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11 INDICATORS OF A (NATIONAL) YOUTH POLICY¹

What do we actually mean when we use the term ‘youth policy’? What should be the main elements of a youth policy – whether it is to be developed and implemented at the local, regional or national levels? Are there some common denominators of youth policy – any common indicators – of what a youth policy should include?

This document presents 11 indicators for what should be seen as essential elements of a (national) youth policy. *‘11 Indicators of a (National) Youth Policy’* should be perceived as a guiding tool for government officials in the youth field, as well as a lobbying instrument for youth NGOs advocating for a more proactive youth policy.

However, it is important to stress that these indicators do not present a blueprint for what a youth policy should be. These are some elements that should be included in a national action plan on youth policy. In addition, each youth policy needs to address the specific realities of young people in its constituency.

Young people – a resource, not a problem!

The indicators underline the importance of looking upon young people as a resource, as not as a problem that needs to be solved. A problem-oriented approach to youth policy is by nature captured in a short-term and ad-hoc perspective, because it will have a focus of trying to “extinguish fires” and solve problems whenever and wherever they appear. To the contrary, perceiving young people as a resource focuses on long-term solutions, identifying needs and developing policies in order to let young people realise their full potential as citizens and let society benefit the most from its intellectual capital.

These indicators can also be used in evaluating current youth policies. However, more effort then needs to be put on finding ways of measuring the indicators. Without good standards of measurement, evaluation will not be feasible. This work has already been started by the Directorate for Youth and Sport in the Council of Europe (www.coe.int/youth).

¹ This document is based on 11 indicators of a national youth policy that were presented by Mr. Peter LAURITZEN, Deputy Director of Youth and Sports Directorate of Council of Europe, at the launch of the national action plan for youth policy in Romania, in Snagov 21-24 June, 2001. The European Youth Forum has elaborated on the different points and takes the full responsibility of the content of this document.

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INDICATOR 1: Non-formal education.

While it is important to pay attention to the conditions for young people in the formal school system and at the universities through policies of formal education, the cornerstone for a 'youth policy' is its focus on how young people can become active citizens and positive contributors to society. This implies a much wider perspective, and an emphasis on non-formal education – education outside the formal school system.

How can government policy encourage and promote an active learning process of young people outside the formal school system? Youth initiatives, youth clubs and non-governmental youth organisations, which are actively involving young people at all levels, and where young people themselves decide upon activities, play a central role in developing young people as active citizens in society.

Governments should see it as an important task to promote the development of active and strong non-governmental youth sector, composed of democratic, open and inclusive youth associations that involve young people.

INDICATOR 2: Youth training policy.

The government should promote the development of good trainers in the youth sector, so that these trainers again can act as multipliers in raising awareness on diverse issues. These trainers can also better facilitate the development of the non-governmental structures in the youth field. A training policy is a prerequisite for better structuring the non-governmental sector.

INDICATOR 3: Youth legislation.

There needs to be a youth legislation that corresponds to the other dimensions of a proactive youth policy. Such legislation should acknowledge the involvement of young people and youth NGOs in policy decision-making, and make the legislative framework for an efficient government administration to work with youth issues.

INDICATOR 4: Youth budget.

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In line with the strong recognition for associative life and non-governmental youth organisations outlined in INDICATOR 1, there needs to be a budget for promoting the development of youth initiatives and youth organisations. In order to promote the development of a sustainable youth NGO sector, the government should allocate administrative grants to youth organisations, that enable them to run a secretariat and otherwise carry out tasks that are not specifically project-related (statutory meetings, communication with members, etc). There also needs to be a state budget allocated for the realisation of activities to be carried out by the youth NGO sector, meaning that the government should allocate project grants for youth activities.

INDICATOR 5: Youth information policy.

A youth information strategy should ensure transparency of government policy towards young people. Such a strategy should also inform young people about different opportunities that exist for them. Different initiatives that can be elements of a youth information strategy can be the publishing of a youth magazine and other information material and ensure open communication channels with networks of all major stakeholders for youth policy.

INDICATOR 6: Multi-level policy.

A national youth policy should outline steps to be taken and policies to be implemented not only at the national level, but at all levels of government administration. A national youth policy can not become a reality without focusing on what needs to be done at the local level, and with the active involvement of local government authorities.

INDICATOR 7: Youth research.

A youth policy should be based on research about young people. A policy should not be based on assumptions and speculations, but rather on facts and research on young people. This should help to determine what should be the focus of government policy. Youth research should address issues relating to the well-being and the situation for young people. However, youth research should also focus on which policy measures that work and which that doesn't, measure how youth NGOs can play a role in promoting youth participation etc.

INDICATOR 8: Participation.

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The cornerstone of a youth policy should be the active involvement and participation of young people in society. A youth policy must address how young people can be included in decision-making processes. How will government officials involve young people when making decisions that affect young people? Furthermore, how can a youth policy facilitate a process where young people participate and contribute actively to society?

There is a long tradition in Europe for involving non-governmental youth organisations and youth councils ("umbrella-organisations" of non-governmental youth organisations) in government decision-making. Youth organisations have for more than 30 years had a strong influence on programmes and activities in the youth sector in the Council of Europe, through the principle of "co-management". Youth organisations at all levels took active part in the consultation process which preceded the White Paper on Youth Policy which has been adopted by the European Union. Active involvement of non-governmental youth organisations on issues concerning young people is practised in most European countries.

Youth organisations also play an important role in involving young people, making them active citizens in their own society. Encouraging and facilitating the active participation of young people in non-governmental youth organisations should be a central element of a youth policy.

INDICATOR 9: Inter-ministerial co-operation.

A dynamic and comprehensive youth policy needs to address the diverse needs of young people in all sectors of society. A cross-sectoral approach is needed in youth policy development, meaning that it should be the joint responsibility and depend on the joint co-operation between a range of ministries with different portfolios such as youth, sport, education, culture, defence, health, transport, labour, agriculture etc. etc.

One possible way of assuring cross-ministerial co-operation is to establish an inter-governmental committee to work on the development, implementation and monitoring of a youth policy.

INDICATOR 10: Innovation.

A youth policy should promote innovation, by thinking creatively how to solve challenges, and to stimulate young people to be creative and innovative.

INDICATOR 11: Youth advising bodies.

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In order to assure the consultation and partnership between the government on one side and young people and youth organisations on the other, a structure should be established (such as a consultative committee) which is consulted and given the mandate to influence government on issues regarding young people. Not only should such a structure exist at the national level, it should also be developed at all different levels of government administration.

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