

National Youth Policies

A working document from the point of view
of "non-formal education" youth organizations

**Towards an autonomous, supportive,
responsible and committed youth**

Produced by the Chief Executive Officers of:

- World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations
- World Young Women's Christian Association
- World Organization of the Scout Movement
- World Association of Girl Guides & Girl Scouts
- International Federation of Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies
- The International Award Association

as a complement to "The Education of Young People: A Statement at the dawn of the 21st century"



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INTRODUCTION

1.1. Foreword

This document has been produced by the chief executive officers of the world's largest youth movements who are also the authors of "*The Education of Young People. A statement at the dawn of the 21st century*". It contains their recommendations on *national youth policies*, without which education in general (and non-formal education in particular) cannot find its rightful place in the proper long-term and global perspective.

There is a need for each nation to adopt a *long-term national youth policy*, based on a consensus of all the country's social and political forces, aiming at creating now and for the next generation, a youth which is *autonomous, supportive, responsible and committed*. Such policy should be integrated: it should concern *all* youth NGOs in the country and *all* ministries in any government.

Non-formal education youth movements can and should contribute to formulating and implementing such *national youth policies*.

Similar conclusions have been reached by such important meetings as the "World Youth Forum of the UN System" (Braga, Portugal, August 1998), the "World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth" (Lisbon, August 1998), and in documents produced by UNESCO and the Commonwealth Youth Forum. There is a growing awareness, worldwide, of the urgency for governments to conceive, adopt and implement - together with civil society and youth movements - such long-term policies that will shape, through youth, the future of their nation and, indeed, of our planet.

This *working document* takes and integrates these thoughts with our own present thinking, as non-formal education youth organisations' leaders, on how this increased awareness can and should become a stronger reality at national, regional and world level.

This is in no way a final word; but we hope that it may stimulate thought and action as a "mover" for youth, for education and for long-term policies related to both. *Meanwhile, comments to this text are welcome from both within and outside our movements.*

1.2. The kind of youth the world needs

Any long term national youth policy should have a clear, consensus-based, vision of the kind of men and women for tomorrow's world needs. We may differ on the type of society we wish to build, but we should agree on the qualities of the individuals that will constitute it. We should foster such personal qualities as part of a global educational approach, covering school, family and civil society.

In our *Statement on the Education of Young People*, we defined the kind of youth and future citizens we all need as:

- **autonomous**
able to make choices and to control their personal and social life as an individual and as a member of society,
- **supportive**
able to show concern for others, to act with them and for them, to share their concerns,
- **responsible**
able to take responsibility for their actions, keep commitments and complete whatever they undertake,
- **committed**
able to assert themselves in respect of values, a cause or an ideal and to act accordingly.

1.3. The purpose of this document

If we want our communities to have young people who are autonomous and supportive, responsible and committed, we need each government and the civil society of each country to work *together* towards a long-term national youth policy that is coherent, efficient, effective and all-mobilising. Our objective is, firstly, to sensitise all decision-makers in the area of youth to the importance of conceiving and implementing such a policy and, secondly, to suggest some guidelines as to the methodology and contents of a national youth policy. It is an *action-oriented* document, aimed at mobilising all those concerned with young people to work together in order to have a long-term, strategic influence on their future.

CHANGES IN SOCIETY AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

2.1. Context

In our *Statement on the education of young people* we identified four global trends in society that affect all people, whatever their age.

In summary they were:

- the increasing and accelerated shifts in population,
- the evolution of family structure and a declining influence of family life in society,
- the development, on a global scale, of lifestyle models which often do not correspond to local realities,
- a decreasing assurance that a young person will be able to assume a full and responsible adult life.

The context for these trends includes an accelerated pace of change, economic globalisation and social fragmentation, and a communication and technological revolution.

The *Braga World UN Youth Forum* also commented that “Young people face the challenges of injustice and exclusion” and “there is a growing gap between the rich and the poor”. They “suffer from xenophobia and racism, homophobia, exclusion from democratic participation”.

For its part the Lisbon “World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth”, stressed the linkage between unemployment, poverty and the marginalisation of large parts of youth affected by “drug and substance abuse, violence, including gender-based violence, neglect, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation; youth involved in armed conflicts; refugees and other migrant young people; displaced and parentless youth; young women and young men living with disabilities; indigenous youth; ethnic and cultural youth minorities; young offenders; pregnant adolescents; and other disadvantaged and marginalised young women and young men”.

2.2. Needs of - and challenges for - young people today

In our document “*The Education of Young People*” we tried to define the needs of young people today and the challenges that they have to face. In summary, these needs are:

- *Finding a secure starting point for themselves based on values, self-awareness and self-confidence.*
- *Coping with change, which requires flexibility, adaptability and mobility.*
- *Gaining constructive control of technological progress through access to knowledge and skills.*
- *Combating isolation by developing a sense of belonging and identity, gaining acceptance and being recognised.*

- *Acquiring a sense of usefulness by making a contribution to the development of their community and beyond.*
- *Learning to recognise the value of co-operation and teamwork.*

Obviously, the specific needs of young people will vary from one culture to another and, indeed, from one individual to another, depending on the particular circumstances. However, in all cases, however, young people need to develop themselves, to test their own potential abilities and to discover the world around them. They need to have access to knowledge and competence to understand the real world. They need to acquire an active and responsible role in social life, and through that role, a status and a stake in society.

These different dimensions are closely linked, and cannot be dealt with isolated from each other. They concern different fundamental dimensions of the personality and of society. They point towards the need for an *integrated* approach to the problems of young people at national level.

2.3. Growing up in circumstances of increasing uncertainty

When we consider young people in their current social context, we realise immediately that their personal development takes place in circumstances of increasing uncertainty.

Here are just a few examples:

- In some countries, a great number of people are trying to adjust from a rural life based on agriculture to industrial, city living, while others are somewhere between the industrial society and what is called, for want of a better term, the “post-industrial” society.
- Under the combined influence of a number of factors, not least the worldwide mass media, many societies are living a transition between a “monolithic” or “homogenous” type of culture and a “pluralist” type. However, in a pluralist society, values come from many sources which can be conflictive: family, schools and places of worship, political parties, organisations of many kinds, the mass media, peer groups. Thus, the values proposed to young people may be convergent or similar; but they can also be contradictory.
- From an increasingly early age, in many societies, children (especially boys in certain cultures) are under increasing pressure to do well at school, get a “good” degree, find work. As to girls, they are too often treated as second class individuals. Both boys and girls are required to cope simultaneously with personal relationships, sexuality, money, the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs.

It is therefore quite understandable that young people feel insecure in terms of their identity and their role in society. This is a general trend that affects all young people, wherever they are, to a varying degree. It is also not surprising, in such circumstances and under the combined pressure of all these elements, that young people in several parts of the world today think of the future with an increasing feeling of anxiety and fear, rather than with confidence and hope.

2.4. Absolute poverty and consumerism

Without any doubt, the most striking phenomenon of our time is that, despite the fact that the past two decades have seen unprecedented wealth creation, the number of people living in absolute poverty has continued to increase. Approximately 1.3 billion people currently live in extreme poverty. Within all communities and countries, there are growing disparities and inequalities. This increasing gap threatens social cohesion and is strongly related to youth mortality, violence and psycho-social stress.

As a consequence, while young people in many industrialised countries bask in an atmosphere of consumerism that affects every aspect of social life, 75% of the world population still has to struggle on a daily basis with severe economic limitations, and views wealthy society as a promise or an example, which could be an illusion.

2.5. School education: a right and a guarantee of employment?

While school attendance is standard practice in most countries, a significant percentage of children and young people, especially girls in the least developed countries, still do not go to school, or leave after two or three years, either to get married or to help their parents to cultivate the land, or to seek employment in the city.

However, even when access to school education is guaranteed and compulsory, school systems are by nature rather inflexible and can rarely adapt to the needs of individuals.

Moreover, while it is generally considered that a good school education is a guarantee of a good job, in an increasing number of countries, young people with excellent qualifications and degrees find their access to the job market blocked by the lack of opportunities in today's society.

2.6. The role of women

While there has been increasing accession of women to positions of responsibility in some societies during the last two decades, there are still countries where opportunities for girls to go to school or to advance beyond primary education are far fewer than those offered to boys, as well as severe restrictions on women in their social life and in their accession to positions of responsibility.

Special attention must be given to the role of women, which needs to be thought through at every stage of policy development and implementation, as a general overriding concern.

A GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL DEFICIT

3.1. Context

As recalled in our *Statement on the education of young people* “education is a life-long process which enables the continuous development of a person's capabilities as an individual and as a member of society”.

In this broad definition, education throughout life - as defined by UNESCO - is based on four pillars: learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. A variety of educational agents make a contribution to the full personal and social development of an individual. The UNESCO definition, generally accepted, shows three distinct types:

- **Formal education** is the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded, educational system running from primary through to tertiary institutions.
- **Informal education** is the process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience, such as from family, friends, peer groups, the media and other influences and factors in the person's environment.
- **Non formal education** is organised educational activity outside the established formal system that is intended to serve an identifiable learning clientele with identifiable learning objectives.

Each of these three types of education plays a specific role which complements the other two and all are necessary to produce the desired results. In broad terms:

- Knowledge and job skills are generally acquired through *formal education*.
- A number of skills, both personal and social, are acquired through *informal education*.
- The acquisition of life skills and the development of attitudes based on an integrated value system are made possible through *non formal education*.

- 3.2. Formal education** One of the major issues facing education today is the continuing tendency to devote more time, resources and responsibility to the *formal* academic, education sector. In itself this is positive; but too many school systems give to the transfer of knowledge priority over the structuring of personality or the acquisition of values. Investments are not made sufficiently in informal and non-formal education and, in proportion, concentrate too much on formal education.
- 3.3. Informal education** With regard to informal education - as provided by the family and by other non-structured environment - we can also note a serious educational deficit:
- 3.3.1. Family** The “Lisbon Declaration on youth policies and programmes” stresses that “the family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened” and “that it is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support”. However, for numerous reasons both economic and cultural, families often tend to grant to – or even impose upon – their children more independence and at an earlier age, while not teaching them the *autonomy* with which to manage their own independence.
- 3.3.2. Leisure activities** With regard to leisure time, the common denominator throughout our global world is our “consumer society” (even in poorer countries) which tends to teach children the *cost* of objects rather than transmit to them the *values* in life.
- 3.3.3. Peer image** Some educational deficits can be seen with regard to informal education as provided by the family and the peer group. Peers can often play the most influential role in the decisions and behaviour of a young person. This, when considering that young people are often marginalised and among the more frequent victims of poverty, makes it easy for them to end up in groups which exert negative rather than positive influence. Thus, consideration of the importance of peer groups is a key success factor of a national youth policy.
- 3.4. The need for non-formal education** In summary we witness a *triple educational deficit* worldwide:
- in *formal* education, where many schools tend to teach more and more but educate less and less,
 - in *informal* education
 - where many families tend to give independence rather than teach autonomy to their children,
 - and where consumer society teaches youth the price of everything but the value of nothing.
- Hence the vital importance of non-formal education, conceived as a complement to formal and informal education and as a specific tool and system to *educate*, to teach *autonomy* and to foster *value systems*. By and large the importance of non-formal education is insufficiently recognised and it does not receive enough support in the increasing demand for finite resources and time.
- Hence also the importance of having an integrated approach to the broader concept of education through coherent and comprehensive national youth policies.
- As is written in the UNESCO paper for the Lisbon Conference of Youth Ministers on “*Youth, Education and Action to the New Century, and Beyond*”: “it is not enough to equate education with schooling or formal education alone ... for a real change to happen, formal, informal and non-formal education are the most effective tools society possesses to confront the challenges and look for new solutions to shape the approach to youth and education in the next century. Both society and youth can benefit from non-formal and informal modes of instruction and learning”.

NATIONAL YOUTH POLICIES

To address some of the challenges now facing young people and to create the environment for the development of young adults for the future, each country needs a dynamic and relevant national youth policy. Today, a number of countries do have such a policy, but definitely not all. And even in those countries that have a national youth policy, it is not always implemented as it should be, as governments themselves admit it.

What role therefore should a national youth policy play? How should it be produced and what should it contain? We would like to make the following suggestions:

4.1. Development of a national youth policy

4.1.1. Recommendations

A national youth policy must create an environment that enables young people to develop into the type of adult that society needs for their future well being. It must therefore have an *overarching coordination role* and give direction to *all* policies that directly and indirectly affect young people and their development as members of society.

We therefore recommend that a national youth policy should:

- be a policy of the State and not merely of a government;
- reflect an integrated, cross-sectoral and coherent approach, and be interdisciplinary, interministerial and multi-departmental;
- be the fruit of multi-party, national consensus, based on a consultation of all concerned, particularly youth;
- be conceived as a long-term strategic instrument and not out of short-term political expediency.

In amplification...

4.1.2. A long-term policy

Today, a number of countries do have national youth policies. Some can even be said to be *long-term* policies, truly aiming at the next generation, aiming at a time when those adults who conceived such policies will no longer be in power!

In each country a long-term *State* policy should thus be encouraged, rather than a short-term *governmental* policy. This is the only way to conceive such a policy as a tool for a more just and peaceful society for, as the Braga Youth Action Plan puts it “justice between present and future generations is recognised as a fundamental base for sustainable development”. It needs a long-term vision where a national youth policy defines the kind of youth which both young and adults wish their nation to have for the day when today’s young people will themselves be adults. Such a policy must also define how the country will go about “producing” such youth. The methodology and the implementation must also be practicable for the long-term.

4.1.3. A consensus based policy

For this to happen, for that vision of the future to have a chance to become reality, a national youth policy must be the result of a wide national consensus, and not just the product of any single majority party. That consensus must be based on not only the ideas of all – or most – political parties, but also of all NGOs concerned, especially those representing young people – and of young people themselves.

Only a national consensus on the future of the country’s youth can guarantee that a policy for that youth can truly be long-term and will last beyond the unavoidable political changes of any system, especially democratic ones. Youth policies that change when the government (or even the minister) changes are common and are weakened as a result.

Consensus of all political forces and of all youth agents is the best guarantee for durability, for it creates ownership and identification in all stratas of society on the future of its youth.

This is why the Braga Youth Action Plan recommends that such policies “should be formulated via a thorough consultation process between the government and the national youth NGO platforms as well as other stakeholders as equal partners in that process”.

4.1.4. An integrated, cross-sectoral policy

The Braga Youth Action Plan rightly recommends “State youth policies ... which are *cross-sectoral, comprehensive* and formulated with a long-term vision”.

This means that a long-term national youth policy must concern not only most sectors of civil society, but more specifically most government ministries and agencies, i.e. not only the traditional “Youth and Sports” or “Youth and Education” or “Youth and Culture” but the Presidency, the Prime Minister’s office and most departments such as labour, health, home affairs, economy and finance, social security and welfare, public works, agriculture, justice, industry and energy, trade, tourism, environment and foreign affairs... to name most, though not all, of the ministries that should have a share in conceiving and implementing their own part of a truly cross-sectoral, integrated youth policy.

Some governments today already have such an approach, but many are only just beginning to work on it.

From that point of view, it is worth noting that all UN documents on youth matters specifically mention such areas of concern as peace, education, employment, health, drug and substance abuse and that the very comprehensive “Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment to the Year 2005” has covered all these areas of concern in a truly participative and cross-sectoral manner, as does the “Strategy for UNESCO’s Action with and for Youth”.

Similarly, the Bamako (February 1999) Conference of Francophone Youth Ministers (CONFEJES), noting that many of their member countries do not have “valid” national youth policies, has recommended not only that such policies should be established, but also that this should be done “in a durable perspective”, after a process of “substantial consultation” between each government and the national youth platform, and that these policies should be “intersectorial and global”.

But a national youth policy must also be a practical, actionable tool, with clearly articulate goals and desired, measurable, outcomes. The articulation of such goals should provide a concrete sense of what is to be achieved. It is also preferable if such goals are based on an agreed time line and a commitment to allocate resources to their accomplishment. Identifying goals reinforces action whilst laying the basis for holding governments and others accountable. Without clearly defined goals and indications on how to reach them, a youth policy may remain lofty promises.

4.1.5. Emerging from the needs of young people

A national youth policy must emerge from a sincere desire to meet the needs and aspirations of young people. And to ensure that this is the case, it should be conceived *with* young people and not simply *for* young people. To be valid and credible, a youth policy must use the creative force of youth: give a young person responsibility and he or she will prove that he or she is equal to the task!

A youth policy must be understood and supported by all young people including those who are not in organised bodies. The policy should articulate how *all* young people can benefit as well as contribute to the development of their societies; special effort must be made to involve young people who are not readily accessible through political and other conventional platforms. In addition, ways must be sought to familiarise young people about youth policies by using media that are more attuned to the needs of young people.

A youth policy must bear in mind that youth is not only the future, but also the present. The Braga Youth Action Plan stressed, among other points, that “Young people are recognised not only as future leaders, but as actors of society today, with a direct stake as both creators and beneficiaries of the development and that youth should participate in decision-making on all levels”.

As to the “Lisbon Declaration” it *commits* the participating Ministers for youth to:

- Ensuring and encouraging the active participation of youth in all spheres of society and in decision-making processes at national, regional and international levels;
- Reviewing the situation of youth and their needs and incorporating young people’s own assessment of priorities, through their participation in a consultative process, and ensuring that young women and young men actively contribute to the formulation, implementation and evaluation of national and local youth policies, programmes and action plans;
- Developing capacity building through the empowerment of formal and informal coalitions and networks of youth.

4.2. Contents of a national youth policy

4.2.1. Some suggestions

For the benefit of national and international agencies of all types concerned for the development of young people, there is advantage in having some common methodology on how to establish the contents of national youth policies. We make some suggestions below.

- Strengthening responsible partnership among all key stakeholders, especially youth networks, non-governmental youth institutions and organisations. Other non-governmental organisations should also be included which deal with young women, particularly the girl-child, and young men, their families, governments, international agencies, educational institutions, civil society, the business sector and media in order to create synergies to better address youth potential and problems both at national and at local levels;
- Facilitating access by youth to legislative and policy-making bodies, through their representatives, in order to involve them closely in the formulation, execution, follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of youth activities and programmes and to ensure their participation in development;
- Giving priority to the building of communication channels with youth in order to give them a voice, at national, regional and international levels, and to give them the information they need to help them prepare for participation and leadership roles.

4.2.2. Consistent with the cultural patterns of each society

A national youth policy must meet and be consistent with the cultural patterns of each society.

For its part, the “Lisbon Declaration” recognises “that the formulation and implementation of strategies, policies, programmes and actions in favour of young women and young men are the responsibility of each country and should take into account the economic, social and environmental diversity of conditions in each country, with full respect for the various religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions of its people, and in conformity with all human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

4.2.3. Concern for the less privileged

A national youth policy must reflect a sincere concern for the less privileged, which must be expressed through concrete measures, with a view to strengthening social solidarity. In the words of the “Lisbon Declaration” it must give higher priority to marginalised, vulnerable and disadvantaged young women and young men, especially those who are separated from their families and children living and/or working in the streets. They need adequate

programmes, actions and necessary funding in order to provide them with the means and motivation to contribute effectively to their societies.

4.2.4. Reinforce *all* forms of education

As we have seen, education does not just take place in schools. Education should be a *broad* concept: formal (in schools), informal (family, free time, peers) and non-formal (youth movements). A national youth policy must reinforce *all* forms of education. Indeed, if we describe the 21st century as the “century of the grey matter”, as the century of intelligence, and if it is normal for school education to be treated as a major priority in the concerns of governments, other forms of education, including, first of all, non-formal education, should not be neglected.

From that point of view, we are glad to note that the “Lisbon Declaration” makes a commitment to “promoting education in all its aspects, namely formal and non-formal”, although the Declaration in general tends to devote too much attention to the formal educational system of schools and does not give sufficient importance to informal and non-formal education, nor to the main agents of the latter, such as youth organisations.

Our document “The Education of Young People. A statement at the dawn of the 21st century” clearly highlights the reasons why non-formal education must be supported:

- because it is within such organisations that education in values takes place in a more useful and lasting way;
- because the internalisation of values, especially during adolescence, occurs through peer group life;
- because the active development of citizenship - not just by words but also by concrete action - forms part of the daily life of out-of-school educational organisations where personal development always takes place in the perspective of social responsibility.

4.2.5. Support of adult involvement

We have indicated that a national youth policy should be consensus-based, integrated and cross-sectoral. This implies that both governmental and non-governmental organisations will contribute to the development of the next generation. Both rely, and will continue to rely heavily, on voluntary adult involvement.

This adult voluntary contribution is an essential ingredient of the ability of any policy to reach the requisite number of young people. Success requires the adult population to be able to work, willingly and supportively with young people. For most of this century this willing involvement has been assumed - indeed almost taken for granted!

Recent developments give us cause for concern. The increasing culture of litigation and seeking blame is, in some countries, beginning to deter adult voluntary involvement. Adults, especially women who have traditionally given their time as volunteers, are increasingly occupied with work and looking after elderly dependants. All future national youth policies must therefore address the needs of the adult volunteer sector as well as the needs of the young people of that nation.

CONCLUSION

This is a call to action: if we want today's and tomorrow's youth to be autonomous and supportive, responsible and committed, we need a *concerted action* at world, regional and national levels. We need the commitment and goodwill of all those genuinely concerned with youth. We need - more than anything else - that each country has a long-term national youth policy, based on the consensus of the national community and with a clear vision of what the next generation must bring to that community and vice versa.

This is a call to those governments that already have such a policy to implement it with the dynamic support of civil society and a call to those governments that do not yet have such a national youth policy to take some inspiration from the recommendations contained in this document and to conceive and implement a long-term policy that should give their country the youth of which we all dream.



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