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**COMMISSION WORKING PAPER**

**Analysis of Member States' replies to the Commission questionnaires on youth participation and information**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Commission White Paper “A new impetus for European Youth”, adopted in November 2001, identifies information for young people and their participation in public life as priorities for action in the youth field. Participation, so strongly sought by young people, is indissociable from information, which is an essential precondition for such participation, but is insufficient in itself. Together, they must contribute to the broader objective of active youth citizenship and aim to “bring citizens, and primarily the young, closer to the European design and the European institutions”<sup>1</sup>.

In deciding to apply the open method of coordination (OMC) to these two priorities, the Member States demonstrated their will to reinforce their cooperation in implementing and monitoring policy in these areas. This was to be done “with a flexible approach in a manner suited to the youth field, with due regard for the competencies of the Member States and the principle of subsidiarity”<sup>2</sup>. It was on this basis that the Commission, in accordance with its mandate, drew up a questionnaire in consultation with the Member States for each of these two priorities and forwarded them to the Member States and the candidate countries, which were to be “associated with the framework of European cooperation in the youth field”.

These two separate questionnaires were drawn up using the same approach and with the same general structure, first gathering basic information, then an outline of current policy with examples of best practice, and, finally, details of expectations at European level.

Countries were also asked to specify the channels used nationally for consulting young people.

While the way in which the questions were handled differed from one country to another depending on the national situation of youth policy and the nature of youth involvement, the replies in terms of information supplied, ideas and proposals put forward and examples of good practice provided a fertile and interesting basis for this working paper.

The purpose of this report is to present a synoptic analysis of the replies to the questionnaire as a basis for proposing common objectives in the area of participation and information for adoption by the Council. For each theme, the replies are broken down into three main areas, preceded by explanatory factual information.

For the questionnaire on participation, the three main areas are: participation by young people in local community life, participation by young people in institutional systems of representative democracy, and education for active participation.

The three main areas for the information questionnaire are: access to information, quality of information for young people and participation by young people in producing and disseminating the information.

The replies from the candidate countries have been incorporated into the analysis for the 15 Member States.

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<sup>1</sup> Laeken Declaration, 14-15.12.2001.

<sup>2</sup> Council Resolution of 27.06.2002.

## **1. PARTICIPATION**

### **1.1. Factual information**

#### *1.1.1. Basic considerations and information*

There are 50 million young people in the 15 Member States, 60 million if the 10 countries set to join the Union in 2004 are included, and 75 million with all the candidate countries. In the 27 countries replying to the questionnaires, the population of 15-25 year olds represents between 11% and 19% of the national population.

The minimum voting age is 18 in all countries for the national and European elections, reduced to 16 in some for local elections; depending on country, young people represent between 10.5% and 17.5% of the electorate.

The proportion of young people voting is not always known and, where indicated, it is not always calculated in the same way (surveys, polls, ad hoc studies, etc.) and refers to different age groups (18-25, 18-30, etc.).

However, one general trend to emerge in the countries in which voting is not compulsory is a decline in the numbers voting, with a below-average turnout among young people (by around 10 points), and a growing division in the participation rate between young people and the other age groups.

The percentage of young elected representatives (aged under 30) is between 0% and 7% at national level, 0% and 5% at regional level and 0% and 10% at local level, depending on the country. Between 0.5% and 20% of young people belong to a political party.

While between 0.7% and 16% appear to belong to a trade union, there are no statistics enabling an overall picture to be gained, particularly as membership is often sporadic and restricted to certain sectors.

Participation systems are many and diverse. The most common are youth councils, youth parliaments and youth associations. Alongside such establishments, which are solely for young people, there are councils or committees open to participation by young people in an advisory or decision-making capacity, often at municipal level. Pupil or student councils are also popular, generally focusing on the establishment's internal affairs. Finally, many countries wishing to establish the opinions and needs of young people use forms of consultation such as surveys, forums, round table conferences, debates, etc.

#### *1.1.2. Legal bases*

The legal bases applying to participation fall variously under international, national and regional law.

Looking at the most international level, certain countries base their national laws on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some refer to participation in their constitution.

There is rarely a specific national law on youth. Many countries, however, have provisions on youth and participation in their laws on education, family, employment, citizenship, voting rights and eligibility. Some countries also have legal rules on youth representation, youth councils and associations, in particular on financing obligations. While specific national laws are rare, countries with federal systems generally have regional or local laws concerning young people. Some do not have laws as such, but rather political declarations, in some cases adopted by parliament.

### *1.1.3. Analysis of data quality*

All countries have a great deal of data, but the nature of those data and the means and frequency of their collection differ greatly, making them difficult to compare.

There are various approaches in respect of young people's participation in the institutional mechanisms of representative democracy. The data are usually estimates based on instruments ranging from indicators taken from reports on youth to the results of surveys or individual opinion polls, or studies, on the whole by universities or associations, sometimes in cooperation with the public authorities.

Looking at young people's participation in the life of their community, statistics generally cover only specific forms of participation, such as membership of an NGO or trade union. Other data, such as use of free time, can also be used to track such participation, but has only an indirect link with actual participation rates. The information can sometimes be found in national reports, but more often comes from individual surveys, opinion polls, studies and research with limited coverage.

There appears to be a vast area still to be covered to improve knowledge of participatory practices and evaluation of their social and personal benefits.

Although various countries point to the lack of specific impact studies, all agree that participation by young people contributes to the development of public policy. In the view of the countries consulted, it is important to find out more about young people's hopes and needs so as to adjust public policy accordingly. Where young people are involved in discussing, defining or, better still, in implementing policy, including preventive policy, decision-making methods are thereby improved. Their involvement has a positive impact on the quality of the decision-making process and alters society's image of young people.

Some countries are worried that, without any data confirming this positive impact, the public in general, and young people in particular, will not be aware of it.

Another major effect of participation which should be looked at more closely is the associated acquisition and development of skills. Useful for young people in their professional and social lives, such skills are also of value for society as a whole in that they contribute to "building intelligent citizenship"<sup>3</sup>.

While all agree on the positive impact of participation on young people's social integration, many say there is a long way to go on validating these skills, and on ensuring that they are as widely accessible as possible.

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<sup>3</sup> Phrase quoted by Belgium.

Participation has to be learnt, and education in this regard should be improved. This is the third major area in which the countries consulted wish to improve monitoring and obtain more data with which to measure progress.

If participation cannot be developed without specific education, the latter will only be credible if parallel concrete initiatives are taken to encourage youth participation both in community life and in the institutional mechanisms of representative democracy.

Data quality must be improved for all these areas of action.

## **1.2. Participation by young people in community life**

*Key points:*

- *Participation is anchored in the local community.*
- *The right to participation is recognised, but more resources should be allocated.*
- *Participation should not stop at dialogue; young people must be involved in decision making.*
- *Relays working with young people on the ground have a crucial role.*
- *All countries are concerned to see a maximum of young people involved.*
- *One of the principal difficulties identified is coordinating the various actors and actions in this field.*
- *Of the objectives proposed, some seek to improve the conditions for participation while others deal with projects and actions promoting it.*

### *1.2.1. Analysis of the situation from Member States' point of view*

Participation by young people in decisions affecting them begins in their normal day-to-day environment.

The best way to make young people's involvement in the decision-making process more effective is to take more account of their specific needs and personal development.

One way to implement this is to develop co-responsibility and co-decision structures. Becoming involved in this way, young people will bring with them their dynamism, enthusiasm and sense of initiative, enriching and giving a fresh impetus to future action.

Care must be taken to ensure that young people have a genuine influence. Representativeness, particularly in respect of marginalised or excluded young people, is essential. They must be taken seriously and their actions made to count.

Lack of an adequate legal basis and quality standards is an obstacle to such participation. The relative complexity of participatory democratic processes also



makes coordination between actors difficult and makes more demands on time and resources.

Schools are still a major channel for participation. Young people are involved in various ways, as class representatives, for example. In most countries replying to the questionnaire, there is a legal basis for such participation in the form of pupils' or students' councils, which are generally affiliated to national federations.

Other organisations outside the education system, such as local youth councils or organisations and sometimes sports organisations, also represent young people's interests.

All countries have channels for dialogue with young people. The nature of these advisory bodies and the type of dialogue vary from one to another, but all combine organisations specifically for young people — such as youth councils or parliaments — with mixed organisations comprising young people, policy makers, youth workers, etc.; there is generally permanent, structured provision for dialogue with young people.

There seems to be a growing tendency to see participation as an objective in its own right, giving rise to national initiatives which are relayed down to local level, even where there are no legal obligations.

Developing participation is a means of implementing the principles of good governance and openness to civil society.

At local level, some countries have specific authorities in charge of youth affairs.

### *1.2.2. Action and strategy at national level*

Analysis of the situation is reflected in a broad range of measures intended to develop young people's participation in community life.

Irrespective of the constraints imposed by current legislation on participation, individual countries support youth work at local level in the form of initiatives, projects or forums organised by NGOs, youth centres or local associations. All seek to reinforce the local fabric which is the root of active citizenship.

There is an emphasis on the role of actors on the ground, in particular that of social workers, who act as an essential relay informing young people about public authority action and programmes, providing support for them in implementing projects and initiatives, and publicising and utilising the results. Also seen as important are the partnerships with the youth councils and parliaments, local authorities and schools.

Participatory mechanisms at work generally mean the election of the staff committee, specialised committees or trade union representatives and are not included in youth policy. Generally speaking, there are no specific moves to inform young people about participation possibilities at work.

As well as information, guidance and counselling activities, support for participation includes training, including training in project management, and exchange of experience. Certain instruments seeking to promote active citizenship among young

people in their daily lives are developed at national level but are available at local level.

The vehicles most frequently mentioned are the Internet, various types of meeting, debates, consultations and non-formal education programmes. The White Paper process is given as an example. Aid can also be financial.

One of the main restrictions to developing a local participation strategy is the difficulty of coordinating various areas of interest for young people involving many local actors who do not necessarily have partnership contacts, with a view to establishing coherence between the different decision-making levels.

The second weakness of current policies is the relative fragility of the mechanisms, including legal mechanisms which, as well as improving the conditions for participation, ensure that young people are involved in decisions.

The question of quality, and quality standards, is brought up frequently.

Finally, maximum accessibility is a concern shared by all countries. Specific difficulties and needs require appropriate responses (specific projects, youth centres, street work). One idea is to make more use of relays from the groups concerned. To be successful, action must take an integrative approach bringing together young people, whether disadvantaged or not, at sports or cultural events etc. For certain excluded groups, the participation objective is linked to combating violence.

If the question of gender is approached in the same way as the other groups — participation, particularly in decision making, is more difficult — opinions on the action needed differ in that some countries recommend reserving specific areas for young women. Indeed, some countries suggest running specific actions for young men.

Most gender equality measures are run by specific public or private bodies specialised in this area rather than in youth issues.

### *1.2.3. Member States' expectations at European level*

All the countries consulted are concerned to encourage young people to take an active part in community life.

At European level, this concern is reflected in a wish to exchange experience, find solutions to shared problems and assess progress together.

Europe, which, for young people, is an area of values among which they live, study, work and travel, is an appropriate context for tackling problems affecting all young Europeans.

The recommended measures target different objectives. Some seek to improve conditions for participation, while others are more directly concerned with developing actions and projects in this area. A wide variety of instruments are proposed for achieving these objectives.

Information, guidance, and counselling must be combined with communication in which young people play an active role and can make their voice heard.

On the question of training and support measures, the Member States have a preference for “tailor-made” approaches which should be given more weight and recognition. Young people must be offered specific training, in particular in project management, since one of the fundamental objectives is that young people should implement their own participation projects themselves.

These projects are to be developed in their immediate environment. Support for youth NGOs, which contribute much to advancing the cause of voluntary service, would benefit from networking activities and exchange of best practice.

The current YOUTH programme, and a future programme, must also support these projects, in respect of which Member States consider that quality is more important than quantity.

Member States would like to see more action on the two areas identified above: on the one hand, support mechanisms and, on the other, projects on participation. This will require more extensive knowledge of the participation issue (observatories, establishing criteria, etc.).

Some propose including measures and actions promoting youth participation in youth work development plans. All point out the importance of taking into account the specific difficulties of marginalised and disadvantaged young people.

#### *1.2.4. Good practices*

There is a variety of good practices in the Member States and in the accession countries regarding the participation of young people in their communities. However, the good practices can generally be grouped in five main categories: Campaigns and events; Youth work; Activities of Youth organisations, Youth Councils; Information and communication; Direct participation in decision-making.

Some Member States try to make young people participate in civil society by providing them with information about their opportunities to participate in a relaxed, fun-oriented framework. To this end they organise campaigns and events with a high degree of originality of ideas and a proactive approach.

Quite a number of countries find that youth work in its various forms can serve as best practice when it comes to making young people participate, in particular at local level. The examples in this field are numerous, amongst projects aimed at integrating young people from a less privileged background who are at risk of exclusion.

Some Member States and accession countries have developed or are in the process of developing National Youth Plans. Nearly all Member States agree that youth organisations play an important role in encouraging young people to participate in civil society, at all levels. Youth Councils are mentioned quite often, as are youth fora. There are many ways in which Youth Councils encourage young people to participate: they might inform young people about their possibilities to participate, but they also offer an opportunity to learn participation in taking over functions and responsibility within the organisation itself.

Important tools for enhancing young people’s participation in civil society are information and communication. These are cross-sectional issues that are part of the other best practice categories as well. However, as information and communication

are often the first means of letting people know about their possibilities and rights to participate, they are mentioned in a separate category. The Internet is an evolving information and communication tool. This can be identified from the answers of a large number of countries. An interesting and challenging way of learning participation is to take part in the decisions directly, e.g. concerning the planning of projects in the community. Some Member States offer this possibility and have suggested it as best practice.

Of the various examples of good practices in the field, the following could be singled out:

- “*Les caravanes nationales: les jeunes, des citoyens actifs*”, France: “Citizenship caravans” were set up to encourage young people to vote in the elections and inform them about their civic rights and duties. Three caravans toured France in December 2001 to meet as many young people as possible and get their citizenship message across. They called at most of the major towns, covering the whole of France armed with brochures, explanatory pamphlets, posters and other information material, permanently staffed by teams of young people, seeking to meet other young people to exchange views, debate, communicate and convince. The young teams sought out their target public at school entrances, shopping centres, young workers’ establishments, university campuses, cinemas, etc., i.e. on their own territory.
- The Government of *Ireland* has decided to implement a National Youth Work Development Plan, with a view to encouraging the development of youth participation structures and mechanisms by means of a governmental plan for the youth sector. The commitment of a government to enhance youth participation by making it a clear and measurable political objective is certainly an important signal to those active in the youth sector, thereby boosting attempts in numerous fields (youth organisations, schools, etc.) to make young people participate in civil society.
- In the field of Youth Councils many examples could be given. The Flemish Youth Council, *Belgium* is open to both individual young people and youth work organisations. Anyone who feels concerned by the issues the Flemish Youth Council deals with and wants to sign its democratic charter may become a member of this Council. The members of the general assembly are elected and major policy lines defined at the Council's statutory congress. The general assembly consists of individual young people, people from nationally recognised youth organisations, one young person active in the “*Scholierenkoepel*” (umbrella organisation for pupils) and one young person active in the Association of Flemish Students. Three commissions provide support for the general assembly: the commission on youth work policy, the commission on youth policy and the international commission. The general assembly, commissions and working groups are open to everyone.
- In the context of information and communication via the Internet, *Finland* has developed a project, launched by ministries, municipalities and NGOs, which aims at improving both young people’s and the general public’s opportunities to participate in the policy-making process. This project is in line with the Act on the Openness of Government Activities, which obliges the public authorities to provide accessible information on matters of general interest before a decision is

taken. On the Internet the general public, the decision-makers and the administrations have a virtual forum for discussing issues of current interest on which decisions are being prepared. The project involves cooperation with schools. The idea is to inform pupils about the work of public authorities, make them aware of ongoing decision-making processes and have them write reports on the procedures involved as well as on the content.

- *Solidarité*: SOS Jeunes is a service assisting young people in an open environment in Brussels, *Belgium*. The project addresses young people aged between 17 and 25 who have dropped out of education, irrespective of social origin. They are offered a “citizenship” year which broadly corresponds to a type of civilian service. For one academic year, the young people are placed in supervised mixed teams of eight. 70% of their time is spent on developing a service for the local community, and the remaining 30% on training, a guidance module for social integration, support for specific personal projects (such as learning to drive, learning a language, an art, etc.) and, for one or more teams, support for an international project. The participants are paid expenses for their work and receive financial support for their projects.

### **1.3. Youth participation in institutional systems of representative democracy**

*Key points:*

- *Participation by young people in institutional political representation mechanisms is vital to a living democracy.*
- *Taking more account of young people’s needs and interests and their ideas and contributions provides an incentive for greater participation.*
- *A structured dialogue between young people and policy makers is essential.*
- *The various elected representation bodies should be made more open to young people.*
- *This greater openness and dialogue are recommended at all levels of representation, including European.*
- *More should be done to analyse and monitor the civic exclusion process.*

#### *1.3.1. Analysis of the situation from Member States' point of view*

The whole of society must be represented democratically. This means encouraging young people to participate, so that their needs, interests and ideas can better be taken into account. Most Member States feel that this will contribute to a well-functioning society and the development of public policy and, as such, is an integral part of improving governance.

Some Member States emphasise, however, that young people have only a limited influence on policy and are sometimes more aware of general and global issues than of local issues over which they could have a greater influence.

The first step in reducing the gap separating young people from a sense of political responsibility is to introduce or strengthen a structured dialogue with policy makers.

Such dialogue could be initiated by policy makers at various levels, if only with the existing organised, structured forms of youth representation (such as youth councils and parliaments). Other potential initiators are committees, groups or youth commissions within administrations, at their various levels of competence.

Political organisations have a role in organising this dialogue and in dealing with youth issues.

Beyond the question of dialogue, that of young people's access to political responsibility and decision making is of increasing concern as participation by young people appears to be in irreversible decline.

This issue is still more crucial for disadvantaged and marginalised young people.

The situation is reflected in the growing difficulty in sustaining the traditional organisations, with no sign of any new participatory structures to replace them. This could point to a crisis of democratic representation and risk eroding the values of citizenship and giving rise to increasing individualism.

There is a real need here to identify the factors discouraging participation.

### *1.3.2. Action and strategy at national level*

Although recognised and generally condemned, the downward trend in young people's participation in the mechanisms of representative democracy is rarely the subject of analysis based on regular monitoring of data, let alone any national strategy to counteract it. Most countries only have occasional assessments or adopt a partial approach, looking only at young people's opinions on a particular question.

Various forms of dialogue between young people and policy makers are developing, however, some formal, some more informal (round-table discussions, etc.).

There is increasing consultation of young people at all levels, by means of interviews, questionnaires, workshops, etc. In many cases, it is directed at specific target groups.

Young people are invited to take part in debates, steering groups, committees, panels, conferences, meetings and work sessions.

Most countries are increasingly using innovative approaches: suggestions boxes, neighbourhood committees, graffiti, role playing, videos, photography, open days, etc.

In some cases, use is made of existing channels such as the education system or social workers to organise dialogue with particular groups of young people.

Large-scale actions at national level are often short-term, linked to a specific event (election campaigns, for example).

### *1.3.3. Member States' expectations at European level*

Participation by young people in institutional systems lies at the very heart of democracy. Where measures within their territory are concerned, Member States look to the European level to provide a forum for discussion and exchange of views and, if possible, for defining generally accepted common principles and objectives valid throughout Europe.

Generally speaking, Member States feel that existing representation structures need to be strengthened and, as far as possible, involved more closely in decision making. This also applies to organisations representing young people, which are an important vehicle for representing civil society.

Concerning youth participation in European institutional systems, some Member States, while recognising the role played by the European Youth Forum, feel that the grass roots representative organisations and non-organised young people should have easier access to European affairs.

Others consider that the consultation model used in the White Paper "A new impetus for European youth" could be a way of involving youth organisations and non-organised young people more closely. Networking to allow debate between various organisations is also seen as a necessary element in creating a participation dynamic.

In order to develop youth representation as a component of civil society, several Member States consider that the European Youth Forum should be involved more closely in the work of the Economic and Social Committee.

To increase youth participation in representative democracy, some Member States underline the importance of measures to bring young people closer to the public institutions, through means such as regular, co-ordinated consultation sessions with those institutions.

### *1.3.4. Good practices*

A wide range of practices listed concern the improvement of youth participation in elections, since the number of young voters is generally low. Information and media campaigns, Internet sites, public debates with young people are widespread. Most Member States aim also at increasing the attractiveness of representative democracy by offering in parallel to official representative structures youth representative structures, e.g. through youth parliaments at different levels, youth mayors, etc. Creative approaches such as simulation games, for instance by showing how parliaments work, are most suitable for attracting young people.

In some cases Member States, regions and local authorities had some positive experiences with lowering the voting age to young people of 16 in order to raise their interest in public affairs.

In order to facilitate young people's participation in elections, initiatives go to the places where young people are, to inform them in their very own environment, for example at school, instead of having them come to a fixed venue. Others organise bigger festivals which attract young people by a multicultural approach and a diversity of activities.

The following examples illustrate some of the good practices mentioned:

- Mock parliament: this is a game stimulating the workings of the Parliament, organised by the Secretary of State for Youth and Sports in *Portugal*. The Secretary of State provides schools with a handbook containing the rules for setting up a national youth parliament. Through this stimulation, young people become familiar with the electoral and decision-making procedures. The Portuguese Parliament (Assembleia da República) has institutionalised a project entitled "school and parliament" aimed at secondary schools in particular. The young people are elected at school and subsequently invited to the Parliament, where they take part in assimilated parliamentary debate.
- Vote4Future, *Austria*: In the national elections held in November 2002, about 1 million young Austrians under the age of 30 were invited to vote. Around 250 000 young people were asked to vote for the first time. Occasionally the National Youth Council initiated a campaign «Vote4Future» with the aim of motivating young people to take part in the elections. An own homepage – the heart of the campaign – shows why it is necessary to vote but also provides detailed information about the elections as such. Young people were given via the homepage an opportunity to obtain information on the parties' programmes and to debate virtually with the parties and during Live Chats with the candidates. The campaign does not depend on any political party and is supported by the Presidency of the National Council, a number of media and prominent Austrians.
- Election youth debates in the *Netherlands*: the *Jeugdraad*'s election youth debate is a good way of increasing the involvement of young people in the elections. They themselves enter into debate with the party leaders. In addition, it reaches other young people. The media devote extensive attention to it. The *jongeren-lagerhuisdebat* (youth parliamentary debate) is another successful form of debate. It is broadcast on national television every week. During this programme young people discuss current political issues with each other and prominent guests from the political arena, for example.
- The Youth Parliament is an educational programme organised by the Greek Parliament on an annual basis with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education of *Greece* and the Ministry of Education and Culture of *Cyprus*. It is aimed at pupils of 16-20 years of age. The main objective of this programme is to develop among young people a positive attitude towards the value of "participation in public life", as well as to initiate them into the values, rules and practices of democracy. 350 teenage deputies from *Greece*, *Cyprus* and *Greeks* abroad are selected as young parliamentarians; the parliamentary proceedings are published and distributed to all Greek MPs and Ministers, to local authorities, to schools, to the church administration, to the Press and to all parties interested; the Plenary Session of the Youth Parliament is broadcast live on television. The competent parliamentary committees, the Governments of both *Greece* and *Cyprus*, various political, social and local players, etc. receive a copy of the final synthesis.
- Middlesbrough Young People's Mayor (YPM), *United Kingdom*: When Middlesbrough's adult voters directly elected a Mayor in May 2002, young people were also given the opportunity to vote for a YPM. Middlesbrough is the first town to have an elected YPM. The YPM was supported by a budget of £30 000 from the Council. He shadows the adult Mayor and ensures that young people's



views are presented to the town's decision-making bodies. The YPM is also accountable to the Middlesbrough Youth Parliament, which is composed of around 30 people representing schools and community groups and has been involved in changes affecting the town. Since the adult Mayor has other duties and the YPM has school and social commitments which are seen to take priority, a support officer has been appointed to help the YPM in his duties.

#### **1.4. Education for participation**

*Key points:*

- *Participation is built on an individual learning process.*
- *This learning process must be developed not only through formal education, but also through non-formal or informal education, which plays a fundamental role in imparting the social skills needed for young people to participate actively.*
- *The links between formal and non-formal education must be strengthened.*
- *In both areas of education, more use must be made of young people's experience of participation and their projects in this field through more familiarisation and exchange.*
- *In the course of this learning process, special attention must be paid to young people in difficulty.*

##### *1.4.1. Analysis of the situation from Member States' point of view*

Schools are an obvious place for teaching active citizenship, and it should be included in the curricula. But schools are also an environment for exercising citizenship skills. Pupils can be involved in decisions affecting the life of the school. It gives them an opportunity to take on responsibility and develop self-confidence. They can bring their own potential to bear and contribute to an innovative approach.

Many countries feel that more emphasis should be placed on active participation and civic education. This also means training teachers in the subject. Programmes and ad hoc aids are needed; schools should have more contact with local communities and the outside world, as this is an essential condition for them to meet their responsibilities in teaching citizenship. There must be closer links between schools (formal education) and the non-formal education environment. This will also enable young people outside formal education to be included.

Education in active participation provides a means of learning which is of benefit to young people and, ultimately, to society as a whole. The skills most often mentioned are the capacity to formulate and present ideas; participate in debate, listen and negotiate; the ability to take initiatives and implement projects operating within given limits and constraints.

##### *1.4.2. Action and strategy at national level*

Although participation is recognised as an important element of the curriculum, it does not always occupy much of a place in programmes. Civic, social and political

education courses exist, but to a differing degree in different countries and across different age groups.

Active participation by pupils in the life of the establishment, although seen as worthwhile, is not necessarily effective; many young people are not involved and it can be difficult to ensure maximum participation.

Some countries are developing policies to provide teaching support for young people wishing to design and implement projects. "Learning by doing" or learning through games or role playing are other approaches gaining in popularity.

These types of measure are usually developed in parallel and the various teaching and support relays often lack structured channels for dialogue. In both cases, there is also the problem of recognising the skills acquired.

There is little in the way of strategy for training and increasing awareness among policy makers and public administrations on the subject of participation.

#### *1.4.3. Member States' expectations at European level*

Member States make various suggestions for fostering participation skills in young people. In most cases, these involve encouraging them to participate in social, economic and political life and promoting participation and citizenship culture and education. The approach put forward is to open-up decision-making systems through measures ranging from role playing (organisation of elections, organisation of youth parliaments, etc.) to participation in decision-making procedures (through consultation or co-management).

These measures rely mainly on non-formal learning, which has prompted certain Member States to suggest that the skills acquired should be recognised by the formal education system as a means of recognising commitment shown through involvement in participation activities. Member States see the potential European contribution, in addition to the exchange of good practice, in creating conditions in which such non-formal learning can be recognised and its benefits exploited to the full.

Another frequent concern is encouraging participation by the most disadvantaged youngsters. Several Member States point out that the route to participation follows a specific trajectory which starts at school, passes through clubs and associations, and may end ultimately in political involvement. It is a route typically followed by young people in the better-off sectors (level of education, etc.) and is less accessible to those with fewer advantages.

#### *1.4.4. Good practices*

The good practices in this field comprise formal and non-formal learning as well as training for young people, multipliers and administrators.

In formal education the integration of subjects as citizenship education or social and political education is an important means of teaching young people about participation and in some Member States it is part of their official school curricula.

Schools remain in all Member States a place where participation plays the most important role in learning to participate; nevertheless, it sometimes remains a theoretical issue of curricula instead of a good practice to experience participation in everyday life in schools. In most countries, elections for School and University Councils offer pupils the opportunity to learn to participate through “learning by doing”.

In the non-formal sector, a wide range of activities provide possibilities for learning and practising participation; in some Member States, pilot projects play an important role in learning how to participate and in finding innovative and new solutions for better participation strategies.

Some youth work initiatives, which can be characterised as learning offers between formal and non-formal learning, aim at integrating young people from less privileged backgrounds and at devising participation strategies for the socially excluded.

Moreover, good practices are to be found not only in the education of young people but in some cases as well in the training of adults, teachers, youth workers and organisers, especially counsellors.

The following specific examples give an idea of the wide range of good practices which have been identified:

- *Denmark* has launched a pilot project that comprises a sort of “shadow elections” for young people. In 1998 a Danish TV station, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and political youth organisations, held a parliamentary election for children and young people, in conjunction with “real” general elections. The project was launched to give children and young people the opportunity to express their opinions and to gain an insight into the democratic process of an election. About 40% of schools participated and more than 120 000 children and young people voted. Because of the great success, the project was repeated at the general election in November 2001.
- *Sweden* has gained valuable experience with school elections. The school election 2002 was arranged by the National Board for Youth Affairs, the National Agency for Education, the Election Authority and the Swedish Association of Student Councils. The voting was set up in a similar fashion to the national voting procedure (voting on existing political parties) and was accompanied by political debates in many schools. As many as 250 000 young people participated and the voting turnout was over 90% within the participating schools. This was a substantial increase compared to the school elections in 1998. The voting figures at various schools were compiled and presented as local, regional and national figures by the National Board for Youth Affairs.
- *Germany* has a training programme for qualifying counsellors as experts for participation of children and young people (in the Land of Rheinland-Pfalz). Between 1999 and 2002, a total of 53 counsellors were trained to become such experts whose task is to motivate, to accompany and to support young people in participation processes, to organise a dialogue with the adult world and to enable them to take part in planning and decision processes. The professional background of the counsellors is particularly the youth sector, where they work in kindergartens, youth centres, youth administrations, etc. The training includes

legal and financial aspects of participation, project funding and planning, different methods of presentation and communication, public relations and specific pedagogic approaches. The training comprises a period of practice in the working environment of the participants, where they carry out an own-participation project in the field.

- By assisting pilot projects, *Luxembourg's* National Youth Service seeks to promote non-formal education activities as a means of encouraging the acquisition of skills and aptitudes, active participation and social integration of young people. Youth associations and organisations, youth clubs and groups and all young people aged between 12 and 26 either collectively or individually are eligible for this assistance. Projects are selected on the basis of key elements such as their objectives, the target groups, relevant skills and experience and the evaluation plan. The projects must be innovative in trying out new approaches or models in connection with the Youth Affairs Ministry's guidelines: youth participation in society, equal opportunities for all young people, the promotion of fundamental values such as democracy, solidarity and tolerance.
- *Spain's* Youth Council is running an "education for participation" programme, through which it is planned to develop tools and strategies for working with young people on participatory values and attitudes, based on the premise that participation is an essential precondition for exercising full citizenship. The programme entails two main lines of action: drawing up a guide to education for participation and running a series of training seminars for mediators in the use of this guide, with a view to producing the desired multiplier effect.

## **2. INFORMATION**

### **2.1. The facts**

#### *2.1.1. Basic considerations and information*

Only a few Member States have a clearly identifiable youth information strategy which is implemented by national youth information networks, ensuring coordination between the national, regional and local levels. The majority of Member States and candidate countries do not, however, have a genuine, funded, systematic, coherent and integrated youth information policy or any all-embracing youth information strategy.

Most of the countries have developed instruments and tools (such as youth information dialogue, education and counselling systems, youth associations, specialised NGOs, etc.) which give an impetus to the future development of a genuine and well coordinated youth information policy at the various levels. There seems to be a common trend to decentralise the responsibility for the shaping and dissemination of youth information to the regional and local levels.

The large majority of Member States and candidate countries stress the need to develop a specific information policy targeted at young people. Only a minority of countries reject this necessity. Many countries which have a specific youth information policy link it to individual counselling of young people. Nearly all countries share the view that youth information remains at the same time part of the

general information policy. Both are complementary to each other: general information policy does not exclude the development of a specific youth information policy and vice versa.

Most of the countries have defined target groups for youth information activities. These target groups are very often defined by age, mostly young people between 12 and 30. In a minority of countries the target groups have been extended to children below the age of 12.

An additional, mostly secondary, target group consists of those working with young people, such as parents, teachers, educators, counsellors, librarians, social workers, youth workers, etc. This target group obviously has different information requirements.

### *2.1.2. Legal basis*

In the large majority of Member States and candidate countries there is no specific legal basis relating to youth information. In most of the countries youth information is part of different legal acts (such as laws, decrees and other regulations) and administrative stipulations relating to the structure and functioning of the authorities working in the youth area. Youth information is very often part of legal acts in the area of education, social affairs, media and relations with non-governmental organisations.

In addition to that, many countries mention the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a general binding framework for their activities. The European Youth Information Charter which was adopted in 1993 by the General Assembly of the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) constitutes another major reference. Nearly all countries adhere to the principles outlined in the ERYICA charter.

### *2.1.3. Analysis of the quality of the data*

The data provided by the Member States and candidate countries in response to the questionnaire on youth information are very abundant. They give a good general overview of the situation in each Member State and candidate country in this area. They also enable common trends to be identified, especially with regard to the challenges and aims of youth information, its organisation and the most important tools used.

However, the situation is also characterised by a high degree of divergence. This is mainly due to the differences regarding basic information (such as financial resources, legal basis), the role of the players in youth information, the distribution channels and the expectations with regard to the European level. With regard to specific questions (such as on finances, indicators, activities at regional and local levels, etc.), quite often precise data are lacking or the data provided cannot be compared owing to the differences with regard to the specific national situation. Thus very often the data must be interpreted within the national context.

## **2.2. Access to information**

<i>Key points :</i>
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- *Information is a tool which helps young people to prepare their future and contributes to enhancing their active citizenship.*
- *The central challenge many countries are facing consists in overcoming the socio-economic and cultural disadvantages and the obstacles related to remote location, enabling all young people to obtain equal and non-discriminatory access to information and advice services.*
- *The cooperation and coordination of information and advice services existing at national and European levels has to be improved in order to use synergies and avoid redundancies, aiming at the provision of coherent and easily accessible services adapted to the needs and environment of young people.*
- *The use of the Internet as a major information channel for young people has to be strengthened, especially by interconnecting existing youth information sites at local, regional and national levels with the new European Youth Portal.*

### 2.2.1. *Analysis of the situation from Member States' point of view*

The Member States and candidate countries share to a large extent the view that only a specific information strategy can cope with young people's needs for guidance, life planning and their desire to shape their own future. Young people need information in order to understand the possibilities available to them and to make informed choices.

The precondition for this is that information is available and accessible to all young people, regardless of their location, ability and socio-economic status. However, general non-discriminatory access to youth information for all young people is not available in every Member State and candidate country.

Access to information implies the question of financing it. All countries stick to the principle that the use of youth information and counselling services should be free of charge.

Some Member States have started to decentralise the provision of youth information and to bring it as close as possible to young people. Networks of youth information access points have been established which offer information to young people at regional and local levels too and in remote, often rural, areas. The aim is to give young people the possibility to have easy access to information and counselling services, e.g. irrespective of their educational or social background and geographical location.

A specific feature of candidate countries seems to be that access to information (computers, Internet, newspapers, telephone, etc.) is often problematic for young people because of the low standard of living in certain areas.

The question of access to information also covers the aspect of how to provide young people with the means and knowledge of getting access to information, how to use information and take advantage of it. In fact, many Member States stress that young people have to be prepared for the "literacy skills" required by the information society. They have to understand the various dimensions of the "new media" and how to use them (Internet, e-mail, etc.). This is a question of "capacity building"

among young people. It plays a crucial role, since the capacity to use new information and communication technologies contributes to the enhancement of social and economic integration. Such a knowledge, some countries stress, is not only a question of a purely technical know-how but also a question of media education, social understanding, ethics, values and individual behaviour (especially with regard to games showing violence, racist web pages, Internet etiquette, etc.).

In more general terms, the majority of Member States argue that access to information and advice helps young people to develop a critical mind, especially with regard to consumption, and thus enhances their autonomy and self-responsibility. The major aim in this respect is to promote with the help of information the emancipation of all young people, to facilitate their involvement in society as far as possible and thus to contribute to the development of becoming responsible citizens.

Access to specific youth information, some countries stress, is especially necessary to facilitate young people's understanding of "political themes" such as the functioning of political parties and institutions, the role of elections, the policy-making process, etc. General information services are sometimes regarded as bureaucratic and impersonal, with information not always available in an environment which young people find attractive or in a language which they understand.

In addition, many countries have the feeling that access to information about the EU is inadequate. Young people do not understand the decision-making process at European level and the opportunities which European integration offers. Young people have therefore to be better informed about the new European opportunities which are available to them. To this end, information on European matters must be available in easily accessible formats and presented in a user-friendly, jargon-free way.

### *2.2.2. Challenges and actions at national level*

There is a consensus among Member States and candidate countries to offer access to relevant information to all young people. However, very often less well-educated young people, young people from financially weak families, young people from a different cultural background or young people living in remote places have difficulties in getting the appropriate information. The central challenge many countries are facing consists therefore in overcoming the socio-economic disadvantages and the obstacles related to the remote location of young people in getting access to information.

Another challenge is linked to the developments in the information society. The question of access to information is linked to young people's competence and ability to use modern information and communication tools. Competencies in using information and communication technologies (ICT) are the necessary precondition of having access to the information which is increasingly offered by modern tools. Nearly all countries therefore request that all young people are trained in ICT and should have access to the Internet in the places where they live, learn and meet (such as at home, in school, in youth organisations, clubs, etc). However, traditional information products (such as brochures, posters, flyers) and distribution channels (such as information stands, public libraries) still play an important role.

A further challenge Member States and candidate countries stress in this context is the need to develop young people's capacities and competencies to deal with information and to make critical use of it. The knowledge about how to use information and communication technologies has to be supplemented by the more content-oriented knowledge about how to find information, to select relevant information (very often out of a mass of information) and to draw conclusions from it.

With regard to these challenges, some Member States and candidate countries have developed a variety of measures:

- to facilitate access to information for as many young people as possible, particularly for the less privileged, by offering information services which are freely accessible, easily understandable, not discriminatory (especially against young women and people from a different social and cultural background), anonymous and free of charge;
- to develop measures adapted to specific target groups which enhance access to information and raise awareness of the use of information and communication technologies;
- to offer easy access to information with the help of the Internet, especially for disadvantaged young people, by providing hardware, software and Internet access to youth information services and activities in the area of non-formal learning;
- to develop young people's competencies in finding, obtaining, understanding and analysing information in order to become autonomous, critical and emancipated users of information;
- to facilitate access by all young people to information in their direct environment, in particular through the development of specific youth information networks and distribution channels adapted to the local and regional context and to individual peculiarities of specific target groups;
- to enhance the cooperation, coordination and coherence between public and private players working in the area of youth information (such as youth authorities, municipalities, associations, pre-schools, schools, libraries, sports clubs, etc.) at the various levels in order to use synergies and avoid redundant information;
- to enhance the coordination and cooperation between general information policy and information policy specifically addressed to young people.

### 2.2.3. *Expectations at European level*

So far the existing youth information services in Member States and candidate countries are not very much linked to each other. Many Member States and candidate countries would therefore like to improve the cooperation and coordination between their respective youth information services. One major idea is to develop a common architecture of youth information services which will allow young people to have easy access to relevant information in any Member State or candidate country. In



order to offer similar services, the development of common standards for youth information is necessary.

With regard to the European level many Member States and candidate countries would like to give more support to existing networks such as the European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA), the EURODESK network and the European Youth Card Association. These networks have to intensify their cooperation and should seek synergies as far as possible. Moreover, many countries stress the need to intensify the cooperation between the European networks and existing national networks of youth information services.

In this context nearly all Member States and candidate countries support the idea of establishing a European Youth Portal. They expect that this tool will facilitate youth information and counselling work not only at European level but also at national, regional and local levels. The portal will contribute to young people's access to information society. Through the portal young people would learn how the EU works and what opportunities it offers them (languages, funding, travel, jobs, etc.). In addition to that, the portal would constitute a common platform for information and advice (especially in the area of mobility, leisure, training, education, jobs) for the different national youth information services and would be linked to the information networks at European, national, regional and local levels. The European Youth Portal could become a catalyst for the development of a network of national and European youth portals and could strengthen cooperation in providing youth information services. Many Member States emphasise that to be successful such an initiative must be well coordinated and adequately financed.

Many Member States observe that young people's information and knowledge about the European Union is deficient. There is especially a lack of information concerning the European Parliament and procedures for election to this Parliament aimed at first-time voters. It is therefore necessary to improve the information about the EU and bring it closer to young people.

The information provided should be easily understandable, up to date, free of charge and accessible without restrictions. Some countries consider that the information should be offered as far as possible in young people's mother tongue. Some of the candidate countries suggest that the EU should provide information about the implications of enlargement for the lives of young people.

Nearly all countries expect that the current YOUTH Programme and the future generation of programmes in the area of education and youth should continue to support projects aiming at providing information to young people. Many countries take the view that the YOUTH Programme should contribute to the networking of youth information services at European and national levels. Some countries stress the need to support with the help of the YOUTH Programme specific information measures with the aim of reaching those young people who have difficulties gaining access to information for geographical, financial, cultural and social reasons.

#### 2.2.4. *Good practices*

Most of the good practices suggested by the Member States and candidate countries are related to access to information and advice.

The practices which were described mainly deal with young people's access to information and advice, whereas access to information by teachers, youth information workers and other people dealing with young people plays a less prominent role.

The examples cited are only rarely limited to pure questions of access to information. Most of them combine various objectives, such as access to information and advice and improvement of quality in youth information, staff training, participation of young people in information work, media education, networking and cooperation between various partners, use of new technologies, reduction of unemployment, etc.

A common trend is the increasing use of new technologies, such as PC, Internet, multimedia presentations, SMS, on-line consultation, etc. concerning the dissemination of information and advice. However, traditional ways of disseminating information, such as posters, brochures, seminars, direct individual counselling, etc., still play an important role.

The most forward-looking model of youth information seems to be a combination of both traditional and modern information and communication methods.

The following examples are given by way of illustration:

- Various private and public partners at the federal (Bund) and regional (Länder) level in *Germany* have established the so-called "Jugendserver", which is an Internet-based platform for information, communication and cooperation covering a broad range of topics and services. It can be considered as a good practice since it is linked to and well coordinated with similar services at regional and local levels. It contributes to the establishment of an easy-to-use youth information architecture and enhances cooperation between the different youth information providers. The "Jugendserver" can be easily linked to the future European Youth Portal.
- The Flemish Community in *Belgium* has set up the JIP (Jongeren Informatie Punten or Youth Information Points) network, comprising a network of approximately 95 youth information centres in Flanders and Brussels. Young people may put all kinds of questions to the JIP, which will offer them guidance in seeking information. The JIP project is a good example of the cooperation between complementary forms of services and partners: youth work and child and youth care organisations. The JIP label is also a quality label which is supervised and monitored by way of training, consultation and information resources: youth information guides (computerised database), folder catalogues (screened folders), folder distribution and promotion materials.
- For several years, the youth information centres in *France* have adapted their local information service to the conditions and constraints of the district concerned. In rural areas, for example, there are "information buses" which go out to the villages to meet the needs of those young people who cannot get to the traditional information establishments in the towns. Youth information outlets have also been sited in problem districts to reach young people in difficulty on their own territory.

- Information Units for socially excluded young people is a pilot scheme being developed in Palma de Mallorca in *Spain*. It can be considered as a good practice since it seeks to forward information to those young people in social exclusion situations who cannot access youth information services on their own. "Information units" have therefore been set up in associations and entities working with socially excluded young people, immigrants, the disabled, etc. The young people themselves implement these information units with the aid of educators.
- Careers Services Offices are a new type of institution for the Universities in *Greece* and a good example for a quality information service targeted at students and young graduates. Their primary aim is to link the institutes of higher education with society. At the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki the Careers Services Office helps students and graduates to smoothly approach their future career and to find a job that is in keeping with the knowledge they received during their studies. Its responsibility is to supply students with information on subjects relating to their career, as well as on subjects that interest young people in general (e.g. educational, cultural, social, etc.). The Careers Services Office functions according to a specific code of ethics, which guarantees the total transparency of its activities as well as the participation of the statutory student unions. This code must be approved by all University authorities. Its correct application is supervised by the Ethics Committee, which is designated each year by the Senate.
- The "*Cibercentros*" in *Portugal* are networked information centres covering towns with universities. They are open to students and the general public and have audiovisual studios, computer and multimedia production rooms, digital libraries, etc. There is a "grant" system enabling young people to work in these centres, which makes for better relations between users and staff. The young people staffing the centres are also free to produce independent information and information instruments for other young people, which are distributed by the centres.

### 2.3. Quality of information

#### *Key points:*

- *Information of quality is targeted information with a suitable design adapted to young people's environment, their language and their behaviour, using a variety of formats without being conditional on prior knowledge.*
- *Many countries face the challenge of how to improve the information and advice services they offer to young people, especially in terms of establishing efficient dissemination channels, training of staff working in youth information, making effective use of modern information and communication tools, introducing a European dimension in youth information and enhancing young people's interest in information about participative democracy.*
- *The introduction of a code of standards in the area of the provision of information and counselling services to young people will enable the establishment of quality criteria and quality control mechanisms and will contribute to the development of quality standards and quality labels in youth information.*

- *The education and training of the personnel working in the area of information and advice to young people has to be improved, especially with regard to the use of modern information and communication technologies, language skills and the strengthening of the European dimension in youth information.*

### *2.3.1. Analysis of the situation from Member States' point of view*

Young people very often get lost in the general information flow. The information which is specifically offered to them is not attractive, does not answer their questions or is simply too much. Almost all Member States and candidate countries therefore stress that information specifically addressed to young people must be of quality. The latter is understood as information that is targeted and has a suitable design and presentation (warm, sympathetic). It is adapted to young people's overall characteristics, their preference for an informal environment, their language and their behaviour. Information of quality is reliable and easily understandable without being conditional on prior knowledge, especially for disadvantaged young people.

Youth is not a homogenous entity but constitutes an extremely diverse group. The provision of information therefore needs to take into account the differences between young people shaped by age, gender, ethnic background, culture, religion, locality, language, sexual identities, etc. Providing an information service of quality in this context means using a variety of information formats, ranging from traditional formats (brochures, flyers, posters, etc.) to modern information and communication technologies.

Youth information that is tailored to a presumed group of "average young people" might largely fail to achieve its aim, since such a group is virtually non-existent. In particular, young people from a disadvantaged background have specific information needs. Tailored information and expert guidance for disadvantaged young people is more important than for other, more privileged young people. An information service of quality has to take into account the various needs and the level of knowledge of the target group. This implies identifying the most effective media for getting the message across, and using the most appropriate information channel in order to reach the identified target group in the most effective way.

Many Member States and candidate countries agree that youth information is addressed not only to young people directly but also to those working with young people (teachers, librarians, youth workers, street workers, peers, etc.). The latter are an important target group. They constitute valuable contact points and help young people in the search for information and give them advice. Those working with young people have specific needs, especially in the area of youth information sources, pedagogic tools and communication with young people.

### *2.3.2. Challenges and actions at national level*

The major challenge in all countries is not so much the content of information as the way youth information is offered and disseminated. The provision of youth information services of quality depends on its professionalisation. This implies coordination between education, information and counselling services offered by youth authorities, municipalities, schools, NGOs, media and families at the various levels. A few countries are faced with the challenge that schools are more or less the only channel for establishing contact with young people and informing them. There

is consequently the risk of overloading schools and teachers with regard to the provision of information.

Another major challenge is the need for training of those working specifically in the area of youth information. They have to be trained on how to attract young people to information, on how to help them to interpret, exploit and apply information and in giving young people guidance and advice. There is a trend to combine information services with personal contact and individual advice, making use of modern information and communication technologies. In addition, there is the need to adapt youth information permanently to the requirements of modern information and science-oriented societies, to new habits, lifestyles and the way of communication of young people (mobile phone, Internet, etc.). So far, only a minority of countries is able to offer such a quality service to young people.

Nearly all Member States and candidate countries recognise that young people need access to information of quality with a European perspective in core areas such as education, training and employment in order to be able to cope with the rapidly changing developments in these areas. Attractive information and counselling services are needed in sensitive areas such as health, sexuality, alcohol, drugs and road safety. All countries consider the learning of democracy and tolerance as very important. A central challenge of youth information consists in enhancing young people's interest in political information and in bringing them closer to political participation, including elections.

There is a need for a learning process which takes into account the specific socio-cultural situation of young people, especially of those young people with disadvantages. The provision of information of quality means in this context that the products and services offered establish a link between political information and the concrete living environment and thinking of young people.

Most of the Member States and candidate countries agree with the principle that the more specific the description of the target group, the greater the chances that the information is disseminated and adapted to the needs of the target group in question. The description of target groups is mostly done by age and by defining specific groups (drug addicts, immigrants, youth in rural areas, young women, etc.). Many countries are focussing information on young people with disadvantages. The challenge many Member States and candidate countries are facing is to make more detailed investigations into the individual demands and needs of young people, especially of the disadvantaged, and the opinions, behaviour and needs specific groups have with regard to information.

Faced with these challenges, some Member States and candidate countries have developed a variety of measures:

- to offer information on a wide range of subjects such as education, training, employment, health, sexuality, drugs, social affairs, housing, environment, legal rights, democracy, combating racism, sport, leisure time, travel and Europe;
- to adapt the content of information to the specific societal and local context in which young people live;

- to provide practical, accurate, up to date, neutral and supportive information which is not patronising in a language young people understand and using tools that appeal to them (SMS, Internet, television, radio, advertising, etc.);
- to improve the financial situation of those players who produce and disseminate quality information;
- to enhance the cooperation between the “traditional” youth information providers and the “new” media world (cinema, TV, radio, advertising);
- to improve the provision of up-to-date information and counselling services for young people, especially during the transition from school to working life, in core areas such as education, training, employment;
- to provide information and counselling services of high quality to young people with the aim of preventing risks in sensitive areas such as birth control, sexuality, health, alcohol, drugs, road safety, etc.;
- to offer information and counselling which goes beyond the national framework;
- to qualify the personnel responsible for youth information and counselling and other multipliers with the aim of delivering a service of high quality;
- to establish codes of responsibility for journalists and youth information providers with regard to compliance with ethical standards in information;
- to develop uniform standards, evaluation procedures and independent quality control mechanisms in the area of youth information and counselling.

### 2.3.3. *Expectations at European level*

Nearly all Member States suggest regular exchange of experiences, innovations, standards and good practices between professionals working in the area of youth information and counselling. This should contribute to the development of national youth policies of quality. The exchange of experiences and good practices should be done in a structured, systematic and pragmatic way. The responsible policy-makers and those working in the area of youth information and counselling should learn about each other’s experiences. The exchange should focus on a few top priorities on the basis of a commonly agreed agenda. The candidate countries could participate in the exchange of experiences. The exchange of experiences and good practices would be evaluated on an ongoing basis which would allow any necessary adjustments.

The most important issues Member States would like to discuss at European level are the use of new technologies, the training of the staff working in youth information, the strengthening of the European dimension in youth information, the launching of joint information campaigns targeted at young people and the introduction of standards, quality control mechanisms and evaluation tools (including indicators) in youth information and counselling.

A few Member States go even further and suggest developing a code of conduct in youth information and counselling which any youth information structure in the European Union would have to apply. The code would define common quality criteria and quality assurance systems and would enable European-wide standardised certification. The code could also become a “motivating instrument” for the benefit of other partners involved in youth information, such as local and regional authorities, schools, media and enterprises.

More specific aspects many countries are interested in are the linkage between information and counselling in order to teach young people about how to become independent and self-responsible information users.

Another idea is to get up-to-date information from the European level in different languages on certain European issues, since the same themes are repeatedly reproduced at national level.

Nearly all Member States expect that cooperation at European level will improve the training of youth information officers at national, regional and local levels with regard to the “European dimension” in information. Some countries have more specific expectations as regards the development of the professional profile of a “youth information worker”, the launch of a website for the exchange of experiences and good practices between youth information workers, the development of European-wide study and training opportunities for youth information professionals, especially in the areas of languages, use of new technologies, exchange of good practices and research.

#### 2.3.4. *Good practices*

There are quite a number of good practices suggested by Member States and candidate countries which are related to the quality of youth information. Most of them have to do with the training of those working in youth information or of those who are frequently in contact with young people, such as teachers, parents, peers, youth leaders, etc.

A few good practices are mentioned with regard to the learning by young people themselves about how to deal with information and how to handle modern information and communication technologies.

Another major focus is the production and dissemination of “traditional” youth information services of quality (such as campaigns, brochures, guides, info kits, information buses, seminars, etc.). These services are quite often combined with other more “modern” ways of presenting and disseminating information (such as via the Internet, CD ROM, databases, TV, video clips, etc.).

Many good practices are also related to the improvement of networking between the various (youth) information providers, the coordination between the responsible players at the different levels, the establishment of standards and guidelines and the development of joint information services.

Only a few good practices deal with the link between information and advice, especially how to improve it by effectively making use of modern information and communication technologies.

The following examples are given for illustration:

- In *Ireland* a code of Standards for Youth Information Centres and an accompanying quality review system have been developed. This is a good example of how to professionalise the work in youth information through the introduction of quality standards.
- *Luxembourg* has produced a guide for young people providing reference points and specific information on how to find their way around the various information sources. The guide is free of charge and is addressed both to young people and workers in the youth sector, providing answers to questions in a broad range of areas : European youth programmes, work camps and working abroad, holiday jobs, study, health, etc.
- The Working Group of *Austrian* Youth Information Services (ARGE österreichische Jugendinfos) decided in 2001 to develop an own training course on youth information. This course is a good example of how to improve the training of those persons who are working in youth information. The course covers 6 training modules of 3 days each which have to be done within one year. Those participants who have completed the whole course get a certificate. The course has contributed not only to improving the skills of the staff in youth information but also to networking the people and organisations working in this area.
- *Belgium's* French Community holds personal advisory interviews at which young people are presented with essential information in the context of a personal development project. There are also group events combining the provision of information with its practical use.
- The Circumlavorando project carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies in *Italy* can be considered as a good example of how to use the new media in order to reach as many young people as possible in matters which concern them. The project aims at disseminating in an informal way information by CD ROM about how to gain access to the labour market.
- In 1991, the Government in *Sweden* entrusted the Swedish Centre for International Youth Exchange, CIU, with the task of compiling, designing and developing an electronic database containing information about studying, working, travelling and living abroad. This project has become a good example of how to link the need for quality information with the use of new technologies. The development of this database was completed in 1994 and published on CD ROM under the name Orbis. Today, the same database (though greatly improved and updated) is accessible via the Internet and is one of the centrepieces of functionality available. The database is developed and quality assured through direct contact with young people.

#### **2.4. Participation of young people in the shaping and dissemination of information**

*Key points:*

- *Youth information and counselling services have to be provided for young people and by young people.*



- *Many countries face the challenge of how to involve young people in the appropriate way in the shaping and dissemination of youth information, especially when using modern information and communication technologies.*
- *Youth organisations at European, national, regional and local levels should be involved in the development and implementation of youth information strategies.*
- *Young people themselves should participate in the shaping and dissemination of understandable and user-friendly youth information products and should be involved in counselling their peers, especially those who have disadvantages or have difficulties in gaining access to information and advice services for social and cultural reasons.*

#### 2.4.1. *Analysis of the situation from Member States' point of view*

The general feeling in the Member States and candidate countries is that youth information has to be provided for young people and by young people in order to be effective. This means that youth information policy has to involve young people themselves in its preparation, shaping and implementation. This concerns not only the definition of youth policy but also questions such as what kind of information is necessary, what type of “youth language” has to be used and what kind of design is the most appropriate. Other areas are the involvement of young people in the dissemination of information to peer groups and in advising other young people on specific subjects.

The general picture is that young people are only to a certain extent involved in the formulation and implementation of national youth information policies. In some countries, the participation of young people is ensured by the consultation of youth organisations, youth parliaments and specific working groups composed of young people at the level of the national youth policy authorities. The majority of youth organisations and initiatives at regional and local levels and young people who are not formally affiliated to organisations are largely excluded and have no influence on the formulation and implementation of youth information policies.

The most frequently mentioned means of involving young people in the production of information content is to give feedback. There are mainly two types of feedback which Member States and candidate countries use according to their needs: either directly via consultations, discussions, individual talks and surveys or indirectly via youth centres, youth organisations, librarians and youth workers. Modern communication tools such as the Internet, telephone polls and videos play an increasingly important role. Individual countries have set up “youth collaborators” linking young people and public authorities, especially in the area of information training and mediation. Other countries have set up mixed groups composed of parents, students and pupils to work out specific proposals or strategies. In a few countries, young people have the possibility of producing their own youth publications, CD ROMs, web pages or radio programmes or are part of the staff of the local youth information centre.

These exceptions confirm, however, the general rule: young people are not an integrated part of the process of preparing and implementing public youth information and counselling. They are not systematically involved but participate in most countries on an ad hoc basis. In none of the countries is there a law which

makes the participation of young people in the preparation, shaping and dissemination of youth information obligatory.

#### 2.4.2. *Challenges and actions at national level*

Nearly all Member States and candidate countries agree that both the generation and dissemination of information should be inspired by young people. However, all countries are facing the challenge of how to put this into practice. As mentioned above, youth is not a homogeneous entity. There are diverging needs, interests and capacities for participation among young people but also among those working in the area of youth information on a professional basis. Any privileging or stigmatising of specific groups of young people or specific information providers has to be avoided. All countries reject a mere symbolic participation of young people in information and they reject participation which is limited to an elite of young people without including those who for economic, social, cultural or geographical reasons have fewer opportunities to participate.

The involvement of young people in youth information should contribute to the quality of the products and services provided. Youth information and counselling also has a pedagogic function and in some specific areas can only be provided by trained personnel (such as in the area of AIDS, family planning, drug addiction, psychological help, etc.). Youth information should become a quality service and should continue to be free of ideological, party political or commercial interests.

Some of the candidate countries are confronted with the challenge that young people often do not make an effort to provide themselves with the necessary information. This is especially true for preventive information on a broad range of issues such as psychological help, drugs, violence, crime, AIDS, family planning. Other neglected areas are active citizenship, participation in local communities, legislation, rights of young people, international exchanges, internships, public policies, EU and NATO. Some of the candidate countries have therefore developed the strategy of enhancing the active participation of young people in the process of receiving information and strengthening the involvement of young people in the production and dissemination of information.

With regard to these challenges, some Member States and candidate countries have developed various measures:

- to raise awareness among young people from all backgrounds to get them involved in the shaping and dissemination of youth information at the different levels;
- to invite young people to become active in youth information, especially by offering more and better opportunities to become involved and by improving the learning about how to deal with information and media;
- to extend the use of interactive and participatory information and dissemination services, especially with the help of the Internet and other new media tools;
- to link the use of modern information and communication tools with the development of new participatory mechanisms for young people in the area of politics and policy-making;

- to offer more and better programmes for the training of youth information trainers;
- to restructure and modernise youth information centres, especially by involving young people;
- to deepen the analysis of the obstacles with regard to the greater participation of young people in youth information and counselling.

#### 2.4.3. *Expectations at European level*

The expectations with regard to the European level in the area of enhancing young people's participation in shaping and disseminating youth information are limited. Member States are aware of the fact that most of the work in this area has to be done at national, regional and local levels.

There is, however, the common view, which is also shared by candidate countries, that the exchange of experiences and good practices between professionals working in this field would be helpful and could contribute to the development of new ideas and approaches on how to involve young people more and better in youth information. This is particularly true for the question of how to improve the cooperation between young people, youth organisations and professional information service providers. Some countries think that the YOUTH Programme should contribute financially to such an exchange of ideas and good practices. Some candidate countries suggest that the common objectives to be defined in the framework of the open method of coordination should enhance the involvement of young people and youth organisations in the active development of information material, especially aimed at increasing participation of young people in society.

Some of the Member States would like to get support for the training of persons working in the area of youth information and counselling in order to motivate young people to get involved. This approach is largely covered by the above-mentioned measures relating to the move towards a service of quality.

Other Member States have a more legalistic approach and suggest guaranteeing at European level the participation of young people in youth information and in supporting them to gain access to the shaping and production of youth information. Thus, the participation of young people in youth information and counselling would become a right and could be added to the ERYICA charter on youth information.

Many Member States are in favour of enhancing the cooperation with the European Youth Forum. This Forum should participate in the information processing and dissemination strategies at European level and should continue to be involved in the development and updating of the European Youth Portal.

A few countries expect support for information, education and training measures for young people at national, regional and local levels in order to enable young people themselves to produce information on Europe and disseminate it in their environment.

In more general terms, some Member States argue that young people and youth organisations should be more actively involved in the dissemination of information about future European issues and the establishment of a European identity.

#### 2.4.4. Good practices

Concerning the participation of young people in shaping and disseminating youth information, only a few good practices could be identified. They deal mostly with a more active role of young people in giving feedback to existing information and counselling services and in disseminating information to other young people.

Many of the good practices are located at local level, such as at youth information centres, and some of them are quite innovative. Not a single good practice could be identified with regard to the participation of young people in the policy-making process for youth information.

The following examples are given for illustration:

- At the Zaragoza Youth Information Centre in *Spain*, 52 young people between 15 and 26 years of age are selected every year in a competition to become information collaborators and to manage one of the 52 youth information mini-centres (collaborators) installed in university centres, secondary education institutes and Youth Clubs. This action enables the young people themselves to participate directly in youth information drafting and dissemination processes.
- The youth information centre “Nappi” of the city of Oulu in *Finland* has developed the Internet service “NettiNappi”, which is an interactive information service on the Internet offering a wide range of subjects and services to young people. It contains a bulletin board where young people can swap information and advertise (buy and sell), a forum for young people where they can produce their own material, and information and counselling services in different languages so that young immigrants, for example, will receive their own service pages on the Internet. NettiNappi will be shaped further by young people according to their needs. There will be two groups of young people, aged 14-24, to test NettiNappi and make sure it runs in a way that is practical for them. The groups will give their opinions to the organisers of NettiNappi. The latter will take the young people’s opinions into account and make any necessary changes.
- At the JIP (youth information point) in Rijnwaarden in the *Netherlands*, young people participate in youth information in a rather innovative way. They familiarise themselves with a theme relating to youth information in a contemporary fashion by producing their own talk-show covering various categories. They also present it themselves and receive assistance to do this if they require it.
- The project “U What?” is an initiative of the Children’s Rights Alliance for *England* and was launched in 2002. It is a good example of how to help young people get involved in government decision-making in particular, by ‘translating’ government consultation and policy documents into plain English to make them more understandable to young people. The project is led by a panel of young people, aged 12-18, who are actively involved in all decisions concerning the project, including the recruitment of staff (project leaders). As well as liaising with numerous NGOs for advice and input, the project consults with government departments to ensure factual accuracy of the documents they ‘translate’. The project also offers young people advice on how to get involved in political activities and campaigning more generally; they are in the process of developing

an e-mail newsletter written by the panel of young people for their peers and have a website.

### **3. CONSULTATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES**

The Member States used various channels for consulting young people when preparing their replies to the questionnaires on youth participation and information:

In some cases, this was done formally by addressing the questionnaires to the various youth representative organisations (National Youth Council, Regional Youth Council, Youth Parliament, etc.).

In others, the authorities responsible for youth affairs set up specific national consultation bodies bringing together representatives of youth organisations with young people who were not members of an organisation, etc.

Finally, in certain cases, specific consultation events were organised (conferences, seminars, discussion forums, etc.) bringing together representatives of various youth organisations and young people who were not members of an organisation.

Often, specific Internet sites were set up to provide young people with as much information as possible about the White Paper and its follow-up, and to ask them, in particular those who were not members of an organisation, for their views on the participation and information questionnaires.

Consultation did not only involve young people, but also, in many cases, other government departments with a link with the youth field, regional and local administrative bodies responsible for youth, researchers, experts on the ground and others working in the field (youth centres, town councils, youth services, national agencies for the Youth programme, etc.).

### **4. COOPERATION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL**

The open method of coordination provides for common objectives to be defined and monitored. In the questionnaires, the Commission therefore asked the Member States and candidate countries to specify their expectations and what kind of common objectives they would like to see.

The replies to the questionnaires show some common ground in the expectations of the Member States and some of the candidate countries. Based on the individual analyses of the situation in each country, these have been translated into proposals for common objectives, which reflect the Member States' and candidate countries' desire for closer cooperation at European level in real terms.

Generally speaking, although not always uniformly described, the common objectives put forward are centred around certain main themes which have been used as the framework for this analysis.

On the question of participation, the main priorities are increasing participation by young people in community life, the mechanisms of representative democracy and the educational environment.

For the information aspect, the emphasis is on young people's access to information, improving the quality of information, and participation by young people in its production and dissemination.

While the proposals are very consistent in terms of content, they are less so in terms of form. What essentially differentiates them is the degree of detail in their presentation. While some Member States put forward certain general, or in certain cases very targeted, objectives, others put forward a whole system of general objectives and very specific sub-objectives, sometimes to the point of recommending specific measures. In some cases a timetable is proposed for monitoring the implementation of these objectives.

The Commission has based its proposal for common objectives, which is the combined result of the questionnaires and this report analysing the replies, on all the contributions received, seeking to find a balance between the different expectations of the countries consulted.