

Foreword

Young people today, in the spring of 2009, live in a very different world from young people a generation ago. In 1988, Europe was still divided between the East and the West, the European Community was a “rich men’s club” of 12 member states focusing on economic development, and travelling abroad was considered a luxury for most. Today’s dominating communications technologies, Internet and the small hand-held mobile phone, were unimaginable for most of us.

Much can be said about the incredible changes that have taken place in the last twenty years, but this is a task that I will leave to others. What I do find relevant for this *Youth Policy Manual*, however, is the development of a youth policy across Europe, developing in parallel with the ever-increasing political and economic integration of Europe. From Baku to Barcelona and from Madrid to Moscow, we can find examples of joint efforts to improve the lives of young people and involve them at all levels of decision making on issues that have an impact on them. Across the continent, governments are developing and revising national youth strategies and action plans on youth policy at an unprecedented pace.

It is clear that we have much to learn from each other’s experiences, although policies must, of course, be adapted to a local context. Still, amid the significant and growing literature on the subject of youth policy in Europe, there are few publications that are easily available which provide concrete advice and practical examples on how to develop a national youth strategy.

The *Youth Policy Manual* aims at providing concrete and useful information on how to develop a national youth strategy. It presents examples of how young people can be involved both in the development and the implementation of the strategy, and provides an overview of how European institutions, as well as the United Nations, work in the youth policy field, and whether it is relevant to speak of a European standard of youth policy. The manual also suggests a model for how a national youth strategy can be developed from start to finish. However, it must be emphasised that it is just that: a suggestion. There is no unique formula for how to develop a youth policy. But there are a number of principles that should be followed, which are elaborated here.

The inspiration to write this manual comes particularly from my involvement as a freelance consultant and trainer in promoting the development of national youth strategies or action plans in Moldova (2003) and Armenia (2004), as well as following the strategy processes in Montenegro (2004-06) and Serbia (2008) as a monitoring expert and evaluator.

In 2008, I become involved with the efforts of the Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in promoting the development of youth policy in South-East Europe (SEE) and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus

(EECA). Through attending three seminars on youth policy development with representatives of governments, non-governmental youth organisations and researchers in the youth field, I gained further insights into the needs and challenges of youth policy development in parts of Europe that have a shorter tradition of applying an integral and cross-sectoral approach to youth policy, with the active involvement of young people. I am indebted to Hans-Joachim Schild and Marta Mędlińska in the Youth Partnership secretariat, for giving me the opportunity to become involved in these activities and for enabling me to publish the *Youth Policy Manual* within the Youth Partnership agenda for youth policy development.

I am greatly indebted to a few friends and colleagues who have provided valuable comments and suggestions to previous drafts of this paper. They include James Doorley, Danijela Jović, Marta Mędlińska, Hans-Joachim Schild, Aleksandra Vidanović and Howard Williamson. Their advice has always been relevant and to the point and has increased the quality of the final product. However, I take full responsibility for any mishaps and/or mistakes that may have found their way into the text. A special thumbs up goes to all the great people at the Ministry of Youth and Sport in Serbia, whose dedication and skills led to the successful development of an impressive national youth strategy in the country. The model of a project design presented in the *Youth Policy Manual* draws to a large extent on this process.

Finally, I would like to pay homage to a person who served as a professional mentor and personal friend in the European youth sector. Without him, I would not be where I am today. Peter Lauritzen, Head of the Youth Department and Deputy Director at the Directorate of Youth and Sport of the Council of Europe, dedicated his whole professional life to European youth policy. The *Youth Policy Manual* is dedicated to his memory.



Introduction

The concept of national youth policy has become well established in Europe. The European institutions of the Council of Europe and the European Union have become strong advocates for the development of national policies that aim at improving the situation of young people. They are pursuing different mechanisms for encouraging their member states to undertake measures to develop cross-sectoral holistic policies that perceive young people as a resource and which actively involve young people and non-governmental youth organisations in decision making on issues that affect them.

During the last ten years, events have taken place which have accelerated the development of national youth policy in Europe and lifted it to a whole new level. First, the Council of Europe, through the first international expert review of the national youth policy in Finland in 1997, established a mechanism for assessing national youth policy in Europe, which rapidly became popular with member states keen for guidance on further developing their youth strategies. By early spring of 2009, international

expert reviews of 16 member states were completed,¹ and more countries had filed a request for an assessment.

Second, as part of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, established in 1999, a Working Group on Young People created a new dynamic in the youth policy field by actively promoting the development of national action plans on youth policy in the Balkan region. This had a positive impact on the development of national youth strategies in South-Eastern Europe, with Romania being the first country to launch its National Youth Action Plan in 2001.

Third, after a comprehensive consultation process with young people throughout Europe, the European Commission tabled its White Paper on Youth entitled “A new impetus for European youth” in November 2001. This brought the issue of youth policy to centre stage of the European Union at a time when 10 candidate countries were very receptive to guidance and direction from the European Commission and eager to develop their policies in line with EU policy.

National youth policies throughout Europe are different. They have to be, since they respond to different challenges, cultural specificity and are developed and implemented in countries with vastly different resources at their disposal. But is it nevertheless possible to speak of a “European standard” of youth policy? And is it meaningful to present a common model for how a national youth strategy can be developed in Europe today? This manual suggests that it is possible to respond affirmatively to both of these questions. It discusses the concept of youth policy and youth participation, it explores the policies of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations system in this field, and suggests a number of elements that must be considered in the process of developing a national youth strategy document. Finally, it proposes a concrete example of how a national youth strategy process can be implemented.

The *Youth Policy Manual* targets both young activists in non-governmental youth organisations who want “ammunition” and inspiration to lobby their governments to improve their youth policy, as well as politicians and government officials who are looking for new ideas and examples of how a national youth policy can be developed. The manual primarily targets countries in South-East Europe and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, which have a limited tradition of applying a resource-oriented and cross-sectoral perspective of youth policy. However, its content can also be of interest to practitioners of youth policy in the rest of Europe and beyond.

According to the World Bank’s *World Development Report 2007*, there are three main reasons why it is so difficult to develop successful policies directed at young people.² First, a successful youth policy requires working across many sectors to develop one coherent, holistic and intersectoral strategy, with clear priorities and measures for concrete action. However, youth policy today too often stands alone and is not integrated into the overall national development policy. Second, youth policy fails because young people have not had a voice in the design and implementation of the policies that affect them. And finally, achieving success in youth policy is challenged by the fact that there are few success stories and examples of best practice.

1 International youth policy reviews have been completed in the following countries: Armenia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden.

2 World Bank (2007), pp. 211-212.

The focus of the *Youth Policy Manual* is how to develop a national youth strategy, while taking into account these challenges. It emphasises the need for intergovernmental co-operation and for maintaining a cross-sectoral approach. Furthermore, the active participation of young people and in particular non-governmental youth organisations is at the core of the model for strategy development which is presented here. It also draws from previous experience in developing national youth strategies in some European countries, which may be applicable and useful to the reader. While the focus of the manual is on developing national policy, it may indeed also be a tool to inspire youth policy development at the local and regional levels as well.

As a last note, it should be mentioned that the focus of this publication is on the development of a national youth strategy – the articulation of the plan. Chapter 5 includes some reflection on the implementation of policy, but the focus still remains on the methods, tools and references for developing a youth strategy at the national level – with the active involvement of young people.