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Policy/legal framework

The work of local governments with young people plays a significant role in the development of the youth policy. According to Paragraph one Section 5 of the Youth Law [1]: “A local government, in executing the functions thereof, shall implement work with youth in compliance with the basic principles of the youth policy and state youth policy development planning documents. A local government plans work with youth, elaborating local government's youth policy development planning documents. A local government ensures the institutional system for the work with youth.” As the youth policy at the national level is a comparatively new field of policy, the youth work at the level of local governments is also at its initial stage of development. The MoES pays a particular attention to the development of youth policy at the local level, developing recommendations to local governments for youth work, providing methodological support to local governments, as well as supporting the elaboration of the local government youth policy development planning documents.

However, the information collected annually by the MoES showes that youth policy is not always as an independent direction of strategic planning in all local governments of Latvia – not all local governments have appropriate strategic planning documents in place and not all of them have an institutional system established to ensure the work with youth (though, it has to be emphasized that the number of local
governments who focus on the youth policy and work with young people increases annually). Neither have any detailed research and evaluations regarding the existing situation of youth work in local governments been carried out.

The Youth Law establishes that “youth work is a set of planned youth-oriented practical measures, which ensure implementation of the youth policy, development of values of young people and strengthening of human values in general.”

The basic tasks for youth work are as follows:

1) to support and foster youth initiatives, creating favourable conditions for their intellectual and creative development;

2) to provide young people with an opportunity of acquiring the skills, knowledge and competences necessary for life through non-formal education;

3) to ensure young people a possibility to spend their free time efficiently;

4) to provide young people with access to information necessary for their development needs.

Though the definitions of youth work seem to be short and clear, their interpretations are versified and sometimes even contrary, especially with regard to certain activities that should or should not be deemed as youth work.

When looking for a denominator in terms of the contents and structure of the youth work, one has to encounter many and different challenges, particularly, if the work methods are evaluated at the EU level. There are different approaches in different countries for definition and implementation of the youth work - there are countries where the youth work is treated in a narrow way and referred only to the child and youth care, but there are countries, where the youth work is viewed upon as a separate branch of policy including non-formal education, social care and sub-sectors of other policies. To define in a wider sense - there are approaches that are based on the centralisation of the youth policy and youth work and the ones that focus on greater decentralisation. The choice between the centralisation and decentralization further determines the approach for the co-ordination of the action policy, institutional system and activities to be implemented.

When assessing the existing practice of youth work in Latvia in such context, it has to be concluded that the existing model is closer to the model of decentralisation when different youth work related policies and activities are not planned, implemented and coordinated within a single institution, but they are implemented in the institutions responsible for the specific fields, and the MoES as an institution in charge of the youth sector operates more as an institution that summarizes information and defines strategic development directions. Which of the approaches is more efficient - unfortunately, there is no single opinion regarding it.

The Report of the European Commission “Quality of Youth Work. Common Approach to the Further Development of Youth Work” defines the youth work that relatively combines different approaches of the EU Member States as follows: youth work is actions targeted at voluntary involvement of youth target group in the activities that foster their personal and social development in non-formal education and life or informal learning. (http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/statistika/petijumi/jaunatne/jaunatnes_poli... [2])

In 2015, the MoES established the work group “Work Group for Elaboration of Youth Development Model”, the main task of which is to develop a certification system for youth affairs specialists and youth workers that would also envisage the evaluation of skills and competences. Introduction of such system in Latvia could serve as a significant investment in the quality improvement of the work of youth affairs specialists and youth workers, and it would also clarify differences between the roles of youth affairs specialists and youth workers and the differences between the names of professions.
Main inclusive Youth-Work programmes and target groups

In order to address issues regarding fostering of social inclusion, young people have an opportunity to get involved in the projects of the “Erasmus+” Programme, implementing the following types of projects:

- Youth exchange projects - these projects are based on a thematic idea that the youth groups wish to jointly implement, and the idea may be directly related to daily experience of young people. A youth exchange project has to be based on non-formal education principles and implemented through the methods of non-formal education. During youth exchange, participants with the support of group leaders jointly implement work programme (a combination of workshops, practical assignments, debates, role plays, simulations, outdoor activities and other arrangements) that they have developed and prepared before the exchange. The youth exchange provides young people with an opportunity to develop their skills, be informed about socially significant issues / thematic fields, to get to know new cultures, habits and lifestyles, mainly in the form of mutual learning, to strengthen such values as solidarity, democracy, friendship, etc. Youth exchange is based on a transnational cooperation between two or more involved organisations from different countries of the European Union or beyond it;

- European Volunteering Service - it is an opportunity for young people to implement their personal commitment by performing unremunerated job and full-time volunteering services for the time period of 12 months in another country within the European Union or beyond it (see information in Sub-chapter 3.7).

- Mobility of staff projects - see information under Sub-chapter 3.8.

Likewise, youth social inclusion issues are being dealt with under the programme “KNOW and DO” (see Chapter 3.6).

Youth work providers in the field of social inclusion for young people

One of the quality indicators for the youth work is the number of persons involved in the work and consequentially the relative indicator of the number of young people on average for one person engaged in work with the youth.

Within the framework of the project “KNOW and DO”, a youth worker:

1. profiles young people identifying their skills, interests, acquired education, as well as determines the directions for development;

2. in cooperation with each young person, develops a set of individual measures based on the profiling results consisting of four mandatory components (learning pillars elaborated by UNESCO): personal growth, inclusion in society, “value of work”, lifelong learning competences;

3. enters into an agreement with a young person from the target group regarding implementation of the individual support programme within the project;

4. implements the individual support programme for a young person within the time period of
9 months, ensuring the measures envisaged therein; the measures may include the following activities:

- individual support of a mentor on a regular basis (not less than 20 hours per month), where the mentor provides support to the young person of the target group in implementation of the individual support programme;

- formal and informal learning;

- professional counselling (psychologist, career counsellor, etc., except for medical staff);

- participation in events (camps, seminars, sports activities, cultural events);

- volunteering activities;

- engagement in the activities, events and projects of non-governmental organisations and youth centres;

- familiarization with professions, including visits to enterprises to choose a professional field or a craft to be acquired with a craftsman;

- engagement in local community activities;

- specific measures for target group youth with disability (with the help of a sign language interpreter, assistant, specialised transport).

**Training and support for youth workers engaged in social inclusion programmes**

A mentor of a young person in the target group within the project “KNOW AND DO” is a person of major age who acquires a training programme prepared by the beneficiary and provides support to a young person in the target group in implementing the individual support programme.

The activities to be supported under Sub-section 2.1. within the national programme for 2016 are implementation of non-formal learning for young people fostering acquisition of new knowledge, experience and skills that improve communication and cooperation skills, develop creativity and initiative, as well as provide an opportunity to try ideas that may be developed as one's own business in future. Within the framework of the projects, young people are engaged in training, creative workshops, discussions, practical classes, acquisition of good practice, etc.

Latvian-Swiss cooperation programme. To implement the aims set in the project agreement, the following trainings have been implemented within the framework of the Project:

- Trainings for visually impaired youth about non-formal learning;

- Trainings for persons involved in youth work about social inclusion.

The representatives of renovated multifunctional youth initiative centres take care of accessibility for disabled persons, as well as provide different activities for reducing the social inequality among young people.

**Financial support**

The financial support available to Sub-section 2.1 of the national programme for 2016 is EUR 40,000, supporting 16 initiative projects.
Total available funding for 2016 that the Agency for International Programmes for Youth can assign for projects approved under “Erasmus+: Youth in Action” is EUR 2,706,407. The source of the funding is the EU budget.

The total funding of the project “KNOW and DO!” is EUR 8,999,975.19, including the funding of the European Social Fund of EUR 7,649,978.91 and the funding from the national budget – EUR 1,349,996.28.

**Quality assurance**

As specified in the public annual report of 2014 of the MoES, 104 youth affairs specialists or contact persons for work with young people worked in the local governments of Latvia in 2014, 182 youth centres operated in the local governments in total, including multi-functional youth initiative centres and day centres. It is specified in the National Youth Policy Programme for 2015 that 84 persons work for local governments performing work with young people, though “youth affairs specialist” is not always the name of their position. The information to be found in the youth affairs portal [www.jaunatneslieatas.lv](http://www.jaunatneslieatas.lv) maintained by the MoES evidences that there are 100 youth affairs specialists and youth affairs coordinators, 150 youth and children centres of different types, as well as 59 interest education establishments.

The differences of data in different sources do not allow to make comprehensive conclusions regarding the number of persons involved in the work with young people; it only allows to conclude that the number of people engaged in work with young people is not large – only one person in a local government on average. At the same time, it is not possible to state that the number of people engaged in youth work is limited to the said specialists – the research performed at the EU level evidences that a great part and even the majority of the involved are volunteers. The number of paid specialists in the EU Member States is between 5% in Belgium and 30% in Germany (the data on Latvia are not available).

As mentioned in the previous chapters, evidence-based youth work is one of the most significant efficiency determinants of that work – identification of the youth work methods, activities and target groups according to representative and qualitative data on youth target groups to a great extent determines the success of the performed work. In terms of the youth work quality, a significant issue is the extent, to which it is based on the available data and statistics.

As the youth work is based on voluntary participation of young people, the success of the work depends greatly on positive indicators of social capital, namely, the extent to which young people trust institutions and persons engaged in formal and non-formal youth work. A low level of social capital, high mistrust in state and local government institutions and peers outside the closest social circle are characteristic of Latvian public in general. However, the results among young people are more positive than in other age groups. Except for the Latvian army, in which 70% of young people place trust, and youth organisations, in which 51% of young people place trust, the trust is placed in different other institutions by not more than 1/2 of youth respondents. Comparatively higher trust is placed in the European Union (48%), police (47%) and local government (42%), but explicitly low trust is placed in political parties (11%) and the Saeima (15%).

With regard to youth work, the data that young people in general place trust in both youth organisations and their local authorities shall be considered positive. Therefore, the youth work at the level of local governments has more positive preconditions than the work at the national level. However, it also has to be emphasised that the trust placed in the non-governmental organisations is very low – only 26% of young people trust them, which evidences that there are significant challenges of development of the civil society among young people. Partly, this issue is compensated by the high trust in youth organisations, however, they constitute an insignificant part of the non-governmental sector. ([http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/statistika/petijumi/jaunatne/jaunatnes_polij...](http://www.izm.gov.lv/images/statistika/petijumi/jaunatne/jaunatnes_polij...))