



## Policy Paper “Youth training - sustainability of youth organisations through volunteering”

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Assembly, 2-3 May 2008 (Castelldefels, Catalonia - Spain)*

### **Executive summary of the paper:**

This paper builds on the previous policies developed by the European Youth Forum (YFJ) in the field of training and in particular on the principle of training being a key tool for youth empowerment.

Through this policy paper, the European Youth Forum aims at recognising the key role played by training for the sustainability of youth organisations. Therefore the YFJ defines youth training as a non-formal education process, based on values such as volunteerism, autonomy, independence, participation, solidarity and inclusiveness, and one aimed both at ensuring the development and the sustainability of youth organisations and at providing young people with knowledge, skills, competences and the space to develop their attitudes.

Moreover, the YFJ highlights that youth trainers are a core element of any training strategy for youth NGOs. Hence, youth trainers should have a background and experience in youth work, as youth leaders do, and consider their involvement as a contribution to the consolidation of democratic civil societies and the development of youth participation.

Being convinced of the crucial role played by training in building the capacity of youth organisations, the YFJ recommends European stakeholders in the field of training to provide youth organisations with specific support to develop their training policies, to increase their cooperation, foster synergies and genuinely assess the needs in the field of training, to take into consideration the values upon which youth training is based and to support sustainable youth work development in its priority regions.

## **1. Background and aims**

The European Youth Forum (YFJ) aims at empowering young people to ensure their active involvement in building a stronger civil society. Training plays a crucial role in that aim, as highlighted by the YFJ Policy Paper “Empowerment through training”<sup>1</sup>, as it allows young people to develop their human capabilities and motivation, providing them with the base for life long and life wide learning.

Youth Training is a key component of Non-Formal Education, the latter as defined by the European Youth Forum as an organised educational process which takes place alongside mainstream systems of education and training and which does not typically lead to certification. Individuals participate on a voluntary basis and as a result, the individual takes an active role in the learning process.<sup>2</sup>

Education and training are core aspects of the European Union’s Lisbon Strategy to become the world’s leading knowledge-based economy. Through the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme, the EU aims at improving the quality and effectiveness of EU education training system and at ensuring all citizens have access to them<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 0262-03 Adopted by the YFJ Council of Members 25-26 April 2003, Brussels.

<sup>2</sup> 0618-03 Policy Paper on Youth Organisation as non-formal education-recognising our role, adopted by the Council of Members in November 2003.

<sup>3</sup> 0633-07 YFJ Briefing note on the Education and Training 2010

Furthermore the European Union acknowledges that the value and visibility of non-formal and informal learning for young people should be enhanced by recognising the work and achievements of young people and those active in youth work and in youth organisations<sup>4</sup>.

The Council of Europe has also stated the importance of recognising and promoting non-formal education and the non-formal learning of young people due to the potential that these forms of education have in reducing social inequality and fostering values such as human rights, social justice, active citizenship and tolerance<sup>5</sup>.

This Policy Paper builds on the definition of youth training provided by the Policy Paper “Empowerment through Training” and aims at further defining youth training as the main instrument supporting the consolidation, and ensuring the sustainability, of youth organisations; the latter being among the main providers of non-formal education.

More specifically, this Policy Paper aims at being a reference document in the field of youth training by:

1. Defining and putting emphasis on the specificities of youth training and highlighting its relevance for youth organisations;
2. Clarifying the principles and practice of youth organisations in the training field;
3. Encouraging the YFJ to play an active role in the capacity building of its Member Organisations;
4. Encouraging networking and positioning the YFJ Pool of Trainers as a tool to further the development of this field;
5. Calling for a pan-European training policy and a responsible approach to youth training from European institutions.

## **2. What is Youth Training?**

The YFJ defines youth training as a non-formal education process, based on values such as volunteerism, autonomy, independence, participation, solidarity and inclusiveness, and one aimed both at ensuring the development and the sustainability of youth organisations and at providing young people with knowledge, skills, competences and the space to develop their attitudes.

The range of training activities offered by youth organisations is linked to several objectives, which are as much linked to the self-development of youth volunteers, as to the work and development of the organisation themselves. Youth organisations develop the forms of training they offer in order to make themselves more efficient and sustainable, but also in order to train individuals: newcomers, trainers, leaders, members, multipliers. Therefore, training has a genuinely two-fold dimension: it is both a tool for organisational and for individual development.

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<sup>4</sup>Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the recognition of the value of non-formal and informal learning within the European youth field (20.7.2006)

<sup>5</sup> See in particular the Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec (2003)8 on the promotion and recognition of non-formal education/learning of young people, the Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1437 (2000) on non-formal education and the joint Council of Europe and European Union's Working Paper on Pathways towards validation and recognition of education, training and learning in the youth field.

Training supports youth organisations in five essential areas:

- in the need to ensure their own sustainability by providing their members with the capacity to constantly adapt the needs of the organisation to external and internal changes;
- in the transmission of the aims, values, ideals, skills and policies of the organisation;
- in the generation of new ideas;
- in ensuring their openness and inclusiveness by enabling them to reach out to more and different groups of young people, including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable;
- in involving new members and thus in making sure that a “next generation” emerges - one able to continue the mission of the organisation and adapt to new realities.

Indeed, the **sustainability** of an organisation depends very much on its capacity to keep and to develop the knowledge that lies within it at any given moment. Youth organisations are aware that the relatively fast turnover that exists in their structures is a sign of vitality and of internal democracy, but at the same time it can be a threat to knowledge management and to organisational memory. Organisational memory is crucial to ensuring that youth organisations keep on developing truly new ideas, and at the same time, are able to capitalise on what has been developed in the past: this is the only way to ensure real innovation. To pass on this knowledge, training programmes, being based on a **multiplier effect**, are essential tools to ensure the continuity of an organisation and policy progress.

Training enables the guarantee of a transmission of values, ideals and policies within an organisation, and therefore training policies, and the way they are designed, are a channel for the transmission of values. Training gives a possibility not only to support the transmission of values but gives a youth organisation the possibility to reflect upon its own core values.

Youth training is **cross-sector** in nature, and covers the various realities, topics, and fields of action of youth work. In this regard, training provides a comprehensive vision of what youth work and youth policy can deal with; it reveals the broad fields of action in which young people and youth organisations are involved - from health education to conflict transformation, from social inclusion to active citizenship, and from global education to intercultural learning.

Moreover, youth training is also a **catalyst for change** in youth organisations: it allows for experimentation, for the discovery of new fields of work and for critical thinking on the practice of the organisation. As evaluation is part of any training path, youth organisations already integrate basic “quality control” when delivering training, which allows them to see whether the work they deliver is in line with the needs of their members and potential members. Such systems of evaluation should nevertheless be further developed.

### **3. Youth training today: Giving the chance to volunteers and trainers**

Youth trainers are a core element of any training strategy for a youth NGO. The European Youth Forum believes that training in youth work should be based on the values of youth work, and in that sense, emphasises that youth trainers are part of the youth work community and whose involvement should be based on the same values, including volunteering<sup>6</sup>, independence, autonomy, participation, solidarity and inclusiveness.

In this regard, youth trainers providing training on youth work should have a background and experience in youth work, as youth leaders do, and consider their involvement as a contribution to the consolidation of democratic civil societies and the development of youth participation.

#### Recognising and supporting the development of youth training

Support to youth trainers should be provided through the establishment of adequate schemes such as Trainings for/of Trainers, the development of training policies and the development of pools of trainers.

The self-development of youth trainers is particularly relevant, as a training path involves transformation, personal challenge, and challenges related to working as part of a group. The European Youth Forum believes that trainers need to have the possibility to discuss their challenges as trainers with their peers, and that teams or *Pools* of Trainers should be promoted, throughout the entire youth work area. Apart from supporting the sustainability of youth organisations, these would also give trainers the possibility to exchange experiences, develop new approaches and feel part of a community. Pools of Trainers also give a consequent opportunity to the trainers to grow and to work together, further developing the quality of and their commitment to their work, and contributing to the recognition of the engagement undertaken by youth trainers.

The European Youth Forum believes that to be able to set clear objectives in their training policies, youth NGOs need to constantly assess their needs. Playing the role of educational advisers, trainers shall be given the possibility to contribute, hand in hand with an organisation's leadership, to the strategic development of an organisation, based on the frequent evaluation and benchmarking of their educational activities.

The European Youth Forum underlines the fact that trainers have a huge role to play in developing training methods, methodologies and materials. The distribution and dissemination of youth training products is necessary, and further complementarities could be sought between formal education materials and non-formal education training materials.

Taking stock of the diversity of tasks that a trainer can have in a youth organisation, the European Youth Forum considers it important to provide a framework for the relationships between youth trainers and youth NGOs. It is the responsibility of an organisation to have a clear space and mechanism for the support of its trainers - providing mutual value and benefit. As trainers are

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<sup>6</sup> 0416-04 'Policy Paper on Volunteering', adopted by the YFJ General Assembly, November 2004

ultimately volunteers for an organisation, it is the responsibility of the leadership to ensure that, as any other volunteer, care is taken of them.

### The roles of youth trainers

Bringing their expertise to training activities, youth trainers foster the development of the competencies, skills, knowledge and attitudes of participants. Furthermore, youth training plays an important role in identifying the training needs of youth organisations and in supporting their efforts in designing training policies. Indeed, youth trainers provide youth organisations with the motivation and the expertise to define training policies; they coach and mentor co-trainers and/or new trainers; and they therefore contribute to the constant evolution of the youth training field.

More specifically, youth trainers perform different roles in training activities, depending on the aim and the target group involved.

As *facilitators*, they create a positive and safe atmosphere, guarantee that everybody has a chance to express his/her own opinion, and encourage the debate. As *moderators*, they safeguard the quality and objective of a debate, presenting the topic of the discussion, taking questions to open discussions, while at the same time bearing a certain knowledge of the subject. As *resource persons*, trainers give input without running a given process and contribute with their specific experience and knowledge.

## **4. Recommendations**

The European Youth Forum is strongly engaged in building the capacity of its Member Organisations and is convinced that training plays a crucial role in this aim. Therefore the YFJ strongly recommend European stakeholders in the training field, including institutional and civil society partners, to:

### **A. Provide youth organisations with specific support to develop their training policies:**

While the European Youth Forum calls for continuous support to youth organisations - as the main providers of non-formal education - it notes that specific support is still needed for youth organisations, at the European level, to develop their training policies based on volunteering. The added value of such support lies in the fact that the provision of quality pan-European educational activities depends on the existence of quality youth trainers and that the development of youth organisations' training policies and of youth trainers' capacities could duly bring benefits to other educational programmes and policies;

### **B. Increase consultations between the different providers of European youth training programmes and activities in order to gain synergy and avoid duplication:**

The European Youth Forum also recommends that youth organisations should themselves reflect on better resource-sharing in their training activities - in order to foster cooperation with other youth organisations or partners in the training field - and also to use the YFJ Pool of Trainers for this specific purpose;

**C. Put in place a genuine needs assessment in the field of training:**

This should be done in cooperation with major youth training providers in Europe, in order to map downsides and shortcomings as well as examples of good practice in training at the European level, to envisage how youth organisations can benefit from better effectiveness and increased quality.

**D. Provide appropriate financial support to training activities of youth organisations:**

Good quality training activities require appropriate resources of material, venue, training aids, overheads of the organisation, and, in many cases, fees for trainers. These requirements need to be recognised and appropriate funding schemes provided or maintained.

**E. Take into consideration the definition of youth training provided by this Paper:**

The European Youth Forum calls on institutions to reflect on their practices when using youth trainers for their educational and training activities. More specifically, European institutions should take into account the definition of youth training, mentioned earlier in this paper, when designing training activities for young people; the institutions should, in particular, ensure that the values of youth organisations continue to be transmitted.

Furthermore, institutions should promote and use peer learning; and trainers and facilitators for youth events should preferably be young, involved actively in a youth organisation and should reflect the reality of youth work.

The European Youth Forum acknowledges the fact that organisations and institutions have a wish and responsibility to ensure the quality of the training they provide, but at the same time it is convinced that volunteers can deliver trainings at least equal in quality to corporate training and that both their role should therefore be recognised. In particular, responsible and reasonable financial provisions for all volunteers should be put in place, providing reimbursement related to a voluntary activity, inconvenience compensation, and/or compensation for a loss of earnings, to thereby support and encourage the volunteer contribution of youth trainers.

**F. Provide support to sustainable youth work development in the regions of South East Europe, Central Europe and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus**

Further support is needed for training activities; for the development of training policies; and hence to facilitate the recognition of non-formal education as such, in these regions - given the fact that training is the cornerstone for organisational development and brings to an organisation the skills necessary to fully realise its potential.

**5. Conclusion**

Youth training gives organisations the necessary tools to grow and ensure their continuous growth; it gives people the support to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes according to the values of youth work and of youth organisations.

Training is a common feature of non-formal education, and youth Training does not exist *per se*, but exists through the support it gives to several fields of youth work, such as the promotion of human rights and of fundamental freedoms; of intercultural dialogue; and of the social inclusion of the most disadvantaged groups.

Training should therefore be based on the core values of youth work and be recognised as a main instrument of non-formal education, hence benefiting from consequent, responsible and targeted support schemes.