

Advocating for inclusive youth policies on municipal level

Handbook for youth organizations

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1. On this handbook

This handbook is intended for youth organizations that want to develop and implement public advocacy projects in the field of youth policy at the local level, in cooperation with partner organizations from other countries using the opportunities of the Erasmus + program of the European Union.

We hereto present an example of a successful approach to this type of project, which you could apply to a lesser or greater extent in your work.

In other words, the goal of the guide is to help you in the process of public advocacy based on the experience in project management by the Consortium, which consists of four partner non-governmental organizations: Association “People’s Parliament” from Serbia, Field of dialogue Foundation from Poland, Crisis simulation for peace (CRISP) from Germany and Association of cultural heritage education in Finland.

The project is a “European Youth Together” initiative of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme, implemented from February 1st 2022 to January 31 st 2024.

What are the values that you attain in this handbook?

- Guidelines regarding the activities we suggest you implement before writing a project proposal;
- Presentation of the essence and necessity of the project as well as possible short-term and long-term goals;
- A description of the chronologically implemented activities with an explanation of why it is important that they should be organized in that order;
- Advices from the Consortium regarding the overall management of the project and its risks, which will save you time and other resources and save you from failure;
- Applied innovations in the realization of project activities.

The handbook starts with the presentation of youth policy and public advocacy, and then goes on to explain how to improve local policies and make them more inclusive compared to EU standards.

2. Youth policy and public advocacy

2.1 What is youth policy?

The youth policy refers to a set of measures, programs and strategies undertaken to meet the needs and interests of young people in society.

The aim of the youth policy is to create a favorable environment for the development of young people, to meet their needs, to strengthen their personal and professional capacities and to involve them in various aspects of society. It can include areas such as: education, employment, healthcare, culture, sports, participation of young people in decision-making, etc. Youth policy is formulated and implemented at the local community level, then at the national and international level, i.e. at the EU level.



2.2 What is public advocacy?

Public advocacy is the support that individuals, organizations or groups express in order to: influence a change in the perception of a certain target group, shape policies or change certain social practices in public interest and do so by advocating decision makers and other relevant stakeholders.

The goal of public advocacy is to promote certain ideas, values, goals or possible solutions in the public and among decision-makers, or to call attention to faults in public policies.



In practice, public advocacy includes activities such as:

- implementation of various research methods for the purpose of gathering facts;
- informing the public on the essence of the problem, the obtained results and possible solutions;
- conducting campaigns;
- advocating and using different types of communication in order to influence decision-makers (using media appearances, forums, public debates, meetings, etc.).

Persons who are engaged in public advocacy often work to raise awareness of specific issues, providing support with knowledge, experience and leadership in specific areas.

2.3 What would it be: youth policy + public advocacy?

As regards youth, public advocacy can be aimed at the adoption of new or modification of existing youth policies, thus remaking and/or creating a legal framework for performing concrete actions anticipated, for example, by a law on youth, national strategy, local youth strategies, decisions, etc.

As an approach that produces long-term results, public advocacy in the field of youth policy can be a key tool for bringing about changes in policies and practices that influence current and future generations of young people.



2.4 Where you can always find ideas for advocacy projects?

Many municipal governments across Europe are not obliged by relevant national laws to adopt local youth policies. In some states there is a certain level of legal obligations, while in some other states this is only recommended.

However, regardless of the existence or absence of a legal obligation, many municipal governments in Europe only formally adopt local youth policies (e.g., national youth strategy, local youth action plans, etc.). Unfortunately, many such (formally) adopted local youth policies are not created in an inclusive manner in relation to EU standards, nor do they generate real benefits for the youth population.

Some local authorities adopt a local youth policy, without asking asking young people about their needs. Some adopt policies that are not fully or are implemented ineffectively.

It also happens that municipal governments allow the previous strategic youth document to expire without even showing interest in adopting a new one.

Variations of possible inert situations are numerous, but the essence is that it negatively affects the activity of grass-roots youth organizations and ultimately the life quality of every young man and woman in the local community.



Furthermore, in some countries, national laws define the work of municipal and regional governments, but they do not recognize youth policy as an area for which the municipal and regional governments have jurisdiction. Therefore, the provision of local youth services is not mandatory. On the other hand, municipal governments consider it the job of the central government and therefore do not adopt any policies. This is a bit like passing the ball from one player to another.

The described situation represents a field of possibilities for project ideas and the potential for your organization, which can take on the role of “moderator” in the communication between these two parties: municipal governments and decision-makers at the national level.

Since youth projects concern young people, as the end users, you will involve the youth as special actors in the advisory processes of examining their positions and needs and encourage their dialogue with municipal decision-makers.

In order to make the impact of the project greater, it is necessary to upgrade it to a higher level – to make a partnership with organizations from other countries that also deal with youth.

3. “Policing the policies” – An example of good practice in the design and implementation of a youth policy public advocacy project at the municipal level

3.1. The purpose of the project, planned short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals

The project “Policing the policies” – the grassroots advocacy initiative for EU-level aligned and “inclusive local youth strategies” aims to make municipal-level youth policies more EU-level aligned and inclusive while enabling networking and cross-border partnerships for grass-roots youth organizations.

Each of the partners from four countries selected two municipal governments wherein public advocacy was needed to implement, so the project included a total of eight cities. The project is a “European Youth Together” initiative of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 program, implemented from February 1, 2022 to January 31, 2024.

This project has short and medium-term effects, as well as some significant long-term effects.

Planned short-term effects:

- grassroots youth organizations engage the municipal governments in a dialogue regarding local youth policies which in turn results in greater visibility of the grassroots’s work,
- grassroots youth organizations get new volunteers and/or staff thanks to their increased visibility as well as participation in project activities gathering young people,
- grassroots youth organizations initiate new projects and/or voluntary initiatives, especially the cross-border ones, involving project-participating grass-rootss and European level NGO’s,
- young people are given opportunities for employment and/or self-employment because they connect with the local population and have the benefit of participating in project activities,
- public perception and level of information in targeted local communities, as well as stance towards NGO’s and local youth policies importance is improved and more positive.

Planned outcomes:

- the capacity of the youth sector active at the grass-roots level improved to scale up their activities and work transnationally, including promoting transnational learning and cooperation between young people and decision makers,
- grassroots youth organizations get to nominate their own project ideas during consultative processes surrounding a local youth policy development, thus open up a potential to receive funding and from municipal government and other donors for implementation of those ideas,
- participation of young people (especially under-represented) is being improved as some of them become and remain active in politics, civil society, etc.
- existing local youth policies modified/improved and start being implemented, new policies adopted and start being implemented, thus bringing multiple benefit to communities as a whole.

Planned long-term effects (impact/result):

- overall social standing of young people improved thanks to greater capacity of the grass-roots youth sector implementing their own projects, both within and outside of the framework of local youth policies,
- quality of life improved for youth population in targeted communities thanks to adoption/modifying and implementation of good quality local youth policies.

3.2 Infographic of project activities



1. Identification of cities/towns and initial analysis of the identified communities (it is done before receiving the grant)



2. Development of the project idea and nomination of the project



3. Mapping analysis at the beginning of the project implementation



4. Organizing national workshops



5. International training



6. Research on the position and needs of young people in the identified cities



7. Organizing a public debate



8. Follow-up meetings with municipal government representatives and securing a written political promise

3.3 Detailed description of the planned activities on the project

Step 1. Identification of cities/towns and initial analysis of the identified communities (it is done before receiving the grant)

The project coordinator and the coordinators of partner organizations will first have to identify (and then analyse) the municipal governments in which the youth policies: a) are insufficiently inclusive in relation to EU standards; b) do not exist at all or c) are not implemented. This step precedes the development of the project because there is no justification for performing public advocacy in cities that have active strategic documents and implement action plans.

What information should this initial analysis contain?

Attempt to find the obligations that municipal governments have in the field of youth policy in legal terms (they are most often defined by the national youth strategy), but they have not fulfilled them. These can be various measures, such as the adoption of strategic documents that have expired, opening of Youth offices and similar resources where they do not exist, establishing certain youth advisory bodies, and the like.

The initial analysis gives the partners an idea of the future directions of advocacy, in order to harmonize the effects of advocacy with the real needs of youth workers, the young people themselves and the needs of other relevant actors at the local level.



Project coordination meetings held in Warsaw (left) and in Helsinki (right)

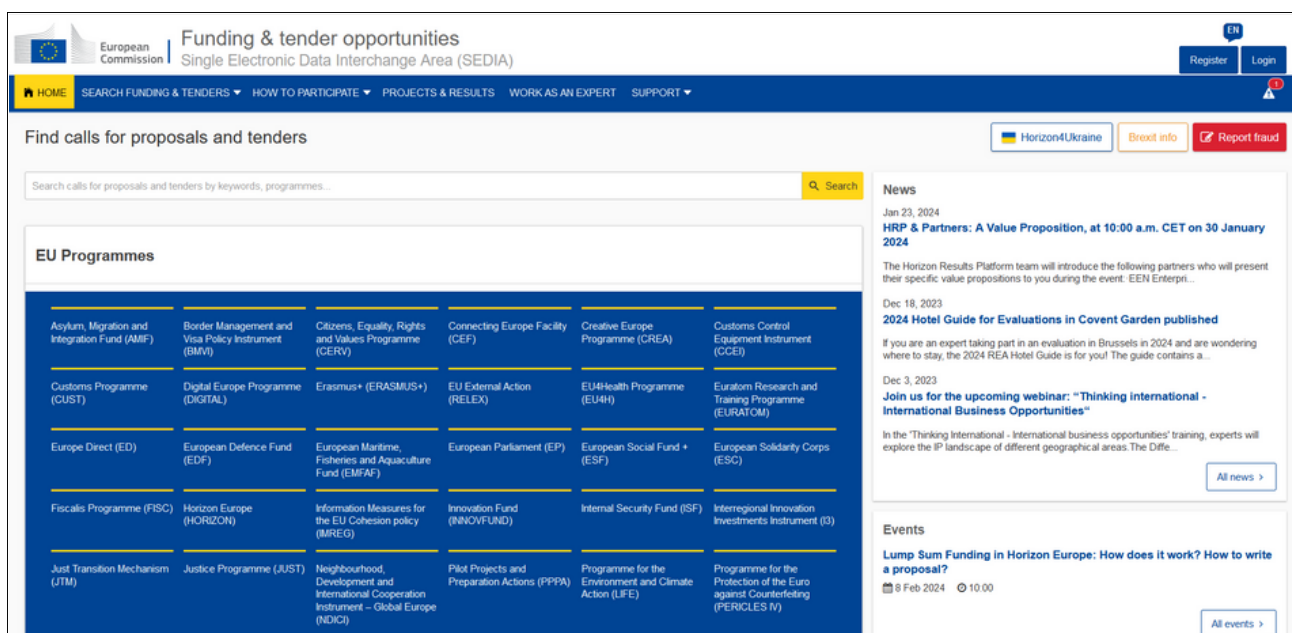
After identification and analysis, substantiate with evidence the justification of the selection of municipal governments which youth strategy has expired and which implement activities randomly, without providing measurable indicators for evaluation.

Other data of the initial mapping analysis refer to the collection of knowledge about the implementation of youth policy in practice, about the number of youth organizations and the dynamics of their work, about other organizations that are active and do not deal primarily with young people, about the structures of the city leadership, the media map, youth activism, general challenges related to youth and work with young people at the local level.

The initial analysis is a work in “progress”, which means that the document should be constantly updating as new relevant information become available during the implementation of the project. It can easily happen that the municipal government that you have chosen in the meantime achieves the goal that you envisioned with the project and you have to replace it with some other one.

Step 2. Development of the project idea and nomination of the project

The application form is a template for EU grants; it must be submitted via Funding & tender opportunities (EU portal for funding and tenders) before the call deadline. The application form must be prepared by the Consortium and submitted by the coordinating organization.



EU portal for funding and tenders

Step 3. Mapping analysis at the beginning of project implementation

A certain amount of time will pass from the moment of application to the moment of the committee’s decision made on your project. During that period, there may be various changes in the field of youth policy both at the national level and at the level of the cities you have identified. You will need to modify the project accordingly. Be prepared for the possibility of replacing municipal governments, if those you proposed with the project have taken the necessary measures in the meantime and your intervention is not needed. ***Here you can conclude that it is an excellent idea to mention the potential replacement of the identified communities in the project form.***

Step 4. Organizing national workshops

National workshops are organized by each of the Consortium partners. They have several goals:

- to collect ideas from “local people” for the project of creating future local strategies
- to teach youth workers/organizations knowledge about youth policies, advocacy, cross-border networking, work with underrepresented youth groups, etc.
- to facilitate networking among organizations at the country level and interaction with municipal officials/employees as these individuals will participate in these events.

Practically, the national workshops are an “ice breaker” since then each organization appears for the first time in front of the project’s users and it needs to demonstrate competence, present the project and vision, build a team and trust.



Young people should be also invited to the national workshops and their problems and needs should be examined and later analyzed in the context of policies that need to be modified, in order to improve the quality of their lives in certain areas.

This activity is “necessary” because it provides the Consortium with the first opportunity to gather all relevant actors in one place and to assess the level of their motivation and competence. Based on the conclusions from the national workshops, a revision of the activities to be implemented is being carried out in terms of: priorities, approaches, working methods, etc.

Some of the most motivated national workshop participants will participate in future project activities, such as international training (more on this in step 5), and they will later engage in public advocacy and interaction with municipal government decision-makers.

Step 5. International training

An international training gathers participants from all participating countries in one place and it is essentially built on the learning outcomes from previously organized national workshops. Youth workers, interested young people, media representatives and decision-makers, therefore everyone who showed interest in the previous national workshops represent potential participants from each country participating in the project. International training is an opportunity:

- to obtain the ideas in the field of cross-border cooperation among those present in connection with the work started – improvement of local youth policy
- to observe the same youth problems and possible solutions from different perspectives
- that participants from different countries learn from each other and improve their future work.



This training is an exceptional opportunity to build and strengthen various partnerships (important for the further course of the project):

- cross-border partnerships (the event will bring together representatives of youth NGOs from different countries)
- regional and local partnerships (within each country there will be networking of youth workers, media representatives and persons from local governments in charge of youth policy).

Step 6. Research on the position and needs of young people in the identified cities

The goal of this research is to collect documents and a data regarding "youth situation" The research is created by using two methods: desk analysis and focus groups.

The desk analysis deals with researching the legal, implementation and evaluation level of youth policy for each selected community, while using data available online (municipal government website, media reports, posts on social networks, etc.). The researcher should present the entire legal framework of youth policy in the selected cities, i.e. the advisory bodies, decision-makers, omissions, good practices, activities undertaken for young people, resources accessible to young people, etc. These data will give the moderator of the focus group the context in which young people live in order to create relevant questions for the youth.

The research made by using the focus group method is a field work (if necessary, tools for online meetings can also be used). A group interview is conducted with 6 to 8 young people on the topic of their position and needs, including all important segments of young people's lives. Among the participants, young people with fewer opportunities (persons with disabilities, young people affected by poverty, young people from rural areas, members of national minorities, migrants, etc.) should be represented. Finally, the research is presented in a publication and this document is disseminated.



Research of the Association CRISP from Germany.



Research of the Association "People's Parliament" from Serbia



Research of Field of dialogue Foundation from Poland



Research of the Association of Cultural Heritage Education from Finland

Step 7. Organizing public debates

Public debates at the local level should be held in all identified local communities. These public debates should involve municipal government officials, people in charge of youth work, representatives of relevant institutions (education, health, culture), people from the responsible Ministry of Youth, media workers, local youth workers, young people themselves, and especially young people from sensitive categories.

In order to ensure the participation of representatives of municipal government, the presence of representatives of the Ministry of Youth is recommended. In this way, you create the preconditions for facilitated cooperation between decision-makers at the local level and decision-makers at the national level.

What should the debate look like?

Your organization should present the project, objectives, activities and the **research results**, as well as the purpose of the public debate. Explain the definition of the problem for which you offered a solution (e.g. a strategy that has expired and a new one has not been adopted yet or a strategy that is not harmonized with EU standards or a high-priority



youth problem that is solved by modifying laws or decisions). Demonstrate that the project is necessary by presenting the collected data from previous activities (e.g. statements of young people from focus groups, conclusions from previous workshops, etc.).

Moreover, in this way you create the preconditions for facilitated cooperation between decision-makers at the local level and decision-makers at the national level.

Step 8. Follow-up meetings with municipal government representatives and advocacy for policy change

After the public debate, there is no doubt as to what the municipal government representatives should do. However, they treat your initiative as an unplanned activity and they have to invest time correspondingly (hold a meeting, define resources, engage people, etc.). That is why intensive advocacy from various interested parties (youth advisory bodies, grass-roots organizations, media) is necessary.

Follow-up meetings are recommended. It is up to you to choose how you will organize them, in relation to what is feasible and what gives the best results: an online meeting, a round table, sending e-mails, involving a person who will advocate for a more efficient relationship between the two parties, etc.

The end result of subsequent meetings is to receive a written political promise that by a certain deadline the municipal government will take a concrete measure at the local level within the legal and/or implementation framework of youth policy.

4. Effects of the project

We will best understand the effects of the project if we compare the changes caused by the project with the situational analysis before the start of the project.

Although all four organizations conducted research on the state of local youth policy before nominating the project idea, due to dynamic changes in the life of each community, we got a final picture of this issue only from the research on the position and needs of young people in selected cities (the method is described in activity 6).

The Project Effects chapter is divided into two areas. First, in the first part, we will present the state of local politics in the selected cities, while in the second part we will present the positive changes caused by the project.

4.1 Situational analysis of youth policy

4.1.1 Youth policy in Serbia

The research on the state of local policies at the legal and implementation level in Serbia was conducted by the “People’s Parliament” Association.

The most important strategic document that governs the position of young people in the Republic of Serbia is the National Youth Strategy 2023 – 2030. The selected municipal governments in Serbia were Užice and Požega. By researching local youth strategies, it was determined that neither the City of Užice nor the Municipality of Požega have a valid strategic document for young people. Also, none of them has a publicly available evaluation of the implemented activities defined in the expired local youth strategies.

In accordance with these findings and project goals, the adoption of new and inclusive local youth strategies in Užice and Požega will be considered a tangible result of the project because it will create a legal framework for a better quality of life for the youth in these cities.

The city of Užice has a Youth Office (KZM) and a Youth Club. KZM cooperates with local youth associations and associations for youth. A youth council has been established, but data on its activity is not visible. The new strategic youth document has not been adopted, and the old one has expired – the Local Youth Action Plan (LAP) for 2015 – 2019.

The work with focus groups revealed that the information channels used by the municipal government are not followed by young people at all, and this was the main reason for their lack of information.

Lack of information is one of the biggest causes of not involving young people in active citizenship and decision-making. Unemployment, uncertain social future and migration of young people are the biggest problems that young people recognized during the focus group.

However, Užice has great potential for positive change. The Youth Office has a large number of active volunteers, and in 2023, young people began to participate more actively in the creation of strategic documents. Mayor of Užice often visits youth associations with fewer opportunities and encourages them for dialogue and cooperation. It can also be said that the online visibility of the implementation of the youth policy is at a satisfactory level.



The situation in Požega is much more unfavorable for youth. In addition to the expired strategic document and the haphazard implementation of youth policy, other important resources such as the Youth Office, the Youth Club, and the Youth Council are also missing.

The focus group research revealed that young people are most concerned about the mood and behavior of peers who are apathetic, inactive and aggressive. Unemployment, wrong channels of information, lack of a main place for young people to spend quality time are definitely the biggest needs of young people in Požega.

The participants of the focus group held in Požega stated that the visit of city decision-makers to local associations and the organization of an “open door day” would build trust in those who decide on their future and influence the more active participation of young people.

At the time of the research, it was concluded that young people are the most active within school parliaments. They emphasized that they need a place to organize activities such as the Youth office or the Youth club and that they want to participate in the creation of a cultural program aimed at young people. They need an SOS line for psychological and mental support because they feel uncomfortable when visiting the school psychologist. Since young people affected by poverty are the most represented vulnerable group in Požega, they proposed that the city should enable them to participate in extracurricular activities for free.

4.1.2 Youth policy in Finland

The research in Finland in the municipalities of Riihimäki and Loppi was carried out by the Association of Cultural Heritage Education in Finland.

According to the law, the youth work and politics are part of the municipality's duties. Municipalities are responsible about local youth work, for example the maintenance of youth facilities, youth associations and assisting groups and (special) youth work. Youth participation, influence and consultation are also included in both the Local Government Act (Section 26) and the Youth Act (Section 24).

Riihimäki and Lope have active Youth Councils (Nuva), which function as part of the municipality's decision-making structures. The people of Nuva found influence to be difficult and that things are progressing slowly. All young people know young people who have opinions and things to say, but don't want to participate in, for example, the youth council or come forward with opinions.

Young people perceive mental health problems as one of the important targets of influence and the inadequacy of the dimensioning of related services in their own municipality. Most of the young people are doing well, but some have challenges related to the use of substances and school absences. According to the young people themselves, mental health problems timely treatment would also prevent substance abuse problems.



Timo Heinonen and Aino-Kaisa Pekonen
(members of the Finnish parliament) participated
in project activities

The young people themselves have ideas about how the well-being of young people can be improved locally. In Riihimäki and Loppi, young people have been consulted and they themselves are being consulted in sensitive decision-making related to welfare issues, for example as a part within the framework of UNICEF's child-friendly municipality operating model and the related application.

Riihimäki's Youth Council was also asked for a statement on Riihimäki from the draft of the welfare plan 2023–2025. According to the young people themselves, mental healthcare should be supported in schools.

Mental health service professionals should be present in young people's daily life and, for example, a curator, a health nurse and a psychologist should be available to students every day in a school week. According to the young people, special attention should be paid to those young people whose life situation is challenging. In Riihimäki, the youth mental health services are understaffed, so help cannot be provided at the right time.

The fluctuation of employees in health care is also a big problem, which makes it difficult for young people to maintain a safe environment, when the staff is constantly changing and they have to explain their situations over and over again.

In the municipality of Loppi, young people also highlighted mental health problems and the lack of this service in the right measure. Then they mentioned insufficient consideration of the lives of young people in rural areas (e.g. lack of transport links, neglect of the impact of climate change on their health, etc.). In addition, issues related to youth welfare, opportunities for sporting activities and hobbies were cited as important targets of impact and protection.

4.1.3 Youth policy in Poland

Radom and Świdwin are the cities identified by the partner organization Field of dialogue Foundation from Poland in order to improve youth policy.

The beginning of Poland's serious approach to youth policy began in 2003 when the government created a document "A State Strategy for Youth for the years 2003–2012". When it ceased to be valid, no new national strategy regulating Polish youth policy issues was created. Currently, there is no strategy in Poland directly related to young people. However, youth policy is implemented at the level of municipal governments, and each of them has its own autonomy in creating strategic documents.

The main priority of local politicians in the city of Radom, publicly announced during elections and local strategies making is to keep the young people in the city, so that they do not move away for education and work to the nearby capital.

However, no activities that could be called local youth policy were observed in the city of Radom. There are two bodies responsible for social dialogue with young people: the Youth Council and the Senior Council. The new convocation of the Youth Council began its mandate in 2023 and it lacks competence, which is reflected in their inactivity regarding the consideration of the city Council's decisions. The cooperation between the Youth Council and the Council of Seniors is not at a satisfactory level, while at the same time the Youth Council faces the inactivity of the youth and the lack of funds for the promotion of its activities.



The city of Świdwin was selected for the project because the city government and local organizations are trying to find their own way to adopt youth policy and they need support in this process. The city lacks tools for the participation of young people in decisions that concern them. At the same time, there is a trend of young people migrating from Świdwin due to a lack of perspective, so one of the solutions is to prepare a program that will involve young people in the life of the city.

The City of Świdwin implements activities in the area of youth participation in decision-making, but their real influence on policy change is lacking.

The political will is confirmed by the establishment of the City Youth Council (consultative body) and the formation of the School Participatory Budget. Young people can compete with their projects and the best projects receive funds for realization. Young people in Świdwin miss the places where they could spend quality free time and engage socially. On the other hand, they are not sufficiently informed about the educational offer that the city enables them, despite the fact that there are many non-governmental organizations working in Świdwin that deal with young people.

The focus group with young people showed that they know exactly what they want from their city – to be adaptable to all kinds of changes, to be safe, inclusive, open to young people's suggestions, to take measures to bring back young people who left, etc. As far as the School Budget is concerned, they stated that the invitation for applying is not promoted enough and that is why many interested young people do not apply.

4.1.4 Youth policy in Germany

The research on local youth policies was conducted by the German organization Crisis Simulation for Peace (CRISP) in two Berlin districts: Tempelhof-Schöneberg and Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, as target regions having local Youth Action Plans adopted but still lack adequate implementation.

Legally and systemically speaking, in Germany the Youth Strategy from 2019 (Jugendstrategie) – entitled “Acting for a youth-friendly society” – run by the German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth – clearly shows that youth work plays and will continue to play a crucial role with regard to policy implementation in Germany.



However, many youth organizations have different priorities in their work compared to the topics covered by the laws. For example, when it comes to the safety of young people, the law primarily deals with risks on the Internet, while in practice the need for measures in the area of clan crime is recognized, as well as the need to adopt a strategy for the mental health of young people. It was found that legislative ideas formulated by youth organizations are not taken into account, while at the same time, these very

organizations do not present ideas and suggestions on their websites, so the public is not aware of their initiatives at all. In principle, lawmaking stagnates at the national level, and especially at the district level.

The research by using focus groups (three focus groups were held in two districts) identified several problems of young people: problems with drugs (drug use, drug trafficking), then stigmatization of young people (young people who come from districts where drug use is widespread have limited career opportunities due to bad reputation), insecurity (sexual violence in urban areas of the district, racism, classism and hostility towards Muslims).



From a strategic point of view, there are relevant actors in the work with young people at the local level (which depend on investments or voluntary work), but the need for them to join together in order to encourage the exchange of resources and ideas is recognized. In the process of this networking, young people are recognized as generators of creative ideas and initiatives.

4.2. Positive changes caused by the project

Now that we have become familiar with the state of local politics in the identified cities, we will present the results to which the project activities have led.

In the guide, we described the project activities that were carried out in a logical sequence. From activity to activity, the partner organizations of the Consortium have been introducing their target groups deeper and deeper into the project, simultaneously building their credibility based on the achieved results.

The last two project activities were the organization of a public debate and follow-up meetings with representatives of local self-government, so that they would take concrete measures in order to modify certain legal acts (strategies, local laws, decisions, etc.) so that they are more inclusive and suitable for young people.

The goal of all public debates organized by the Consortium organizations was to include municipal and national government officials in charge of youth work, then municipal youth organizations, the youth themselves, underrepresented youth, any other interested parties such as media workers and other relevant interested parties. The debates were a kind of tool for advocacy and initiation of practical agreements regarding sustainable youth policies. After the public debates, the representatives of the Consortium continued to communicate with the decision-makers, in order to help them practically implement the political will expressed during the public debate.

4.2.1 Advocacy results in Serbia

During the public debate event, Mayor of Užice Mrs. Jelena Rakić Radivojević announced adoption of formal decision by Užice city government and kick start of the inclusive process of development of new Local Youth Action Plan in Užice. This publicly made commitment is a necessary and very important first step.

After the event, the association “People’s Parliament” made several subsequent successful efforts in order to urge Mayor to come up with a time frame for enacting the Local Youth Action Plan in Užice. In that sense, “People’s Parliament” had follow-up meeting with municipal government and Mayor promised that she would keep up with her commitment to enact this document during February 2024. In the meantime, “People’s Parliament” continues to monitor and control this commitment, reminding Mayor and advocating for its implementation.



Mayor of Užice Mrs. Jelena Rakić Radivojević



Snežana Klašnja, Minister advisor – Ministry of tourism and youth of Republic of Serbia

Otherwise, Mayor of Požega cancelled his previously confirmed participation and didn't nominate a replacement. Youth from Požega though attended the public debate and were very active in discussion. After this event, "People's Parliament" continued with outreach towards the Požega Mayor, in an effort to advocate Požega municipal government as well.

The public debate was also attended by a number of relevant municipal and national-level decision-makers (Snežana Klašnja, Minister advisor – Ministry of tourism and youth of Serbia, Marija Maričić, head of Užice Youth Office, members of Užice city council, head of finance, head of social activities, etc.) Besides these municipal and national-level stakeholders, a number of participants active in different associations, grassroots youth organizations, educational institutions and sport clubs from Užice and Požega attended the debate.

Some grassroots organizations proposed to local governments to support them in running podcasts on issues of local youth affairs and youth life in both communities. This idea is already part of the draft "Program of Activities of Local Youth Office and Youth Club in Užice for 2024" and has been implemented even before the program development started. This directly serves further fulfilment of planned outcomes of the project.

In October 2023, Užice municipal government adopted formal decision envisaging development of the "Program of Activities of Local Youth Office and Youth Club in Užice for 2024". This decision is in fact an operationalization of the City of Užice Development Plan, Measure 18.8 – "Development of the annual Program of activities of Municipal Youth Office and Youth club in Užice".

This Measure, as the essential tool for the well planned and implemented youth policies was included in the City Development Plan back in January 2023, based on consultation process and inputs from various stakeholders.

Just few weeks after the public debate “Development of Youth Policies in Užice and Požega” this commitment was formalized and Užice Youth Office was tasked to develop Program of activities for 2024. In addition, the association “People’s Parliament” was at the same time formally invited to participate in this process and assist the process with its 25+ years long experience in youth work and youth policies planning. ***The first draft of the “Program of activities of Local Youth Office and Youth Club in Užice for 2024” has been developed by the local Užice Youth Office.***

4.2.2 Advocacy results in Finland

The Association for Cultural Heritage Education in Finland decided that the subject of public advocacy should be the improvement of the mental health of young people through various modifications in the legal implementation framework, both at the local and national level.

The public debate organized at Monara, a Youth Center in Riihimäki, was attended by local policy makers (The Mayor of Riihimäki Mr. Jouni Eho, municipal councilors (Mr. Juha Peltola and Mrs. Jessica Sonko), people working in the mental healthcare and substance abuse services of Kanta-Häme district “OmaHäme”, the Riihimäki welfare coordinator, representatives of relevant institutions, young people, organizations working with youth at risk of social exclusion, etc.



Young people spoke openly about their personal experiences in relation to institutions. However, some of the representatives of the criticized institutions responded that young people are poorly informed about the role of school curators, who are responsible for mental health work in the field. Almost none of the young people could

name a school curator, nurse or psychologist. It was concluded that a better way of informing young people about mental health support services must be found.

The director of education and culture stated that the Finnish government plans to increase the number of lessons in primary school and proposed that in planning the Riihimäki curriculum part of those lessons should be focused on mental health or the development of emotional competences.

After the public debate, in the follow-up process, there were certain positive changes:

- The Welfare Department has developed a new substance abuse prevention program for 2024–2025.
- The local curriculum of the municipality has been changed to prevent absenteeism and direct teachers on how to deal with absences.
- Schools in the municipality of Riihimäki were instructed to include specific plans for the prevention of peer violence in their curricula for the period 2023–2024.
- Kanta-Häme County “Omahoimi” has employed psychiatric nurses in designated schools, where they offer easily accessible counseling to youth and their parents about mental health and substance abuse issues.

During the duration of the project, in 2023, a new government of Finland was established, which adopted a program containing the following relevant plans:

- reducing the high fluctuation of employees who work in the field of mental healthcare of young people,
- primary mental health services will be improved by taking into account, inter alia, the experience gained from the scheme known as first-line therapy,
- the availability of measures such as walking tours and chats will be promoted throughout the country,
- investment in preventive measures, such as field work with young people, youth workshops and prevention of social exclusion,
- in cooperation with the providers of leisure activities, it will be ensured that every child and young person can engage in at least one activity in their free time, of their choice. Special attention will be given to children and young people who either do not have free time or have dropped out of school.

Advocacy results achieved:

- Riihimäki school curriculum was altered to prevent the school absence and direct how teachers should handle the absences;
- schools in Riihimäki municipality are directed to include concrete bullying prevention plans in their curricula for 2023–2024;
- a new Substance Abuse Prevention programme 2024-2025 was drafted in the Wellbeing Department of the Riihimäki;
- during the Policing the policies Public debate held on 31st of October 2023, the Director of Education and Culture of Riihimäki Jari Lausvaara made a motion that in the Curriculum planning of the next year, local government should introduce a class for emotional competences and mental health topics in elementary schools.

4.2.3 Advocacy results in Poland

The aim of the public debate in Świdwin was to present the research results (conducted focus and desk research), as well as to discuss the challenges we identified using the World Cafe workshop tool. The debate was opened by the City's Deputy Mayor, Beata Ociepa.



Divided into groups, the participants developed solutions on how to make Świdwin a more "youthful" place. The statements of the focus participants concerned primarily the prospects for education after high school. The attitude of adults towards young people turned out to be important during the discussion. There was a talk about the lack of knowledge about the perspectives of a group

of young people, the imposition of rules and solutions from above, or the possibility of sharing the opinion of young people toward adults. What matters to young people are the following values: openness to change and a sense of security.

The City should: create places for young people to meet, educate and care for children, provide psychological, psychiatric and healthcare support, create jobs, provide housing, build apartments for rent, develop infrastructure and create a system city promotion. Thanks to the implementation of the process, cooperation was established between young residents and municipal decision-makers in Świdwin.

The goal of the public debate held in Radom was to jointly design the activities to strengthen the competences of the Youth City Council in order to improve its influence in the social dialogue between young people in Radom and the municipal government. Research on the position and needs of young people was presented, in which this priority problem was clearly emphasized.

Applying work in groups, the participants proposed guidelines and tools to the members of the Youth City Council on how to use their three competences in practice: legislative initiative, participation in the drafting of strategic documents, giving opinions on decisions and convening Council sessions. One of its successes was the appointment of the Student Ombudsman and the adoption of 59 resolutions, 11 of which concerned council positions and initiatives.

The Field of dialogue Foundation achieved effective cooperation with decision-makers from both cities - who on their part made strong contribution towards the public debate organisation ("in-kind" support with premises, inviting participants and informing about the event, etc.), as well as towards the implementation of the project.

The advocacy activities carried out in Radom resulted in several Youth Council initiatives that positively affected the overall living conditions of young people in the city. The first effect – the Foundation have empowered youth counselors to utilise statutory competences of the youth council and become bolder in talking to decision-makers. This empowerment resulted in the appointment of a Student rights Ombudsman and the adoption of 59 resolutions, 11 of which concerned council positions and initiatives.



In Świdwin, the public debate was the very first opportunity when a broad representation of young people could meet with municipal decision-makers and talk about their future and the challenges of living in the city.

This firstly resulted in public commitment from the municipal authorities that there would be more such meetings. In addition, participation in the project strengthened

the competences of the youth councillors and the municipal coordinator - the group felt strongly inspired and announced that they too would work on a formal process of developing local youth policy.

Recommendations developed during the public debate and the project were effectively communicated to the city authorities and acknowledged - through the participation of representatives of the office in the meeting, including the vice mayor, the main decision-maker on youth affairs and education. The municipal officials vocalised strong political commitment to support the recommendations both during the public debate and later, after the event.

The Foundation will however continue to monitor the progress and advocate for the changes at the municipal government level. Despite the fact that after the public debates there were political changes in the structures of the municipal authorities, which resulted in the "loss of key people" with whom Foundation previously cooperated.

4.2.4 Advocacy results in Germany

The “Policing the Policies: Youth Policies and Cohesion in Berlin” public debate, held at Gelbe Villa in 2023, was a critical platform for discussing youth policy development in Berlin. Attended by 23 key stakeholders, including representatives from municipal offices of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg and Tempelhof-Schöneberg, youth organizations, and youth communication professionals, the meeting aimed to address vital issues concerning youth in the community.

Initiated with a comprehensive introduction by a CRISP facilitator, the meeting focused on the interim report’s main findings of CRISP, highlighting essential themes such as youth security, identity, and participation. A significant part of the discussion revolved around ensuring youth feel safe and respected in their environments and understanding their role in local, regional, and national politics.

Presentations by Mr. Staubach (a representative of several youth groups active in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg) and Ms. Staudiger from The Children and Youth Participation Office emphasized engaging youth beyond educational settings and enhancing cooperation and communication across municipal districts. Ms. Führung from the JFSB (Youth and Family Foundation of the State of Berlin) indicated the issues of many short-lasting project initiatives which are often not coherent with each other and proposed long-term projects in the field of youth participation that are based on public advocacy.



Group discussions were extended in duration due to productive exchanges, covering topics like addressing racism and antisemitism, integrating parents in youth work, establishing physical and digital safe spaces, and facilitating direct youth participation. Strategies to balance the needs of schools and young people were also a focal point.

The meeting concluded with a joint debate, consolidating ideas from breakout sessions and fostering a direct dialogue between youth representatives and municipal officials.

The public debate and the advocacy resulted into drafting of an action plan by present participants with clearly envisaged practical channels for youth – policyholder interaction, more coherent family engagement strategies, and efforts to establish secure spaces.

A substantial step towards a youth-inclusive approach in Berlin’s policymaking, setting a precedent for future collaborations and opening avenues for meaningful youth participation in shaping policies.

5. Challenges in project management and “know how” for their prevention

In the last chapter, we will convey the experiences of the entire Consortium in relation to project management. You will find out which solutions gave good results, and where, despite the effort invested, satisfactory outcomes did not occur. We believe that any information will be useful to you and help you avoid potential inconveniences.

Beware of overly ambitious goals

When setting goals, try to be realistic about the changes the project can make. The results of such a project depend on state institutions that rely on a series of procedures and approval decisions from the city council. If there is a deadlock in one procedure, the inertia is reflected in the others.

Goals concerning long-term changes such as the initiation of cross-border cooperation between municipal grassroots organizations with other youth organizations or the nomination of projects of grassroots organizations that will be financed from the budget of the municipal government or the ministry in charge of youth require constant work with young people and focused leadership.

All the activities covered by the project, in which young people participated, undoubtedly change their view on the necessity of active participation. However, when it comes to the fact that they need to do specific tasks (for example, to write a project or start a dialogue with the municipal government), a special type of stimulus is needed. Whether it will be an attractive prize, a study visit, public recognition that will increase their publicity and open new perspectives, it depends on knowing the target group of young people.

Taking into account the challenges with the target groups you work with (decision makers and young people), you may think about additional activities, because the duration of the project should be extended to more than three years.

The researcher doing the initial analysis of the identification of cities should be familiar with the “youth” program and have experience in research

During the project, it happened that a person that was hired in one of the partner organizations identified cities that had adopted strategic documents and there was no need for project “intervention”. That is why it is important that the person doing the research has experience in youth policy, or in the case he/she does not have it, insist that he/she check the accuracy of the research by interviewing city government officials from the department that deals with youth.

A similar situation can happen with “desk research”, which is done on the basis of data available (most often the city's website, social networks, media reports, decisions, etc.). Data accuracy depends on regular updates, so out-of-date data can lead you to wrong results.

When choosing cities for advocacy, consider the cooperativity of key people

Failure to respond to a call or inquiry by the people you are referred to, failure to comply with an agreement, absence from an event and the like can exhaust you and take a valuable time. If you have a choice of several cities in which public advocacy should be done, do not neglect the factor of cooperation and political will of the local government to improve the lives of young people. Of course, this does not mean that “difficult cases” should be weighed at all costs. Young people from such places have exactly the same right as young people from places where the municipal authorities are more cooperative.

Check the procedures regarding the change of the legal framework of the youth policy

You can get an idea for a public advocacy proposal immediately during the identification and analysis of cities, when you recognize a deficiency in youth policy that needs to be eliminated. However, it can also happen in some of the following stages: organizing national workshops or researching the state of local policies (desk analysis + work with focus groups) when you hear directly from young people what their priority problem is.

In any case, you are referred to the network of institutions. And so, long before you get to the last stage when you need to cause the desired change, go into the administrative procedures and check if your mission is even achievable, regardless of the cooperativity of the decision makers. We suggest that already during the identification and analysis phase, you get in touch with the heads of certain youth departments, who will give you an opinion regarding the feasibility of the goals. Otherwise, you will not justify the project idea for which you received funding.

Youth vs youth policy

There is no doubt that young people want their life in the community to be high-quality and promising. A part of them is ready to participate in volunteer actions and workshops in areas that interest them. However, when the project deals with changing youth policies, there is a risk of “losing” them. Especially those from the younger category (15 – 20 years old).

Why is it like that? Their associations regarding politics (even if it directly concerned them) are: boring form, doubts about one's personal ability to be informed to understand the topic, belief that nothing will change.

No matter how hard you try to present the results of the project to them, hire collaborators from local communities, push announcements, etc., don't be surprised if organizing national workshops (step 4) or organizing focus groups doesn't work out the first time.

Topics such as: youth policy, strategies, public advocacy are better accepted by older categories of the youth (students active in student parliaments or young people active in associations). If they are advocating for greater rights of young people, they are much more familiar with terminology, legal frameworks, system procedures, so a project of this type will be clearer to them. In short, to ensure the success of events where the presence of young people is required, be sure to target this target group.

Any help in order to initiate young people is welcome

When you organize events with young people in another city, you can get help from the local youth organizations, youth associations with fewer opportunities, student parliaments, school management. You can create informational material (printed or e-flyers) for young people of the “copywrite” type that will draw their attention.

Consider an event that we did not take into account, which is a campaign in high schools and colleges in cooperation with social science teachers, who will give “additional weight” in the animation of young people with the promise of a certain reward for the school and outstanding individuals.

We suggest that whenever you work with young people you should:

- clearly present the purpose of the meeting and let them know that their opinions will reach the right people and the wider public,
- motivate them by giving them the opportunity to help themselves and their peers,
- request confirmation of participation in order to adjust the organization to the number of participants,
- schedule a break for refreshments during work and reward them with a certificate confirming their contribution.

Carefully create a questionnaire for the youth in the focus groups and create a safe environment for them during the interview

During the desk analysis, you learned about the policy context in which young people live. On the other hand, there are political plans for the youth in that community at the local level, and certainly at the national level. It can be your base. Divide the questions into areas that cover all segments of young people's lives.

When working with focus groups, try to keep the atmosphere relaxed. Tell them that all answers are welcome (even “I don't know”). This will ensure their receptivity.

You can have combined approaches in conducting a focus group. In addition to the fact that it can be a group interview, you can divide them into groups and give them tasks, or they can individually write answers to a given question on a large sheet of paper. This is a good approach when you have youth who are uncomfortable speaking in front of a group.

Involve the most motivated young people to participate in international training

The international training is preceded by a national workshop, in which, in addition to youth workers and officials, individual young people also participate. On that occasion, you will notice the most motivated and enterprising young people who can make the best use of the experience from the national training in terms of networking with organizations from other countries, undertaking ideas resulting from the training in the local community, etc.

Secure “in-kind” support from local government

Holding a public debate in the town hall is very useful for the project. On the practical side, in-kind support contributes to the overall budget of the project, which is especially important as the public debate was not budgeted like the international training (it did not include costs such as accommodation, premises, professional work, food, refreshments, travel expenses of the participants, equipment, etc.). On the other hand, everything that is organized in the town hall represents news of importance to the public and guarantees the mandatory arrival of the media. This increases your project's visibility and impact on the public.

How to make your public debate motivate the present decision makers

All Consortium organizations had a more or less similar working plan. At the beginning, they presented the project (goals, activities, results) and explained its justification. When someone from the ministry in charge of youth attends the public debate and presents the national policy plans and successful results of other local communities, it contributes to the sense of commitment of the municipal government.

The young people present who speak openly about their problems, proposing solutions at the same time exercise a certain kind of pressure and awareness that political activities towards them are seen as a priority.

The presentation of research on the position and needs of young people should show that you have done a great job with a lot of valuable information that will be included in the creation of future strategies.

The presence of media workers and reporting on the activity allows the general public to be aware of the initiative and expect concrete activities of decision-makers for a better future for the youth and prevention of migration.

The most important thing – how to achieve the result of public advocacy

If you have taken care of previous approaches, this should not be unachievable. During the public debate, if the officials declare the political will to change a specific legal act related to youth policy, try to get a clear reply regarding the time frame when it can be completed. After the public debate, keep in touch with the decision makers, whether it's a online meeting, a phone call, in-person meeting. Constantly remind the decision makers of the made commitments. Posts on social networks and/or advocacy through the media can be helpful in this sense.

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