

2.2.5 > develop the European dimension of existing information services

European youth programmes, and new measures directed at young people at the national level, do not take place in a vacuum. It is essential that information about them makes the maximum use of existing information services and channels and that, at the European level, more resources are provided to develop the European dimension of the work of these services, which in some cases already goes beyond the European Union.

2.2.6 > support training and quality criteria for information work

In recent years, there have been considerable advances in the professional quality of youth information work in many European countries. The training of youth information workers is a priority area of ERYICA's work, and a number of countries have established standards for youth information centres, on the basis of which they receive recognition and support from central or local government. While avoiding unnecessary uniformity and respecting the principle of subsidiarity, the European Union should promote and support training activities and quality measures in the field of youth information.

3. Employment and Social Integration (social inclusion and social protection)

3.1 Policy Statement / Definition of Needs

In a number of European countries, the traditional careers guidance systems are no longer considered effective in helping young people make their vocational choices, and are being radically reformed (eg. the new Connexions service in the United Kingdom). It is clear that any effective approach must be client-centred, must start from the aspirations, skills, experience and needs of the young person, and arrive at a solution to which s/he subscribes. Consequently there should be real participation of clients and other young people in the design and evaluation of the services established. In this process, the experience of youth service structures and youth information centres, which often pick up the young person who falls through the net of other services, should be taken into account.

In countries where there are high levels of unemployment, much more creativity must be employed in designing programmes and activities for young unemployed persons in the local community, such as non-formal educational activities which can give them skills that will be of use to them later, and help them find their place in the labour market.

In the area of social integration, the situations of young people are very varied both according to the country and culture in which they live, and within countries (rural / urban, mainstream / marginalised-alienated, male / female, etc.). There may be a certain number of common needs, but the situation of each young person needs to be analysed in its specificity, and responded to accordingly. Sometimes, particular problems may occur in certain localities concerning, for example, immigration (or emigration), or a lack of housing or other facilities for young; in such cases, specific measures and services must be introduced to meet the identified need, in concertation with other relevant youth services.

3.2 Measures to be Taken

3.2.1 > listen to the needs of young people

Experience of youth information work (over more than 30 years in some countries) has clearly shown that only if the information staff really listen to the young users and the needs that they express, can the service respond to those needs in an adequate way. This entails having the skills needed to listen and to identify the real need which may not be presented in the first question posed by the young user who is meeting the youth information worker for the first time. It also means a constant evolution of the information and documentation provided to the public, in order to meet new needs and to respond to new users. The same skills can also be applied to the identification and preparation of measures and policies to meet the needs of young people.

3. Employment and Social Integration (continued)

3.2 Measures to be Taken (continued)

3.2.2 > information is not enough

Very often “informing” young people is not just a matter of supplying the address of a requested organisation or service. It can go much further, in the sense of **advising** (in a non-directive way), of **dialoguing** to clarify what the user wants, of **accompanying** the user (in completing a curriculum vitae or a funding application for a project), or of **counselling** when there is a family problem or crisis situation (or **referral** to a competent service, when the youth information centre is not qualified to handle the matter). Many youth information services are deliberately organised to meet the needs of different users: to permit those who wish to do so to consult information files or the Internet without any help from the staff, to have the time to dialogue with the user who is not too sure or clear about what s/he wants, and to counsel those who require attention to more complicated problems.

3.2.3 > specific services to meet specific needs

To give an example, in some major cities to which young people are attracted in their search for employment or for other reasons, the lack of housing at prices which they can afford causes real problems. A youth information centre, or the local authority, will seek to respond to this need by establishing a specialised service, making it easier for the user to know what is available.

4. Education (formal, non-formal, informal and life-long learning)

4.1 Policy Statement / Definition of Needs

In this area, ERYICA would first underline the importance of the non-formal education opportunities which are provided by youth organisations and youth services, especially for young persons who have not thrived in the formal educational structures. Ways should be found to give recognition to forms of non-formal education which provide young people with skills which can help them in their search for employment.

The increasing importance of computers and communication technologies such as the Internet offer new possibilities and new challenges for young people, but they are far from being the panacea that many people would suggest, even as sources of information, or as educational tools. First, unless adequate steps are taken by governments, there is a real risk that unequal access to these technologies will create new social inequalities (or accentuate existing ones) among young people. Second, even if many young people know how to use these technologies for games, music and video, they often need help to learn how to use them to search for information, and to know how to evaluate the quality of the information they find. Third, when young people look for information which is more than an address, the computer will in no way remove the need for dialogue with an information worker that often accompanies the information request. Finally, youth services rarely have the means to pay the cost of equipment and Internet connections that an adequate service in this area would require.

4. Education (formal, non-formal, informal and life-long learning) (continued)

4.2 Measures to be Taken

4.2.1 > formal recognition of the skills obtained through non-formal education

Through their activities as participants or as leaders of youth groups and youth organisations, or in other programmes organised by youth services or youth-serving bodies, many young people acquire a range of skills which can be of great use to them in later life, and which can also be desirable in the eyes of future employers. At the present time, although the question is being studied in some countries, these skills are not identified, formally assessed or recognised so that they can count in the search for employment. The European Union should initiate research on how such non-formal education could be recognised.

4.2.2 > support access to new technologies in non-formal education organisations

In the context of national and European programmes designed to develop computer and Internet literacy among young people, more attention should be paid to providing youth information centres and other bodies offering non-formal education to young people with the means to obtain and use information and communication technologies. In particular, when they organise services providing free-of-charge access to these technologies for their users, they should receive assistance to meet the costs both of equipment and of Internet connections.

4.2.3 > support training in the use of computers and Internet

Among other areas of training for youth information workers and youth workers (see 2.2.6 above), their training in the use of computers (for data management and desktop publishing, for example) and of Internet (searching for information, Web-site management, and networking) is necessary if certain areas of their activities are not to be taken over by commercial interests which do not respect the same principles of public service.

4.2.4 See also the **measures** proposed under 3.2) above, and the **first paragraph** of 3.1).

5. Health and Well-being, Personal Independence and Youth Culture

5.1 Policy Statement / Definition of Needs

Helping young people to exercise their personal autonomy is one of the primary aims of youth information work that is carried out in accordance with the European Youth Information Charter (adopted by ERYICA members in 1993). Providing information and documentation on all the topics which are of concern and interest to young people in an as objective way as possible, offering the widest range of choices and solutions, adding advice when appropriate in a non-directive manner, so that users can make their own decisions, these are the daily tasks of a youth information worker. The experience acquired in many countries over the years in this field clearly demonstrates that this kind of service responds to the needs of many young people at the time of their transition from adolescent dependence to autonomous adulthood, when they are faced with many key decisions and choices to make.

5. Health and Well-being, Personal Independence and Youth Culture

5.2 Measures to be Taken

5.2.1 > exchange good practice in informing about health and other issues

Experience has shown in many countries that it is far from easy to influence the behaviour of young people in a number of health areas (smoking, abuse of alcohol and other drugs, Aids prevention, road safety) where the information campaigns often emanate from official bodies. In view of the immense personal and societal costs resulting from these “epidemics”, the European Union should increase its efforts to identify and make widely known examples of good practice in informing young people about these issues.

5.2.2 > promote the involvement of young people in youth information work

One example of good practice in youth information work in general, but also relating in particular to the issues mentioned in the previous paragraph, which merits a real effort of promotion is peer information, the participation of young people in different stages and types of youth information work. With appropriate training and supervision, especially on health issues, young people can be as professional in information work as trained adults and often more effective because of their easier access to their peers, as projects in a number of countries have already shown. Such an approach is not a panacea, but one whose value has been demonstrated in a number of areas.

6. European Values, Mobility in Europe, and Europe in the World

6.1 Policy Statement / Definition of Needs

Information promoting the mobility of young people in Europe has been, and still is, one of the priority areas of co-operation between ERYICA national partners, resulting in an Internet-based information service, “INFomobil”, in which youth information structures in 20 countries provide practical information about their country for young people who move around Europe. The information covers facilities and reductions for young peoples, cheap accommodation, cultural events and other day-to-day topics, but also how to enrol in higher education, employment and residence regulations, social welfare systems, and other information needed by young people who install themselves in the country in question. At the present time, the INFomobil service, the development of which has been supported by the European Commission, is not able to respond to the growing flow of questions concerning specific possibilities in a given country (“where can I find a training course in country X to be a computer salesman?”, “which universities in country Y offer undergraduate courses in architecture”, “where can I find offers of summer jobs in country Z?”). If, as seems probable and desirable, the demand in this area is going to increase, it will be important to develop the trans-national partnerships between information sources that facilitate trans-national access to the needed information. Another area where the European Union should intensify its efforts is the removal of administrative obstacles to youth mobility in Europe.

6. European Values, Mobility in Europe, and Europe in the World

6.2 Measures to be Taken

6.2.1 > removal of obstacles to youth mobility in Europe

There is widespread recognition that, while the geographical borders within the European Union no longer hinder the movement of the citizens of those countries between the Member States, there are a number of administrative and other obstacles which hinder youth mobility in Europe, especially for young people who wish to reside in another country of the European Union for a certain length of time. The obstacles are much more substantial for young people from non-European Economic Area countries, including for many who have a legitimate reason for a visit or a stay in a Member State of the European Union. A much higher priority must be given by the European Union to the removal of these obstacles, especially in the area of the recognition of educational qualifications and the transfer of social welfare rights.

6.2.2 > research on new information needs in the field of youth mobility

Based on the experience of the National Agencies for the Youth programme of the European Union and of other national services in the field of information promoting youth mobility, the European Union should support research into new information needs which are appearing in this field, and into possible ways of meeting these needs.

About ERYICA

Information about ERYICA, its member organisations and its activities, can be found on the ERYICA Web-site: www.eryica.org.