Final report

Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 28-29 October 2015

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of youth

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

EUROPEAN UNION

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Rapporteur: Sladjana Petkovic,
Pool of European Youth Researchers

The purpose of the report[1] is to provide an overview of the context and main findings of **Beyond Barriers: a youth policy seminar on social inclusion of young people in vulnerable situations in South East Europe,** which was held in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 28 - 29 October 2015. The seminar was organised by the EU-CoE youth partnership, in co-operation with the Bosnia and Herzegovina's Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The seminar **aimed** to analyse and discuss the role of youth policy in promoting young people's social inclusion from a holistic, cross-sectoral perspective, especially focusing on youth in vulnerable situations in South East Europe (SEE). In terms of **content** the focus of the seminar was on the Western Balkans (Albania, Kosovo[2], "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Montenegro and Serbia) and the EU Member States Slovenia and Croatia. Therefore, the geographical denomination South East Europe is used throughout this document.

Objectives of the youth policy seminar were:

- To serve as a **platform** for the exchange of ideas on ways to support young people in vulnerable situations through youth policies, primarily in SEE
- To **share examples** of successful youth policy initiatives supporting young people in overcoming barriers to social inclusion
- To contribute to the visibility of **youth policy** and its role in reducing obstacles to social inclusion and to produce recommendations for youth policy in this regard
- To initiate **dialogues, discussions, debates**, exchanges and possible **co-operation** among all stakeholders and, hereby, support peer learning on cross-sectoral youth policy development focusing on social inclusion of young people in vulnerable situations.

The **programme** of the seminar was structured in four blocks in order to meet the aforementioned objectives:

1. Setting the youth policy landscape in South East Europe
2. Understanding the impact: analysing the policy framework
3. Looking forward: elements of successful social inclusion policies and good practice sharing
4. Future Thinking: guidelines for inclusive national youth policies.

The seminar brought together around 50 youth policy **stakeholders**, including policy makers, researchers and youth workers coming from 14 countries.

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[1] Disclaimer: The content of this document, commissioned by the EU-CoE youth partnership, is on the entire responsibility of the author and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of either of the partner institutions (the European Union and the Council of Europe).
[2] All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

Social media outreach of the seminar was available via **Facebook event page**[3] and the **EU-CoE youth partnership page**[4], as well as on the **Twitter hashtag:** #Youthinclusion15. All the presentations and materials of the seminar are available on the EU-CoE youth partnership page.

Graphic recording of the seminar was carried out by Siiri Taimla[5].

The organising team of the seminar was composed of: Philipp Boetzelen, Tanya Basarab and Viktoria Karpatski, EU-CoE youth partnership; Nik Paddison, facilitator**;** Dunja Potocnik, resource person (Pool of European Youth Researchers); Jasmin Jasarevic, PRONI Centre for Social Education – local resource person, and Sladjana Petkovic, rapporteur.

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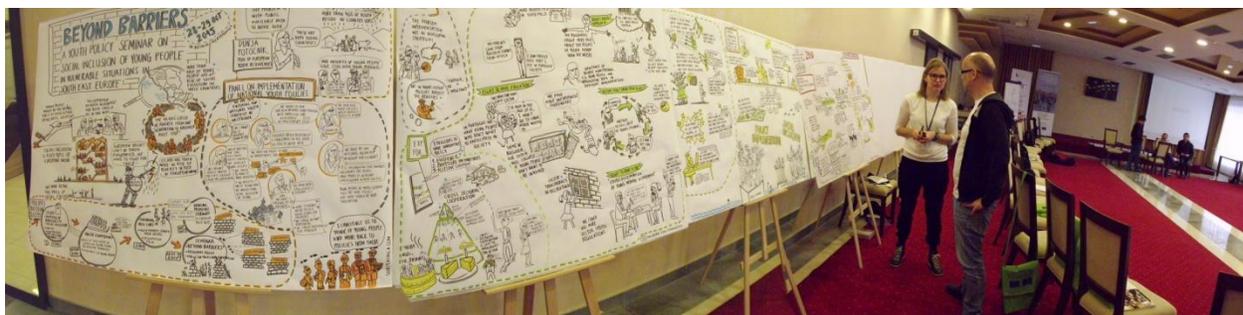
[3] https://www.facebook.com/events/431379943735113/
[4] Official page of the event: http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/mostar
[5] https://www.facebook.com/siiri.taimla

During **introductory speeches,** the representatives of respective institutions pointed to the fact that the social inclusion of youth in vulnerable situations has been for several years among the **key areas** of concern for both the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

For **Biljana Camur**, **Assistant Minister of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina,** youth policy seminar resonates with the priorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, especially with those referring to social inclusion of young people with particular attention to the most disadvantaged youth. She emphasised furthermore that available evidence provide insights into the multiple challenges that young people face in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially in areas of youth employment, democratic citizenship, and active participation. In this regard, the Commission for Co-ordination of Youth Issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina fosters and co-ordinates youth policy development at all levels, and between young people and the complex, multi-layered governmental system.

Karin Lopatta-Loibl, the European Commission, stressed that social inclusion represents a key policy area of the European Union and has been one of the eight fields of action defined by the EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018), since its beginning 2009. The economic crisis and the quite high youth unemployment rates pushed more young people and their families into poverty or at the threshold of poverty. Consequently, social inclusion becomes the focus of the second three-year work cycle of the EU Youth Strategy (2013-2015) and is reflected in the 2015 EU Youth Report. Along the same lines, fighting poverty and social exclusion represents one of the five headline targets of the EU 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Therefore, the European values cannot be taken for granted - discrimination needs to be addressed

efficiently, and youth should be encouraged to engage with and learn from other cultures in an open-minded way.

Mary Ann Hennessey, Head of Office of the Council of Europe in Bosnia and Herzegovina, emphasized that social cohesion is firmly based on human rights and acceptance of shared responsibility for the welfare of all members of the society, especially those who are at risk of poverty or exclusion. Contemporary European society pays the costs of social exclusion while facing severe threats to its vital democratic security. SEE is one of the regions affected by the economic crisis and recession, impacting young people's lives and creating unfavourable social conditions for their growth. The Council of Europe works towards developing comprehensive political and policy responses to strengthen human capital and address challenges and risks of social exclusion across Europe (especially regarding discrimination of migrants, hate speech, inclusion of minorities and other initiatives). The Enter! project and the No Hate Speech Movement, implemented in the youth field are two examples of how the Council of Europe directly engages with this work.

Philipp Boetzelen, the EU-CoE youth partnership, pointed out that the regional co-operation activities in SEE supported by the EU-CoE youth partnership started in 2007 with implementation of several workshops on youth policy development over the years in Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Albania. The Symposium held in Croatia, focusing on the role of youth information and counselling in young people's social inclusion and access to right), showed the strong need to continue discussion on social inclusion and the role of youth policy and youth work in the region. This seminar addresses issues of social inclusion of youth in vulnerable situations, particularly focusing on challenges of youth policy implementation from regional perspective.

The seminar closes a two-year reflection on social inclusion that the EU-CoE youth partnership has focused on, including a **mapping of barriers to social inclusion for young people in vulnerable situations** [6] , and previously implemented activities "**From Malta to Mostar**" [7] . These, among other, refer to an expert seminar followed by the conference on youth work supporting young people in vulnerable situations held in Malta, and an Ideas lab seminar held

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[6] http://pjp-eu.coe.int/web/youth-partnership/mapping-on-barriers-to-social-inclusion
[7] http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8894448/Tanya%26Philipp_from+Malta+to+Mostar.pptx/2ca8c47b-e069-4e83-b0cc-c7c6f6b793a3

in Strasbourg giving young people and youth workers from social inclusion projects the opportunity to put forward ideas on youth employment. The overall purpose of this process was to develop knowledge-based resources that can better support initiatives aiming at ensuring young people's access to rights and at providing them with opportunities to equally engage in society.

Social inclusion represents the process of individual's self-realisation within a society, acceptance and recognition of one's potential and integration in the web of social relations in a community. The mapping **approach** to social inclusion consisted in identifying vulnerable situations instead of focussing on the problems of different marginalised or vulnerable groups of young people and thereby shifting the focus from the individuals to the social environment young people live in. The EU-CoE youth partnership used **peer learning and exchange** of good practices, and developed the recommendations for improvement of policy and practice.

The messages shared **by youth experts** - young people having experience of social exclusion – during the conference in Malta, were equally relevant for the context of the Mostar seminar:

TAKE US SERIOUSLY - RESPECT OUR OPINIONS - DON'T LOOK DOWN ON US
GOOD COMMUNICATION: DON'T TALK TO YOURSELF ASK US WHAT WE WANT
MONEY IS IMPORTANT, BUT PEOPLE ARE MORE IMPORTANT
WE NEED TO COME TOGETHER AND TO TALK TO EACH OTHER
SUPPORT OUR CHOICES' –'LIFE TIPS BUT NO JUDGEMENTS.

Dunja Potocnik (PEYR), **resource person of the youth policy seminar** provided **better understanding** of social exclusion, and the regional context of youth policy as well as **a brief portrait** of disadvantaged youth in SEE[8].

She reminded that the EU-CoE youth partnership study on barriers to social inclusion (*Finding a Place in Modern Europe, 2015*) refers to **five areas** of social exclusion: education, labour market, living, health and participation, and can be referred to as elements leading to correction of '*safety nets*' since they provide basic resources and prerequisites for fulfilment of everyday needs.

Furthermore, she particularly stressed importance of **human values of social inclusion** in line with the following definition provided by Salto-Youth Inclusion Resource Centre: "Social inclusion is an on-going process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the

society in which they live. It ensures greater participation in decision-making which affects young people's lives and access to their fundamental right"[9].

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[8] http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/8894448/Beyond_Barriers_Snapshot_paper_Potocnik_v2.pdf/4649c5a9-94fe-4e39-8994-c50064dd1c7a

[9]Potocnik, D. (2015): Snapshot on the situation of youth, challenges to social inclusion and youth policies in South East Europe: information paper for the Seminar 'Beyond Barriers', Draft paper (p.4).

Reflecting on contemporary regional findings, she stressed in the end that the **Shell Youth Survey**[10] shows that the second half of 2015 for the youth in SEE is marked by persistence of economic crisis, with youth unemployment rates exceeding 50% in some of observed countries, which means that at least more than half of young people in these countries are at risk of social exclusion. For example, *Information Template on Social Inclusion of Young People: Republic of Serbia* (2015: 3) lists some categories of youth in vulnerable situation referring to: "Young people facing poverty, young Roma, young disabled persons, young refugees and internally displaced persons, young returnees in the readmission process, vulnerable young people in terms of gender, young parents, young people with unsolved housing issues, young people without parental care and young people from the street".

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[10]The South East Europe Shell studies were coordinated and financed by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Serbia.

YOUTH POLICY REALITIES IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE - IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES AND SUPPORT FOR INCLUSION

The panel on implementation of national youth policies and support for inclusion provided an overview of the current trends and the country examples in youth policy development and implementation from "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovenia.

Zorica Stamenkovska (Agency for Youth and Sport, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"): In co-operation with UNDP, the government agency responsible for youth launched the process of development of the new strategy for youth in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" in January 2015. The process is based on participatory methodologies and builds on evidence from the study on youth trends (2014). It also takes in consideration results of the consultations with youth on thematic areas of priority stated in the study (among other, social inclusion). The strategy should cover a period of 10 years, and is envisaged to be adopted in 2016, together with the action plan and monitoring plan (www.strategijazamlade.mk).

Jelena Miljanic (Joint UN Youth Programme, Montenegro): The development of the new strategy for youth in Montenegro started in 2015, launched by the Directorate of Youth and

Sports and the Ministry for Education in co-operation with the UN System. The process is supported by the development of a Law on Youth. The strategy development is a complex process based on an evaluation by UNDP which revealed various challenges with implementation, such as lack of monitoring mechanisms and quality indicators to track youth policy impact, lack of cross-sectoral co-operation, and lack of evidence on youth in general. The process will use an ongoing situation analysis and international expertise. The UN System provides expert support in 'Planning for results and change' in line with the Results Based Management approach, by using participatory, innovative approaches such as Foresight to strategically plan the 'preferred future', as well as by developing Serious Game for consultations with stakeholders and youth (including young people in vulnerable situations). Finally, one of the implementation measures presented is the 'Youth innovation Lab', which is based on **Design thinking**, and which shifts the focus from groups to individuals (young people), starting from their everyday lives and needs.

Ms. Daniela Topic (Member of the Commission for Co-ordination of Youth Issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina from the European Students Forum, Bosnia and Herzegovina): Similar shift in approaching youth policy planning focused on results happened in the Republica Srpska**.** Newly developed strategies and regulations covering youth and volunteering were based on research, a new vision, and a participatory approach prioritising 5 areas (among other, social inclusion). The role of the Youth Council of the Republica Srpska has been to bring youth to the process.

Katarina Vuckovic (former member of the Commission for Co-ordination of Youth Issues in BiH, The Institute for Youth Development "Kult", Bosnia and Herzegovina): Youth policies have been developed quite simultaneously across Bosnia and Herzegovina, meaning that priority areas are quite similar, mainly covering youth employability, social inclusion, social care, youth participation, and recently also youth safety in a broader sense. The main challenges to youth policy development and implementation are related to **governance**, which has been addressed by mobilising a wide number of supporting stakeholders, and support from international organisations (mainly UN agencies). The creation of the Federal Youth Council would help channelling the voice of youth and represent youth living in remote areas, especially in Western Herzegovina.

Peter Debeljak (Director of the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Youth, Slovenia): Social inclusion should be addressed from the **horizontal** perspective. Recent history reflected in rapidly changing social dynamics and realities brought various challenges to the youth policy agendas across the SEE (but also globally). Combined with the "limited resources, capacities, social and intergenerational altruism for proper policy/social adjustment", these have resulted in increasing gaps between **'New challenges/phenomena/questions'***,* on the one side, and '**Old arsenal of answers'** on the other. Consequently, the young generation is the "true victim of our incompetence to react/adapt to the new reality".
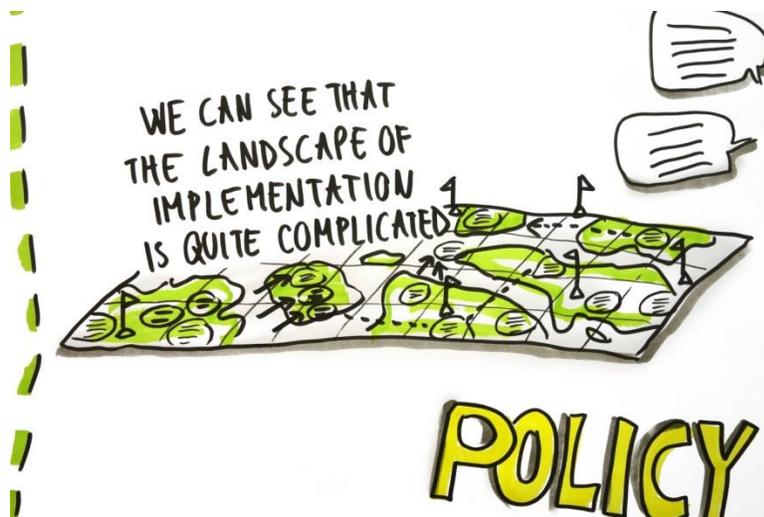
Solutions to these challenges should refer to **Breaking old patterns** (example: employment grants as an active contributor to social inclusion), and developing **new approaches** to youth policy development. This applies to the '**mono-sectoral approach'** which does not work any longer and which should be replaced by **accepting a new logic** (example: efficient employment policy as the best housing policy), and **adapting sectoral policies to new reality** (example: sport as a tool for integration of individuals with a migrant background). One size fits all approach is not always suitable and complementary measures are needed such as pluralisation, individualisation, situation-based approach, etc…

Jelena Milutinovic (Board member of the National Youth Council of Serbia – KOMS, Serbia): The evaluation of the first youth policy cycle showed shortcomings of youth *policy development and implementation* meaning that it should not be created as a "list of wishes which are not realistic". To provide broader consultations, and potentially bring change, youth organisations and representative bodies play a significant role in the process. Legal framework to policy development and implementation was also provided through Law on volunteering and Law on Youth, putting special emphasis on social inclusion. One challenge of the implementation process was lack of clarity regarding roles that various stakeholders. To address this, KOMS published the 'Vocabulary of youth policy'. Another challenge lies in building partnerships with the business sector in order to address youth unemployment.

Building the picture of youth policy realities across the SEE, participants emphasised several **challenges,** and elements of the policy development/implementation which need to be **changed and improved** across the region:

- **Implementation** of laws and strategies in the youth field across the region is problematic, and usually existing 'only on paper'. Youth policy processes are usually **detached from youth realities**, taking place in a "Self-created youth policy bubble", so the direct involvement of youth in the development and implementation stages is needed to assure 'reality check';

- **Evaluation, evidence and concrete data** on the outcomes of previous cycles is weak or insufficient;

- **Knowledge gathering, dissemination and presentation** of data in the field of youth is unstructured and not properly linked with governance; it is also missing particularly on the groups affected by social exclusion;

- The policy cycles are '**too long**' (5 to 10 years) and not flexible/adaptable enough to the changing realities, on the one hand, and '**too short**' – discontinued, causing policy vacuums and preventing from reaching meaningful results, on the other;

- **Approaches** to development of youth strategies (in general, and especially targeting youth in vulnerable situations) should be more proactive and based on the assumption of change, instead of being focused on 'resolving problems';

- **Consultations** are seen as a common way of involving youth in the decision making processes, which is problematic because it does not recognise youth as important stakeholder in the process;

- **Tools and mechanisms** used to assure **youth involvement** (especially vulnerable individuals and groups) should be more innovative, youth friendly and less manipulative;

- **Youth policy** has not been put firmly among the policy priorities in the countries in SEE and therefore it is hard to see the impact. This is why stakeholders in the field of youth focus primarily on building sustainable youth policy cycles.
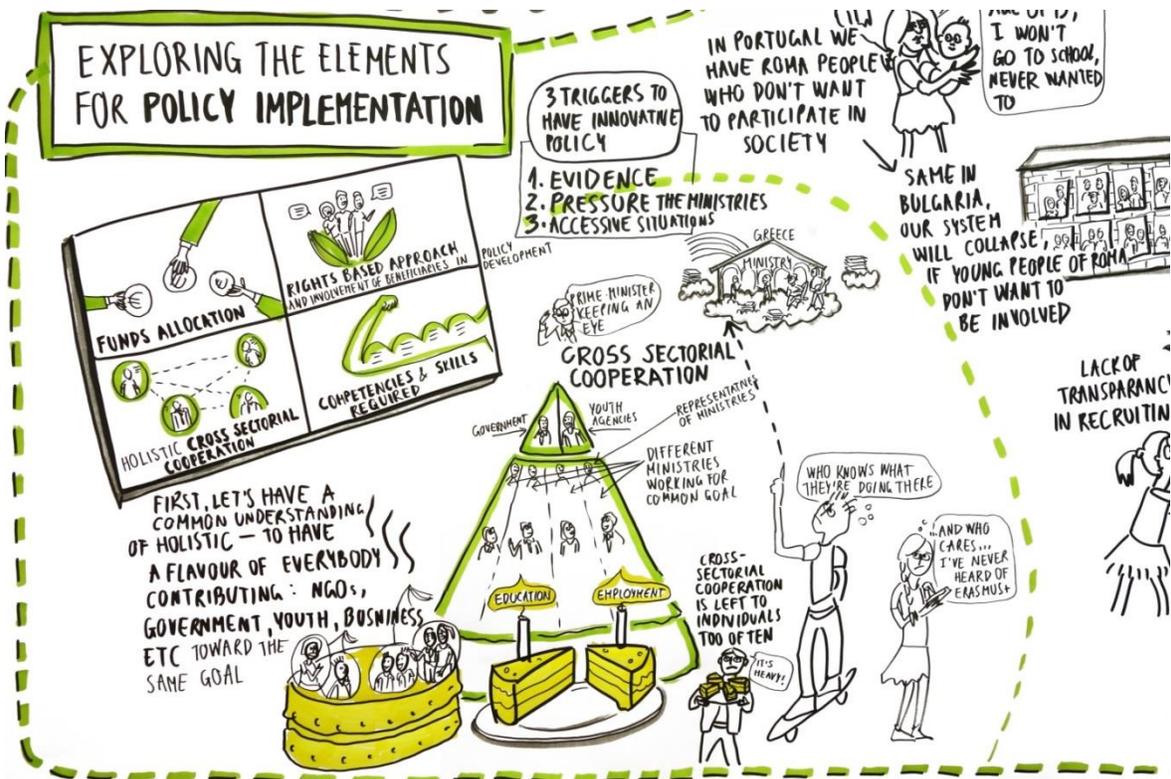
The working groups critically reflected on the **key elements for successful social inclusion policy implementation,** and reported on common aspects identified (challenges and possible solutions) in the following areas: funds allocation; rights based approach and involvement of beneficiaries in policy development; holistic cross-sectoral co-operation; and competences and skills required.

FUNDS ALLOCATION

- Youth policy development and implementation across SEE is mainly **centralised**. An additional example from Turkey showed that youth policies are also formulated and implemented at the national level, while local needs and differences are not taken into consideration.
- Discrepancy in **access to funding** among international/ national, and local organisations dealing with youth has been highlighted. Accessibility to funding of youth in vulnerable situations is problematic, so their exclusion has been qualified as a '*transversal and trans-border issue*' reflected in multiple barriers. Practice showed, however, that existing European financial programmes such as Erasmus+ with its Western Balkan Youth Window, as well as the European Youth Foundation resources could be used more by organisations in SEE.
- The bad access to resources has been linked to **poverty and social exclusion** of young people across the region, especially for youth with disabilities and those living in remote areas.
- **Allocation and good management** of funds is needed especially at the local level, having in mind that youth Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) struggle more for less funding in the region.

Previous financial support provided by the international (mostly UN Agencies) and European donors did not help in developing **sustainability** and **co-operation** among youth CSOs, which is currently **weak or lacking**. The number of CSOs dealing with youth is **reducing** across the region; only those with developed capacities and infrastructure manage to stay active. Special emphasis was put on the risks and lack of support to the **small** grassroots youth initiatives, both of youth in general and of disadvantaged youth.

The following **solutions** to aforementioned challenges were suggested:

- **Decentralisation** in order to provide conditions for equal access to resources/funding to the local governments and youth CSOs, as well as to avoid **corruption** and **social exclusion**;

- Better use of existing sources of financial support, especially of the **European Youth Foundation** (which is providing small grants), and **Erasmus+ Programme** which is also available to informal groups;
- Establishing **co-operation** and consortia of mixed types and size actors, with 'bigger' CSOs, or specialised agencies providing grants to smaller ones;
- **Examples of innovative projects** were shared offering grants for young people and directly involving them in the problem solving at the community level (such as Innovation Lab in Montenegro), providing mentoring in problem solving, and support in designing good quality projects.

RIGHTS BASED APPROACH AND INVOLVEMENT OF BENEFICIARIES IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

- Issues such as a lack of **transparency** and **trust** in institutions, combined with a lack of **interest** and **involvement** of youth in the policy development and implementation were identified;
- Development of youth policies based on 'needs' is outdated;
- The question of **available tools** to rights based approach for programming was raised (the European Youth Forum was mentioned as an example of organisation advocating for the rights based approach, and providing training in the field);
- The rights of **minority groups** across the region (Roma and Gipsy communities, and young women), are not respected and need special attention;
- **Reform** of the Criminal justice systems and rehabilitation (and related legal framework) is needed in order to improve the power of implementation and enforcement of relevant laws;
- The need to **involve young people more permanently** in policy processes, beyond consultation phases, became evident from practices across the region.

HOLISTIC CROSS-SECTORAL CO-OPERATION

- From the perspective of youth CSOs, **political will** and structured dialogue is not sufficient and should be fostered at all levels;
- Cross-sectoral co-operation is especially needed **at the local level** in tackling youth exclusion. Reflecting on the question of '*who has an authority to reinforce it*' **the Local Youth Councils** were seen as problematic by some in terms of their mandate, mission, and function. On the other hand, **individual involvement** and co-operation is seen as valuable but not a sustainable way of addressing cross-sectoral issues.
- The **capacities** of the government structures to establish meaningful cross-sectoral and inter-ministerial co-operation are **relatively low** across the SEE which makes *youth mainstreaming* highly problematic;
- The procedures for **inter-ministerial financial management** (fund allocation) are rather complicated, probably because finance and economy ministries often do not support arguments for funding from ministries responsible for youth across the region.
- There is a general need to collect, analyse and disseminate concrete practices of cross-sectoral approaches in the region.

COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS REQUIRED

- **Awareness** should be raised about particular skills and competences required at all stages of the policy process (from policy design to implementation), and among various stakeholders;
- **Capacity-building** for the skills and competencies required is needed among all stakeholders (especially government institutions responsible for youth);
- Not enough attention was given to **non-formal education** and development of **soft skills**, as well as to consistency in advocating for their recognition. Peer learning, reflection and transfer of good practice are also lacking.

The youth work practitioner, **Harun Sabanovic, PRONI Centre for Youth Development, Brcko, Bosnia and Herzegovina**[11], reflected on the findings of the working groups, and presented **Model of youth clubs** established in Brcko by the PRONI Centre for youth development which are strongly linked to the local community. The special value of these local youth clubs lies in provision of the physical space and supporting programmes for both mainstream and socially excluded young people, as well as for youth with disabilities. Despite limited capacities, PRONI Centre provides support to these clubs mainly through training and consultations. What is missing, however, is the government commitment and structured, and coordinated youth policy development and implementation at the local level, based on sustainable funding.

The perspective of the youth work practitioner resonated with experiences of majority of the participants stressing that, despite existing laws (such as the Law on youth information centres in Romania, for example), implementation is **missing** to support local youth organisations and youth clubs, as well as advocacy to strengthen co-operation with local authorities (for example, this is the case in Greece). It was concluded that there is a lot of **youth work** going on across the region, mostly done through volunteering, which should not be ignored. Focusing on a particular level, especially on the **local** one, helps to understand better specific issues related to various elements of youth policy.

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[11] www.pronibrcko.ba

Behrooz Motamed-Afshari, youth expert: Critical reflection on the concept of cross-sectoral policy is needed as well as on the ways it is implemented. **'Cross-sectoral'** should refer to establishment of "c*ross-points between different policy areas*, and *joint target groups and common action area*s" while **'co-operation'** should refer to "*sharing of information and competences, objectives and goals, tasks and results"*. These are pre-requisites for mainstreaming youth policy in other policy areas at the national level.

Another important condition is reflected in taking 'youth' as the **resource** in society, which is not happening very often in reality. In order to implement cross-sectoral co-operation fully, it is necessary to define **common complementary goals,** provide the **right mix of players**, establish relevant **tools** and provide proper **co-ordination** (closely linked to leadership). **Mono-sectoral policies** should be avoided, and **ownership needs to be developed** among various stakeholders. Importantly, youth strategies and action plans do **not** represent **an aim** for itself, but simply the tools to meet young peoples' needs.

Social inclusion is understood as "Empowerment of the individual by society for active participation in social life and access to fundamental rights". Greater participation in the decision making and access to fundamental rights should be provided to young people at risk of poverty and social exclusion so that they can "enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in their societies".
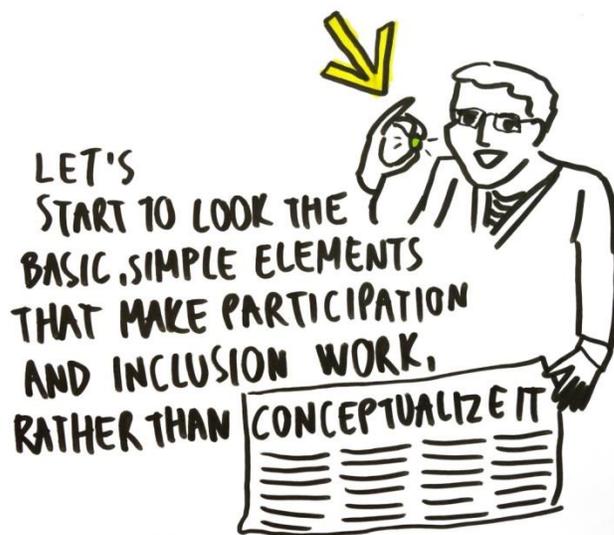
Shortcomings of the definition: "**who** are those at risk", and "**how** do we define normality" - substantial and comprehensive **knowledge about the excluded** is missing.

The way in which social exclusion/inclusion is **measured** across Europe is also problematic and narrow (mostly linked to unemployment).

The importance of **integrated** youth policy and **cross-sectoral** collaboration is emphasised as - embedding short term responses in long term efforts to empower young people participate fully in society.

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Complementing the views shared by the researcher, following **panel on good practices** provided valuable insights on policy implementation and **key success factors** across the region.

Jasmin Jasarevic, PRONI Centre for Youth Development, Bosnia and Herzegovina, referred to the concept of 'M*jesna zajednica*' (local community) plays important role in developing youth related initiatives at the local level in Brcko, but also questions an old fashioned pattern of communication and behaviour which are strongly rooted in the local culture. Good practice of developing and supporting the network of 26 Local Youth Clubs, especially in villages and suburb areas results in changing quality of life of the local youth, particularly for girls. Another success story is related to developing quality standards for these youth clubs, but also to coping mechanisms developed during multiplication of these practices. Additional value of these initiatives lies in their sustainability, despite extremely limited funding, which is provided by creating strong ties and joint decision-making bodies within the local community, as well as striving to bridge ethnic and gender divisions, and build links with other youth CSOs.
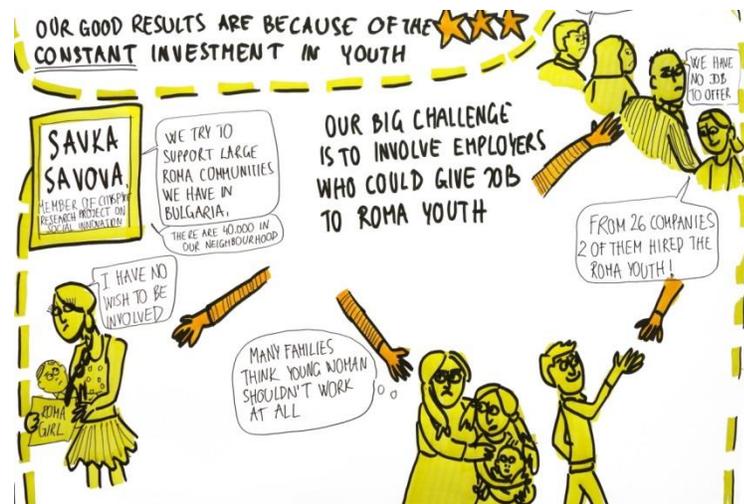
Savka Savova, HESED, a member of CITISPYCE Research Project on social innovation and inclusion of young people, Bulgaria: Example of the **Transfer of an integrated approach for the improvement of employment prospects among Roma youth** delivered in Sofia, Bulgaria based on a model of good practice from Brno, the Czech Republic [12] . The project covers establishment of services in Health and Social Centre for Community Development focusing on **prevention and personal growth,**

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[12] www.hesed.bg , www.iqrs.cz

and **education and professional career** within the Roma neighbourhoods. Highlight of good practice was the provision of **individual employment counselling** with Roma youth and creation of a **database** of young Roma job seekers, employers and relevant job advertisements. Although the focus of the project is put on employment, "*it has a long-term potential to increase social capital and contribute to the social trust, especially between the network of employers and young Roma job seekers*".

Marijana Rodic and Dzenana Dedic, European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA South East Europe) informed the participants about the latest efforts to establish the **Balkan Regional platform for youth participation and dialogue**. Apart from the establishment of the youth advisory groups at the local level in 5 countries (and 8 cities) across the Balkans,

the preliminary results of the regional participatory study show that young people play an **insignificant role** in the process of social change in the region. There is **a gap** between youth and the government institutions. The majority of the respondents (15-30) also believe that: "*Young people have a minor role in society, although there are structures for their participation on paper*", "*Young people are rarely asked for anything, and even when asked for their opinion, it has no major impact on the decisions*", "*Young people are perceived more as equal partners and resources in society by various CSOs, while this is not the case with the local authorities and institutions*". Still, "*Young people do make small changes in the community, and there are examples of good practice of teamwork and co-operation, but the largest change is happening at the personal level*".

Overall, the study shows that a lot needs to be done in order to strengthen co-operation of local authorities and strengthen their position within their national systems as well as to develop their capacities of advocating for improvement of young people's role in the decision making processes and access of those living in disadvantaged conditions to resources (especially funding, information and education).

Tony Geudens, Salto Inclusion, and **Adina Calafateanu, Pool of European Youth Researchers** stressed that "the policies should be kept alive" – developed and implemented where young people really are (like for example 'La Dolce Vita', the rural youth club in Romania). Youth policies should have young people as the main focus and actors, and should be based on **shared responsibility** of all partners involved from the European to the local level. The Erasmus + Inclusion and Diversity Strategy in the field of youth includes tips and strategic interventions for a participatory and inclusive approach to policy implementation.

ROLES OF NATIONAL POLICY AND DECISION MAKERS, PRACTITIONERS, AND RESEARCHERS

Emphasising that **future policy** addressing inclusion of youth needs to be **multidimensional** and based on their **real needs** (for example the need for belonging, acceptance, security, empowerment, sleep, water, property, emotional security), the representatives of various actors of the youth field formulated the following guidelines:

THE PRACTITIONERS DIRECTLY WORKING WITH YOUTH (face to face youth workers):

- Improving the conditions for **cross-sectoral** youth policy implementation,
- Improving the mechanisms for **direct involvement** of youth in the policy process,
- Fostering **motivation** of youth to actively take part in the policy implementation and develop a sense of ownership,
- Opening implementation to **verification and monitoring** and adjusting it accordingly.

'One size fits all' approach to open youth work was not seen as meaningful, especially not when addressing needs of youth in vulnerable situations.

YOUTH CSO

- **Bridging the gap** between governmental institutions and youth,
- Building **trust** as a platform for the future co-operation of various **stakeholders,**
- Improving the **capacities** of local stakeholders for youth policy implementation,
- Making youth policies more **effective** and **youth friendly**,
- Strengthening **horizontal co-operation** among various youth CSOs,
- Providing sustainable **funding** for youth policy implementation.

YOUTH RESEARCHERS

- **Fostering and clarifying the use of evidence based approach** to youth policy development and implementation, since its impact is not clear,
- In planning and developing youth strategies, **evidence** should look a bit more to the future **(foresight planning)** starting from emerging issues and actual youth realities,
- **Improving use of impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation** in youth policy implementation,
- **Adjusting** research methods to rapidly changing youth realities,
- **Developing indicators** in general and especially in the area of social inclusion, with particular care and sensitivity to specific groups, situations, and contexts,
- Establishing and strengthening existing national research structures on youth (Institutes, Agencies etc.) and building more think tank and knowledge development for better policies.

Overall, a **broken link** between researchers, policy makers and practitioners has been recognised in terms of knowledge production and dissemination. Researchers in the region face **similar challenges** as policy makers (long and complicated processes, not responding to

dynamic changing needs of current youth generations). Very often their motivation to produce academic papers dominates over the need to feed the policy process. This then links to the lack of appropriate ways of communicating results to other relevant actors in the youth field and reflects in policies.

POLICY AND DECISION MAKERS

- Creating conditions for **cross-sectoral** youth policy development as a prerequisite for making youth policies in the SEE region more inclusive,
- Using **strategic** and **outcome oriented approach** to youth policy development,
- **Building capacities** for mobilisation and co-ordination of relevant government sectors targeting youth,
- Raising understanding and demonstrating **how public investment in youth** as a resource can make a difference and create changes (through **media** and other creative ways), especially at the local level. **Positive approaches** are rarely heard and presented in practice so they need to be fostered,
- Promoting the role of **research** and **evidence based approach** for policy development, although additional efforts are needed to make it more up to date, understandable and applicable to the policy context.
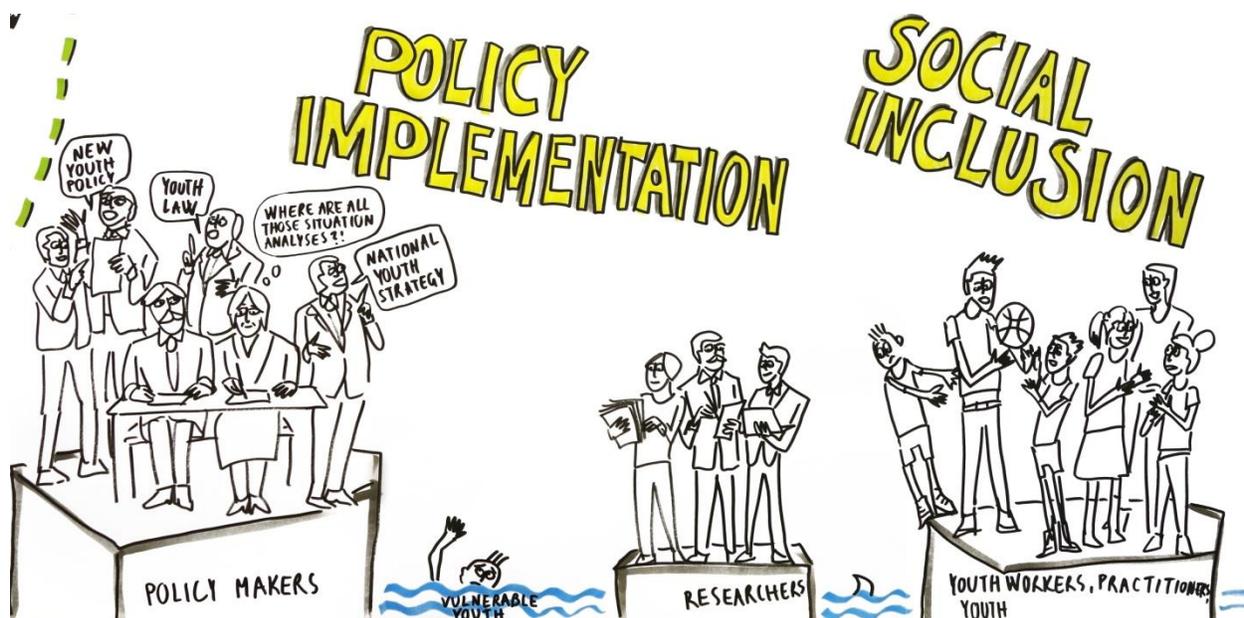
Sladjana Petkovic, Rapporteur (Pool of European Youth Researchers), summarised main learning points and highlights of the seminar.

Closing remarks were given by **Philipp Boetzelen and Tanya Basarab, EU-CoE youth partnership, André-Jacques Dodin, Council of Europe,** and **Karin Lopatta-Loibl, European Commission**, emphasising that both respective European institutions are committed to provide support to the countries in SEE region in order to strengthen their capacities for development and implementation of inclusive and participatory youth policies, promoting the human rights and evidence based approach, as well as the European values.

CONCLUSION AND KEY MESSAGES

The Council of Europe and European Commission recognised the **need** to understand the consequences of worsened social situation of youth in SEE, concluding that the quality of life of young people in the region relies on **sustainable implementation** of the policies related to social inclusion, based on mutual exchange, co-operation and solidarity. In this sense, the implementation of European policy frameworks, including follow up of the **Enter! project** and the ensuing Council of Europe [Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to the member States on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights](), or better use of the Erasmus + Inclusion and Diversity Strategy in the field of youth are important guidelines to start with.

The youth policy seminar provided **new insights** into specific challenges and opportunities in Western Balkans in dealing with social inclusion of youth in disadvantaged situations.

The seminar covered two complex themes such as **social inclusion** as a priority youth policy domain in most of the SEE countries, and **youth policy implementation** as the most challenging phase of the youth policy cycle across the region. Considering frequent policy change and short implementation history of youth policies, the priority of ensuring strong, actively implemented youth policy with a set of instruments and infrastructure in place took precedence in the discussions. The short-termism of youth policy cycles made it hard to explore how it fosters young people's inclusion (especially regarding youth in vulnerable situations). This came mostly from the presentations around youth work practice and some local case studies shared during the event.

- Despite the different contexts and dynamics, there are certain **commonalities**, including the use of evidence based approaches and of participative methodologies (mainly through consultations with stakeholders, including youth) in developing new strategies and regulations across the region.

- The **youth policy implementation** suffers from **a lack of accountability** and **institutional capacity**, as well as **a lack of tools**/mechanisms for meaningful cross-sectoral co-operation and collaboration in the most of the countries of SEE.

- Existing patterns and approaches to policy development and implementation **do not respond** effectively to the new social dynamics and rapidly changing (youth) realities, as well as to limited availability of resources, so they need to be critically questioned and redesigned (like in Slovenia).

- **Systemic change** is needed so the youth policy map is **reshaped**, and the political commitments/agendas reviewed across the region, so that '*business as usual*' approach to policy design and implementation can be overcome.

- New **result oriented approaches** to policy planning and design are needed. There are examples of good practice in the region (in "the former Yugoslav Republic of

Macedonia", in Montenegro, and in the Republica Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina)), starting from individuals and their realities, and striving to plan their **preferred futures** using innovative methods.

- New strategies should be flexible, providing platforms for action based on **rights** and **principles,** which are linked with flexible and measurable action plans.

- Special attention should be put on **contextualisation** and **individualisation** of policy development and implementation processes across the region, in order to address needs of youth in vulnerable situations more efficiently (avoiding *'one size fits all'* approach).

- **Knowledge gathering, dissemination and presentation** of the data in the field of youth is unstructured and not properly linked with the governance.

- Traditional wellbeing **indicators** used in monitoring and evaluation processes should be revised.

- The idea of establishing tools/mechanisms to **mainstream** youth in policy development and implementation was widely supported, and '*double mainstreaming*' suggested to provide prioritisation of social inclusion on every level of the governance.

- Youth in the region needs to be **empowered as stakeholders** building on their potential and capacities for social change in order to become aware of their role in transitional processes/societies.

- Successful policy implementation requires good **cross-sectoral co-ordination**, linked with established mechanisms for horizontal and vertical communication and peer-learning among stakeholders.

- Understanding the essence of the **cross-sectoral principle** is important, and should be based on the idea of **mutual contribution to the same goal** in order to establish the ground for implementation, based on co-operation and mutual commitment.

- The 'triggers' for an **innovative youth policy** are: a) *existing evidence of good practice* (showing what works in other regions of Europe), b) *pressure* (CSOs are willing to put more effort and pressure politicians), and c) *pragmatic assessment of the situation* (starting from the current state of play).

- **Key success factors** for youth policy implementations should be kept in mind like the youth centred realistic approach, use of creative, fostering sustainable partnerships etc.

- **Allocation and good management** of funds is needed especially at the local level, having in mind that youth CSOs struggle more and more for less and less funding in the region.

- One possible way of overcoming existing challenges is seen in the context of the EU youth co-operation with SEE - through the **Western Balkan Youth Window** of the **Erasmus+ programme** - which is opened in 2015 to project proposals regarding capacity building in the field of youth by organisations from Western Balkans, and explicitly refers to the support of activities involving young people with fewer opportunities in the Western Balkans. The **Council of Europe's European Youth Foundation** granting schemes is also a tool particularly accessible to small NGOs and groups of young people.

Finally, when tackling issues affecting young people in vulnerable situations, implementation of measures with their **direct involvement** in the dialogue, is paramount as it provides a unique and genuine perspective on the reality.